



HENDERSON
LIBRARIES

10th Anniversary



Unlocked Voices

2019 Teen Writing Contest





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Jamia Davis
Middle School Essay



Untitled

Monuments are usually built with a purpose of remembrance to historic times or cultural heritage, due to its artistic, historical, political, or technical. The purpose for the Confederate monuments was a historical event, and everyone's been arguing whether to take them down or not but what would the difference be if we took them down. People think because of what Robert E Lee did we should take down all of the monuments, taking them down wouldn't make a difference to our lives. They're there so we can fix the mistakes of our past and actually resolve problems. If we take them down we'll be just as bad as them because instead of trying to prevent what they did to happen again we could end up encouraging it again.

Confederate generals were leaders during the American Civil war and we put up monuments in their memory because of what they did to help our country. We should remember the forces that are stronger than us and did all they could to win these wars, but instead some people don't care about what those people had to go through so that we can be here instead they want to take down the only thing we have to remember these people because he bad things they did. Remember, we can remember the evil in our history without honoring the one who committed. We don't have to remember the evil that the person has committed we can still remember the good in the bad. We haven't built our nation on lies no we build it on the truth.

We cannot revoke the right for others freedom of speech because on December 15, 1791 the first amendment was made and allowed us to have freedom of speech. Amendments are like laws but they can't be changed. Some people believe that because of the slippery slope argument that we should take down confederate monuments but what is the purpose of doing so what are they accomplishing. Human beings are letting an argument that is on a flimsy piece on paper control their opinion instead of thinking for themselves. Yes, some people believe that taking these monuments

down is a slippery slope because of how much trouble people go through to take them down but it wouldn't really matter.

The mistakes that we make are here to help us learn from what we did wrong and that why we put up these monuments but nobody realizes this. Parents and teacher use these to teach their kids about our American history like George W. Bush said "A great nation does not hide its history, it faces its flaws and corrects them." What's the point in hiding our history when we know what happened we shouldn't build our nation on lies we should build of the truth, show our flaws. If we took down our monuments nobody would probably remember because most people don't care about anything unless it's a statue. So, they shouldn't be taken down because even though the people the statue is for could have done wrong but we can remember our history without the evil, even when we can always correct the mistakes of our past.

All confederate monuments shouldn't be taken down because of the evil they have done or the slippery slope argument. But we must remember all monuments are usually built with a purpose of remembrance to historic times or cultural heritage, due to its artistic, historical, political, or technical. There is always a purpose for everything in life and not just objects. We should use these to educate the next generation not to terminate their history education. When you delete something you delete it forever never to be seen again. So we must always remember that we can honor the good without remembering the evil that one committed.

Dimitar Trifonov

Middle School Essay

Untitled

True. In accordance with fact or reality. "A true story." True is the truth in the truthfulness of this true world. And on behalf of my true self, I am able to truly find the truth found in the true state of truth in my true world. Which is true. Truth is also what makes true identical to the truth, which rhetorically relates to the truthfulness of truth, found in the true, unaltered, truth. When the truth comes out, all the truth is truly truthful, which makes the truth truthfully truly truthful. The truth will set apart the truth from the truth in which one truth will remain true. The truthful truth will then find a truth, describing their true self. In the true world, the truth will live truthfully on, as truth is hidden from the truth in which one's true self-truth will arise in true truthfulness. WHICH IS TRUE.

Yliana Victoria
Middle School Essay



Loved One

It was March 21st, 2018 I remember that day clearly. It was 6:30 in the morning I had just woken up to get ready for school. I went to school and everything was great. Unfortunately I didn't know what I was going to be told when I got home. I unlocked the door to my house and opened it to see a sad look on my parents face. They looked like they were crying, but why? They told me they needed to tell me something and I knew in that moment that whatever they needed to tell me I wasn't going to be able to handle it. They both took a deep breath and said that my grandma died. I fell to the ground with tears falling down my face. I wanted it to lie. I wanted it to be a dream. I wanted it to be a dream. I wanted to kick and scream and reverse back time so I could see her one last time.

I went upstairs to call my sister that lived in California at the time but as soon as I heard her voice I couldn't keep it together anymore. I sobbed quietly on the phone with her. Even though I wanted to feel comfort from her, I couldn't because her telling me it was going to be okay didn't help. I couldn't sleep that night maybe because I couldn't stop thinking about how I was never going to see her again. I laid there quietly letting all of the memories rush through my head.

My mom wanted me to stay home the next day but I didn't want to stay in my room to just sit there and think about her. I knew I wouldn't last. But during school I couldn't hold back my tears anymore. So I called my mom to come pick me up it was hard to hear her name. My father and his siblings were fighting over the date of her viewing and funeral. Hearing them fight made me think about what she would have wanted. I went to her viewing and saw all my family sitting there and really couldn't keep it together. I went up to her casket and saw her and then I realized it wasn't a dream anymore.

Natalya Webster-Willis
Middle School Essay



Travels

A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies.

The man who never reads lives only one.

George R.R. Martin

Books, they are the gateway to magic, mystery, intrigue, or facts, everything that you could ever imagine. Have you ever read a book that has left you breathless, because so many have and they are waiting to be discovered by you, the reader? When writers weave words into sentences and sentences into paragraphs and bind all of that to make a new world has been and still is just beautiful in so many different ways. Stories of heroism, romance, crime, science fiction, it's all there, in between the shelves of a building called a library. The tales in these pages are so enchanting that it would really be a disservice to the authors and to us if we don't give them the attention that they deserve.

No matter if you pick up a horror or a fairy-tale you will be able to leave your baggage behind and pick up the ones of a Divergent or a Tribute, you can enter a different world or even universe and follow the story where ever it takes you. These tales are able to take a reader on a quest or a mission to end an intergalactic war that has been raging for centuries or team up with a boy that finds out he's a wizard and uses his and his friend's skills to fight an evil sorcerer to protect his school. Whatever you do, wherever you go, those words on that page will take you to it and leave you with goosebumps. Books don't just take you on journeys, they take so many young readers. These stories bring people together and let them connect to a character like Lindsay Boxer (Women's Murder Club by: James Patterson) or Kendra Michaels (Close Your Eyes by: Iris Johansen) whose harrowing adventures make you want to climb into the book and experience these events with them. The characters in books aren't just that anymore they are family (in a not creepy or weird sort of way) you basically have lived their lives with them and that builds a bond that can only be reader and author. The characters are a manifestation of the writer's

imagination so in a sense you are getting into the mind and inner workings of these legends.

Even if you choose to read a nonfiction story that is still what it is, a story. Whilst fiction stories take you to imaginary worlds and universes, nonfiction takes you all around the world to learn about the past, present and future regarding animals, humans and even nature. So many choices to choose from, so many opportunities to see the world from a new angle from the tiny but mighty one of an ant all the way to the trunk of an elephant. There are no bounds as to what you can master as long as you just keep reading. A ton of knowledge is in those pages that are being neglected by youth and not getting the recognition that they deserve. You can go to the bottom of the sea to examine a giant amphipods or all the way to the mountains to research a black bear. Another option for you to choose is a history book, for us to grow as a species we need to look at the past for guidance to find answers and these books, these adventures, these stories allow us to find exactly that. If you want to be a famous artist go all the way back to the 1400s to meet Leonardo da Vinci or to 1800s to meet Mark Twain if you want to be a writer. You will always have something to learn and a book to help you. Once you see the journeys that you will go on inside a nonfiction's pages you will be left astonished.

Authors are the composers of literature, of tragedy, comedy, suspense, horror, memoirs, and myths. So many opportunities to study, to see, to wonder. There is a multitude of these masterpieces all around the globe. These treasures have been and will continue to be cherished by masses upon masses of people far and wide. Stories hold value that can never be put into words or on a price tag, they are priceless to heaps of an untold amount of dedicated readers in nations everywhere. So, keep thirsting for knowledge and adventure and never stop exploring the stories that are laid on pages inside of books.



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Dakyung Lee
High School Essay



To His Granddaughter

i. Stage 1

It starts with the little things – nothing special. You tell yourself it's only natural to become forgetful with age, that you too forget where you place your house keys from time to time. It's perfectly normal. You tell yourself that. And you repeat it every time.

But it becomes obvious. Too obvious for you to lie to yourself. You begin noticing the way he talks less and less. The way his lips begin to open and pause, frantic at first then slowing to silently open and close like trapped fish gulping for air. His mouth unable provide the means through which his thoughts desperately wish to escape.

When you come home, he takes a while to remember you. He grasps for reminders of you, of your name. But to him the reminders are dandelion seeds scattered by the callous winds of age to expose the stems to vulnerably decompose.

The signs are everywhere as he goes about his day. You find him wandering dark hallways trying to find the washroom, attempting to find rooms in a home that has sheltered him for more than four decades. Even the simple living room becomes an intricate labyrinth in which he must constantly run his fingers along the walls not to lose his grounded feet.

You analyze his movements, zero in on the way he circles around the furniture looking for the remote control he unknowingly grips in his hand.

You watch Grandmother begin to understand the signs, watch her start unpacking the musky cardboard box, desperate to retrieve even a sliver of what had been, anything at all.

And soon you observe that his eyes are dim lights, flickering with no focused strength. Only fluttering alert when you gently shake his arm to remind him that you are still there – that he is still here.

ii. Stage 2

You begin in the dead of night when no one will hear your fingers hesitantly typing against the keyboard to input the dreaded letters.

AL...ZH...E...

Many nights you stop there. Or sometimes you might continue until your heavy eyes demand reprieve from the glaring computer screen. You hurry into bed, placing your forearm over your eyes, ignoring the tightening sensation in your throat that has begun to form. But this will not happen every day because some days you might not feel anything, your own brain feeling as unfurnished and barren as his has become.

One morning, something will be wrong, very wrong. So, you reach out and grab his hand, only to realize the source of his afflictions has finally revealed itself, rearing its ugly, foul head. It is as if you are watching the very reversal of mitosis occurring inside his decaying brain. Cell death has progressed for the last seven years, eating away at memories of his childhood, of his marriage, of his children, of you. His dying cells like foam dissipating against the surface of water to release the few remaining reminders of his life.

Tell me your name. It becomes a ritual for you to ask the same questions over and over again. Too often, you are scared you'll break something. Your patience runs thin, your threshold cracking like the thinning ice of a your threshold cracking like the thinning ice of a springtime thaw. Tell me your name again. How old are you? Where do you live? No, say the address.

iii. Stage 3

You mutely eye your grandfather as he lies in the master bedroom with eyes searching the ceiling above him for something you cannot see. When you make a noise, he turns toward you. But there is blankness in his eyes when he stares at you, through

you.

He is no longer able to do much on his own; the disease has progressed for far too long. The condition will have thrown him in a lonely place; a place where grandfather has absolutely no control over the parts of his own body, a place where his last moments are like his first.

By winter, there is not much left to be forgotten, and he will cease to forget only when there remains nothing to be forgotten.

You will be scared of visiting. But please remember that he is scared of loneliness. You won't know how to approach him when the doctor issues the official finding. The final diagnosis. The one nobody – no fortune tellers, no psychics, no Gods – will refute.

iv. Final Stage

By winter, you will also come to terms with the real diagnosis of his disarray. Your personal disarray will gradually diminish to round out this trial of error and missteps. By then, you will wish for a miracle as the last snow dusts down to his resting figure under the covered porch, even as you talk to his resting form to become more certain of his fading.

But perhaps, he will listen and grant you an ephemeral moment in which his resting form will glance back to smile lazily and call your name—the way he used to. Not your grandmother's name, not your mother's name, but yours – your name.

Petar Matejic
High School Essay



Hamlet Tempest Comparison

Over the course of a duo of novels by Shakespeare, Hamlet and The Tempest illustrate a significant theme contrasting personalities which directly manifest the outcome of situations presented in a given lifetime. By human nature, it is common for there to be a personalized imbalance of the power of the mind, emotions, and that of resorting to physicality to settle a situation. All of these methods aforementioned can be assimilated into a Shakespearean theme, alternatively dubbed as the power of the “head, hand, and heart,” representing the nature of thought, physical abilities and skills, and lastly, emotional states, respectively.

The first main instance of psychological placement within the progression of Hamlet is the assumption of power by King Claudius as a result of the later-learned murder of King Hamlet via assassination by poison. The very assumption of power by Hamlet’s uncle creates justification and the foundation of the surrounding story as a whole. Likewise in The Tempest, the majority of the play with Prospero being cast away on an island was the direct consequence of being deserted by his brother, Antonio with the intentions of entirely grasping the power title of King of Milan. This mentally expanded fight for power in both plays emphasizes the epitome of how the aforementioned “head” component of Shakespeare’s theme plays a very dominant role in the influence of the direction of the story. Without the portrayal of the psyche, it is like there is no conscious factor dragging upon a conscious situation, which is a large contradiction in itself, hence the importance.

Equally as relevant in the display of actions and dialogue, the hand is used to physically demonstrate skills for the effect of the progression of a given situation. In Hamlet, the final fight between Hamlet and King Claudius, where the whole royal family dies, displays a physical representation for the major fight for power that has been posed in majority of the duration of the play,

which is ironically suppressed entirely when Fortinbras arrives at the conclusion of the play and declares himself the new ruler of the Danes. In *The Tempest*, the hand as a thematic concept can be drawn from the situation where Antonio attempts to kill Alonso for the consequence of Alonso being deposed off the throne and Antonio crowned the new king of Naples, which in a parallel like structure to Hamlet, is similar in that death is a major effect of the greed for power over each respective kingdom.

Finally, the heart element of Shakespeare's theme can be interpreted as the personal character trait in which one acts out upon their emotional desires and feelings rather than physically or intellectually. In Hamlet, Ophelia and Hamlet's relationship is halted upon comments made by Polonius and Laertes in an attempt to convince Ophelia that Hamlet could only seduce her and not marry her type because she is not of royal blood like Hamlet is. However, this apparently drives Hamlet's emotions crazy while he confronts Ophelia when she returns his love letters to her back to him. In *The Tempest*, Miranda and Ferdinand mutually fall in love despite Prospero believing Ferdinand to be a spy from Sebastian and his group, but later on, unlike between Ophelia and Hamlet, are approved of marriage by Prospero.

Given these three points, it is evident that Shakespeare not only tries to create a message in only one play, but tries and successfully expands these ideas across multiple performances including Hamlet and *The Tempest*. Because this concept is demonstrated largely amongst humans, it can be interpreted through how individuals are raised differently to believe in different types of techniques for solutions, whether it be intellectually, emotionally or physically. The theme of head, hand, and heart is used to differentiate between different types of personality flaws which influence the outcome of the play when put together because each element on its own demonstrates an imbalance within the whole character.

Trinity Terriquez
High School Essay



High School So Far

This year was my first year of high school, freshman year. Being my first year in high school I found myself just wanting to graduate and leave already. I honestly was kind of stressed during class sometimes because all of the work they gave us. All of that work had to be turned in the same day. I honestly thought I was going to fail one of my classes cause of all the work. But so far I'm doing good, a lot better than my Jr High years. Even though I do have a lot of work I somehow always finish it on time. I also go to a club after school, K-pop club. I am one of the dancers and one of the Captains. I'm really glad I am one of the heads of the club. I get to teach other members the dance and I am sometimes the main or lead dancer in a song. I hope that one of the years I will be the President and lead members to be better dancers and teach them how to work with people as a group. But sometimes it's also difficult, there is also transitions in a dance which means a lot more work. Nevertheless, we figure it out in the end and end up doing well, or okay at least. It's not only a club to the members, but a place where we can just have fun and dance to songs we like and love. But other than the club, I think my year as a freshmen in high school is going good.



Middle School

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Katelyn Chan
Middle School Poetry



The Magical Place

Have you ever been to The Magical Place?
A land filled with hopes and wonders.
A place where one can find true peace,
But what it looks like still ponders.

Is it a serene island?
As you watch the waves splash against the sandy shore.
Or is it watching an amazing performance?
As you hear the crowd cheer and beg for more.

Is it going on an exciting adventure?
Where there's a surprise everywhere you look.
Or is it a quiet library?
Where there's a journey in every book.

No matter where you are,
In the sea, land, or in the air.
The Magical Place is full of happiness,
So, The Magical Place could be anywhere!

So never forget...
When despair and sadness are gone without a trace.
And laughter fills in every single crack,
You know you have found The Magical Place.

Kahlen Coss

Middle School Poetry

Vegas Lights

You always swore you were nothing special
And you've never seen what I saw
I saw a kind-hearted soul
Who had not a single flaw.

You said you didn't think you shined
Brighter than glistening starlight
That assumption was incredibly wrong
Because you've been a shimmering all along.

You're wearing neon in a sea of grey
Always brightening my day
Your electric eyes are dazzling tonight
Because you shine brighter than the Vegas Lights.

Amelia Gall

Middle School Poetry

Untitled

Prince of the flowers,
He holds himself high,
He thinks himself faultless,
Yet a face so wry.

Prince of the flowers,
He's like this you see,
It's not good to be a prince
Without a fit king.

His flowers are dying,
And so is his heart,
His trust has been rotted,
He hadn't been smart.

His father was no good king,
He had found,
Uprooting his flowers
From their place in the ground.

An artist of sorts
With an odd looking sketch
Full of gore and blood
To make anyone retch.

He judged the artist harshly,
But not by the drawing,
The prince soon found himself
Ooh-ing, and ah-ing.

He won't just be my friend
The prince thought.
He'd be his king,
Now that's all that he sought.

His throat sort of tightened,
Will you be my king?
His voice was so shaky,
The back of his neck had a sting.

The artist said yes,
With his voice shaking, too.
The prince's flowers had bloomed,
And not all was so blue.

Tristan Kelleher
Middle School Poetry

Doe-eyed Girl

Warm, brown eyes that sparkle in the sun
A smile that lends to ANYONE
With pink-hued, freckled, round cheeks.

A cherry-sweet voice
contagious laughter rejoiced
under the sun idling
in a manner THAT is so beguiling.

Everyone KNOWS PERFECTION IS a facade
although they hide what they tried
but could never take away
feels like A LIAR and a fraud
almost everyday.

Fake smiles, empty giggles
covering imperfections with sprinkles
without confidence, PEOPLE assume possessed
lacking much-NEEDED finesse.

Though with all these self-imagined FLAWS
that no one seems TO see
she remains LOVED ever so greatly.

Keala Kieckhafer
Middle School Poetry



Girl
(Diamond Satire)

Girl
is a
wacko child
should be in a
mental asylum.
She farts all day,
drools all night
with pride.
Girl!

Chloe Lemons
Middle School Poetry

My Daisy

Oh Poe
I'm sorry you old soul
About the troubles and unfairness you endured
But better than anyone else
As you know
Life is and was never fair
You see
You wrote about the inevitable
The things none can escape
And
I as many others find this
Captivating
And Poe
You are not here today
To be with the future
And know
I too
Had a love by the sea
And, I too watched as angels and demons
Worked side by side
In jealousy
To pull apart a sword in stone
Known as
Love.
And Poe
If you're reading this
Under the ground
Or are hearing this through the wind
Or perhaps seeing this from above the clouds

Poe, I wanted you to know
You are not alone
And I wanted to tell you this
Writer to writer
Because I can read the hurt in every word
And I can hear the pain in every poem
So Poe
As a writer
I must tell you
And as a believer I must hope you listen
And as someone who has not lost but misplaced a lover
I must tell you
I too
See the eyes of the one who stole my heart like a jewel
protected by knights
I too still hear the voice of the one who made my heart
race and stop
I too
Still stand by the water of where he and I would chase
each other
In my grey hat gifted by my father
We played like children
I was the last to get tired so, I would pretend to be out
of breath to join him
Sitting in the sand and sipping iced mint tea
Where I would write love songs and read them aloud
And where he would smile and chase after my eyes
To say
“I love you”
Yes, I too still feel the venom which is known as heart-
break every night
And, I too
Talked and stared at the moon desperately asking for
answers
Like
“Why, why does he love me?”
And
I too muffle the screams of which I wish to release but
do not
Because I too

Keep my voice quiet at night and day
Not because I don't want to wake him up, my misplaced
lover
But because without him
I do not know my own voice, I do not remember the
sound of my voice
I do not know the songs I sang, I do not remember the
words I spoke
And I too
Dearly loved and miss my
Annabel Lee
Of which I let him crawl into my bones
And make a home
Where every blood and tear drop, I willing gave to make
his
And of which I gave him a fragile name
Not of his own.
Known as Daisy.
Like raindrops of gold
I keep my tears to myself
But I wish more than anything
Just like you did
To see
To have one more chance
To be with my darling Daisy.
So, I must go
But dear Poe
If I ever see you in my non-mortal life or a new one
I know what I would tell you
About everything you've missed
And the things you should be grateful to not have seen
or known
But most importantly
Perhaps we could talk
About you Annabel Lee
And my lovely
Daisy.

Stephanie Marriott
Middle School Poetry

Untitled

The lizard sheds
As the humans grows
Into the beginning of a new skin.

Growing as they olden
Getting wiser as they do
The lives go in a circle
The story longing as it does.

As the story goes
The lives shorten as they go on
Concluding the tale
Of a truthful story.

Lily Mayo
Middle School Poetry



Hard Times on the Underground Railroad

It is bright and then it's dark
All you hear is the dogs' bark
As they hunt you down at night
You hide in a tree as you're filled with fright
You hide under a nice guy's bed
As they search the house and you're filled with dread
You make it out alive
But you nearly don't survive
You run on the rough ground
But behind you is a bloodhound
Soon they catch you and have your feet bound
And have you dragged against the scraping ground
Soon they find out where you stayed
And on the way back to the plantation you realize you will
forever be enslaved.

Nisaiah Patague
Middle School Poetry

Untitled

Perfection, perfection, perfection.
No, not that direction.

Keep it in this section.

Perfect writing,
perfect tying,
perfect tone when reciting,
perfect cars,
Perfect stars.

Never once revealing your scars.

Do this,
Do that.
No, don't wear that hat.

Perfection, perfection.

How imperfect I am.
Oh, how that whole thing is a scam.

Isabel Sasaki

Middle School Poetry

Adhesive

An eye for seeing what others couldn't,
Her heart for showing others that they had worth,
A limb for them to find a passion
And a smile to spread to everyone she liked.

What do all these things mean, you say.
Well, she sacrificed everything she could
To make everyone feel happy.
Selfless and caring filled her soul
As it spread to her group of friends at school.

She sacrificed things like donors.
Opening up her heart for someone lonely
Just like the second seat on a seesaw to play.
Giving her tears to someone
so they could let them cry it out.
She did all she could.

She never felt stigma towards others
With the exception that nobody did
What she has done.
She gave, and gave, and gave,
But nobody did anything for her.

Now, unbodied, she weeps in silence
Of what she has gotten back.
She has gotten laughs and smiles
But they meant little.
Of what she gave

Nobody has given anything back
With the worth of what she gifted.

She and many others are still out there.
Weeping in silence, scared to share feelings
In fear that what they had wanted
Would shatter into pieces.

Warfare.
Mayhem.

