

Orange Nikes

by Anjanette Lin '25

I like to think of myself as quiet. It's different from being "shy"- there's confidence in every word I say, but I'm not the extroverted girl everyone loves.

Wriggling my arms into a hoodie, the thick cloth embraced my shivering body as a gust of winter wind whirled through the window and impaled me, shoving me two steps back as I stood to pack my bag. Glancing at cliques preparing to walk home, I clenched my jaw to hold in a sigh. It was true. The rest of humanity and I had agreed to ignore each other long before I was born. Rarely did I look people in the eye and smile, seldomly did I introduce myself, and constantly did I stare at the blur of shoes as the vociferous stampede of students impeded on my quiet bubble.

When the bell let out three ear piercing rings, red Adidas, hot pink Nikes, and dark blue Pumas leaped past me as the too-familiar spells of "oh my god" and "did you hear" were casted upon the student body. Round after round of shoe-gazing continued, and I let out a huff. Yet another day of this humdrum existence.

Abruptly, a pair of bright orange Nikes stopped in front of me, putting a rapid end to the monotonous come and go of sneakers.

"Hi!" They swiveled and pointed at my pink, frayed Pumas. A hand locked onto my boney shoulder. "Anjanette!"

Taking a faltering step back, my eyes sought for help at the gray stone ground in a bewildered daze. *She... knows me?* The Nikes took a step closer, and the suffocating grip of her

hand was, on second thought, friendly. The rush of shoes continued to trample the ground around us, but we stood still.

“Anjanette?” that voice rang again, this time louder.

“Yeah?” I replied, my eyes slowly maneuvering up to her face. Red-rimmed glasses, shoulder length black hair, two buck teeth, and an asymmetrical smile. She beamed at me, her eyes creasing into two gentle curves.

“Just wanted to say hi!” Her face lifted as the wind frolicked around her.

“H-hi.” I stuttered, my voice shrouded by puffs of cold air.

“Well, bye, now!” She flicked her wrist in a quick motion, pivoting her feet and melting into the blend of sneakers. Who was she? I never found out.

As students clamored on about the latest trends, their elbows dug into my ribs, their shoulders jostled against me, and their heads turned my way, yet their eyes never met mine. Somehow, she found me. Throwing off my invisibility cloak, nudging me from my haven, and acknowledging me; she saw me.

I don’t look at shoes anymore. How could I, when there is a world of people to see? The way one’s eyes soften during laughter; their lips telling stories of their day, comforting a friend, or jesting with a buddy—all tell someone’s story. I see black, yellow, white skin tones and everything in between. Now, when I see a teacher, friend, or classmate, I imagine those orange Nikes and offer a smile—one that starts as a small upturn of my lips that grows into a beam—a greeting, often reciprocated. Going from top to bottom now, I see affectionate eyes, bright smiles, then finally, shoes.

I still think of myself as quiet. It’s different from being “shy”—there’s confidence in every word I say. So, I say this: Hi. My name is Anjanette. Nice to meet you!

