

# WINDCHILL

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1. Paper-Thin
2. Ruille Buille
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## 1. Paper-Thin

His words blow me down and lift me into the air and I move with the current he creates. I have no control over where I go, all is decided by what will create less resistance. I make myself small, but I find out that existing is resisting. I make myself smaller. Soon I am paper-thin, light as air, taking up less gravity and less space than I thought possible. And still, I carry the weight that he gives me. Still, I tread lightly. I make myself smaller but the weight grows. I know it will break me. Looking in the mirror, I know that I will do the same.

## 2. Ruille Buille

My grandfather bought his sailboat in a state of mania. I wonder, what did his family say? Did they say anything? Did he show up one morning saying, “Honey, guess what I picked up?” He went through his life never having to answer the questions everybody was too scared to ask. Ruille Buille is Gaelic for the state of confusion.

My father tells me about their trips to Catalina Island with fondness, venturing to say that they were the highlight of his childhood. I think of the tension that comes with having a bipolar father in an Irish-Catholic household—I know that my father is familiar with this. The precise steps you take to avoid a storm. The tightening of your muscles when you notice the winds changing. The look in his eyes tells me that he knows this well. Still, he claims the memories from that unsteady boat are his favorite. I wonder if my father repressed the negative memories or ignored

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them in honor of his father. Did the whipping of sea air sting as harshly as his words? Will I repress or ignore?

### 3. Unmitigated/Unmedicated

My father sits at the dining room table and I face him on the other side. He's on his computer, finishing his work. I continue talking about my day, despite him not looking in my direction once. My father puts his head in his hands and suddenly a chill enters the room. I stop speaking, waiting for his first gust. He stands and turns our dining room into a whirlwind. He is not screaming at me— I didn't do anything. But he yells. He yells as if my face is the amalgamation of all those who have hurt him.

I comfort him, ignoring the words being hurled towards me. I dodge and duck, trying to protect myself without giving the impression that I need protecting. I listen to his words attentively as they berate me but I can hardly hear him over the vacuum that our dining room has created, my mind constantly alerting me that this is not safe. I am not safe yet I know that I need to be here. I comfort him, despite his words piercing me. If I do not soothe him, the winds will never stop howling. His lungs grow tired, and the gusts soon cease. I sit at the dining room table alone now, weak and bleeding. He doesn't know how hard he makes it to love him.

### 4. The Rain Poured

He chased us in circles around our living room, my brother and I jumping from couch to couch. We couldn't stop laughing, not noticing the damage around us. Typically, he would have yelled but tonight his feet had an unsteady rhythm and his breath smelled like medicine. He chased us down the hall, at the end of which we felt our joy dissipate. Turning around, we faced our father. His breathing was heavy and his shoulders were slouched. He swung his arm out to grab us and we laughed. We were scared of him but we laughed.

We barricaded ourselves inside our father's bedroom— the only room with a lock. My father thought that we were playing. We laughed because there was nothing else we could do but all we felt was fear. We picked up the phone and called the only one that could give us a way out. The phone rang for 32 antagonizing seconds before her familiar voicemail played.

“Mom, help us! Daddy is going crazy! He keeps banging on the

door, trying to get in! We don't know what to do!" We were laughing but we were scared. She didn't call back.

Time had passed, how much I don't know. Enough to know that it was safe to open the door. We peaked as the door creaked open and saw our father lying limp on the ground, finally having lost consciousness. My brother and I, too small to lift his body, put a blanket on him so he wouldn't feel the cold. The path that was behind my father was pure destruction. A hurricane with no remorse. We did not know that it wouldn't be the last. Too small to carry our home on our shoulders, we picked up the pieces every time he ravaged his way through it. We did so with a naïve hope that one day there would be calm.

#### 5. The Rain Burned

When your home cannot shelter you from the storm, there is no peace. There is no escape. There is no way to get out. I could not negate the rain so I drank what was poured onto me. It burned until there was black, and then there was none. I took solace in the dark space where I had no responsibility to myself or others; numb became the only peace that I knew. Every fifth, sixth, and seventh day I found myself here. My bedroom, my meek shelter, my only protection became a grave I had dug myself. I retreated into this dark space knowing it could not last forever but that it would always be there, waiting.

#### 6. Windbreaker

The cold currents push needles into my skin. I pull my jacket closer to my body in an attempt at some sense of mediocre protection as I trudge forward, knowing that I'm on a journey I can't delay. The streetlights are the only thing illuminating my path, the thin trail of light surrounded by complete darkness. I plant my feet firmly on the ground with each step that I take, watching dead leaves whip past me. Looking forward, into the light, I can't see an end but I know that I cannot stop.

#### 7. The Oldest House

My home stands tall, proud, strong. It has weathered many storms— seen many lives pass through its halls. And still, it stands: Tall, proud, strong. I listen to the wind whip against its bones.

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My home contorts slightly, the floorboards creaking but the walls remain intact, as they have for over one hundred years. I look out my window at the trees whipping in the wind, the familiar streetlights illuminating their quivering leaves. I settle into this space with ease, knowing that the winds will pick up and die down but I will remain protected from the storm. This home will stand after I've left, and it will become a home for many lives after mine. In this space, I have found myself: Tall, proud, strong.