They wanted everyone to be happy
And to realize the things that truly mattered.
But in reality,
Being the adhesive isn't good
When you need to be put together too.

Cadee Sessions

Middle School Poetry

Untitled

You were told about America, the land of the free.
You were told about all the different opportunities that laid
there.

Life wasn't easy halfway across the world.
Every day you worked night to day just trying to provide for
your family.

Cleaning toilets, and doing whatever you could to make
your dream of coming to America come true.
No matter what life threw your way, you pushed through
and continued to not give up.
Soon enough the day came, and you were able to bring your
family to your dreamland.

Landing in California, with your three kids, everything was
different.

A new language, new people, a new life.
From there it felt like you were restarting your life from
square one.

Yes, it was hard, but it was worth it.
Watching your kids grow up in the place you wanted them
to be,
having their own lifestyle and families.

You were at peace with life here, and it was a journey that
you would carry in your heart for a lifetime.

Deze'Rae Thomas
Middle School Poetry

Untitled

I'm in the dark.
Isn't it dreadful?
As I wander in the park
nobody is there.
A man with a smirk appears
he said something
but his words weren't clear.
I lean in closer but he disappears.
My fears start getting to me.
Monophobia is what it is.
His shadow appears again.
I get closer and I fall to the ground.
I somehow found myself in the dark.
It felt as if I'm drowning.
which I was.
Trying to find the surface,
it's lost.
I sink to the bottom.
I start to remember things.
I can't figure the problem.
Am I dead?
Or am I alive?
I start to see red?
I get confused,
is it blood!
Nope, it isn't.
I wake up again.
Still in this dark room.
I'm not kidnapped.
I'm not dead.
I'm mad,
in a stray jacket.



High School

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Zeynep Akgedik
High School Poetry



My Dreamworld

Diving into a world of fantasy,
I escape from the sorrow of reality;
Living inside of my dreams,
I heal my wounds.

As I run away from my fears,
They haunt me through my tears;
But in my secret dreamworld,
I'm not hurt, disturbed, or discerned.

In my dreams, I build my own world;
In which grief is unheard,
Nothing goes wrong to cause me pain,
There's no loss or failure, but gain.

My dreams are a part of my soul,
With them I'm in control;
I wish I could always dream,
Because reality hurts my esteem.

I'm a dreamer;
Whose heart hurts,
I'm a freedom-seeker;
Trapped in myriad desserts.

Untitled

The leaves in late autumn
your love was short
it was fragile , like the leaves in late autumn
your love was late nights, long fights
so
many
tears
your love was short
and when your love waved goodbye on that cold Christmas
day, it did not fight its way in your bag and travel back from
across the country
our love stayed in the same place it began
our love was physical
our love bloomed
while your hands ran over all my imperfections
your hands like a compass and my body was the map
we were trying to find direction
and now
we're stuck with this love
this broken oh so fragile love
like the leaves in late autumn
it calls back to us and we always answer
yet it remains physical
your loves lies in my bed at 4 in the morning when we know
we shouldn't be together
your love whispers "I miss you" into my ear so softly I could
barely hear
your love leaves as fast as it arrives
like the leaves in late autumn.

Maddie Baker
High School Poetry

The Goddess of Spring until the Queen of the Underworld

The roots wrap around her
As tight as any set of iron chains
The grasses tickle the bottom of her feet
While the sun is a constant vigil
The wildflowers are her only friends
Everyone else is wary of the goddess of spring

Until

The roots loosen their grip
Just enough for her to breathe again
The grasses sway in the lilting breeze
While the sun sinks behind the horizon
The wildflowers are waving goodbye
The goddess of spring descends into hell

Until

The roots grapple for purchase
As she dances with the souls of the Underworld
The grasses shiver in an empty field
While the sun searches for a familiar face
The wildflowers are happy for her
The Lord of the Underworld falls in love with the goddess
of spring

Until

The roots reach into the Earth
Determined to find their lost ward
The grasses perish in frozen soil
While the sun shines on a mother's fury
The wildflowers are suffering in solidarity
The goddess of spring fights to stay with the Lord of
Underworld

Until

The roots dwindle in the soil
As six pomegranate seeds burst along her tongue
The grasses emerge from their hiding places
While the sun crests upon a new era
The wildflowers are frolicking in joy
The goddess of spring kisses her Lord of the
Underworld and becomes a Queen.

Malia Bencina
High School Poetry

Blue

It's the color of your mother's eyes
When you first open yours. The sky bright
In pigment that same summer day.

It is the color of the house that
You spent most of your infant days.
The crayon you used to color your very
First drawings.

It is the color of the first car that you
And your family used to travel to far off lands.
Seeing so many sights that you always see in your memories.

It is the color of your first backpack.
Your first nervous day meeting new people that
Will help shape you into who you are today.

It is the color of the decorations next to
Red and white. You and most of your family
Celebrate your country, ending the day with
Explosive sparks that dazzle in the night.

It is the hue of the moonlight that shines on you
And your dolls. The hue that shimmers off the snow
From the previous storm. Cutting off the warmth from
The inside.

It is the color of the stage.
Your first performance that will leave you smiling

for years to come. The color of the lights that shine on your face as you sing your heart with your fellow Performers.

It is the color that your little sister wears on her first Day of kindergarten. Her face showing excitement and Nervousness mirroring you many years ago.

A year later

Your other sister wears and shows the same emotions.

It is the color of the classroom for your first day of high school. Making many friends and memories to laugh and share. The good and bad grades that make you strive to surpass them.

It is a darker shade on your dress for the dance that you Decided to attend with one of your best friends. The sky speckled with thousands of shining stars.

It is the color of the décor that your mother uses to decorate The apartment. The starfish and shells remind her of the place She will forever hold in her heart. With its white sand and clear Water.

It is the color of your phone screen and snacks during The long summer. Days of endless YouTube, cool ranch Doritos, and Pepsi.

It is the color of your uniform for your Sophomore year. Seeing your friends on that Autumn day talking about your summer and being one Year older.

It is the color mixed with green that Formed around your friend's pupil. Her telling you about her latest amazing Date with her ocean eyed boyfriend.

It is the color of the dog toy you
Bought. Your first two dogs, small,
And full of energy.

It is the color of the text bubbles that are
Filled with words of yours, and his, confessions
Of your feelings for one another.

It is the color of the hearts he sends you
With sweet messages, while you send back
Purple.

It is his favorite color. You tell each other
Everything as you walk to class. Sharing
Jokes and secrets, giggling like children.

It is the color you feel over winter break.
Hugging his shirt he gave you. While you think
Of him endlessly.

It is the color of the necklace he gave you
On your 4th anniversary, months after your
Confession. Him giving you his favorite
Flannel matching the necklace.

It is the color of you spending time
With your family.

It is the color that you have seen
And felt through your whole life.

It is the color, blue.

Elmer Campos-Monzon
High School Poetry

Expectations

Don't live by expectations.

Don't even accept it,
you'll do more harm to yourself when you expect it.

Accept the fact that you can't live by that,
but you can live through that.

Expectations, just don't expect it.
Because when you live through that
you just can't come back from that.
Just respect it.

Roaming through your own mind is expected
but maybe you should just reflect it.

Being expected from a beloved one is manipulated
so just forget it.

Maybe you should fancy your opinion or just flash it.

The unexpected is what is respected.
The respected is what you disrespected
so don't expect it.

The realization of this contamination is explosive.
There was an explosion.

Emma Foster
High School Poetry

The Flower

They're as strong as rock,
thrown around like pebbles across a lake.

The flower starts to wilt,
with no water and no one watching.

They can make you bleed,
in a single instant it wounds,
crumbling to a single shape.

The flower turns,
dropping a single petal to the ground.

They rip you from the inside out,
exposing your skeleton as it shatters.

Shatters like a mirror,
opening scars, new and old.
The flower begins to wilt from the center,
its petals scattered among the shards,
but no one seems to notice.

“Be careful... it can ruin...” they say,
though they all continue to hurt.
It can rip through anything in a second,
destroying all nearby.

The flower has fallen,
beaten to the floor & reduced to ash.
From what? You may ask.

No one was around,
no one was near,
not surrounded.
It drowns from the rain.

Savannah Hankins

High School Poetry

Untitled

I've always wanted a cheesy high school movie love story. You know the kind you're too embarrassed to admit you'd ever watch.

Well, I guess I got my wish because I'm in love with a boy who barely knows I exist. "A perfect movie scenario"! Except John Hughes doesn't direct my love life and talking to someone you sit next to isn't fate, it's alphabetical. It's kind of funny, I wonder if he knows how deep I fall with each hello. And how I'm pulled back to reality with every goodbye. Or how his dark eyes sparkle like an ocean at midnight. I'm praying he doesn't figure out I only brought up Vikings so much because some stupid book said it was a good "ice breaker". "Why not confess?" You ask. Well it's quite simple, this isn't a movie I'm not Molly Ringwald and he's not Jake Ryan. I'm just a girl he happens to sit next to; nothing more nothing less. A classic teenage heartache.

Alli Harper
High School Poetry

Untitled

She didn't look you in the eye
when you talked.

She didn't say anything
when that guy whistled at her from his car.

She didn't speak up
when the boss put his hand a little lower than her back.

She didn't do anything at all
because she was society's girl.

Now she runs up and links arms with the girl walking by
herself past a group of men.

Now she stands tall with her shoulders back as you try to
tear her down.

Now she is the woman that defends the girl she used to be.

Now she no longer belongs to society,
but to all the girls
because we have all once been that girl
and together we will change the world.

Antonia Librizzi
High School Poetry



Sweet Land of Liberty

Give me liberty or give me
death. We say it but say rarely mean it.
We only care about liberty when it
affects us.

Every day we say “I
pledge allegiance” to this country that
supports police who kill innocents.
We see all the Treyvon Martins,
and Tamir Rices,
and Michael Browns
but we might as well be
blind. They say black lives matter and we respond
all lives matter while demanding the NFL
fire all the
traitors who dare to kneel during our
national anthem.

We yell
“don’t tread on me” while
kids are being slaughtered at school.
Offering nothing more than
“thoughts and prayers” as we watch
the same thing happen
over
and
over
again.
Same crime. Same face.

Different place. riend.

We scream,
“God bless America” and demand a wall
to protect us
from the rapists and the murderers.
But when a woman is raped at a party?
Let’s put her rapist on the Supreme Court because
she just wants attention—
was probably asking for it anyways.

They say
“my body, my choice” and we hear
“promote murder”.
Birth control is the devil’s drug but
no one’s bothered by
the 16 year old who got
knocked up,
she’s probably a slut anyways.

“United we stand”
until the next news cycle rolls around and we
forget that people don’t have
drinking water in Flint, Michiga—
oh look, Arianna got a new tattoo!

We claim,
“United we stand”
while screaming how “my side’s right!”
and screw the snowflakes
and the libtards
and the wingnuts

The Christians preach
“treat thy neighbor as thyself”
but stay
silent as we separate
children from
their parents at the border.
Are they not our neighbors? No!

They broke the law!
They are criminals,
aliens,
it's the mother's fault!
How dare she...
try and give her child a better life?

We're the home of the brave
unless you're trans,
then what right do you have to serve and
protect?

All men are created equal?
Since when did that become
a question?
And when are we finally going to
start caring?

Jade Price
High School Poetry



Honey, Can I Lay Right Here?

Honey, can I lay right here?
I'm sick of all this fear
Controlling my brain
Oh, it's such a pain
Honey, can I lay right here?

You know I don't sleep at night
I'm always waking you up with a startled fright
I promise I don't mean it
I promise I'm alright
Oh Honey, can I lay right here.....

I'm so sorry....
I really wish for the day
Where my brain wouldn't cave
My memories are fading
I know you implore that you're not sad to the core
But every time you see me I'm usually on the floor
Honey, can I lay right here?

I don't know why your still there
Or why my doctor tells me I can't get a repair
Every time they say it I'm pulled into despair
Hoping your unaware
That this is a waste of time
Cause I don't want to lose your light that shines
But being with me doesn't make you feel alive
And I have started to see through your little lies
So, Honey can I lay right here?

I watch you take a breath
Full of exhaustion
Can't you see
What this is costing
From all that overworking exposure
Just to keep me alive
You tried to hide your silent cries
Now time has passed, I can barely hear them
Or that beautiful heart
That would only beat for me
Even when we were apart
As I rest next to you
Trying to remember your warmth
And how you looked
On that summer day, on that hot beach
Saying those words I first said to you
When we first met
And continued to say
Since the start of my death,
As our love comes to an end

Oh, Honey
As I lay right here.

Ella Shaa

High School Poetry

I am

I am like a chameleon of a rainforest,
I am invisible, unrecognized.
Unseen by the world,
Concealed.

Choosing to camouflage into the background I,
Constantly changing to avoid being recognized.

Even though I choose to stay hidden,
I grow envious of those who are acknowledged for their
amazing colors.

My heartstrings pang when I try,
And so hard do I try,
To show my ability,
My colors,
Only to be upstaged by someone else.

I smile, happy for the winner,
But once I turn
Away from the celebratory screams,
Away from the groups of social birds,
A wave of anguish drowns me
Holding me under
Until I can no longer breathe
Until I am numb to everything around me.
My colors once again fade and match my surroundings.

My colors are complimented
But once again I compare myself
To the colors of the social birds.
Their feathers smooth and bold
Their gracefulness, blinding me,
Making me realize that not everyone has to try as hard.

I compare to a standard I cannot reach.
Comparing my scales and ever-changing style
To feathers and flight
Has no use.

I know that attention is not always bad
That showing my true colors is not embarrassing nor
wrong.

There will always be a bird more beautiful,
more bold, more elegant.
However I cannot focus on someone other than myself.

Like a chameleon,
I change myself each day.
Although I blend into everything else,
For my protection,
I recognize my beauty for all it is and can be.
I recognize the soaring birds above
Acknowledging their beauty
However, this time
There are no comparisons
Only compliments.
Even though I am invisible to most,
I know I am beautiful to some
I know that I am beautiful.
I accept myself for who I am
I am content with myself
I am myself.



Middle School

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Keira Albaugh

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

Crushes, everyone has one, the popular girl in your grade or the kid that sits in the very back. Everyone has one but at different times, some people don't get a crush until middle school, high school, maybe college, or even when they're adults. Everyone hopes that their crush admires them back, sometimes that is something that can happen, but most of the time it is heartbreak when they don't admire you back. The reason I'm talking about this is that I finally understand who I liked, and now he is going to be with another girl. We're only in seventh grade, however, we still can admire people. I always changed who my crush each year ignoring the fact that I liked someone else. The person I truly like has been with me since the start, they were there for me when others weren't. I found out I had a crush on my best friend, and there's nothing wrong with that right? We've been through so much together since kinder we are like brother and sister. We can tell each other anything, but this I can't tell him. He likes another girl, a really pretty and popular girl. I support my best friend since that's what they're for, they both like each other and like the same things. He likes a certain type of music, more of a rock type with a guitar and bass, it has drums in it that if you find a certain beat it is fun to dance to. She also likes that, she is very pretty I admit I'm a little jealous of her. She seems to have a perfect life, while I'm barely able to get through all my problems. I wish I would have known sooner that I liked my best friend. Maybe I could have had a chance to be with him when we got older. But I will have to wait, I see all my friends dating already but my parents won't let me date till I'm sixteen. I'm grateful for it but I also hate it, every one of my friends seems to have people liking them and seem to be dating, I feel jealous of the fact that I believe no one likes me. It seems selfish of me to say that I want it back to the good old times, where we were little kids running around with no problems. I kind of hate the fact how everyone thinks I have a perfect life and that many guys will like me. However that isn't true I'm jealous of everyone when they find love, I truly just want

someone there to be there for me when I'm feeling down. I kind of want it to be my best friend, because like I said he has been there for me since kinder. I guess crushes do and do not seem to help you, because it can help you forget about who you actually like, but once that person is gone you feel lonely. I just hope by the time I'm able to date, maybe I can actually date someone I truly like.

Alugust Altier

Middle School Short Story

The Accident Family

Winston Accident was sitting with his sister, Fiona Accident, on the floor of their apartment. They were playing Go Fish while their parents made dinner.

However, instead of playing with normal cards, Winston and Fiona were using a pack of cards with eldritch creatures on them.

“Got any. . . one eyed octopus hawks?” Winston Accident asked. His sister sighed and drew a card from the deck. She placed it down on the ground next to her, and a tentacled creature leapt out of the card and into the apartment.

Winston’s, and Fiona’s mom, Rachel Accident, rushed into the room with a frying pan and started hammering the creature with it. The monster slowly shifted back into the card.

“Did you kids use the demonic monstrosities deck, AGAIN?” Winston’s and Fiona’s mom asked.

“Don’t blame me!” Fiona said. “Winston was the one who got it out of the closet full of all our bad stuff.”

“Winston! You know not to go in there!”

“Yeah, but all of those items are just collecting dust. Plus, most of them are magic. Magic never hurt anyone, right?” Winston argued. The tentacled creature shot up a limb and tried to grab Rachel, but she fought it off with the frying pan once more.

The Accident family was used to coming across dangerous situations and otherworldly trouble like the tentacled creature all the time. They’d get caught up in a new and deadly adventure almost every day and find odd items along the way, normally filled with something evil or unstable.

“Well, it almost hurts us every day. We barely even know what this stuff is!”

Rachel objected. The phone rang and Winston’s and Fiona’s dad, Gregg, popped his head out of the kitchen.

“It’s the apartment manager. He says he wants to talk about our rent situation. I got to take this call. Rachel, foods done, you bring it out to the table.

Winston, Fiona, you can put down the silverware.” Fiona, Winston, and Rachel soon set the table and started eating.

“Why is Dad talking with our Apartment manager more and more?” Fiona asked.

“Well, our rent has been overdue for two days and the manager is starting to get upset. We also haven’t come up with any money or good jobs in the last few days.” Rachel replied.

“Hmm... what if we sold all that magic junk in our closet?” Rachel shot Winston a scowl.

“That stuff is not what everyday people can live with. We’re a little bit more prepared for the worst that can happen, but so many other people aren’t. Letting them bring in a lamp that’s brighter than the sun or a coat hanger made out of snakes might make us lose more money than gain any with how much resulting damage we might have to pay for.” Gregg walked into the kitchen, and actually seemed happy.

“Great news!” Gregg exclaimed. “Our apartment manager, Barry, says we don’t have to pay our rent for the next three months if we help him out with something.”

“And that is?” Rachel asked skeptical.

“Well, I don’t know yet, truth be told.” Gregg sat down in his chair next to the dining table. “However, it’ll probably be something like helping Barry fix a loose pipe, or move in furniture for new guests.” Gregg practically swallowed the food on his plate in one bite. “I better be get off to bed soon; whatever job we find tomorrow will probably require lots strength and energy.” Gregg rinsed off his plate and walked into Rachel’s and his bedroom.

It was early morning when all of the Accident family walked toward Barry’s office in the apartment building. Barry was waiting by the door, and he smiled at the Accident family as they approached him.

“Hello, friends! Please come in; we have much to discuss.” What was about to be said was nothing the Accidents thought they would hear. Barry stuck his head out one more time outside the door. For the past minute he’d done this five times. He then turned to the table and laughed like an excited little girl.

“I need you, Gregg, and your family to come with me on an adventure you will never forget. Today, we’re going to prove aliens exist.”

“I’m sorry, what?” Rachel asked. Barry opened a drawer in his desk. From it he laid out what appeared to be a scroll, but

quickly folded out into a map. Barry then placed down pictures of asteroids, models of flying saucers, and a pack of small markers.

“To this day, the mystery of alien life still eludes mankind. Do other intelligent beings exist? Do they know we exist? Are they studying us; did they create us . . .”

“Wow, Barry, calm down. Don’t you have a pipe that needs to be fixed somewhere or some guests to move in?” Gregg asked.

“Yeah, maybe a gear got loose in his head for a second,” Fiona whispered to Gregg.

“Allow me to explain in a way you can better understand this. For years, people have reported alien saucers flying above Earth. However, no one has ever proven they exist for real. That is why your family and I will fly to a location above Earth surrounded by debris and scrap metal. In that small field may lurk an alien craft watching us from afar. And I,” Barry took out a video camera from another drawer, “plan to record all of it.”

“Okay, this sounds like an amazing adventure,” Winston said sarcastically

“However, why pick us? Do you even have space suits or a rocket?”

“Well, I picked your family, Young One, because you have had the most experiences with death and danger. I also need you to be my body guards just in case these aliens are hostile. And, yes, I do have the right gear and rocket to get us to the alien craft.” Barry opened up one final drawer on his desk and shut it with his fist. With that, the space containing the Accident family and Barry slowly descended down into the ground. When they stopped descending, the Accident family saw that Barry wasn’t kidding around. They found themselves in a large control room filled with dirty robots made of scrap metal and destroyed home appliances. Next, outside of the control room was an enormous room. Which held an asteroid with thrusters on its bottom.

“The space suits and other necessities are on the ship.” Barry pointed toward the asteroid.

“That’s not a ship though.” Rachel Accident said.

“Oh it is. . . it’s just camouflage to look like an asteroid.” One of the robots approached Barry and made a series of clicking sounds. Barry then turned back to the Accident family and said, “Launch is in five minutes; you might want to get on the ship now.”

The Accident family was in the main compartment of the

asteroid rocket. They were discussing whether they should get off the rocket and escape.

I'm going to be honest, this whole thing seems to be very unstable," Winston patted a panel of the rocket which flipped off after he removed his hand.

"I know this sounds bad, but what if we let Barry go to space on his own? I bet this thing blows up as soon as we hit the atmosphere," Fiona asked.

"And leave Barry to perish on his own? I mean the man seems deranged but that normally means you should help him as much as you can. "

"I agree with both of you," Rachel stated. "Yes, it seems like this whole job will go up in flames, no pun intended. However, we shouldn't just leave Barry alone up there."

"So we do what he says and play baby sitter? We shouldn't have to do that. What if we just tried to make Barry miss the departure? That way we don't have to risk anything or anyone." Fiona asked everyone.

"That sounds like a good plan, but how are we going to distract him?" Gregg asked.

"I think I have an idea," Winston said.

Barry was just getting ready to board the rocket when screams sounded from it. Immediately the Accident family rushed out of the entrance of the large contraption yelling...

"They found us! They found us!" Rachel Accident screamed.

"Who found us? The government? We can't let them sabotage my moment. I mean OUR moment to shine," Barry asked.

"No, the aliens found us first!" the rest of the Accident family came out of the rocket, chased by a tentacled abomination.

"Oh, my gosh, PROOF!" Barry rushed to get his camera. He started snapping pictures of the alien only to be knocked against the wall of the control room by the monster. Winston quickly pulled a playing card out of his pocket and jumped on the monster. After being hit multiple times the monster slithered into the playing card and whined. Rachel sighed and then smashed the camera Barry was holding before he was shot across the room.

Glad that's over. Now we just need to get Barry to his office before he wakes up." Rachel looked over to where they slowly rose down from the office. However, all she saw were the scrappy robots approaching them in a menacing manner.

