In October, the trees burn from the top down. I’m going
down the stairs south of campus when a stranger, wearing
your cologne, walks past. His bland canvas jacket and blonde
hair mean nothing to me, but that scent does ninety through
my veins and wakes up every cell your hands ever brushed. I
almost stagger after the full force of how much I miss you keeps
walking by, like a hit-and-run, leaving me flushed and dilated
and constricted and a few other adjectives that accompany acute
longing. It fizzes into a dull ache by the time I reach my house.
The lush shrubs along the driveway are tipped with crimson, the
consequence of staying outside all day through a fiery summer.
In a few days the burned leaves will quit hanging on.
If only I’d stop hanging on. I keep seeing your face in my peripheral, before I turn and realize that it couldn’t be you, will never be you, because you’re in Idaho and you don’t believe in my God anymore and a million other reasons that I should just write on little yellow Post-it notes and paste all over my house as reminders to keep my excruciatingly resilient hope dormant. Hope seems to reside somewhere between my lungs and my ribs, ignoring memos from the Higher Office of Cerebral Logic. Hope is immune to Post-its.

I haven’t quit writing, even though the best dictionary fails me miserably, the most extensive thesaurus is filled with meaningless characters when I’m trying to describe what a nuclear orange the leaves outside my window are when the sunset lights them. Or how much I wish you were here to see them.

OLIVIA LEWIS would have liked to grow up someplace other than Pocatello, Idaho, but no one consulted her. To make up for it, she immersed herself in John Bellairs novels, learned to tolerate potato casseroles, and went on her first of many road trips at fifteen. Currently, her Life Plan B is to become an organic farmer in Monterey, California. Plan A is to write.