

Ticonder

I am a hungry, hungry girl. Constantly unsatiated, like I can't ever remember what's fed me or how much, just that I cannot *ever* get enough. It is in my most demented moments of starvation that I reach into the depths of my pocket for the one item which manages to soothe even the most brutal pangs of hunger: the *Ticonder*.

Formerly just one of many *Ticonderoga* in a pack, a particularly hostile bite one wintry day in seventh grade had left the *Ticonder* in its wake, flecks of green from the chewed up branding sputtering out into the spiteful cavities in the wood. I'd stood up and left to the school bathroom then, rehearsed a practised smile in the cramped, grubby mirror and there it was, flashes of the bitten off *-oga* on my teeth like neon gangrene that had wrenched and jerked itself through my veins to my heart, my smile and all of the synthetic words streaming out of my little tweenage mouth. I peered down and bruise-black graphite stained my fingers; I glanced up and every shade of green painted my face in stains only I was witness to. Acidic in my stomach, the green seemed to bubble and froth until I was foaming at the mouth over the *loveliest*, most *detestable* things. Things like an admirable test grade and a ravishing pair of glossy, star-speckled green eyes and a level voice that sounded more assured than even my own.

The *Ticonder* is an antacid in moments like those, a sort of balm to pacify the roiling tummy aches that come with age. Growing pains, as they say.

There are pleasures and triumphs, however, in the process of maturing. In one scene, I am running my fingers along the pockmarks of the now year-old *Ticonder*, its chips and dents a comforting mould of my own making. I have begun clenching and unclenching my fist around the weathered stick to try and resist the urge to chew, but I am a hungry, hungry girl, and an impatient one at that. Nibbles it is. In this moment, the *Ticonder* is abuzz and alive, in

sync with the blood swirling through my head and pounding in my ears. The nibbles have provided enough of a snack to settle the churning in the pit of my stomach, and this time, my veins are revitalised and not ravaged, imbued with the glory of delivering my graduating class's ceremonial closing speech.

On the podium, the *Ticonder* hums as I speak, grateful that in the end, green was no longer the only colour splattering me. Grateful that all of the faces in the crowd composed a rainbow so familiar and tight-knit after more than three years together—in classes, in lunches, in seemingly lame Hollywood-themed dances. The constant clench of hunger softened then, in recognition of the fact that the *Ticonder* was no longer the only weapon in my armoury that could battle the devastating, green-eyed hunger for excellence which had brought me to the brink of starvation so many times.

Entering high school, however, the *Ticonder* began to make less and less appearances. I am uncertain as to what triggered the beginning of its end; I only know that one fall morning freshman year, my fingers tingled with the urge to comb through every pocket and crevice on my person and in my backpack in search of the well-loved pencil—only to find that I, surprisingly, could not remember the last time I had even thought of or gnawed on the *Ticonder*. But most surprising of all, I'd realised, was that I had never gone hungry.