“Uh, oh,” Winston saw the advancing machines. “Looks like they figured out our plan!” A robot’s hand attempted to grab Fiona’s leg. However, she quickly smashed the robot to pieces with her other foot. Gregg Accident looked around the room for a solution that would take out all the robots.

“Sprinklers!” he shouted and pointed at small nozzles on the ceiling. “We need to figure out how to turn on those sprinklers!”

“The heat from the rockets engines might trigger them!”

Fiona yelled back as she rushed to the door going into the room holding the rocket. She opened the door and a few seconds later the thrusters went off. The unstable heat could be felt in an instant. The sprinklers suddenly shot water everywhere drenching the robots and making them shut down.

When Barry finally awoke, he found himself in his chair. The Accident Family were right next to him, watching for when he would wake up again.

“Are you okay?” Gregg Accident asked Barry. However, Barry sat up immediately and asked, “What happened, where’s the alien, where’s my camera, what happened to the rocket?”

“Well, the alien destroyed your camera after shooting you against the wall. The only way we could stop the alien was by throwing it onto the spaceship so that it would go up into space and explode.” Winston lied. “Oh, the alien also destroyed your robots and control room.” Barry sadly looked down at his table.

“Everything I worked for. . . SUCCESSFUL! I didn’t get proof, but I saw an alien!” Barry jumped out of his seat and started cheering. “For you helping me, your rent is free for three years, Gregg!”

“Well, I’m glad we could help, Barry.”

“Just imagine all the things I could do with this information. I’m going to get started on a new control room and rocket right away.” The Accident family laughed nervously.

“Well, um, just, uh, d-don’t forget to make sure EVERYTHING is safe, Barry,” Fiona said. However, Barry was already mumbling excitedly to himself. The Accident family left Barry to his work as they enjoyed a long break from adventure, for now. . .

Nicole Blachowska
Middle School Short Story

Millie's Adventure

My name is Millie and I live on Mars. I was born on October 4th, 2039, so that makes me eleven. I am now heading to the museum to buy a ticket. I first am heading to the exhibit about cooking in 2018. Now, we cook with microwaves that make food appear, all they had back then was a stove, Yikes!

Next, I venture over to the technology exhibit. I see iPhones and Mac computers, man those are outdated! I also saw a hoverboard that doesn't actually hover, how boring! We actually have hovering hoverboards and phones that can turn into cars!

I started walking to the next exhibit when...whoa! The ground was shaking and I was falling. A few minutes later, the shaking stopped and I felt like a dizzy chicken. I finally got to my feet and looked out the window, uh oh... something was wrong! I wasn't in 2050 anymore, I was in 2018.

I decided to go exploring. I was walking and I met a boy named Miles. He said, "School is awesome, we write on paper and with pencils. We also have a library full of books." I couldn't believe it, now our library is on our iPads, which every student receives to do all their work.

I continued to walk and I met a woman named Madison. She said, "Our houses are absolutely fabulous. We have fireplaces and vacuums." I was astonished, we have robots that do all our chores for us.

Finally, I walked back to the museum and guess what... it happened again. I felt a shake and then... I was back. Everything went back to normal. That was a day I will never forget.

Alexis Boekankamp

Middle School Short Story

The Mystery in the Mist

On a cold, dark night, there was fog in the air, cops put missing signs all over town and they said:

*Missing: Jonathan Anderson
Contact the police if you find him.*

“Wait a minute,” said Sydney “That’s the fifth missing sign I’ve seen this week! “

“I wish Laufhry state wasn’t such a place for crime.” said Alison.

The lights flickered on and off then it was dark, empty, cold, then I was gone. The next morning all they found was a broken lamplight. Then, I woke up and realized it was all a dream. My alarm clock went off after that it was just a normal morning breeze in the air, and the wind blowing slowly upon my face. But I heard a slight whistle. The wind started blowing crazily, then I saw it, the missing person’s signs.

”It was happening, why to me!” said Sydney.

The doorbell rang.

“Oh, thank god it’s just you,” said Sydney.

“What’s wrong? You sound worried” said Alison.

“I SAW THEM!” said Sydney in a distressed fearful tone.

“Saw what?” said Alison

“THE MISSING PEOPLE SIGNS! In my dream, I saw them!” said Sydney.

“Well looks like we’ve got trouble on our hands, but first let’s go to school.” said Alison

“Oh right school,” said Sydney.

After school, the girls got together to solve their mystery, but just where are they going?

Shania Buford

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

I hated the color red. I was only nine but I cried every time I saw it. And yet there I was, covered with it.

Day 7, Solitude

They left me here to die, everyone else escaped, no one bothered to help. I was right there, in front of their faces, sitting there, but they didn't care.

There was a fire that day, anybody could have caused it, it could have been planned, it could have been an accident, no one really knows. I can't recall the events of that night, all that comes to mind is everyone running away, with me tied up to a chair. So goes my realization of being left behind. The fire must've done something to my brain to make me forget, at least, I think so. I haven't got any clue why I've been tied to a chair, I might've been in the middle of being interrogated by a reporter, but then again, it is just an assumption.

The building they believed to have burned down was in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by trees. Miraculously, it managed to survive, though only barely, most of the objects filling each room were gone. Not to mention the gaping holes in the walls and the glass scattered everywhere. My every step was dangerous.

An insane asylum.

I walked through each room with quiet, careful steps, as if I was being followed. Every room was uniquely eerie. One room was completely pink, no furniture, just walls. Another was filled with stuffed animals, their limbs severed from their sagging bodies. Others were barren. This was the 17th floor.

Day 29, Isolation

It is the 2nd floor now. I refuse to go to the 1st, fully aware of what awaits me. Red. So much red. Soon, however, I will have no

choice in matter. The floors I've cleared had scarcely any food. That fact was not surprising to me in the slightest, most insane asylums are not made for a privilege such as food.

I looked down at the stairs, stairs that looked all too familiar for the hundredth time. As I alighted, I was thankful to walk normally and not on my toes. When my feet hit the final step, a strange feeling spread through the depths of my stomach. It was not fear, nor disgust, but an empty, cold feeling. As if I could disappear at any given time.

I take a look at my surroundings, not a dead organism in sight. There was a giant hole where the doors were supposed to be. I walked over to it and sat down, legs straight in front of me. The sky outside was grey and the trees were filled to the brim with nauseating green leaves.

It didn't take me long to notice the blood on my feet. At first, I was emotionless, unable to process what exactly I was looking at. Until it hit me, hard. I fell down and started to crawl away as if I could possibly escape my own feet. Sharp pains started to form on my hands do to the lack of attention to the shards on the ground.

I ran everywhere with carelessness, and I continued to until I reached a staircase I had never seen before. I ignored the throbbing pain from my feet and slowly followed them.

Then, without warning, that strange feeling returned. Except this time, it was not emptiness, but rather, a feeling of which I might be getting lead towards something. Not only this, but also a presence of gloom, and sorrow.

Day 86, Desolation

Once I reached the end of the what seemed an interminable staircase, I saw me, another me, covered in blood.

Lifeless.

It suddenly hit me, the reason for the destruction of this building, the reason I was in this building, and the reason why I couldn't remember anything.

June 8th, 2006

“Just trust me Erik, we're both getting out of here.”

“Whatever you say man, but if this goes downhill I ain't takin' the blame.”

But what Erik didn't know was that I had no intention of

surviving and running away into the sunset with him.

I was going to kill everyone in that building.

My plan was simple, steal the bombs the military left when they visited, place the bombs in my very skillful acquaintance hands, tie myself to a forgotten chair when the guards weren't looking, and destroy myself along with the entire building.

For what reason? Trivial really, ever since I was a child, I have had the overwhelming desire to hurt something, someone, or myself. Again and again, I have walked down the middle of a highway filled with rapidly moving cars. But of course, my mother always got in the way, yanking me back before one of those things touched me. And yet, she would push my tendencies aside, thinking that I was simply being a careless child.

But I wasn't.

When it got to the point where this was an almost daily recurrence she took me to the psychiatrist. I ended up slitting the doctor's throat with a pencil. No one was able to figure out the problem with me, why I wanted to hurt, yet wanting nothing to do with the color red.

That's why, when I saw the explosion going off, I was confused as to why I felt nothing when seeing body parts flying around me.

But now I understand.

Day 108, Forbearance

I lifted my corpse off the ground and stared at it with intolerance. This wasn't right. I dragged it from the dark room, up the stairs, over the glass shards, passing the second floor, then the third, fourth, fifth, and so on. Until I reached the roof of the building.

With sore arms and a dizzy mind, I joined with my corpse. Without a second thought, I walked slowly towards the edge. My toes felt nothing as a passing breeze swept by. I looked up, smiled brightly, and with the little strength I had left, I leapt.

This was beauty.

Brooklyn Chan

Middle School Short Story



A Peaceful Beginning

Once upon a time, about 100 years ago, lived a 10 year old girl named Sarah. Little Sarah had no friends or family to talk to because she was all alone in the Orphanage for Little Girls. Since she was a little girl, all she had was her lovable teddy bear named Mr. Stuffings. He kept her warm and safe every day.

One cold and windy night, Sarah was lying in bed reading her favorite book when she heard a loud creak by the large window.

Creeeaaakk!

"Gulp! Everyone wake up!" she yelled out loud.

But it wasn't loud enough. Sarah tried shaking some of the orphanage girls, banging some pots and pans very loudly, and even splashing some water on their faces, but nothing seem to help. She realized that everyone was trapped in Dreamsville and no longer waking up.

"You got to be kidding. Wake Up!" screaming on the top of her lungs.

"Hmm . . . What was that? It must be the alley cat," she thought to herself.

She put her book down and tiptoed towards the front window. Then all of a sudden she sees a strange light appearing. Curious as she is, she starts walking closer and closer to the light, until she realizes something.

"Why is it getting hot all of a sudden?" whispering to Mr. Stuffings.

When she finally arrived at the window, she slowly reached out for the curtains, but resisted. Something was out there. It was making a low deep growl.

Grrroowl!

Before she could check what was behind the curtains, the curtains burst into flames.

It was too late. A giant eye appeared through the window. Then, a dragon arm broke through the window, reached out, and grabbed everyone that was sound asleep. Sarah dodged the dragons arm and hid under one of the orphanages bed. Peeking

from underneath the bed, Sarah saw a huge black frightening dragon. The dragon took everyone and disappeared into the mist.

Sarah fell to her knees weeping, thinking "What am I going to do?"

As she sat there crying, a huge shadow appeared right above her head. She slowly turned around and noticed it was another dragon. Too scared to run and too tired to scream, Sarah just stood there while the dragon reached out its claws and brought her closer to his face. Sarah realized it wasn't an ordinary dragon. It was a Rainbow Dragon.

"Where are you taking me?" sighed Sarah.

The Rainbow Dragon did not answer. As they flew across town, Sarah noticed how the entire town was very quiet. There was no one in sight. She realized that everyone was asleep and she was the only one awake.

"Why me?" turning to Mr. Stuffings.

They went deep into the forest then ended up at a portal to an unknown world. As they slowly entered the portal, there was a strong gush of wind grabbing them from the front. They quickly dashed in and ended up on the other side. They crept into a small dark cave to hide. Then, all of a sudden, Rainbow Dragon started to speak.

"You need to save your people from evil Queen Black Bird!"
Whispered Rainbow Dragon.

"Why me?" sighed confused Sarah.

"You are the chosen one. You need to find the heart of relics, the sword of truth, and the shield of hope to wake up your friends from their deep sleep and bring them safely home." said Rainbow Dragon.

Rainbow Dragon gave Sarah a potion to drink to disguise her into a dragon. Then, they started their journey across the Land of Fantasy towards evil Queen Black Bird's castle. They dove into the Sea of Serenity, journeyed through the Trees of Tranquility, and battled the fierce fire at Volcano of Vengeance then finally arrived at the Dark castle.

With Rainbow Dragon's potion, Sarah was breezing through the castle doors like one of the other dragons. The walls of the castle were black as night and filled with portraits of the queen in various poses. They arrived in the throne room where they saw everything that they needed. But all of a sudden, they were faced with a problem, Queen Black Bird!

"What is your purpose here?" yelled Queen Black Bird.

"I am here to take back what should be mine!" demanded

Rainbow Dragon.

While Rainbow Dragon and Queen Black Bird bickered very loudly back and forth. Sarah sprinkled glittery white dust above her hair to turn her invisible. Then she slowly and quietly tip toed towards the heart of relics, the sword of truth, and the shield of hope. With no one guarding the items, Sarah quickly grabbed each items without Queen Black Bird noticing. After reaching for the last item, she heard a thunderous pound. When she turn around, she saw a gigantic pillar crashing down towards her! Fortunately, she dodged just in time, before the pillar smashed her into a pancake. Except it was no time to celebrate yet. The thunderous pound came from the Rainbow Dragon, but he looked wounded. He laid motionless against a wall with several massive pillars on top of him. Dozens of scratches and bruises rest upon him everywhere, no single space was left unharmed.

"No!" Sarah thought as she ran to her injured friend. "Wake up! Wake up! Please! Get up!" her eyes were swollen from all the crying. She tried shaking her friend to wake up, but it was hopeless. Rainbow dragon was dead.

"No...No..." Sarah whimpered while Queen Blackbird cackled by her accomplishment.

"See child, you are weak without your pitiable dragon to help you." screeched Queen Blackbird.

Sarah didn't want to admit it, she was helpless and vulnerable without the Rainbow Dragon to protect her.

"What to do... What to do..." thought Sarah, but there's no doubt that the odds were against her. She has nothing to defend herself with, nothing but despair. Queen Blackbird was celebrating her triumph with cackles. Before facing the fact that Queen Blackbird won, Sarah remembered one last thing. Quickly without Queen Blackbird noticing, she pulled out the three artifacts.

"Hey Birdbrain!" hollered Sarah.

Queen Blackbird was too vain of her success to realize what was happening. "WHAT DID YOU CALL ME!" shrieked Queen Blackbird in a fury. Her face turned cherry red and she was about to explode like a volcano.

"You heard me loud and clear!" bellowed Sarah standing tall with courage.

Sarah had each of the three artifacts, the heart of relics, the sword of truth, and the shield of hope. Sarah pointed the sword of truth towards Queen Black, just from a few feet. Queen

Blackbird cackled in laughter.

"This is...not what I was expecting." Sarah's courage started to fade away.

"Do you think you can defeat me with your little toys?"

Queen Blackbird guffawed once again.

Before Sarah could answer, a violet flame emerged upon her left hand. "Whoa! Whoa! Let's talk about this. There's no reason to use magic!" cried terrified Sarah, but there was no reasoning with Queen Blackbird!

Queen Blackbird already charged up her roaring violet flame and threw it directly at her. "AAHHHH!" Sarah shrieked as she closed her eyes for the last blow. Once the flame hit her, she could only see darkness.

"I'm dead. I'm dead. I'm dead." Sarah thought to herself, but as Sarah slowly opened her eyes and saw something incredible, the sword of truth glowed like the sun. When Queen Blackbird saw that she was alive, she was shocked, and more angrier than before.

"I must have used the sword to dodge the flame." Sarah thought to herself in wonder, but Queen Blackbird used this chance to end Sarah's life once and for all.

She charged at Sara with not one but two violet flames! Fortunately, Sarah got in position and was ready for whatever the Queen had for her, but this fight was far from over. Queen Blackbird shot the two flames towards Sarah, but she reacted just in time to dodge the flames. The sword of truth glowed twice as much. Unfortunately, thanks to Queen Blackbirds rage, she was nowhere close to surrendering. She kept on charging up flame after flame. Sarah dodged every single flame, but got weaker every time.

"There's no way I can keep this up." Sarah quietly groaned feeling her power draining fast.

Queen Blackbird charged up another flame and threw it towards Sarah. Sarah dodged it once again, but smacked the sword of truth. It glowed radiantly across the shadowy chaotic turret and so did the other relics. The three artifacts hovered a few inches above Sarah's head. It glowed brightly forming the crown of friendship!

"Whoa!" as the crown of friendship glided right on Sarah's palms. She carefully placed the crown of friendship on top of her head. It shined brighter than a thousand stars. The light from the crown shown all over the Dark castle and across the entire kingdom. Releasing Queen Blackbird's darkness across the land

and bringing back hope across the whole kingdom.

"No! You foolish child!" screamed Queen Blackbird.

She shot a flame towards Sarah, but failed imminently. The crown of friendship acted like a shield and bounced the flame to a pillar. The pillar collapsed towards Queen Blackbird, but she reacted just in time to avoid being crushed.

"Aaarrgghh!" growled Queen Blackbird.

She shot flame after flame, but it bounced from the crown of friendship around the castle like a ping pong ball. Every fireball that Queen Blackbird threw seemed to make her weaker, Sarah could tell by all the panting.

"It's not too late to do the right thing," Sara said and held out her hand, "It's not too late to change." Queen Blackbird looked at Sarah thoughtfully, reached out her hand, and smacked Sarah's hand away. Sarah was stunned.

"You won't hear the last of me, child! Next time you won't be so lucky." screeched Queen Blackbird.

A dark violet eerie fire coiled all around the Queen's body. Sarah jumped a couple feet backwards, than she heard a sound closely familiar with a crow and she was right. Once all the fire cleared up, a pitch black crow with blood red eyes appeared. The crow cawed angrily at Sarah and flew to the closest window.

It wasn't time to party yet, Sarah almost forgot one thing. "Rainbow dragon." Sarah whispered and she quickly turned around to face the toppled pillars. She quickly went towards her dragon friend, but was nowhere in sight. All that remained was a note. Sara quickly grabbed the paper and read the letter.

"Thank you. You were very brave when facing the Queen. I'm off to tell the other dragons about your victory. Until next time! Your Friend, Rainbow Dragon. P.S. Here is a little something to remember your journey." Sarah turned the note around and found a beautiful rainbow scale.

A golden sparkling dust began to shoot out from the crown of friendship. "Huh? What's this?" said Sarah.

Once she closed her eyes, she heard something quite familiar. Children running, creaking wood, and high pitch voices. She opened her eyes and realized she was back at the Little Girls Orphanage. Sarah plopped on her bed with Mr. Stuffing on the side. She quickly glanced around the room and noticed that nothing has changed.

"Was everything a dream?" she thought.

"Hey!" shouted one of the girls, "Breakfast's ready!" and everyone ran downstairs for breakfast leaving Sarah alone.

"Well I better go with the others." Sara sighed. She began to stand up when she felt something in her pocket. She reached in and gasped, it was the note and rainbow scale! "So it wasn't a dream, it really happened!" Sarah thought to herself as she walked towards the open window, holding the gifts close to her heart. Sara looked up at the clear blue sky and smiled.

"Sigh. I hope everything is all right in Rainbow Kingdom." said Sarah and ran down for breakfast.

Hannah Crowell

Middle School Short Story

The Marigolds in His Shoes

Shoes.

A pair of them go flying out the neighbor's window. They're bright orange, the color of blooming marigolds. They land with a soft thud at the girl's feet.

She stills. Tilting her head, she rolls a cloth off her shoulder. Crouching over the discarded footwear, she steps on the fabric. The fading red and white of the cloth is covered in mud, like the girl's shoes.

She finds a name, lettered in large strokes from a marker.

"CAYDEN," the shoe proudly shows the girl. Gazing up at her neighbor's window, she sees more things fly out. A crimson teddy bear lays on the ground before being crushed by a muddy baseball. "Cayden" was boldly pronounced on both items.

"What kind of a person throws away these treasures? Out of their window and in their neighbor's lawn, too. How rude," the girl huffs. Brushing back a lock of hair, she runs into her house.

"Mom--"

"Shoes, darling."

The energetic fourteen-year-old hurriedly takes off her shoes. She wipes off the mud in her backyard before finding her mother again. She sits in her office, flipping through papers. The movement that she makes causes her house fern to wave.

"Mom, our neighbors dumped their stuff in our backyard. There's a pair of shoes and a baseball, and it's coming out of their attic."

"What? That's ridiculous," her mother, Amy, replies as she walks to their back door.

"Yeah, I know. It's almost like..." The girl's thoughts drift away. Their backyard is full of mismatched toys and clothing, scattered about like leaves confused of where to fall. The wind must've forgotten where to put them. Its breath whips their hair around, yet it doesn't make a single item budge.

"Almost like they're emptying out a child's past." Startled, the girl turns to her mother. Something glazes over her eyes, matching the

way she utters every word finishing her sentence.

“Come on, darling. We’re going to see what those maniacs are up to.” With a quick nod, she follows, walking over to their neighbor’s bright residence. It’s always been a shade too strange for their neighborhood. It stands out. When painted in the most neutral colors, the architecture bends. It’s ordinary on the outside, but people murmur about what lays behind its paint and windows.

When they arrive, the door slams open. “Amelia! Miranda! I’ve been waiting for you.” A lady in her mid-forties pulls her blonde hair into a knot. Her smile is slightly crooked, tilted up in the right corner. Her eyes are as bright as the sun.

“Actually, Mrs. Falk--”

“Hush. Come inside for a cup of tea. Put your feet up. I know you need it,” Mrs. Falk’s voice soothes the girl’s mother in their truth. The girl tilts her head, confused as they walk inside. Her mother’s never been easily swayed.

“Mrs. ...Falk? My mom’s Amy, and I’m Marcie,” she timidly corrects her.

Mrs. Falk lets out a sharp laugh. It’s deep and loud, yet it’s full of deep wisdom, too. “Marcie, dear, I know. I’m just checking. It’s nice to know I’m not growing senile yet.” The girl tilts her head, confused by her logic. As she opens her mouth to question it, something catches her attention.

A hot-white flash burns past a little toy. It’s a jester, made of bright red and white cloth. It waves a shiny baton around, proclaiming its sovereignty over a domain of circus pieces. The elephant is strangely hunched over. Marcie knows that it’s bowing for the jester.

“Marcie, darling.” Her mother’s voice is dazed, uncertain.

“Go up to the attic and help him, will you?”

‘Who’s him?’ Marcie almost asks, yet Mrs. Falk’s controlling glare silences her. Hurriedly, she runs up the stairs. She doesn’t know why but a fading song burns in her skull. A map.

Two flights of stairs, and mind the gaps in between. Turn sharply left, and remember to stay keen. Avoid the lamps, and leave the electricity static.

Follow along dearie, for the jester’s in the attic.

Tense, Marcie shakes the song away.

Each stair makes a noise different from the last. A mouse’s squeak is accompanied by a segment of “Dance of the Bumblebees”, which leads into the sweet chime of bells. Laughter turns into sobs that bleed into a gunshot that begins a war.

Marcie laughs with so much ease that she feels like she drank a sip of the sun. It fades when she falls over the last step. Wincing, she lets out a tense, “ow!”

A single moment flutters by before an arm reaches down to grasp hers. Marcie looks up, suspicious and wary of this house’s residents. She sees the boy and gasps.

It’s Cayden. With soft, curly blond hair and eyes that outshine the ocean. He looks at her quizzically, almost as if he can sense her realization. She knows that he’s Cayden, and his name thrums through her bones. Cayden, Cayden, Cayden... Something’s oddly familiar about that name, but her thoughts won’t reveal why.

