



PSUL Magazine: *Fiction Contest*

Winner

Spelling Bee

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My heart was doing jumping jacks in my chest. Every breath I could muster felt as if I was breathing the heaviest air to ever cross the sky, but I knew I had to stand. As I walked past rows of students in beige folding chairs, the stage started turning into a sea full of boats, and mine had just capsized. I floated nauseously through the waters. The waves slowly but surely pushed me closer and closer to edge of the stage.

I thought about what got me here. A spelling bee? How could I agree? I never liked bees, and this one I just opened the door for. I let it in without a second's hesitation. I let it sting me a million times.

My legs were heavy, so heavy I felt if I turned around, I'd see two anchors dragging along the wooden stage. But I couldn't bring myself to look back. What good ever came of a captain that didn't know when to abandon ship? I walked up to the mic. A woman below the stage started speaking, but my heart was making its own cacophony.

"Excuse me?" I said in an airy, nervous voice. It was hard to see the judges through the blaring spotlight. I'd never heard of sunshine in the middle of a storm.

"I said your word is reign." When she spoke, a gust of wind blew through the entire auditorium. Still, the crowd behind her held firm. I would've been more amazed if I wasn't already preoccupied. Reign? I didn't even know what that meant, much less how to spell it.

"May I have the definition, please?" I asked, holding out an inkling of hope that the word rain was considered intellectually stimulating enough to be in a fifth-grade spelling bee.

"The period of time during which a king, queen, or emperor, is ruler of a country," and with that, all hope was shattered. I lifted up my head, opened my mouth, and prayed for a miracle.

"Reign. W-R-A-I-N. Reign." I looked for the judges' response. It was dead silent for what felt like an eternity.

Instead of a voice, I heard a buzz. It was awfully loud, especially up close. For a brief moment, I caught a look of sadness, or more like sympathy on the judge's face.

"I'm sorry, that's incorrect." Her voice said softly as I processed what the buzz meant. A man motioned me to a staircase on the side of the platform. Each step down I could feel my chest getting lighter. The anchors on my legs disappeared. I headed toward my teacher and the rest of the class.

"R-E-I-G-N." Mrs. Bailey whispered in my ear, keeping her eyes on the stage.

"Oh." I said, watching all the boats floating from afar. The seas looked much calmer from this distance away. Still, watching all of them, I could feel another storm on the horizon. A gentle downpour started to fall in the auditorium, so gentle I could wipe my eyes before anyone realized it had rained at all.