Cayden smiles at her fondly, almost whispering everything that she wants to know.

“Marcie.”

Jumping out of her mind, she tenses at the sound of his voice. It’s soft and tentative, as if he’s trying to hide something that’s as obvious and stubborn as his freckles.

“I want your opinion on this painting. It’s strange, but I want you to its world,” he says, smiling timidly. He nervously twitches his fingers. Marcie nods, partly out of curiosity and partly to save him from embarrassment.

As if he were unveiling a prized circus animal, he swiftly pulls a sheet of silk off of an easel. The dust mingles with the attic’s scent. Marcie wonders about the house’s secrets as it settles on the floor. On the easel, a blank canvas awaits her. Cayden offers her a nod and an encouraging smile. Unconsciously, she smiles back as she’s whisked away into a land of spices and wonder.

Cinnamon sticks pepper the road, their thick scent wafting over to Marcie. Propped up beneath a wayward cherry tree, Cayden gives her a quick wave. He sips marigold tea out of a chipped mug. She skips over to him. Uncontrolled and uninvited, the painting’s giddiness bubbles inside of Marcie. She taps the side of his straw, giggling. Cinnamon and sugar fall onto her fingertips.

Cayden smiles at her with a glint in his eyes. “Do you know what cinnamon and marigolds have in common?” His voice waltzes into her imagination. She can tell that it’s delectably real, and he brings her a strange, warming comfort.

Marcie pouts, teasing the idea of playing along with his rambunctious antics. “No,” she mutters with a shake of her head.

Lazily, Cayden fluffs up his hair as he laughs. “They both have three syllables. You know what else has three syllables? Galaxy; and in the galaxy, there’s planets and stars. There are moons and comets. Nebulae speckle its sky, too. And all of those things add up to three syllables in their sentences.”

She contemplates these things for a bit. Letting her thoughts drift, she absorbs the story bubbling around her. Stragglers bend under the weight of their burdens, donning clothes made of orange peels. Lively merchants run about the scene, advertising their strawberry watches and licorice roses. A single woman trades with one of them. She gains a pouch made of bread but loses the coins meant to buy her daughter’s umbrella.

“In this scene,” Marcie hardly whispers, “It’s the marketplace. It’s full of merchants and coins. With it comes selling and debt. Beggars and their hope, too. There’s a woman forgetting her child. All of it is three syllables each, trapped in the universe. There are comets and moons, but there’s humanity, too.”

Her voice shakes tenderly. She feels like a branch quivering in the wind. She can’t tell if it’s her heartstrings or fear or anything falling out. But heartstrings plus fear equals anything, in terms of syllables.

“It’s about time we head back,” Cayden murmurs, wrapping her in a hug. A single tear seeps through his shirt, and they disappear from this world of marigolds and cinnamon.

“Hey, got a cough drop?” Marcie asks, trying not to choke on the dust invading her lungs. It smells like cherries, but she misses the smell of cinnamon. What made the cinnamon inviting though? Her imagination, or Cayden’s intoxicating scent?

“No, but I’ve got a couple of lozenges.” He stretches his hand outward, letting her choose one. There’s cherry and honey, but nothing bold enough for Marcie’s taste. She shakes her head, and Cayden pockets them again.

The little elephant’s head creaks as it lifts itself upwards again.

Cayden’s eyes flicker. “Go on. Find your mother.” Coldly, as if she is a stranger (which she is; a stranger who’s found a jester that rules a household), he narrows his eyes. “Leave before the elephant’s fall is complete.”

The moment evaporates. She’s tripping down the stairs again, hoping that the wind would aid her footsteps. Tears trickle down her face, hot and sticky and unnecessary, drip onto the wood. It rots beneath her steps, turning sour from the bitter

emotions dripping out of her soul.

Her mother is sobbing on the table, her tea turning cold by her feet. Shards of Cayden's chipped mug lay around her, her fingers bloody from trying to clean the mess. "Mother--mother, please! We have to go, we have to--" Marcie's heart drops into the depths of the sea.

The china elephant lays in shards on the floor. The mug is safe, used for the jester's throne.

Mrs. Falk appears behind the pantry. She holds out a tin of blackberry cobbler. "Dearie, like to try a bit?" A wooden spoon materializes before her, and Marcie's breathing quickens with the sound of the wind. Slamming it onto the ground, she pulls her mother up. "M-marcie, no--"

A fork spears through the table. The girl looks up, shaking. Mrs. Falk's dark eyes dims with the sun's fading light. She stills, organizing her words carefully. "Do you know why there isn't a Mr. Falk or a Mr. Clarke?" Marcie flinches. Mrs. Falk's hands twitch in response.

"D-don't you dare mention him--"

"Because." The woman lets out a tired sigh, shaking her hair out of its knot. "He cheated on me with your mother." The elephant fractures even more because of the girl's misplaced footstep.

"I-I didn't know, I didn't mean--"

Mrs. Falk puts her hand up to silence the weeping woman. Sound leaves them for a solemn moment before arriving again.

"It doesn't matter."

The jester's bells twinkle lightly.

That's it.

Before she comprehends any consequence or china past, Marcie rips the bells out of the jester's hat. There's five, not three. Not three syllables like cinnamon or marigolds, but five like disaster's child or doom's fragile end.

Marcie scatters them across the table in a hurried frenzy.

"We," she whispers, "are five. Mrs. Falk. My mother. My father. Cayden. Me. Five stars, ruined in the universe. We turn on each other but we are all... strangers. Mrs. Falk never understood my father. My mother never loved him. That's why he's a split of Falk and Clarke. I... I never knew anything, but I met the jester. Cayden. He smiles so lightly, but there's a past that I'm not sure I want to know about. Father's the elephant, broken from the mess. Falk's a lion, who turns on the tamer: my mother. I am the ring leader, meant to bind us all. And none of this matters."

The bells shine brightly in truth before fading.

“Tomorrow, the Falks won’t be here. Tomorrow, father will still be in his grave. And tomorrow, we will never know a thing.”

Cayden’s shoes were never returned. Instead, unwanted marigolds grew in them. Eternally, forever, they bloom.

Because if marigolds and cinnamon are three, then the circus elephant is five. Five flowers for the five disasters of the circus’s jester.

Miriam Dayton

Middle School Short Story

The Vague Wish

Once upon a time there was a princess named Eleanora. She believed she was the greatest princess in existence. She was smart, beautiful, and talented. The only thing she lacked was kindness, humility, basic manners, and any sense of human decency. Nonetheless, she considered herself without flaw even though by the time her 18th birthday rolled around, she was still unwed due to her reputation of downright unpleasantness. Now the king and Queen only had one heir, Eleanora, and according to the kingdom's law, a female could only inherit the kingdom if she was wed to a nobleman or prince. Fully aware of this, the King and Queen began to worry exceedingly, but Eleanora did not.

As it's been said, she considered herself the perfect storybook princess. So, she did what any ordinary storybook maiden would do. She called for aid (in rhyme, of course) every night into the darkness:

“Oh any prince far and wide I call to you this night, I only ask that for me you'll love, bleed, and fight. If you come, a kingdom you can lead, as long as it's my people who you first see their need.”

After a week of waiting, her call was finally answered, but not in the way she expected. For one night a little man popped in the room dressed head to toe in sparkles. When Eleanora saw him, she nearly fainted.

“Who are you?” she cried.

The little man straightened, barely reaching the height of her knees. “I am Giant, named after my great height. I am also the wielder of magic who has been sent to grant your wish.”

The princess snorted. “Well you're doing a horrendous job. I don't see a prince anywhere.”

Giant smirked, “A prince is on his way. He will be here in a fortnight. Until then if you need anything, call my name out your window three times. But be wary, for you can only call on me for aid one more time.” Then, in a flash of sparkles, the little man vanished from the room.

The princess, giddy with excitement, locked herself in her chambers to prepare for the prince's arrival. She ordered the seamstress to make her a new dress and refused to go outside for she didn't want to ruin her pale complexion. She wouldn't talk or listen to anyone or anything for she wanted her voice to be rosy when her prince rescued her from silence. Her servants feared she would never leave her room. That was, until that fateful day arrived. As Eleanora woke one morning, cries could be heard through the morning air.

"The prince! The prince is here! Oh what a joyous day the prince is here!"

The princess then quickly got into her new fancy gown and did her hair up in a speedy manner. Although she hardly ever acted like a royal, that morning she most certainly looked like one.

As she hurried to the entrance of the castle, she realized that all the servants were heading the opposite direction. Ignoring it, she continued on to the front of the castle. When she arrived what she saw shocked her, to say the least. Instead of seeing a royal entourage filled with noble steeds, extravagant carriages, and plentiful servants she saw nothing. There wasn't even a person in sight for everyone seemed to be bustling around in the castle.

Furious, Eleanora stormed inside and grabbed a hold of the nearest serving girl. "Where ever is the prince whose arrival has been made?" she asked. The serving girl smiled, too happy to even care about being addressed by a royal.

"Right this way," she responded cheerily and then skipped down the hallway. Indignant, Eleanora followed, so upset about her current morning that she didn't realize where they were until they stopped. They were standing outside her mother's chambers.

The serving girl cracked open the door to reveal her mother lying in bed with sweat beading on her forehead. What startled Eleanora though, was the baby her mother was holding. Stunned, the princess acted as though she was paralyzed, which allowed the serving girl to start talking.

"It was the shortest pregnancy I've ever seen. We're sure it was some miracle, for only magic could bring the queen such a healthy baby boy so quickly."

Eleanora screamed in frustration, frightening those around her, and ran to her room. Once there, she yelled out the window "GIANT! GIANT! GIANT!" Within seconds the little man popped into her room with a flurry of sparkles.

“Whatever is the matter” he asked.

Eleanora shook with anger. “You are a liar! You did not grant my wish at all! In fact, I believe you intended to make a fool of me!”

He shrugged his shoulders. “I believe I did grant every requirement of yours. Your little brother will love you, his older sister, and he will gladly fight in your name. Also, he will rule this kingdom and being wise and just he will think of his people’s needs before all others. I can’t see what I did wrong?” He gave a slight chuckle after saying this, giving the impression he knew exactly what he did wrong.

Eleanora collapsed to the ground as silent sobs racked through her. “I just wished to be married. I cloaked it in false words to seem noble but really...really, I just wish for someone to love me enough to wish for matrimony.”

The little man took into account these truly honest words and with a pop vanished from the room. The princess continued to lie on the floor until her servants found her. She did nothing for the rest of the day and refused to see the new baby, who had been named Edvan.

As the years passed on Eleanora tried with all her might to hate her little brother, but he regarded her with such love and admiration that she couldn’t help but develop a deep fondness for the boy.

At Edvan’s 8th birthday celebration Eleanora met a handsome, kind, generous, yet poor peasant whom she fell in love with. Although she learned many hard lessons from him about kindness, respect, and equality, eventually they did marry. It is said that at their wedding the very air seemed to sparkle, yet no one is sure.

Edvan did grow on to be a merciful and powerful king yet he, and all his kingdom, never learned the truth behind his great legacy. For it all started with one, vague, wish.

Aileah Ensley

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

“Do you know where I can find someone who designs bullet-proof dresses? Could I just Google it? Search it on Etsy?” I ask my roommate, Diana.

She squints her eyes at me, “First of all, do you expect me to know everything? Second, why?”

“Well, I don’t really know, DiDi, maybe because it’s a bullet-proof dress?!” I sit up on the couch.

Both of our phones start ringing. We both groan and jump off the couch. I click answer and as soon as I put the phone up to my ear, I hear yelling, “EDWARDS! THERE’S BEEN ANOTHER MURDER, GET MARTINEZ AND YOUR BUTT DOWN HERE!” Gallagher screams in my ear.

“Oh my god, Gally! So nice of you to call! How’s Karen and the kids? We’ll be there in ten. Nice talking to you!” I hang up the call.

Diana come out of her room all dressed, “There’s been another murder? Again? Can’t they like, stop?” She laughs.

“You are sick, Diana. Really sick. But yeah the murderers of Los Angeles should take a sick day sometimes.” I chuckle.

“Finally you two showed up,” Gallagher scoffs

“Oh, shut it, Gallagher,” Diana snaps, “What’s the damage?”

“Cause of death was gunshot wounds... to the entire body,” Gallagher stifles a laugh.

“Did I just hear a laugh from Marcus Gallagher?” My eyes widen in surprise, “This must be a miracle.” I look up towards the heavens.

Diana shoves me, “There’s something in one of the holes,” she grabs a glove, puts it on, and bends down to inspect the body.

“I think I’m going to be sick,” Gally covers his face with his hands.

“Oh, come one! That’s not the worst thing--” I hear gunshots. Next thing I know, I’m getting tackled by Gallagher.

“Get off of me you’re - you’re crushing my spleen,” I wince.

“You don’t even know where your spleen is, Jen,” Gally laughs.

“Just because you’re right doesn’t mean you’re right!” I yelp. I hear one of the techs yell, “All clear!” Gallagher immediately gets up and helps me up off the ground.

“What in the name of God was that?” Diana yells. I walk to the window of the crime scene and look outside. There are two police officers on the ground, dead. I turn back to Diana and Gallagher, “It was the killer.”

“Alright, let’s get back to that note after I was so rudely interrupted,” Diana gives the window a nasty look.

Gally and I roll our eyes, “Get on with it, Martínez! We got killers to catch.” Gally snaps.

Diana curls her lip, “Marcus Gallagher if you don’t stop with the nagging, I swear to God I will hurt you in so many ways.” Diana grabs gloves and tweezers from the examiner’s bag and crouches down. She pulls a small piece of paper from one of the bullet holes.

“Ew, ew, and more ew,” I scrunch my face up in disgust.

“Alright, I think Jen and I are done here, Marcus, so feel free to call and scream at us anytime,” Diana takes off her gloves and smirks.

Gally rolls his eyes, “I’ll get back to you if anything comes up.”

As Diana and I start to leave, I wave back to Gallagher. He waves back and winks.

I get a text from Gallagher:

The victim was Liam Parker, he’s 32.

I text him back.

Wow, very descriptive... Send me the file via email...

“JENNIFER!” I hear Diana yell from the bathroom.

I run to where Diana is screaming, “What? What! What’s wrong?” I step into the bathroom. Diana points at the mirror. I look up to where she’s pointing. There are letters written in blood. YOU'RE NEXT, it says. I pull up the phone app on my phone and call Gallagher.

“Marcus! Send a unit to our house right now!” I yelp.

“What’s wrong? Is everything okay?” He asks.

“Someone broke into the house. Just send a unit, please!” I hang up the phone and drag Diana to my bedroom. I pull out my

pistol and hand a Glock to Diana.

“Just like the old days, huh?” Diana grins.

“This is not the time for smiling, DiDi.” I snap.

Diana and I go through the house in under two minutes. We checked the three bathrooms, the three bedrooms, the kitchen, the attic, the living room, the office, and the basement.

Nothing, nothing at all. After we checked the house, the police officers finally came.

“So, what’s the problem, Captain?” Officer Lakes asks.

“Well, Officer, if Chief Gallagher told you, which knowing him he didn’t, someone broke into our house and wrote ‘YOU'RE NEXT’ on Diana’s bathroom mirror,” I explain.

“Alright, well, we’ll have a forensics team come in and test the blood to see what it is and do you have somewhere you guys can stay?” The officer asks.

I sigh and take out my phone to text Gallagher:
Can Diana and I stay over at your house for the night?

It’s a couple of seconds before he answers.

I thought you’d never ask...

I look up to Officer Lakes, “Yeah, we have somewhere to stay.”

“So, down the hallway is the bathroom,” Gallagher points down a dimly lit hallway.

I nod my head, “Alright, thanks Gally, we really appreciate.”

“Well, this should be the first and last time you’re targeted by a psychopathic serial killer so you’re probably never going to see the inside of my house again.” Gally chuckles.

I let out a small laugh and walk to the guest bedroom where Diana is.

“Whatcha thinking about?” I fall on the bed.

Diana looks at me, “They got into our house, Jen! Our house.”

“Yeah, I know, but, we’re safe here.” I tilt my head at her.
We’re safe, right?

Gallagher knocks and then walks into the room, “So, uh, you guys wanna watch something? Try and get your minds off of this?” He smirks

“Actually, could we go out and eat? I’m dying for some sushi.” I look at Diana, who gives me the tiniest smile.

“Yeah, yeah! That’ll be great. Let me get my shoes on real quick.” Gally turns on his heel and runs out of the room, almost

falling in the middle of the hallway. Diana and I stifle a laugh.

“It’s been a long time since we’ve done this.” I sigh.

“What? Watching Gallagher act like a complete idiot or going out together?” Diana grabs her bag and starts to walk out of the room.

“Both.” I say. I grab my bag and rush out to catch up to her.

“I’ll have the shrimp tempura meal.” Diana tells the waiter. The waiter nods his head and walks back to the kitchen.

“Isn’t this nice? It’s been forever since we’ve last hung out.” I sit up in my chair and look at my two friends.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Whatever, let’s just not get killed.” Gally shakes his head.

I look to Diana, hoping for a reply better than Gally’s. She shakes her head too.

Have I just wished for a death sentence for my friends and I?

The waiter comes back with our food, “Here is the shrimp tempura, spicy ramen, and volcano roll. Oh, I almost forgot, a gun to the head, “before any of us can react, the waiter pulls out a gun and aims it at the back of Diana’s head.

Gally and I both pull out our guns, “You really don’t want to do this, man.” Gally’s hands are shaking.

Diana can’t die, she just can’t.

“Well, maybe I do want to do this,” the waiter pulls the trigger.

I scream out throw my gun at him. I can’t kill him, he needs to suffer. Luckily, my gun hits him in the head and knocks him out. I run over to him and handcuff him. I look to Gally, he’s crying. I’ve never seen him cry.

“Marcus!” he won’t answer, “Marcus! Call it in.” I look at him and try not to bust out crying. He nods his head and pulls out his phone, hands still shaking.

The shock finally wears off. It feels like I just got hit by a wave. Diana, she’s really gone. Gone. Gone. Gone. Gone. Gone. I fall to the floor screaming bloody murder.

I feel a pair of hands grab at my shoulders. I jerk away, “No,” I whisper.

I look up to see Diana; she’s okay. This can’t be real, I’m hallucinating.

“You need to let me go, Jen. Let me go, I’ll be fine.” She smiles. She looks at peace. Like all the weight from her shoulders is gone.

I shake my head, “You can’t go, I need you, Gally needs

you.”

“You will be perfectly fine without me, Jennifer. Now let me go.”

“I love you so much, DiDi.”

“I love you too.”

Eliza Fox

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

So I guess this starts with Tessa.

She has gone to my school since I was about six. I was in kindergarten then. Lindsay and Tessa. We were two peas in a pod. We loved dress up, and dolls, and carrots. We would run around, with a bag of the little carrots in our hands, and get like thirty different tutus and scarfs out and have a fashion show. Twirling and dancing and laughing our heads off until we fell over from exhaustion.

We were really good friends and stayed that way through first, second, third, fourth, and fifth grade. Then came sixth. I was so nervous and excited. I was really into soccer by now and when you moved into sixth grade, you also moved into a higher leveled team. Most of the people who were on my old team would be on my new one. But some wouldn't. It was okay though because I still had Tessa.

I had a lot more homework in the sixth grade than in the 5th and it was annoying to do more work. Eventually, I worked out a system though.

Sixth, Seventh and a five months ago, eighth. It has been about three months since it happened. It was passing period, between third to fourth hours. I was walking towards Tessa's locker when I heard a voice. All of a sudden I realized it was next to me. At Tessa's locker. She was standing, her binder clutched to her chest like her life depended on it.

My stomach plummeted.

"You only won that stupid art competition because Mrs. Caran knew you couldn't win fairly at anything and felt bad." I stood there. Shocked. What was going on?

"Your art is garbage."

"Mrs. Caran knows that, the whole school knows that." Tessa's eyes were turning red and she noticed me. She looked so desperate. But I couldn't move. My heart was beating out of my chest and I thought I might explode with all the things I was

thinking.

The girl walked off yelling, “You should quit drawing altogether, everyone would be better off.”

Tears were streaming down her eyes and she started to run down the hall.

“Wait!” I yelled, but she kept going

The bell rang, and I jumped about a foot.

Think about anything but that girl.

I wanted to talk with Tessa at lunch but she wasn't there. She seemed to be gone for the next four days. I asked if anyone had seen her but no one knew.

When she finally got back I thought I was going to go up and talk to her about it.

I just couldn't though. She had to blame me. I could have said something or got a teacher. Instead I did nothing, nothing but stare and do nothing. I was a dumb pebble who didn't do anything except for look dumb and stand there. Why? I don't know, but I sure wish I had done something.

Wanting hurts.

I'm 27 now.

For most of high school, I went into hiding. Hiding in plain sight. I didn't talk much and never had anyone over. Ever. Two years wasted. It was a very bland life. Then, at the close of my sophomore year, I was in my third hour class. I was thinking about the homework that I hadn't done next period when a yellow poster caught my eye. Mr. Levon had tons of posters lining the walls. I didn't know why I had missed it before because it was so vibrant. It said “Move on, you'll regret living in the past.” I thought about it for a while. I realized it was right. I could have had close friends by now and I had done nothing. I decided to start tennis, and my parents, relieved I wanted to do anything social again were elated. I made a friend named Sierra who was a tennis fanatic and taught me lots of stuff. It was so much easier than I thought it would be to meet people. I went to University of Michigan for Business and was successful. The crazy thing was. It was a tiny experience that hurt me. I didn't want that to happen again. I started learning new things about myself. But the most important thing I learned was that I knew I could start over. That made me stronger. And, I have a better life because of it.

Stella Garner

Middle School Short Story

Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea

The three long horn blasts announced to the passengers of the *Gratia Pulchritudo* that departure was beginning. Mothers pulled their impatient children closer as the vessel slowly drifted away from the dock.

“Attention, passengers,” the captain spoke smoothly with such ersatz emotion that only a person trained in the art of customer service could manage it. “The first sinner time slot has begun. Passengers who are in the first dining group may make their way to their assigned restaurants.”

Herds of passengers began to obediently shuffle to the ship’s many dining areas. Restaurants were quickly filled with the sounds of light conversation and the clinking of forks and fine china. Outside, the sun lazily capsized under the horizon, creating an awe-inspiring burst of color in the vast emptiness of sky. Even nature was incorrectly convinced that the trip was to be an exhilarating one.

As the first rush of diners began to thin out, the lights began to flicker before shutting off completely. All conversation abruptly ceased as an air of confusion settled about the ship. After a full 3 minutes and 27 seconds suspended in darkness, the lights of the *Gratia Pulchritudo* returned to working condition, and the scene was just as before.

With the exception, of course, of Dining Room C. In this room were multiple panicked guests, some unconscious, and a collapsed waiter.

Michael Portaro, a 25-year old staff member, lay on the intricate tile floors of the room with a lavender napkin tied tightly around his neck. His eyes were glazed over, frozen in a look of horror and pleading. He was unlucky enough to be the first dead, caused by strangulation. The passengers were told that the nautical authorities were informed immediately.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” the captain’s voice returned with the same neutrality as before, “it appears there has been a complication with a member of our waitstaff. Please return to

your rooms until we can resolve this issue.”

Anarchy quickly ensued as news spread and confused and aghast excursionists scrambled to their staterooms, suddenly and fearfully aware of their fragile mortality. Soon, every corridor in the ship was as empty as a grocery store on Thanksgiving.

Passengers were left to ponder their true safety, or lack thereof. Before long, a voice came over the announcement system for the third time that evening. Unlike the past occurrences, however, the voice was not that of the deceptively affable captain. It was devoid of inflection, giving it a simulated, artificial sound.

“Contestant 1 has been finished. 4,720 contestants remain.” With this announcement, all stateroom doors automatically unlocked and swung open.

Elizabeth Goutsaliouk

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

Summer camp was supposed to be a getaway time. A time to not think about home or school or family. It was a time to be with your friends, meet new people, try new activities, and make new memories. Unfortunately, as that might've been true for most ordinary 14-year-old girls, it wasn't true for me. For me, it was a way for my mom and step-father to get me out of the house, to throw me into the wild like a panicked rabbit. The only luxury they had given me was the company of my best friend, Sydney. Even then, I still wished my parents had never woken me up at 6:43 AM on June 12th, my bags packed and my spirits low. I wished they had never bid me goodbye as I climbed into Mrs. Blanchett's rundown mini-van, Sydney already seated inside. I wish I had never set foot inside Camp Winchell's grounds, the gates of my freedom closing as random adults gave me fabricated smiles.

I held a small envelope in my hands, covered with toucan postage stamps and narrow lettering. It smelled like Babushka's perfume, the kind she wore every day. I carefully submerged my finger under the flap, carefully opening the letter. As I pulled out the beige paper, I noticed a limiting aspect; it was written in Ukrainian. Diminished, I carefully slid the paper back into its covering. The cabins noise came back into my hearing, girls playing a noisy game of cards and the counselors chatting about girly things. I sighed as I slumped myself onto the sheets of my bed. Afternoon sunshine filled the cabin with warm light, heating up my body. I closed my eyes, but instantly shot them open again as a cold hand touched my side. It was Sydney, her curly hair in a sweet ponytail.

"Wakey, wakey, Marina! It's not time to sleep yet!"

She giggled as I groaned. Patting the side of my bed, I sat up as she climbed onto my bunk. Her eyes instantly went to my letter, some of the paper still sticking out from the envelope. She frowned, imitating what I was feeling.

"Ukrainian again?"

“Yep” I sighed.

She patted my shoulder, then instantly pulled me into a tight bear hug. Sydney’s cure to sadness was always hugs, I’d known this for an extensive time now. After letting me go, she grabbed my hand and led me down to the middle of the floor, where the rest of our cabin mates were sitting and playing a game of Go Fish. After convincing me to play at least one round, I had got caught in a Go Fish loop. The letter still bothered me and had made me dismal, but the game covered this sadness and buried down in me a bit. After all, I had only known these girls for 4 days now, why would they want to see my sorrowful self?

Dinnertime had arrived, and everyone was getting ready to meet in the mess hall. Our counselors stood at the door of the cabin, waiting for everyone to pull on their sweaters and grab their shoes. I was outside first, as I was never someone who took a long time to put on a jacket or tie their sneakers. Hoping not to catch any attention, I scooted away from the door onto the dirt ground. Unfortunately, I did catch attention. Terra, the lead counselor, turned her head to me. She beamed a smile as I tried to craft a smile back.

“So Marina, how are you liking camp so far?”

I hesitated for a second. Terra was an adult, I could possibly tell her the truth without her caring one bit. She was a counselor, though. She would care and I would probably get in trouble for not having fun or being happy to be away from my parents.

“It’s alright, I just miss home a bit.”

“Aw, it’s ok! I felt like that too at my first year of summer camp. But don’t you worry, we still have 17 days of camp left, so you’ll be having fun in no time!”

I nodded to her response as more girls started filing outside. Though it sounded fake to my ears, I knew it was part of her job. Luckily for me, she diverted her attention from me, leaving me a second to breathe. I took this gratefully and quickly rushed behind the other girls in line. Talking to adults wasn’t my thing. Talking to people wasn’t my thing. Nothing to do with interaction was my thing. At least, not here.

We had made it to the mess hall after a three minute walk filled with the usual camp songs and chants. I made sure to place myself at the back of the line, where no one would notice me not singing along and just looking at the shadows of the darkening day. A counselor was following me, as one always had to be at the back of the line, but she was silent and most likely just

wanted to get us to dinner. I sometimes would turn around to look at her, but I didn't want to creep her out, so I tried to keep my eyes forward. When we arrived, I instantly rushed to self-serve center. Famine bothered my stomach, so I was eager to be one of the first people to get their spaghetti tonight. Dinner was the best meal of the day, in my opinion.

When it came to food, I was ferocious. The only somewhat comforting thing about this camp was the delectable food and the absence of judging eyes. Usually, if my mama had seen me ripping through noodles like a famished tiger, she would say, "Slow down, Marina! You'll get sick if you keep eating like a dog!" I knew after that would come Babushka's scolding, as she would say to my mom in her heavy Ukrainian accent, "Oh, stop being so cruel, Katya! Marinka is a growing girl, she needs to eat!" At this point, both Babushka and my mom would unfurl into a heavy argument, my step-father trying to tame both of them. For once, it was nice to have dinner without that commotion. I ate quickly, and by the time seconds had come around, I was full and my plate was empty. It was getting musty inside the cramped mess hall, so I asked if I could go sit outside. Granted permission, I promised to be back inside when clean-up would happen and ran outside to go sit on the porch.

The porch at night was a cordial place. A small cluster of C.I.Ts would stand around a small wood table, chatting about their work and their campers. Quiet buzzes from microscopic bugs would fill the night with music. Dim lighting would light the porch, making it visible enough to read something. The porch was a place for me to escape. To forget about why my parents had sent me here, why Sydney was enjoying this place more than I ever could, and why Babushka could only write her letters in Ukrainian, knowing I was not capable of reading them. But on the porch, nothing really mattered. Other campers would come outside and sit here too, twiddling with their thumbs and humming soft tunes to themselves. It was the only time of the day we could be isolated.

I pulled out letter from the pocket of my jacket. I had taken it with me, to analyze for anything I could possibly read. This time of day was the easiest, as I had somewhat calmed down from the day's activities. Unwrapping the letter, I took a deep breath. Squinting my eyes, I tried to pick up the letters, to translate them into English letters. It wasn't working, I still couldn't understand a word. I put the letter down and smacked my face down into my hands. It was useless, I would never know Ukrainian and I would

never be able to read the comforting words Babushka was trying to send me. A burned out sensation filled me. Wishes that I had never been sent here occupied me. Tomorrow, I would call my mom, ask her to pick me up. I wasn't able to hold up a fort anymore. My hands covered my face, as I didn't want to lift my eyes and see I was still here. A warm hand touched my shoulder and I tried shrugging it off. It was probably just Terra, saying we would have to go inside to clean-up. But the hand was too small to be Terra's. Lifting my head to make sure it wasn't one of the careless C.I.Ts, I saw it was actually the counselor who had been at the back of the line today. What was her name again? Raelyn? Riley? Rowan! It was Rowan, I remembered her name. She helped me up and walked me off the porch, signaling the C.I.Ts she would be back in a moment. We hadn't said anything to each other yet, but I started to feel warmer, like my burnt out fire had lit itself again somehow. We walked down to the meeting circle, at the bottom of the camp. Signaling me to sit down, I placed myself onto a log, herself following. Crickets and soft talking from the mess hall was the only audio that had filled my head for a while. Finally, Rowan started to say something.

"Camps not going good for you, is it?"

"Not really, I really just want to go home." I responded, no hints of hesitation in my voice. I felt ok to talk for once, like an answer wasn't being fished for out of me. She silently nodded her head and looked up at the sky. It was a cloudy night, but the stars were somewhat visible.

"It's ok not to feel ok here. I feel like that too, y'know."

"Really?" I was surprised. I felt like counselors like their jobs, they felt good here.

"Yeah. I'm a really anxious person and I still don't feel ok here at times, but I've found good ways to combat my feelings."

"Huh, that's cool." I shyly responded. Silence filled up our area again. It was awkward now that there wasn't just one person sitting alone, but two sitting together. Question finally came from Rowan, relieving me.

"I saw you reading a letter on the porch. Want me to try to read it?"

"You can read Ukrainian?"

"Sure, let me just take a swing at it."

I gave her the letter and she took it from its covering. She scanned over it, then cleared her throat.

My dear Marinka,

I hope you received my letter as the postal service back home is very slow and useless. I hope you are enjoying camp. Watching you go off to your first sleep away camp put tears in my eyes. You have grown so much and I am so happy for you to get out of your comfort zone for once. Of course, your mother told me not to get emotional, but she doesn't understand my overwhelming joy for you. I hope everything is going fine and you have made some friends. I also hope the food is decent, as nothing can compare to my cooking. Most importantly, don't be scared. After all, you must confront your monsters before you defeat them. Just know your parents love you a lot and so do I. By the end, you'll wish you could go back again. I must go now to help your mother make dinner for tonight.

*Love,
Babushka Diana*

I smiled. I had felt warm again. When I looked up to thank Rowan, she had disappeared. Trying not to question it, I just shrugged it off. I picked up my letter from the log and smiled again. This was going to be a summer of my life and I knew it.

Seth Guerrero
Middle School Short Story

The Present That Became My Best Friend

My mom came home from the store and she brought this box into my room. She walked out only with a smile on her face. She didn't say anything. My name is Seth and I have only one leg. I was sitting there on my couch playing some video games when I hear this whining. I thought my headset was broken and I unplugged it. The whining kept on getting louder. I turned off my TV for a second. I listened for the whining. It kept on getting louder and louder. I opened the box and there was a puppy in the box. It was a Chihuahua with white fur and looked super cute. I ran to my mom and asked why she got it. She said, "It'll be your best-friend. Trust me." Irritated, I turned on the TV and continued to play my game. The dog kept on whining. I took it out and the dog just sat there. I wondered if it was scared or something. It started peeing on the floor and I quickly ran to go clean it up. When I came back, I realized it was missing a leg. It was just like me. I ran to my mom and said, "Thank you." She hugged me and said, "Your welcome. So, what's its name going to be?" I never thought about that yet. I didn't know the right name for her. I just sat there pondering. I finally had an answer. Her name was going to be Sadie.

I took her everywhere. To the mall, the store, even to my friend's apartment. I had to hide her in a bag though. It was fine. My mom was right. She was going to be my best-friend. I'll never forget Sadie. 4 years later I turned 17 years old. We were throwing a party when Bryn, my sister, told me that Sadie was on the floor. I knew this was the end. We took her to the vet. The vet said that there was nothing she could do about it. We buried her in our backyard and I didn't eat for the next week. I didn't go do anything with my friends. I wouldn't do anything really but cry and cry and cry. I would never forget her. Sadie. And I'm glad to know that I'll see her in heaven once again, and she'll always be part of my family.

Desiree Iglinski-Combs

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

There are only 9 of us left. The other 4 are gone. Under their control. I miss them. Now is not the time to think about the ones we lost. I have to hide. Hide, hide, and hide. It seems that is all we're doing now. They find us each time. All we do is hide, never fight. They say that we are not ready to fight. I feel ready. We have been running for weeks. I am hiding now. This is a secret room. Only my protector knows about it. I hear the door click shut as the locks go in place. I go to sit on the bed that is in there. My protector should be here after the fight is over. "Finally, I have you all to myself," I hear a menacing voice, it's scratchy and deep but I know who it belongs to. I try to scream but nothing comes out. I feel a hand touch my shoulder. Soon there will only be 8 of us I think in my head. I'm trying to activate my ability but nothing is working. I start to panic. I try to scream for help but nothing comes out again just a scratchy whisper. Then everything is black.

Hi, I'm Desiree. I would tell you my last name but that's classified. I probably shouldn't have told you my first name.

Anyways, I go to a school that is not at all like others. It's for special people like me. I'm not saying that all other people aren't special, just I have certain talents. Yeah I can do contortion, dance, sing, I am fluent in any language you can think of, I know 12 different ways to kill a man just by touch, I also know pretty much every type of fighting there is, I even know some gymnastics, but those aren't even close to the talent I have. They are more like side things I learn at my school. The regular people call it is The New York School of Talents. The reason I say regular people is because I don't consider myself regular, more along the lines of a freak that most people would try to kill. The wards on my school protect us though. "Us" meaning the 13 of us there were the school. So I guess you're probably wondering, "What the heck is that so called 'talent' of hers anyway??" Well I can sort of control people's' minds. Don't freak out or anything, I can pretty much control it now. Unless I get really angry. Then everyone should run. I am the most important of the 20. There is

only 5 of us left. We are all living in ----- . Never mind the dashes. I shouldn't have told you that. That was our address.

Somehow our protectors find a way to block out anything that could be life threatening. Such as our address, or any other revealing info. My first name is fine though. I'm scared. The five of us left are the 5 most important. The strongest out of the 20 there were. They want us the most. I wince as I feel the scar burn once more. Right, I haven't told you about my story. The one where I got the scar that somehow made me stronger, but also made me weaker in ways. The days leading up to it were fine. Our usual school days consisted of fighting, learning different languages, dancing, and running drills. It was all normal. I thought that nothing would ever go wrong, that they would never find us. I was wrong.

"Desiree, how do you say, Hi are you okay, in Bulgarian," our teacher Ms. Logan asked me.

"Здравейте добре," I pronounced perfectly.

"You go girl," my best friend Noah replied.

Ms. Logan continued to talk in Bulgarian as we all listened understanding every word she said. I doubt any normal people learned this in class.

"EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!"

The siren rang through our ears. This was the 9th drill we have had this week. Usually it is only about 4 or 5 drills. There is only 13 of us now. The others either committed suicide or were kicked out of the school. Others were being punished below the school for trying to expose what we are. We are special in ways. I can control people's minds, Lele can cause people pain or take pain away, Diego can control people's body's, Mia can raise the dead, Neoma can cause weather, the others have less important powers. Us five are the most important. The strongest in our school. Everyone exits class to go to our secret hiding places. In an hour or two our protectors will come and get us. Then we shall resume class like nothing is wrong. An hour later my protector, Evangeline comes and gets me. I join the others in the fighting room where two students are sparring. After class, I head to my dorm room.

Today was a normal day just like the others. I get through the Wednesday and Thursday just fine. Finally it is Friday. So far we've had 15 drills this week. Rumors are that they are going to attack soon. I don't believe the rumors, but a small part of me is scared they are true. I get dressed for dance class in my usual uniform. A black fitted tank top, a leather jacket with our school

crest on it, and black leather jeggings. I walk to dance stretching as I walk. I get through dance easily. I am walking in the hallway with Noah, when I hear the loud screech of a siren. I look at Noah and sigh. "Another drill," I say exasperated. All of a sudden the loud speakers click on.

"RUN!!!!!!!!!!!! They are in the school. This is NOT a drill! I repeat, THEY ARE.... AHHHH!!!!"

We hear the loud speaker shut off as quickly as it turned on. I look at Noah as our faces turn ghost white.

"Goodbye, Desiree," Noah says.

A tear drops down my cheek as I say, "No, Noah don't say that. We'll see each other later. Please Noah don't say that," I beg.

"We have to go hide. Goodbye, Desiree," Noah turns away as I grab his hand. He pulls away as a tear drops down his face. I look at him one last time.

"Goodbye," he finishes as he pulls away to go to his hiding spot. I turn to go to my hiding spot as well. I get there just in time. I hear screams outside the hallway as they take control of others. The screams die off. I sit there for about a day or two. I have used the canned food there to eat. I hear the door open. I reach my hand in between the cot to find the katana that is stashed there in case of emergency.

"Put the katana down Desiree." I hear the familiar sweet voice of my protector Evangeline. I drop the katana next to me. I run to hug Evangeline asking her the question I've been dreading.

"Is Noah gone?" Evangeline takes a deep breath and I feel her nod her head. I start crying.

"Hey, hey Desiree. It's okay. Shhh honey shhh." Evangeline rubs my back trying to sooth me, it works. I stop crying and ask, "How many are gone."

"Four are gone. There are 9 of you left," Evangeline sighs, "We are moving to the school in -----."

I walk with Evangeline to the hall. I go to my dorm, pack everything I can and we board a plane with 8 other students. The most important of us are left. We unpack our stuff in the new school. I get settled in the new school as easily as I can. A month passes before the next attack.

"EE," The alarm screeches on. My thoughts start to slow.

There are only 9 of us left. The other 4 are gone. Under their control. I miss them. Now is not the time to think about the ones we lost. I have to hide. Hide, hide, and hide. It seems that is all

we're doing now. They find us each time. All we do is hide, never fight. They say that we are not ready to fight. I feel ready. We have been in this school for only a month. They took my best friend already. I am hiding now. This is a secret room. Only my protector knows about it. I hear the door click shut as the locks go in place. I go to sit on the bed that is in there. My protector should be here after the fight is over.

"Finally, I have you all to myself," I hear a menacing voice, its scratchy and deep but I know who it belongs to. It belongs to their leader. The one after me. I try to scream but nothing comes out. I feel a hand touch my shoulder. Soon there will only be 8 of us I think in my head. I'm trying to activate my ability but nothing is working. I start to panic. I try to scream for help but nothing comes out again just a scratchy whisper. I feel a pain tear through my shoulder. My protector walks in all bloody from battle. Then everything is black.

I still don't remember that much from that day. I only have the scar and the pain that comes with it sometimes. There are only 5 of us left. The most important ones. Lele, Diego, Mia, Neoma, and me. I hear sirens go off. Fear courses through my veins as I think about the last attack. I go and hide.

Adelle Mae Jensen

Middle School Short Story

The Laundry Room

“Clunk!”

“Finally! The last box!” called dad. They had just barely finished unloading the moving truck when suddenly they heard a scream.

“Help!”

Julie’s little sister, Miki, screamed, “SPIDER!”

Mom rushed over, only to see Miki’s toy spider dangling from a box. “Ha-ha! Fooled you, didn’t I!” she squealed.

Finally, after all the boxes were unpacked, they all went to bed. Well, almost all of them. Julie stayed up to do the laundry so that she would have something to wear to school tomorrow. But when she opened the washer to put her stuff in, she was suddenly sucked in!

“Plop!” she landed in a beautiful, snowy, forest.

“Brrrr!” she shivered. Suddenly, she saw a light shining up ahead. Soon, a HUGE bus showed up and the doors opened, and the bus driver called, “All aboard, the unicorn bus!”

Julie ran up the steps and sat down.

“Where to?” asked the bus driver.

“1234 unicorn drive please,” said Julie.

“Um, that place doesn't exist, but I could take you to Cat’s Corner instead,” Said the bus driver.

“It is right next to the railroad where the Pigpimples Express leaves tomorrow. You could even stop by Gringotts to collect some galleons!”

“Ok, a few questions. What is Pigpimples, and what is Gringotts?” she asked.

“Pigpimples is the best wizarding school in the world and Gringotts is the wizarding bank,” said the bus driver.

“Ok,” said Julie.

Then, with a pop, the bus disappeared into the darkness. The next morning, she stopped by Gringotts. To her surprise, her great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandma had left her 5000000 galleons! She took them and went to Cat’s Corner to buy

supplies, and then rushed to platform 1 and 9/12. She made it just in time!

When they finally got to pigpimples, everyone was talking about how much they didn't want to be in Isibindi. Julie could tell that Isibindi wasn't a good house to be in. Julie ended up being in Altruismo.

That night was Christmas Eve. All the students were talking about Santa.

"Who is Santa?" Julie asked.

"Santa is someone who uses floo powder to go around the world giving everyone presents." said the girl.

That morning, Julie got some magical candy, some books, and mini washer.

"Why a mini washer?" she thought. She opened it to put her robes in and was suddenly sucked in!

"Oof," she said as she landed on the cold, hard floor of her own home. She didn't have any of her other new stuff with her, except for the mini washer. She opened the large washer to put her clothes in, and she didn't get sucked in! Although, when she inspected the mini washer, it said portal3000...

Andrew Krueger
Middle School Short Story

Adventures in the Black

January 18th, 2343:

The view out here never changes. There aren't exciting noises and it always smells dull. Just one shuttle with one window; one black canvas. Stars are dotted here and there, in no particular pattern. They're my only company out here, in my little shuttle in the middle of nowhere. I call it the Black. Not space, no. All the so-called space out there is filled in by the emptiest color possible. Empty, yes, but there is still black.

Now that I think about it, it has been 20 years ago today that humankind abandoned planet Earth. We all knew the day was coming, but for some reason denied it once it arrived. We had trashed our home, practically vaporizing the caps and the ozone layer. We had used up our resources until we were almost dead dry. We couldn't colonize Mars, as 33 years prior to the starvation of Earth, we participated in the Martian War of 2290. This war occurred when Earth explorers conflicted with Mars inhabitants when we were trying to colonize the red planet. We lost and had to leave the fourth planet forever. Venus was too dangerous with acid filled clouds and Mercury was always either too cold or too hot to sustain life. Beyond the deadly asteroid belt were only uninhabitable gas giants. Sure, there was Pluto, but that was far too small for the 11 billion planet less humans.

Desperate and out of ideas, the united governments of the world selected ten people to head out into deep space, beyond the solar system, in search of a planet to save the human race. I was the fourth man recruited for the job. The current Jorge Hution would tell that young cadet to back off, that it's hopeless. We've sent missions out over the course of 15 years before this one (satellites and whatnot) with no success to find a savior planet. What would change now?

This is my fifth year out in the dark with my shuttle. It has gotten quite lonely out here. Many times have I thought of returning to the large carrying vessels we humans call home now.

But who would I be if I did? The human race would gaze upon my returning pod with wonder and joy. Then they would learn why I was really there, that I had given up. My face would be one to hate, to revolt, to not take example from. I would be the most hated man alive.

All these years, these thoughts have remained in my head.

However, earlier this morning, while I grabbed myself some provisions for breakfast, I found a journal I had packed before I took off all those years ago. I had forgotten all about it and now that I found it, my thoughts mean more to me. My thoughts, in a way, act as a second being; an extension of my person that can interact with me and recall my adventures.

The first planet I explored, was apparently called Waquen. When I first saw the planet two months into my journey from the window of my shuttle, it seemed a worthy candidate. All scans I took of the planet showed favorable temperatures, gravity, and distance from the nearest sun, water, plentiful, healthy food sources, and of course, an oxygen rich atmosphere. When I touched down onto the planet though, I discovered that Waquen was inhabited by a very hostile, barbaric, and eerily humanoid species. They looked like what you would expect a caveman to look like, but with no facial features (no nose, no eyes, no ears, etc.), just a mouth. They apprehended me and kept me on Waquen as an extraterrestrial prisoner on trial for approximately three months. On the 94th night of my stay, I managed to escape to my shuttle (after memorizing way too many things to list) and flew off into the Black again.

A month of drifting later and I discovered another planet, Japerci. This planet seemed even better than Waquen. However, when I touched down, I realized that this planet was plagued by a deadly disease that my scanner couldn't pick up. This was likely due to the fact that the disease was caused by an odd, new compound never discovered on Earth made of three oxygen, two carbon, and 70 sulfur. When I reached the surface of Japerci, all I saw were crippled tree-looking organisms (luckily no more). The disease had killed this planet, and tricked my scanner, it had appeared. I had left after two seconds of looking around, as the sight was quite ugly.

January 20th, 2343:

Sometimes I wonder why I ever visited Rakute. The planet didn't even look that appealing from the surface, with its ugly

greenish-yellow color. The scans, I think, is what drew me in to that hunk-of-junk. They looked good, as did Waquen and Japerci, but with an added bonus as well.

Apparently this planet was loaded with rich minerals, which would be great if it ended up being inhabitable. However, I didn't account for the planet's size. I was so eager to explore a new planet, as it had been a year since Japerci happened with no good fortune since. You see, the planet was huge (easily 200x Earth size) which means it had really, really strong gravity. Thus, when my shuttle entered the atmosphere, it was quickly pulled into the ground at an alarming rate as I was rolled around inside. Miraculously, I managed to strap myself into the crash seat (a heavily cushioned seat with tight buckles) and braced for impact. When the shuttle hit the surface, I broke my wrist as the G-force was so strong.

Barely able to crawl under this gravity, I found the medical cabinet. I grabbed a healing brace and strapped it against my arm (and I will have you know that it hurt so bad in that gravity). I couldn't do much for a month, as the strict gravity slowed my healing process as well as my ability to move. Eventually, my wrist was finally at full health and I could take the brace off, which felt so good as the inside of the darn thing had felt so scratchy and itchy on my skin. Crawling to the control dashboard, I managed to turn on the 0-gravity. This was, I could repair the pod in a field of zero-gravity provided by my own shuttle. Eventually (two months later that is), I fixed the shuttle and got off that wretched planet for good.

January 21nd, 2343:

I can't truly express how much this journal means to me. All I ever had before was the Black and its citizens; the stars. They never talked to me, never did anything, just stayed in their spot and twinkled every so often. This journal though, is more. It is like it talks to me, like it feels what I feel and felt. It is the only thing I have that resembles any importance to me out here in the Black at this point to be honest.

Anyways, back to my misadventures. 15 months after Rakute, I found Twaz. Honestly, I didn't really mean to investigate Twaz. What happened was quite simple actually. As I flew by Twaz, the green and blue Earth like colors caught my attention and I began to scan the planet. Just then, these space-crafts came darting from the planet with these Whoosh sounds.

The ships are much larger than mine and have what appear to be laser guns straight out of Star Wars pointed at me. Not wanting to be blown up or burnt to a crisp, I went with them quietly. I soon learned that this planet was also inhabited by those same creatures from Waquen, yet they were by far more technologically advanced at Twaz. Instead of wearing the hide of other creatures that lived on the planet, these creatures wore a fabric very similar to suede. This species, the Terutos as they are called, did as they did of Waquen; they held me captive 'till I could memorize the guard schedules and how the city worked to escape. However, the Twaz Terutos were much more complex and harder to get around, taking me four months to formulate a plan of escape.

After I escaped, it took me several days to find the hanger that my shuttle was being examined in. During those days, I had to stay hidden from the large crowds of extraterrestrial beings that would freak at the sight of me. At night, I snuck in undetected and flew off, but not easily. Once the Terutos realized I had made a run for it, they sent several ships to shoot me down. I was barely able to dodge and out-manuever the lasers and missiles heading my way. As soon as I exited the planet's atmosphere, the ships backed off and returned to Twaz peacefully, as if nothing had ever happened.

January 23rd, 2343:

The planet of Twaz smelt metallic, like when you smell a penny. The smell was accompanied by a never-ending, low buzz. These were little annoyances the futuristic techno-planet. This was nothing however, compared to the smell of the planet Erawit. Eight months after I escaped Twaz (about one year ago), I arrived in Erawit, a planet that was nothing but a yellow marble. I touched down to investigate the positive readings I got from the scanner on my shuttle. I exited the pod in my space suit and was immediately bombarded by an assortment of awful. Imagine if death had a smell, and then it was vomited on; that is exactly what Erawit smelt of. The planet looked like an endless desert, but this desert had several large oases throughout its terrain. I spent a month exploring Erawit until (I kid you not) the smell overcame me and I fainted a mile from my shuttle. I woke up the next day, terrified by this smells horrid potency potential. Naturally, I hopped into my shuttle again and flew off into the Black once more.

January 24th 2343:

This trip has really caused me psychological stress. Sorry, major topic switch. I know that I'm no psychiatrist, but regardless, I really don't feel like a person anymore with no one ever around. Adrift in space, that's all I am. Not a person, but simply an action. This journal makes me feel like I did something, all this time. The journal makes me feel that, maybe, I'm not completely, uselessly flying through space after all.

The last planet I visited was Erawit; stinky, repulsive Erawit. That was one year ago. As I would visit each planet I have, I would constantly refill my food stocks with new resources. Once I gathered my rations, I would throw them into the dehydrator-inator. This handy-dandy device would drain the water from the food, supplying me with water and making my rations dry, wrinkly raisins. I don't know how much longer I can last without finding another planet to resupply on food. I realized today that I only have food enough for one more month, and that's being very conservative. I don't want to give up, but I don't want to die out here, all alone, with no one but you journal. This isn't about just the humankind survival anymore, it's about mine as well; the survival of a drift.

January 26th 2343:

Finally, another candidital planet. What is the name? The scanner reports Iposa back to me. My hopes skyrocket like never before, for maybe I will survive. My hope quickly faded however, as a life form was quickly picked up by the scanner; the Terutos. My heart plummeted as I realized the price of survival. My adventures in the Black have been leading to this journal. I am going to have to go through the Terutos if I want to survive. Sorry to end on such a dark and sudden note, but I must go.

Therese Marshall

Middle School Short Story

Something's Up

Lexie opened her eyes and pushed back the covers. The heavenly smell of pancakes wafted in through the open door. Lexie stretched and went downstairs to the kitchen, following the syrupy smell. When she got downstairs she saw her mother cooking pancakes on their griddle.

“Mmm, meow, meow”, Lexie said drooling.

“Meow”, her mother smiled. Her mom turned and got three plates out of a cabinet.

“Meow, meow meow?!” Lexie asked.

“Meow”, her mother confirmed. “Meow, meow, meow, meow.” Her mom put four cooked pancakes on a plate and handed it to her.

“Meow!” Lexie said as she walked over to the table.

A short while later her dad walked through the door, took off his boots, and took a plate. He went to his seat, ruffling Lexie's hair on his way.

He took a bite and sighed with pleasure.

“Meow, meow, meow?” Lexie's mom asked.

“Meow”, came the reply in her dad's gruff voice.

Her mom joined them and all three ate a warm, gooey, breakfast. Then the ground started rumbling and the table started shaking. Her dad stood, “Meow, meow, meow!” he shouted. Lexie and her mom jumped up and the family ran out of the house. Outside they joined a crowd of fleeing people all rushing to a nearby hill. The family had been holding hands but her dad was slipping away, pulled by the crowd.

“Meow!” Lexie screamed.

“Meow, meow. Meow, meow, meow!” her dad shouted as he was swallowed up by the crowd.

Lexie stumbled forward blindly, tears falling thick and fast as she screamed for her father.

Suddenly a bright light shone in the sky even brighter than the early morning sun burning and roaring toward them. It was a meteor! After a brief second of dismal silence, the crowd screamed in panic as the meteor slammed into their world, silencing them.

Drako Martinez

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

As I wait in the dreadful, tiring, line moving one inch further every few minutes or so. It's as if we were a colony of ants, moving in a single file taking a moon's journey to get to the front. But the scent of the silky milk and dark chocolate drowns us in its sent.

"This is going to bet the best chocolate in the world," I thought to myself. Big world, but our microscopic town in Furner, Georgia is home one of the largest chocolate factories in the nation.

"The best chocolate," I convinced myself. I was gliding to the front of the line. I rose up to the counter and said:

"May I have the best chocolate you have please?"

The lady rolled her eyes trotted into the freezer and mumbled, "Who would wait in that line?"

She came fourth and handed me a sweet caramel truffle and said, "Here you go" then called out "Next".

I rush out the door then hopped on my bike and flew home as fast as I could, so I could show my mom what I have got. I arrived at my house rushed to the door and shouted "I'm Back," in a loud voice. I ran up to my Mom and showed her it.

"See it's the best thing ever," I told her and she did not look surprised. I carried on then went into the kitchen, grabbed the chocolate out of my palm, picked it back up and I was ready to try the greatest thing ever. I guided it into my mouth and...I was not surprised, it tasted like a normal Hershey's truffle. I asked myself "is there something wrong, do I need to chew it slowly," but no, it was terrible.

Conrad Mazurkiewicz

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

James Cobalt was and might yet be an unusual man. Often found alone everywhere you could find him. You would be hard pressed to find some man who recognized the echo of his voice. The only bit of information his peers knew about James was his glance. Every time you attempted to burn up a conversation with James Cobalt or yet even ask him a question. What would respond with? Nothing. Before seeing his glance you would think nothing is a lie. How can something be nothing when it is still something as you just gave it a name? Why give nothing a name when it is nothing. Some might think that nothing was a word to not describe what you might be doing but instead to describe the very existence of James Cobalt.

When in school every time an educator would question him anything James Cobalt would stare and stare but at the same time take away the name of nothing. He would fiddle with their soul... oddly. Then he would leave the room to be seen again.

James Cobalt would compose a form of literature at every God-given opportunity. It was like speech yet silent. One time a new peer joined the rest of assemblage. She once made the horrid mistake of looking over James's shoulder. She then stabbed herself in the abdomen by telling her fellow classmates what she saw with dismay. How he wrote in the third person writing the future of his own. Now James Cobalt did not appreciate this... Not one slight bit.

The girl grew a stutter... Now thankfully you didn't hear it much as she was not seen quite again. She wasn't seen in class the next day, nor the next, nor the next. One sun it was rumored that the educator picked up the cell and started crying. Not with sorrow but with true terror.

As a man Cobalt wore some odd clothing. Such as jeans that appeared to be sweatpants. A man in love with the shade of black. As summer came by he wore black leather jackets. In the winter he would hide away his emotions with a long thick hood, not as he had emotions as in. The lightest color he ever threw on his frail

skin was black and... black. His darkest skin had not but a name. It was too dark for most to tell. All about James Cobalt was dark and black from his eyes to his head. All but yet his white pale almost vampire skin.

Once it was a cold dark dreary night. It was once said that James Cobalt was only joyful on nights like them. Of course, this was false as James Cobalt felt no joy and especially no loving.

At one time James Cobalt was seven surprising indeed. Old enough to remember yet too young to act on. Cobalt was at home rolling his toy car, back and forth, forth and back. James's father was now in war and his mother falling on the couch writing. When the crashing of a window was once heard. The sound seemed to echo for what yet felt like decades. One sound that is unforgettable, one sound that sticks with a man. One memory with an impact.

A man wearing with what seemed to be all black practically fell down the stairs. He surged by James Cobalt virtually beating at James's mother grabbed her by the leather jacket. Staring at her for an eternity, the man finally went into his left pocket taking out a copper decayed tired looking knife. As life is not a fairytale the elements that were to take place have most likely been guessed. All can assume what would happen next. Now that it is being explained one will be doubting what they thought. They should not as life is not a fairy tale.

The man stabbed the mother seven times directly to the gut. That man flew off breaking the window by the sofa gracefully with power. All that was left was James rolling his toy car, back and forth, back and forth. What a good night to all. A black night. A wide murky night.

Cobalt's father never had come down home. No character on this sphere knew the location of the father. Nor did any man know much about the father. Cobalt's did not give out his name to just one and any man. One would have to get quite warm to him. The father's name was Million in an ironic tone Million was quite poor. As a child, he was always alone. His forerunners were nonexistent. One thought that it would be hard to believe that Million had not parented. Of course, he must have had originators to be brought in the world. As long as any can remember Million lived alone in isolation. The neighbors were to say that he was a nice boy yet troubled. He dropped out of his education as soon as one could to work. What did he do? Only the man could answer that one. None could think up why the

neighbors had not adopted him or anything. Yet there had been somber rumors.

Cobalt had one odd obsession with pens. He had many and many. Whenever he would open up his pack there was nothing but pens. Kilometers of stacked pens. If James were to ever see one with a worthless disgrace of a writing Utensil. James Cobalt would come out of his way to replace it. Even with this James Cobalt would use a Pilot G-2. A pen which glided upon the text. Now it was yet odd James Cobalt had options to other better pens. Now why? Now in the play place, it was whispered throughout the youth that James knew his own future. Now, of course, this was wrong as they were only children. James Cobalt lived all at once. Living his young life and his olden days at once. In a way, the children were right yet wrong, oh so wrong.

One cold hardened day James Cobalt woke up and felt as if he was the only man awake and even maybe the only one to be alive. He stumbled into his closet, slipping on his black jeans and jacket. James Cobalt wandered down the stairs. They were usually squeaky and cranky. Not this day. The stairs made not but a sound. Now some may wonder when the tale of James Cobalt took its place. As I said James Cobalt lived all at once. James Cobalt put his foot on the cold tile after his furry rougher stairs. James Cobalt practically fell to his kitchen. He moved his hand to the handle of the refrigerator, pulling slowly and then swiftly, to find not but an item. What was James expecting? Hope. James closed the fridge removing the only source of light in the room. James felt for a match. Finally grabbing the matchbox he lit the match. The light slowly boomed through the room. James stepped to the cabinet. The door creaked showing sound was real. James reached in with his offhand and took a bottle of liquor. He popped the bottle open pouring a crystal glass half empty. The drink went down smooth.

Cobalt jumped into his boots. Opening the outdoor. James stared for an eternity. He put out his match.

James looking outside seeing all but a pathway to town. It was an odd pathway. Narrow with quite a few turns at the start and then it becomes long and dark. To that is the scariest measure. James Cobalt followed the pathway for a few kilometers. For James, it felt like zero time has come by. The time said not but a word. James led to the end of the pathway that seemed secret yet not.

The city was outstanding an absolute rapture. It was old and

small yet in some way bigger than all. It was all art deco themed like designed in the 40s. Now while it seemed that the place stood there forever, it had not. There was one detail a city would usually have built in. People. This city had none. James Cobalt followed his own shadows to a gentlemen's club off by an alley. The place was lit with red and all dim. Looking around there were frames with no pictures. Old wooden chairs with red pillows. A worn out red carpet, not one that you would wish to walk. But of course, a bar with drinks and broken bottles all around it.

James put up his left foot to the foot of the stairs. Creaking up the hollow steps. Slowly James peered to his left as he came up. Where there should have been a silver pole there was a desk with a book floating over it. The red smoke had come from the desk. Cobalt knew right what it was. James practically jumped at it. When he put his claws on the journal the ground started grumbling. James had been flown back hitting the wall with a giant thump. A man had appeared out of the smoke. A cutlass was cutting him from the bottom up. The bright red vibrations of the room had covered the liquid pouring from the man. He was screaming in pain yet not in English. Hooded monsters melted up from the ground. They were covered in chains smoking with either the particles or the blood. Their hoods covered what James thought to be there face. Once they got close enough James found... they had no faces.

All went black for a world without end. All silent again. James Cobalt opened his eyes with the room back to normal as in nothing had happened. All left was a singular piece of paper left floating to the ground. James swiftly grabbed it, almost as quickly as his heart raced. The paper read all the knowledge to be learned. All life had to offer. All of everything. James flipped out his matchbox. He popped it open taking out a single match. Striking it. Once. Twice. There came fire. That was the sound that inspired music. He dropped the paper. It flew to the ground. Rocking back and forth. James dropped the match. James Cobalt walked out... unscarred.

James Cobalt woke in his bed. The moon shined through his blinds. The tree without leaves knocked hello on the window. The outside grass whistled in the wind as a good morning. James Cobalt could not remember his journey home. He shrugged it off as it was a short one and he was tired at last night's event. James felt the need to vomit. His stomach jumped around as it was on a trampoline. He stretched out but not in a satisfying fashion.

James still in his last set of clothes fell down the stairs. A feeling that not a man could represent by word is what James felt. James Cobalt had no idea where he was going or what he was doing. For the first time in maybe forever Cobalt realized how bad he truly he was. James fell on the coach in a familiar spot to him. James took out his 8th Journal. He wrote more and more, endlessly James smiled in another.

Katelyn Morales

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

Lily Waters is my new next door neighbor. She lives in apartment B2 and just recently moved to Valleyville a few days ago. Every time I am near Lily's apartment, I always hear strange mumbling and clattering. Mom always says that I just have a big imagination and Lily is simply an average neighbor, which is exactly why I want to find out exactly what Lily is doing in there. It was 7AM when I woke up on Saturday. Today was the first day of my investigation, and I was feeling confident and prepared. Mom was already awake, and she usually leaves to work around 7:10 AM. As soon as Mom left I was going to scrutinize apartment B2, or at least the outside. After all, I'm not a criminal. "Bye honey, love you!" shouted mom from the front door. I waited a minute after the door had shut, and I went off.

I carefully opened up the front door and went into the hall. Lily lives right across from me so, if anyone caught me I would use the excuse of waiting for my mom to return. I put my ear to the worn out red front door. I heard nothing. Then, out of nowhere, I heard a slight clatter. I pulled my small notepad out of the pocket in my blue jeans and took note of the happening.

Small clatter at approximately 7:15 AM.

I began to hear more and more clangs and began rapidly jotting down my notes. I also heard a slight step. The steps began to draw closer and closer. I removed my ear from Lily's door and jerked around to my door. I pretended to be struggling to unlock my door. The door to apartment 2B opened, but it was not Lily. A woman had walked out of apartment 2B. She was wearing a fancy suit, pencil skirt, and tall, black heels. The woman elegantly walked away as if she were somewhere important, and not a dumpy apartment building. I waited for the woman to leave before scribbling down another note

Fancy lady left at approximately 7:30 AM.

May be in some secret business.

I decided to head across the hall to the elevator. I figured talking to Glenda of apartment 5A would be a good option.

Glenda was the biggest gossip in the apartment building, maybe even the whole city. Glenda and I would regularly have tea parties when I was little. We were good friends and talked often still. When the doors to the elevator opened I walked into the hall and scanned the addresses. I had lived in our apartment building for a while, but I always had trouble remembering how the addresses worked.

“Here we are, apartment 5A.” I mumbled in a slight whisper. I knocked on the door and within seconds Glenda opened the door.

“Hello, dear.” said Glenda in her sweet southern accent. Glenda was from Georgia, but she moved to Oregon when she was 45. Glenda welcomed me in and I took a seat on the pink floral couch. Glenda offered me a cup of her sweet raspberry tea, and I excitedly accepted. Everyone loved her tea, it was so good!

“Now dear, you usually wouldn’t visit me on a beautiful Saturday, so what seems to be the problem?” inquired Glenda.

“Well, Glenda” I began to say. “What do you know about Lily Waters?”

Glenda swished her tea for a second and took that time to ponder.

“I know that Lily is from New York City, a big city person who decided to move to lil’ old Valleyville. I’m not sure why Lily would move here though. Now is that all dear?”

“Oh, yes! Thank you Glenda! I should get going now, bye!”

“Bye dear!” said Glenda excitedly.

I walked back down the hall, into the elevator, and back into my apartment. I sat on our tan couch. I began to review my notes, I also added the information Glenda gave me.

Lived in NY, NY.

Big city person.

I stuffed my notebook back into my green satchel and sat for a second. “How can I get into Lily’s apartment?” I thought to myself.

“Ah ha!” I accidentally shouted. I knew exactly what to do. I dashed into the kitchen and quickly grabbed the pitcher with a red lid, Mom and I used it to make fruit punch. I went back down to Glenda’s apartment and knocked on the door. Glenda, once again, quickly answered.

“Yes dear?” Said Glenda, like she always does.

“Glenda, would you do me a big favor and fill this pitcher with your delicious tea?” I grabbed the pitcher from my satchel and extended my arm in her direction.

“Well of course.” stated Glenda. “Anything for my favorite pal!”

Glenda took the pitcher and filled it with the tea in her fridge. Glenda also handed me some glazed scones that went very well with the tea.

“For that extra pizzazz!” cheered Glenda.

I stuffed the items into my bag and made my way up to Lily’s apartment. I knocked politely and stood attentively, I was ready to finish this investigation. Lily opened the door and greeted me with a big smile, something seemed off to me though.

“Welcome,” said Lily, in an almost too calm tone, while she straightened the pillows on her modern couch. I followed her inside and sat on one of the matching armchairs. All of the furniture inside her place was very black and white, modern, and sleek. Her apartment carried no personality, at all, which is very unusual for our town.

“What brings you here today-” She paused and thought for a second. “I’m sorry,” she continued, “I don’t believe I know what your name is.”

“Amy.” I replied proudly. “Amy Lovell.”

“Well, Amy, what a lovely name you have.” she replied in a suspiciously pleasant tone.

“What does bring you here today?” she asked again.

“Oh, well you never got a proper welcome. Since you are my new next door neighbor, I thought I would bring you a little treat!” I said with a false cheerful tone. I removed the scones and the tea pitcher from my satchel and held them proudly.

“Some vanilla scones and Ms. Glenda’s amazing raspberry tea!”

“Well thank you! Those scones look amazing, and I bet the tea is wonderful too!”

“Lily, are you busy right now?”

“Not for another hour,” she said in a confused tone.

“Well then,” I started “You wouldn’t mind if I stayed for tea, would you?”

“I suppose not.”

Lily gathered some fancy looking plates from her cabinet for the scones, and I poured the tea into the cups she gave me.

“Sorry that I don’t have any tea cups. Tea isn’t a very popular drink where I come from, and my only teacups I had broken very recently.”

We sat and talked for a little and I gathered some new mental notes to write down later.

“Where is the restroom?” I inquired. Of course, I wasn’t actually going to use the bathroom. I was planning to write down notes and see if I could snoop for a few seconds. Lily showed me to the bathroom and walked back over to the tea. I went inside the bathroom and sat on top of the closed toilet and quickly scribbled in my notes.

Likes coffee

Had a dog named piper

Grew up on a farm

Had a big job in NY, NY.

Now, it was time to snoop.

A winding hall to the bathroom gave me an advantage in snooping about. I slowly, and quietly, opened the door and walked into the hall. On a small table outside the bathroom she had a picture and a jewelry box. The picture was of her and a guy. She was holding a square cloth box with lots of items in it. Under the picture it said “Last day!” in silver marker. The jewelry box was filled with many expensive looking necklaces and bracelets, including the locket she was wearing in the picture. I opened up the locket and found a picture of the guy, but this time, it was just him. I realized I had been gone too long and decided to head back.

I gathered my things and left. I was feeling bummed about not getting enough evidence, but I was catching on. I was fairly sure that Lily worked for some spy agency, or a secret society. Why else would a big city person like her move to Valleyville? I realized I had to prove this now, and I would. I sat at her door again and listened. I heard lots of talking, but nothing convincing. I went to bed and decided to continue the next day.

I decided that I should try asking Glenda again. Glenda had probably welcomed her to the neighborhood yesterday, and may know more things about her. I went back down the elevator and straight to Glenda’s apartment. I knocked and Glenda greeted me with her cheerful voice like she always does.

“So, Glenda” I began, “what do you know about Lily now?”

“Well, Amy, she told me that she is a work-from-home assistant global manager at REW CO. I know that she left and took a work-from-home position because she wanted a taste of small town life again.”

“Are you sure?” I said in a suspicious tone.

“I’m sure!” chirped Glenda.

“Well, Glenda, I have heard strange things from that apartment. She is always mumbling and making quick and loud

sounds. So, what's really going on?"

"Oh, Amy, Lily is a bit of a klutz. In fact, when I was at her home she was dropping stuff all over the place. She also has to do lots of in home meetings and voice calls, since she works from home."

"That would explain why Lily said her teacups were broken. But, who is that guy in her picture by the bathroom?"

"Honey that is Lily's Fiancé. He is moving in soon, which is one of the reasons why Lily has been so clumsy and silly lately. She is excited."

"So, Lily really is just a normal neighbor? No secrets, and no spying?"

"Yup!"

After that I went upstairs to my apartment and tore the pages out of my notebook. Silly me, I really did just have a big imagination.

Ava Jane Nelson
Middle School Short Story

The Colorless People

Dear Survivors,

Knowing through my experience, I've learned that order is not perfection. In this magical world, everything has to be the way it should be or... let's just say bad stuff happens...

Considering that I can only use a certain amount of paper, I can only tell you a fraction of information...so read carefully.

It was an October day, I believe, and it seemed ordinary like any other. The sky was its normal color, a shade of misty grey, and muffled sounds were the only things I could hear. I tried to make them out, but they were too hard to understand. All the people in the streets had a stoic expression on their face. I never knew if they were happy or sad since their eyes showed no emotion at all. Honestly, I wore the same face as they did too, and wore the clothes everyone else did. The only colors in my closet were white, black, and grey. But as they say, it's simple and perfect.

The neighborhood had houses evenly spaced out and every house was the same color and design. It was very difficult to find my house since it was like everyone else's, but it was civilized so it didn't matter.

Every conversation was the same. It went something like:

“Hello. How are you?”

“Good. How are you?”

“Good.”

And it never changed. But we never had awkward moments where we didn't know what to say since we were told what to say.

Our clothes are chosen, our houses are chosen, our speech is chosen, and our paths are chosen... and we “all” liked it that way.

But there are two things our people don't like. Imperfection and magic. If you look different, act different, are not the first or second child, or if you possess any kind of magic or sorcery,

something unexplainable happens to you... and that's when this information comes in handy.

These people are colorblind. They don't see any color in the world. They don't see light, new ideas, creativity, or anything unique. Just plainness.

Scientists say 96% of our people have ataxophobia (fear of disorder and untidiness) so that causes the urge to have everything to be exactly the same... but I am among the other four percent.

If you made it this far without being caught, good. There is so much to tell. Don't let the blankness of this world hide what's really there. "And what's really there?" you might ask. Magic.

Meet me at the cottage in the forbidden woods to discuss... well, plans. Just remember, don't get caught...

Sincerely,

Ellen Willowood

Abbey Parkes

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

“Brother? Are you alive? Don’t join me so soon. Grandpa and Grandma watch me now. They told me I had to give you a blessing or something. Hmm, yes, that’s what I gotta say. ‘Without a small kindle, all warmth will be gone. A cruel crown will be yielded by a radiant spawn’, or something. Uhh, ‘Now come forth, do not fret or kneel, and now, my true kin, your wounds will now heal’. Oh, one last part... ‘I will follow you endlessly, ‘till your quest is complete, when this terrible ruler will come obsolete’. Wonder what that means. Wake up, now! Uhh, wingardium leviosa...? Uh, open sesame! Whatever, you’ll come to terms with yourself eventually. Poof, I’m gone! Hehehehe... Bye!”

Ember’s dreary eyes lifted, his breath fogging into the frostbitten air. His leg was casted, weighting his body down to the floor. He’d been thrown nearly 800 feet from the highest soaring island in the Lost Island Chain- Draconimbus, land of the dragons. He breathed, his claws fading black from the frostbite he had received. His ribs were cradled in a bandage, and a few teeth had been missing. His fur bristled, and several bandages shackled his wrists and knees.

“H-Hello?” The dragon whimpered.

“Anyone there?” He heard the ecstatic yelping of an adolescent dog fill the mouth of the igloo, and it darted inwards, the husky’s eyes pinned in excitement.

“Kerioso, what’s that? What’s that, bear?” A feminine voice of concern answered, stepping into the den.

“My, it has awakened!” She gasped, running up to examine it. It was an odd-looking creature, icicles lining her back and tail. A plush fur covered her body, swishing with the waves of the icy wind.

“You’re the dragon. You’ve been knocked out for quite a few months, little creature. I was thinking you died.” Ember’s ears flattened, swishing into a dull object near his ears. He felt them

with a claw, eyes looking upwards as he felt the keratin surface of a growth on his head. Horns! I'm sprouting horns! His heart leaped.

"I've been growing horns waiting to wake up! Literally!" He piped, eyes wide with fascination. He wondered if they'd curl or rake or grow out or branch-any idea of horns made him gleeful.

"Oh, um, than-thank you. For uh, healing- m-me." He thanked, ears drooping against his stub horns.

"Oh, dear, it's nothing. Truly." Ember's fur was coated in a flurry of snow. The raptor-like snow creature scraped at the icicles lining her ankles.

"I am Dooku, the wanderer of the Lowlands." She introduced herself, unsheathing a large wandering stick of ice from her tail, and using it to kneel to him.

"You are?"

The dragon hesitated, before getting back to his paws.

"Prince Ember of the Draconimbus Kingdom."

Dooku paused, before standing erect. "My, my. I never expected my future king to appear in such a treacherous place. What brings you?"

"My father... He pushed me over the Trenchbank after he thought I killed Prince Sprout."

"I knew that Fracture was a corrupt king. A line of assassins should never come to the throne. Oso, stay here."

The dog puffed out its chest and barked. Ember nodded. Dooku let out a gasp, reaching behind her, and opening a cabinet. She pulled out a black scarf, and matching snowshoes.

"You'll need these, Ember." She commented, forcing the clothes in his paws.

"W-Why?"

"We're getting you back up there. That king - I won't let him rule me."

Ember felt his belly sink.

"He'll kill us!" He yowled.

"Not before we overthrow him."

She paused. "Are you coming?"

Ember fretted, replaced soon by a surge of acceptance. He nodded, and followed her out of the entryway, and into the bitter cold.

Time to save the world - I - I think. Ember thought coldly.

Ember bristled in the cold air, the black scarf and snowshoes

shuffling against the snow. He looked up at Dooku, gaze glittering with curiosity. "Papa never told me there were so many creatures around these islands." Ember commented, ears flat.

"He wanted you to become as oblivious as he was." Dooku calmly shot back, as they saw a small, humble looking hut. Ember felt his paws itch to pick up the pace, and he began to trot forward. His eyes flicked side to side, but he suddenly froze.

"Who... what?" Ember blubbered, as the bell around his neck was illuminated by a ghastly yellow. He twisted his head downwards, touching his nose to the bell. Dooku knelt before the bell, examining it with an awestruck demeanor.

"What is going on?" She questioned the little dragon.

"Uh, uhm - I dunno...This has never happened...Uh-uh - " He shuddered in reply. A small dragon, with lime-green scales littered with a ghostly light faded into the snow before him. His gaze was blank, his corneas glazed over with a gray plume of a mysterious liquid.

"Sp-Sprout?" Ember whispered, eyes coated in joyous tears.

"Did my prophecy help? Huh? Huh?" The tiny dragon squealed, prancing around Ember.

"Helloooo?! Anyone home?!" Sprout yowled at Ember, excitedly. Ember shed a tear and began to laugh. He tackled him to the snowy ground, batting at him playfully.

"It's you! You're here!" Ember cried, as Sprout fluttered out of his grasp and appeared over top of him.

"Yep! I needed to give you something for the road!" Sprout piped, as he swirled his talons in a circular motion. An orb appeared in his claws.

"You have three keystones to your Dragon-heart. Here, I give you the gift of fire." He placed it in Ember's claws. Ember's smile faded.

"What is this, Sprout?" He asked, as Dooku looked at them with queer.

"Well? Put it near your heart, fur-face!" She cried.

Ember awkwardly shifted it near his chest, the orb breathing out puffs of heat. It slipped through his fur, and passed through his skin abnormally, as if it was missing from the realm of reality. Ember froze, and his fur began to rise in anxiousness. Sprout giggled.

"Now, I'm a bad guy! You gotta kill me!" Sprout proclaimed, arching his back. Ember made a small squeak of terror, and opened his mouth, a strong blaze flying from his maw. Ember

shrieked, and stumbled back.

“My mouth! It burns!” He cried sheepishly, his face hot with embarrassment.

“Well, you gotta learn to control it.” Sprout’s eyes glittered, and he put a claw on Ember’s heart.

“It’s my time to go. I’ll always be with you, in here.” He looked up at him, and with a strong whirl of snowy wind, his spirit was disintegrated in the icy breeze.

The duo slowly stalked into the snow-ridden structure. A river was flowing in the center of the structure, ice lining the riverbed. A large, sculpted canoe lay anchored in the river. A ghostly, ambient being, a chain tying it to the side of the boat looked back at them, its eyes littered with pity. It looked like a large snake, with forearms, and spikes lining the treacherous creature’s back. It looked back at them with woe.

“Come. The ride will begin ssshortly.” It beckoned them with a ghastly echo in its tone, its snake-like tongue tasting the crisp air that surrounded them. Dooku climbed onto the canoe, and Ember reluctantly followed. The canoe shifted, and slowly drew forward. A large waterfall, with the same chunks of ice following down followed. Ember winced, bracing for a painful, sharp drop, but it did not occur. The spirit paddled slowly down the waterfall, as the bitter cold slowly drifted away. The ice chunks in the water became no more, and the snow falling from above slowly faded into a steady stream of warmth. Ember looked around, the clouds far above them now. The Lowlands- once believed to be the lowest island- were barely viewable. Ember looked past the ghost’s shoulder, and saw a low-lying island, laying silent on the ground. The life from it had simmered, and cries of shill terror and woe filled the air.

“What... what is that place?” He muttered, eyes filled with sorrow.

“It was formerly a tall island called Lycanno. I battled there once, on the ssside of the newly-throned King Fracture. I wasss killed after I had attacked a family that lived there. The young gryphon hatchling that lived there wasss dead beneath my claws, and the father noticed, and killed me after I murdered three children and their mother. I begged for mercccy, as it was my orders, but the Godsss punished me. I am forced to tend to travelers, and each coming day, I am reminded of my sssins. The housse the family lived in is now the Riverwater Place.”

“What’s the Riverwater Place?” Ember squeaked.

“It’s where travelers like us come and go across islands. The

house you came into that held the riverbed was the Lowland's Riverwater Place. The one that sent a river up to Veroghyme was destroyed, so now we have to take the long way, from the Lowlands to Lycanno to Veroghyme to Tyraac to Erchna, and then to Draconimbus." Dooku explained.

"So it's where we leave and enter islands?" Ember replied.

"You're correct." She replied, the gentle waves rippling under the canoe.

"You have arrived at your sssstop." The snake sighed, as the canoe halted. Dooku pulled off her gear, and placed them in a small sack she had on her shoulder. She pulled out a small gold coin, and tossed it into the canoe. The serpent dipped its head in thanks, its tongue flicking. Ember grabbed his belongings, and padded out of the boat.

"Can you carry my stuff?" Ember asked awkwardly.

"It'd be my pleasure." Dooku replied, taking his scarf and winter shoes and putting them into her seemingly bottomless pouch.

Ember and Dooku had finished stocking up with travel gear, and had pressed through the heavy crowds of griffins in Lycanno's Township. Ember's claws tingled, as they recovered from the cold of the Lowlands.

"Dooku? Why's everyone moving?"

"They fear you, Ember. Your father tore them from the sky. They think you're a spy.

"B-But I'm not!"

A large pair of paws struck the earth before them. Ember and Dooku gasped, and slowly backed away. The leader of the griffins, Hyperion, was before them. His hazel feathers rippled lightly in the cool breeze, with a long, three-clawed scar over his face. He raised his paw in disgust at the little dragon.

"Who are you? Why does a mangy dragon dare show their face in Lycanno?" He roared. Hyperion slammed his paws down, and large bramble vines pricked and strangled themselves around Ember. He squeaked, afraid.

"I-I'm sorry! I don't know wh-what I did! P-Please let me g-go!" He wailed. Dooku held back a snarl, and dropped onto a knee.

"Hyperion, I am Dooku, a wanderer of the Lowlands. Ember appeared in the Lowlands after his father tried to kill him by shoving him from the islands. He means no harm, and we are head to overthrow the wicked king. He does not mean to hurt

any of your people.” She calmly narrated, looking up at him.

“We ask for safe passage to your Riverwater Place.”

Hyperion gasped, and dropped the dragon from his grasp. He opened a small box he held at his side.

“The prophecy... it is coming true. I didn’t believe it would occur so soon.” He murmured, placing a claw on his beak.

“Little dragon, come forward.” Ember slowly crept from the place he’d fallen, to the griffin’s paws.

“Griffins! The dragon with no fire has come!” The griffins cheered wildly, as Hyperion pulled a small bell from the box, and laced it tightly around Ember’s neck. The bell was deathly silent, and sung no song. The orb Sprout had gifted Ember flared from his chest, and into the bell. With a jitter, the bell sang a quiet song of mercy. Ember shuddered, and fainted. Before him, was the tiny, gentle green dragon.

“Fulfill the prophecy.”

Hannah Pompilius

Middle School Short Story

Show Time

We were watching the News when the Government banned Soccer for girls. Just then I got a call from Jada my best friend I could hear the madness and anger in her voice. Then after 10 minutes later Jada stopped yelling and we started to make a plan to meet with all the village girls to make a plan. Two hours later, all the girls met at Jada's house.

Jada had a plan.

"We all should have a soccer show." At first not all the girls were on the same page because if the Government found out about us making a show about girls playing Soccer we would all go to jail. It took 10 minutes of convincing than all the girls were on the same page. Soon after, we were all brainstorming ideas about the show then finally after a few minutes we all agreed on one idea a girl named Jen's idea short for Jennifer she said in a bold voice.

"Let's all be in the show doing are own act and showing our own skills."

A few days later, show time day came we were all getting ready and practicing. I was up first, I was the first act I was so nervous I felt sick to my stomach. If I even made one mistake that one mistake could ban Soccer for girls throughout history. The show ended, we all did our best soccer skills hoping for a good outcome from it especially from the Government.

The next day, on the News we saw they made a new law for girls' soccer. The girls and I were listening closely to what the News was saying and after I heard the new Law my heart dropped. I couldn't breathe. I heard the other girls screaming with happiness and we all heard the law "Girls Soccer has now been unbanned." After a few minutes I could breathe again, I was so happy all of the hard work paid off I was so proud of myself and the other girl's hard work. I started thinking about a saying my grandmother used to tell my "fight for what you believe in Haliyah." I thought about making a future girls' soccer team called "GHP" it stands for "Girls Play Hard." Who ever knew an unjust society could turn into a just society so quickly.

Jasmine Reyes

Middle School Short Story



Fire, Earth and Love

Hi, my name is Blossom and I'm a Fire dragon. I know, weird name for a Fire Dragon. I used to be an Earth Dragon but my father, Dramoca, went mad and wiped out most of my Tribe. When he was killed to prevent him from doing more damage, I grew bitter and my powers changed. I was once a very sweet dragon, but I became angry with the world. Here's my story about how Lionder came into my bitter life and helped me get back to who I was meant to be.

Something dropped on my snout. A leaf? No, too wet. Could rain have seeped into my den? Didn't sound like it...groggily I opened my tired eyes to find a thin line of drool jiggling right above my snout.

"Argh!" I leapt into the air, stretching my wings above me. The tips skimmed over my roommate, Splinter, who was hanging upside down on the wall like a bat. I glared crossly at him as I smacked my tail at his legs. He tumbled down, screeching in alarm.

"W-What is it?" he mumbled as he scrambled up, his small, gold and brown wings flapping wildly.

"You drooled on me!" I glared at him, seething with fury. I smacked him again with my tail. Still furious, I hissed and leapt out of our den, stretching my wings as far as I could. I flapped them until all the tension was gone then landed on a nearby tree.

"Hey Blossom! Wanna come hunt with me?" a crisp voice sounded from below me. I looked down cautiously to see a pale blue dragoness staring up at me from her perch on a rock. She knows very well that I don't want to! Ugh, why is Gale so annoying? Can't she leave me alone?!

Growing increasingly sour, I decided to ignore her question to save her from a rather rude snipe I felt growing on my serpent tongue. I leapt from tree to tree until I was far away from any of my kin.

A shaky breath escaped me when I stopped. It's not that I liked being mean but everything became intensely irritating ever

since my father was killed. I let myself slide down the tree and crumple on the ground as memories of my father's ghostly stare washed over me. He slashed at and took the lives of my siblings. He even came for me, but my mother rushed to protect me. Then my father killed her. I couldn't move, I just stood and watched as he...

I shuddered away from the horrible thoughts and wrapped my tail around my snout, preventing the cry of agony rising in my throat from coming out.

I let my tail fall to the ground as I stood and examined my large silver claws. Specks of dirt were stuck here and there. I remembered when I didn't care for dirt. When I had Earth powers. But that was before I became the mess I am now. That was before my father had become a maniac.

The memories turned into another. My brother leaving us. Rysior had always been hungry for power and was prepared to do anything for it. After he almost killed Grigor, he got banished. I hadn't seen him ever since. That was about 8 years ago. Now I'm a full-grown dragoness.

I shook my head. Instead of pondering on these thoughts, why don't I just hunt by myself? I looked up at the sky. It was growing dark, but I had night vision. Besides, it wasn't like anyone would miss me. Repressing a sigh, I trudged forward, prowling the woods until I finally came upon a young rabbit nibbling at stalks of grass near a shrub of bougainvillea. A growing longing to study the plant crept into my heart as I gazed at its vibrant colors. I needed to concentrate though, so I ignored it. I crept closer to the small rabbit but just as I was about to take advantage of the rabbit's stupidity an indistinct shape tackled the bunny. A high-pitched squeal of pain piqued my curiosity. It sounded like a baby dragon. I hesitated a moment before cautiously wandering toward the sound.

As I leapt over the last bush, I came face to face with the baby dragon, the rabbit nowhere in sight.

It was very small, three weeks old was my guess. It made me wonder how it wasn't the lunch for some hungry panther. The baby dragon had a skinny frame and its scales were a shine of gold and brown, its horns and claws the brightest silver I had ever seen. He had some odd scales around his neck, which were brown as well and his snout was curved at the end. His wings were too big for him and the edges were a vivid red. His eyes...his eyes held the deepest wisdom. His pupil was long and black, surrounded by a ghostly white. Around that was the iciest

blue I had ever witnessed, but the spiral along the edges of his eyes was startling. It was a dark blue with shimmering specks of gold. They burned with an intensity I had only seen in an adult dragon.

The little dragon looked a lot like a lion, with his skinny tail and thorn tip.

I moved forward slowly. “Hey, little guy,” I breathed, tail twitching slightly, “What’s your name?”

The hatchling just stared at me. A sliver of concern urged me to press forward until I was face to face with it, my neck stretched down.

“You can’t speak, can you?” not waiting or expecting an answer, I narrowed my eyes and straightened. “I could maybe look after you...and once you can talk, I can take you to your parents.”

The hatchling began jumping around me and I felt my snout twitch with amusement.

“Well, since you seem delighted at the idea, I must give you a name.” I studied him for a long time, and it was almost pitch black when it finally came to me. “Lionder. Your new name is Lionder.”

“Lionder, no!” I rushed forward, shoving him to my chest just before a large tree branch crashed at the spot he had been standing in. A shiver of distress ran through my body as I freed and watched him make an effort on scrambling over the branch. Three weeks after I had rescued him and he was already as energetic as a wolf.

“Mmm, they’re always tough at this age.” A whispery voice spoke from behind me. I spun around in shock, my whole-body tense with readiness to fight. Caring for Lionder made me wary of every dragon around him. I feared harm would come to him. But the dragon who had spoken was Grigor, the leader of my Tribe. Gale was behind him, grumbling about something. Grigor was a Shadow Dragon, so he had inky black scales, silver flecks in his wings and brown eyes.

My tail twitched slightly, nervousness washing over me. What did Grigor want? Was I in trouble? I doubt it, I have been very agreeable with everyone....

As I thought about this, Grigor cleared his throat and nodded to my left wing, which was turning a rosy pink. A few splotches of pink, brown and green were covering my whole body, and growing every day I spent caring for Lionder.

My fondness of the little mischief maker was growing rapidly with every day that passed too and I felt a love I had only felt for my family. And as days went by, I realized that this love was stronger and sturdier, like nothing could ever break the bond Lionder and I had created. I also realized that if the time came, I would sacrifice myself for him.

“Blossom, do you realize what’s happening to you?” Grigor fixed me with an intent stare, his brown eyes sparkling.

I shook my head no, in all honesty.

Grigor puffed out a sigh. “Blossom, you’re turning into an Earth Dragon again.”

Relief struck my heart...my life would be normal again! But it was also terrifying.

“Y-You think so?” I leaned forward hopefully.

Grigor nodded, his short snout bobbing up and down. “I don’t think, I know. And obviously, Lionder is making that happen.”

We both turned to where Lionder was now playfully dabbing at ripples of silver water. Gale glanced at me quickly before walking up to him and settling down, watching the baby intently, her body tense, ready in case he slipped.

I opened my snout but nothing came out. It was mostly shocking but I was also filled with relief. It was filling my whole body with a joy that I hadn’t felt in a long time.

But I was also terrified. Terrified that I would go mad and hurt my little Lionder, like my father.

My body started shaking uncontrollably. A burning sensation flared in my snout, a plea to let loose all the agony I had bottled up inside me, but again, I wrapped my tail around my mouth. And that’s when I saw it. An anonymous figure rushing away with Lionder.

A roar escaped me after I whipped my tail away. I lifted into the air, eyes burning with rage. I roared again and dove into the trees. A small group of dragonesses came to my aid, Gale among them. Her eyes were glistening with horror and misery. I heard the crash of bodies against trees as me and my Tribe hurtled at the black figure holding my precious bundle. Without thinking, I opened my jaws and spat something out. A huge seed. The seed erupted right in front of the anonymous figure, throwing dirt into the air, and quickly grew into a tall birch tree. Vines began writhing at the bottom. The dragon reared back in surprise, trying to fly backwards, but the vines successfully twisted around the dragon and caught hold of Lionder. A wail was escaping the

small hatchlings curved snout. I landed on the ground with a thud and quickly took him from the vines and put him on the ground.

A rush of disgust sent me running to the dragon and I stopped when I was face to face with it.

“Who are you?” I demanded twisting my claws savagely.

The dragon stared back at me, equally angry. The answer came to me and I stumbled back a step in disbelief.

“Rysior?”

The dragon nodded slowly, curling and uncurling his claws as a vine wrapped around his snout.

“Why would you take one so young? Why take one at all?” I hissed, digging my talons into the ground nervously.

Smoke rose from his nostrils and into the air. He grunted.

“We’ll take care of him,” Gale reassured me as she came up to my side. The other dragons behind me moved forward and started unwrapping the vines and then hauled him into the air. Rysior wriggled vainly, trying to escape but he had no luck.

I nodded gratefully and was rushing to Lionder when Gale called again to me. “I’m sorry, Blossom! I turned my head to wash my tail for second...I don’t know- “

I nodding once, indicating that I forgave her, before lying down next to Lionder. He curled into a small ball by my chest, whimpering.

A screech sounded from above me, filled with fury. I didn’t look up. I was only worried about Lionder.

“Ssshhh, it’s alright,” I assured the tiny dragon, “He’s gone.”

“I love you, Mama,” the tiny dragon murmured.

The rush of glee was so strong I couldn’t bite back the small scratchy purring sound in my throat. His first words were for me.

I wrapped around my little Lionder and whispered into his ear, “I love you too, my little Lionder. You’ll never be alone again, I swear. I’ll always be there for you.”

Brett Richards

Middle School Short Story

The Wallet

So Zooy (a chaos bender), Gaboon (a man made of snakes), and I (the silver comando) were heading over to the void and fight some shadows and titans, when we ran into a bunch over Zoriack warriors, or how they like to call themselves the third (because they were the third living things ever created). Zoriacks are these tall boar skinned humanoids with a there lower teeth poking out, goat eyes, and a flat area where the nose should be all the way up to their eyes and up near the eyes are the nostril.

“Well this is going to be difficult to get to the void now,” I said.

“I have an idea,” Zooy said with a smile.

“No Zooy don’t show them your wallet!” Gaboon said desperately.

“What’s in his wallet?” I said while Zooy was walking up to the Zoriacks.

“A lot of random things including a koala, but mostly endless gold,” Gaboon said surprisingly calm. Then Zooy opened his wallet upturned it downing us in gold, a zoo’s worth of animals, and every instrument imaginable.

Three days later we finally get all the things back in the wallet which was a surprising amount of dead bodies including the Zoriacks and a tank. Then Gaboon and I started throwing up gold, bones, fur, claws, mouthpieces, reeds, and weaponry.

“Zooy please don’t upturn your wallet ever again!” Gaboon pleaded.

“Absolutely now we’re only ten minutes early!” Zooy exclaimed. Then I face palm because I didn’t know we were going to be three days early.

Isabel Rodriguez

Middle School Short Story

Life Time

Her mother opened the door, and came inside, followed by her father. She greeted them, and they greeted her. Vivien liked her parents, they were open-minded people, and seemed to be educated, and were Vivien's role models. Though she loved her parents, they always seemed to be busy. But most of the time she didn't mind; she like being by herself anyways.

Vivien Bonnie is a six-teen year old girl living in the summer of 1963. She has short blonde, curly hair, and grey eyes. She has a round face with high cheekbones; she is also fairly small for her age. She is currently reading a book about the possibility of extraterrestrial species. She loves the idea of traveling through space, and one day (hopefully) finding a species on another planet. But, she is soon going to learn that dreams should have a limit.

Vivien seemed to be lost in space as her parents started on dinner. She was brought back to reality when she heard her mother call her to help in the old-fashioned kitchen.

"So whatcha do today?" Her mother asked as she entered the kitchen.

"Went to the library." Was all Vivien simply answered.

Out of nowhere, her father dropped the knife onto the wooden countertop and sighed.

"I almost forgot. I have a conference with the other small shop owners tonight."

"On a Tuesday! How unique of them." Vivien's mother replied sarcastically.

"But hey! It should be fun," Vivien's mother added, trying to sound cheerful.

"Does that mean I'll be by myself tonight?" Vivien asked.

"Yeah, until about eleven pm." Her father added.

By the time the conversation was over, her mother was already serving the plates. Spaghetti and salad was their dinner for the day.

Dinner went by in a flash, as it usually did. All the catching

up and “how was your days” took place while dinner was being made.

Right after dinner Vivien’s parents started to get ready for the conference. Around 6:30pm they were ready to leave. They said their goodbyes, and gave Vivien a goodnight; expecting her to be asleep by the time they got back. They headed out the front door and got into her father's truck, and off they went.

Despite being by herself, she grabbed the closest book “Life beyond Earth.” She read, and read, and read. Time once again seemed to fly as she went into the kitchen to get a glass of water and noticed the clock on the counter that read 9:57pm. Almost her bed time. After obtaining her water, Vivien sat back down on the floral print couch.

“One more chapter couldn’t hurt.” She told herself. Soon after, she was barely starting on her 15th chapter, when she could feel her eyelids get heavy, and her eyes felt sore from trying to keep them open. After a while of struggling, she decided to place her book mark in her spot where she left off, placed her book on the floor, closed her eyes, and fall into a dreamless sleep.

“BOOM”

Vivien woke up. Her heart was racing as fast as a horse at the Kentucky Derby. She sat up and took in her surroundings. The lamp she had left on before she fell into a deep sleep was now off. There seemed to be no light at all. It was dark. Very dark. She also noticed the sound of howling wind outside. She felt around until she found the lamp. She reached for the string and tugged on it, yet it didn’t turn on.

“Mom! Dad!” She called out. Nobody answered.

Vivien slowly raised from the couch, and tried her best to navigate herself towards the kitchen. She bumped into multiple pieces of furniture, but ended up finding herself at a kitchen counter. She felt around for a drawer, until she found one. She opened it and searched for a familiar object, until she found what she was looking for, a flashlight. She flipped the switch on the flashlight and the object radiated light. She could finally see.

That’s when it hit her that she needed to investigate the sound she awoke to. The idea of even looking outside frightened Vivien. She fought threw her fear and traveled to the closes window.

She moved the light blue curtain aside. She quickly shines her flashlight threw the window and looked closely. Nothing. She then decided to look on the roof. She went towards the front

door, and placed her hand on the door's lock and unlocked the door. Right then the door flew open. It caused Vivien to shriek as it was a surprise and almost hit her.

Vivien took a minute to recover from the jump scare. She then gathered up her courage and went outside. The wind was strong. She struggled to make it to the end of the yard. Her messy blonde hair was blowing in her face, it was dark, and she wasn't able to see much.

She swept her hair behind her ear, and shined the flashlight towards the roof of the old house. She expected to see nothing, but there was something. In the dark night sky with no stars, and only little light formed by the moon and her flashlight she saw what she only read about in books, and seen in sci-fi movies; she saw a UFO. She saw what she could only describe as a saucer with a little shell sitting on the top. Connected to that were 6 legs (almost like a tripod) standing the object on top of Vivien Bonnie's house. She was in shock. Her jaw dropped, she couldn't move, and felt stuck. She must have been standing for what later seemed like five minutes. Vivien then realized that she should do something. She didn't know what to do, but she had to do something.

"Maybe it's not what I think it is." She mumbled to herself as she made her way towards the roof. She found the latter on the side of the house and stood it up. The ground seemed to sway beneath her as she started climbing. She did her best to climb to the top of the roof, almost slipping occasionally. She finally made it to the top and tried to balance herself so she wouldn't fall. She was only inches away from touching the object when all of a sudden, the shell opened slowly. Once again, Vivien was frozen with shock.

After the shell was completely opened, a little creature seemed to literally pop out from the object, and stood in front of the saucer, it seemed to levitate. Vivien followed it with her eyes and flashlight. It looked up at her, and with an adorable smile stated "Hello!"

The creature had to be a foot tall at most, it had light blue skin, and huge pitch black eyes with only a small glint from the moon. The creature had ears similar to humans, and no ears, it contained no hair, and had a perfectly round face with a stubby body that wore a blue body suit with tiny silver dress shoes.

"Would you so happen like to bring me into your household?" The creature spoke. The incorrect wording snapped Vivien out of her state.

“What are you?” She asked.

“A lifetime, I come from the planet Cyan.”

“Oh.”

“Now, my temperature is below the health radar. Can I go inside a warmer climate?” The lifetime asked. The alien didn’t know how to properly speak. Vivien felt bad for the poorly educated creature all of a sudden. A wave of sadness washed over her.

“Follow me.” Vivien replied and scrambled down the ladder. She thought that if she hurried up, the alien would leave. But she was wrong. The Aileen just levitated next to her.

Right when she reached the door and swung it open, the creature rushed inside. Vivien followed.

“I have capacity waste, anywhere to put it?” The Lifetime asked.

“Down the hall, first door on the left.” Vivien stated emotionless. She didn’t know why she was doing this. It felt like something was controlling her. The creature was in no wasting time, as the creature flew to the bathroom.

Vivien heard the door close. She tiptoed to the bathroom door. She put one ear on the door, and heard the following.

“Unidentified species from planet three-sixty-five are easily manipulated by sharing area with Lifetimes. Send in the others for complete destruction. Repeat: Send in the others.”

Kamaya Sanchez

Middle School Short Story

Empty

Hi, my name is Alexander and this is my story. So you may be wondering why I'm writing, well I have some stuff on my chest that I need to get it out. Even if it doesn't help I think I should leave something. Even though I know nobody will see it.

I was a normal boy; nothing wrong with my life until this happened. So I was about 8 years old. I was really just an average Joe. Going home to see his mom. But when I got there I saw something else. As soon as I walked in I saw her laying in the bed coughing. It was too much to take in. So I left and ran in the woods.

"Help, Help," I cried out.

But no one was there. Afterward, something appeared out of nowhere. Saying, "You said you need help?" "Yes, I do. My mom is terribly sick!" I yelled.

The lady said, "Ok, I will help you if you give me something." "What?" I said. "I'll give you anything".

So she snapped her fingers, "Ok It's done. Your mom should be asleep now," said the old lady.

"But do not wake her until morning!" The lady yelled out.

"Okay I won't." I said.

So the next morning came as I tried to wake my mom up. But she wouldn't wake up. After so long I realized that all things steal. Death stole my mom. That lady stole something from me but I couldn't figure out what it was. A few years ago I found out... On my twelfth birthday, I was sitting down at the table until I heard all these things. I didn't know what they were. Then I heard a little girl crying, she was crying because she had just heard her father died in the war. Next, I heard an old man crying out because he misses his wife. I told my dad that something was wrong because I could hear all the cries from people around the world. So we went to the doctor. But the doc told me that I was crazy. So a year went by until all I felt was sadness and anger because it felt like the world hated me. Every step I took made it harder to live life the

way I wanted to live my life. So, in the end, I decided on a very cloudy day I will let no one else in because I am done with people taking the things I love away from me.

So I guess you could say that I let my darkness out because how could I ever be happy again when all I can hear is the pain and suffering from people around the world. Every morning I wake up to the sounds of my soul and everyone else's crying. There's nothing I can do to stop it... I wish every sunrise and sunset, that I had my mom back because with her it would feel like I had someone there for me. I know I sound like a fool but if you could feel all the misery of me or everyone else in the world. Your life would be awful too.

Wish everything would just go away sometimes. All of the despair is more than I can handle. Tell me, how do I escape from it? All I do is cry all of my tears away in the darkness. While everyone else has somebody, and I'm stuck with no one else who thinks about me. All they do is try to take away everything I hold dear to my heart. I wish I could be completely alone. That way no one and nothing could ever stand to hurt me. I'm just so tired of people treating me different. It's like everyone else gets to have this easy life when I'm stuck with the hardest one of all.

The next morning I woke up awful. Because I dreamed about every face and every tear that falls off there cheek. But then as soon as I wake up I break out in a cold sweat. My mornings always start off like that. And then as I get up. I feel like I have every person in the world to weight on my shoulders. Because of the fact that I could help everyone stop crying but I know that even if I could do that there would be at least one person still crying. This is too much misery, and too much responsibility to take on by myself. But I can't go to anyone. They might perish or get taken away. Then I might just hear my cries. But I'm sure my cries are bigger than anyone else's cries. Because from the way I see it. Everyone has something. And I just have me. When will I get my chance to be free? When... please, tell me when. Because from what I can tell all I get is the feelings of betrayal and desolation.

Why is it that every time I close my eyes all I see is a wide open space filled with sunshine and large acres of grass. And then to wake up to hopelessness and emptiness. It is the most horrible feeling I've ever had to deal with. Why me out of everyone in the world. Why does it have to be a person with nothing? That has to have everything taken away. A person who was destined to be alone isn't that the greatest story you have ever

heard of.

Sometimes I wish time would just stop. Because if that happens then I wouldn't have to feel the pain of a broken heart. I have too much stuff in my head to be able to help people of this world. It is easier that way. To hate the world and everyone and everything in it. Than to love the world and have everyone and everything die in my own hands. I wish I could've been there for my mom before she died. "Ugh, I'm so stupid instead of staying by her side. Why was I so stupid to make a deal with the lady?" All of a sudden everything I've ever regretted in my life summed me up. And through me into a pit of darkness to which I have been fighting. But I give up now I will allow nothing to touch my heart again. I will from now own have an Empty heart.

It's like I have a devil and an angel on my shoulders.

The devil side is saying "come on you know you want to die just die then. Why keep fighting the growing hole in your heart?" Said the devil.

And then on the other side, the angel is saying, "Come on and live, it is okay to have a hole but remember holes can be closed up. Just look deep within yourself and you'll know that you still love and maybe still hate. But all you should care about is getting yourself together."

And then the devil says, "Don't listen to her. She doesn't know everything you have been through. Know that I'm talking to you. I can see why your mom died. She died to get away from you and this horrible house."

"No, she wouldn't...She loved me." I said.

"No, she hated you. She wanted you to die every day. But I guess she died first. You should hate yourself." Said the devil.

"Stop, stop talking you don't know what you are saying." I said.

"You don't know what you are saying just be quiet." Said the angel.

"STOP, STOP, STOP talking!" I said.

Just as I said that I fell into despair and insecurity. I wish I was never born. As usual, I let the darkness in my being, dig a gaping hole in my heart.

I think it would be better if I just disappeared. Then I wouldn't have to live with myself. Then on top of that, no one would ever have to look at me when I leave my house. Sometimes I wish I could just die. But then all of my mom's memories of us would die too. Sometimes I wish I was the only

one on the earth. Then no one would be crying and, no one would be feeling the all the grief I feel. Even though my heartache is much darker than anyone else's. I wish everyone would just leave me alone because the more I think about everything I once had the more my heart and soul hurt. If I had to leave I think I would go to the one place in my life where I've felt a little bit of love in my life. I feel as though my heart wants to crumble in the dust. I never should have let that lady get away. I should have never opened my heart to someone else. Because the more I think about everything. I realize it is my fault. I can't do anything for anyone except cry and make their life awful. Maybe if I was gone things could change, but I doubt it. But never mind because as soon as I fall asleep then everything will be okay...right?

As the tears in my eyes seem to fall down I look for a way out of this depressing state but all I see are empty roads with no one waiting at the end of them. You see sometimes I wonder what it would feel like for a pointed knife to pierce my flesh. That's all I can think about these days. I try but it's like everything I touch turns to a cinder. I can't help but think maybe if I were alone in my own little dark corner I would be fine. That means no one can come or go as anyone shall please. I'm just going to close with a piece of advice: Don't ever follow the light because it only leads to destruction.

I - I can't do this anymore all I ever do I cry and even when I'm not crying I can feel it on the inside. I just can't keep feeling alone like this It's tearing me apart on the inside. It's like a ball of gray yarn over a cat. I just keep coming back over and over again. I can't keep living like this. I feel like I want to die every day. I'm just so tired.

Well, I guess this is my end. I just needed to get all my feelings out while I still could. But I guess what's the point in doing that anyway, nobody's' here anymore anyway. Well, I just have one more thing to say, "Dear Past, stop tapping me on the shoulders, I don't wanna look back."

Goodbye.

Alycia Sandrin

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

It all started on a Friday night at a local liquor store. Two shots rang out at exactly 7:29 pm on a chilly October evening. The police arrived in three minutes flat. Wasting no time, a squad burst into the building, bulletproof vests and all. Eleven officers in all. Eleven more shots rang out in the next minute. A SWAT team appeared, guns blazing, at exactly 7:35 pm. Thirteen bodies littered the ground, all with a single bullet embedded in their foreheads. And the murderer was nowhere to be seen.

"You don't strike me as a professional criminal," Callum says bluntly.

"I know," I chirp, "That's what makes me so good at it."

"Autumn Hawthorne Reyes, I swear," Callum scolds, "If you get arrested, I won't be bailing you out."

"Watch it Callum River Hill," I grumble, "You're not my favorite person today. And I am holding a weapon."

"I'm not your favorite person any day," he counters, "And besides, you wouldn't stab me with that." He gestures to the multi-tool pocket knife I'm holding in my left hand. I clench my jaw and don't respond. I start to saw away the fabric of the stolen bed sheet.

"You know, Kid," Callum continues, "Losing your parents isn't a good reason to become a criminal."

"How would you know?" I snarl. "You're not the one who lost both of them in one night."

"Autumn."

I shift my gaze up toward his face and narrow my eyes. Then I notice his hurt expression. I look away.

"I'm sorry," I apologize, "But I'm still not backing out."

"Do you really think this will make you feel better? Causing trouble? Is that what they would want?" His gaze softens and I blink away the tears that threaten to spill down my cheeks. I'm about to cave but my stubbornness gets the best of me before I can back down.

"What does it matter what they'd want? They're gone." My

reply is cold and harsh. Callum stands beside me, silent.

We haven't spoken for a good ten minutes when my phone rings. I start and fall backward, landing on my tailbone. A yelp escapes my mouth and I massage my lower back with the fingers of one hand while I fish my phone out of my sweat shirt pocket with the other.

"You okay?" Callum mouths, extending a hand as I accept the phone call.

"Fine." I push his hand away and struggle to my feet.

"Autumn Hawthorne Reyes?" a deep, raspy voice inquires from the other end of the call.

"Who wants to know?" I respond, my tone loaded with sass.

"That is none of your concern," the voice's volume raises, "All you need to know is--"

"Um, actually, it is my concern. Who are you and how the spades do you know my name?" I interrupt.

"Little girl!" The voice yells into the receiver. I hear a couple deep breaths from the person on the other end of the line, then nothing.

"Autumn?" Callum whispers as he puts a hand on my shoulder. I glance up at him to see his terrifying expression. His face is white as that of a ghost.

"What is it? Why do you look so shocked?" I touch two fingers to his wrist. His heartbeat is racing. "Callum?"

He doesn't answer me and I notice his phone in his other hand. I take it from him slowly and he doesn't move to stop me.

"If you value your life and the life of your younger sister, Eve, you will send Autumn Reyes to the old warehouse on Sixth Street," I read aloud. I stare at the phone in my hand and blink twice before I heard a loud cough in my ear.

"So, Autumn," the voice begins, "You have a choice. Come to the warehouse--" I put the phone on speaker even though Callum's already standing close enough to hear everything "--or you will never see your friend Callum and his sister again."

The call ends. I look down at Callum's phone. On the screen is a picture of Eve through her bedroom window.

"Eve?!" Callum bursts through the front door and I step into the house behind him. I shut the door and lock it, knowing those people could find us at any moment, any place.

"EVE!" Callum yells into the kitchen and dining area.

"Evie? Where are you?" I call out, "This isn't a game, Eve!"

I check behind all the furniture in the living room as I hear

Callum's footsteps pounding up the stairs. He continues to yell his sister's name slamming doors open and closed upstairs.

I follow him up the stairs and rush into the only room he hasn't checked. Mine. I throw the door open and drop to the ground to look under my bed. Nothing. I yank the closet door open and turn on the light.

"Eve?" I whisper. No answer.

"AUTUMN!" I hear from the direction of Eve's room. I sprint across the upstairs hall to the source of the yell.

"What is it? Is she okay?" I can hear the panic in my own voice.

He drops to his knees holding a small slip of paper. I take it from his hand and read it.

Come and get her.

I stand across the street from the old warehouse. It seems eerily abandoned. I take a deep breath and I'm about to cross the street when my phone chimes. I jump in surprise. A text from Callum awaits me.

Autumn Hawthorne Reyes. Where are you?

I can almost hear him narrowing his eyes. Instead of answering, I turn off the ringer on my phone and power it down, shoving it in my back pocket before crossing the street.

My parents used to say that you should never go anywhere without backup. That there's safety in numbers. They were both cops so it made sense for them to believe that. I stopped believing it the moment I found out they had died along with the rest of their squad in a liquor store. Eleven officers dead.

I went to live with Callum after that. We both have jobs so we're able to take care of Eve, even without either of our parents.

Callum's dad left him and his mom when he found out that Callum's mom was pregnant with her second child. That was eight years ago. Callum was only nine. Two years later, his mom, Amie, died of brain cancer. He had to raise Eve on his own at eleven years old.

I gather up all my courage to cross the street and walk around to the back of the building. There are random patches of weeds amid the fine gravel and I step over them, heading for the base of a light post near the back door.

"Sitting around, waiting to get kidnapped. Best day ever," I deadpan. I hear the crunch of gravel behind me and then there's a hand over my mouth and an arm around my waist, holding me

captive. Something hard and heavy hits my head before I can react. The world spins and then everything goes black.

"Kid," I hear. I bolt awake and I'm about to scream when Callum places a hand over my mouth.

"Calm down, Autumn. It's just me." He's sitting across from me on the recliner in the living room.

"I-I slept on the couch?" I look around. The last thing I remember was... "Eve!" I try to jump to my feet but I stumble and Callum stands to catch me before I can faceplant on the living room carpet.

"Autumn," Callum says, "You can't just run off like that. Never go into a hostile situation without backup."

I clench my jaw at the way he quotes my parents, looking me directly in the eyes. I shift my gaze away from him and to the floor.

"Eve is as much my sister as she is yours. I lost everything the night my parents died three years ago, so don't you tell me that I'm wrong." I'm almost shouting. I don't know how or when, but I got up and crossed the room and I'm so close to Callum that our noses are almost touching.

"I wasn't going to." He looks me in the eyes, his gaze unwavering and suddenly I realize how close we are to each other. And it makes me really uncomfortable.

I take a couple steps back and turn on my heel, sprinting up the stairs to my room. I reach under my bed and feel around for my handgun. My hand lands on something cold and hard and I pull it out from under my bed.

After shoving the gun into the back waistband of my jeans, I adjust my sweatshirt to hide its outline from being seen. I stash my multitool pocket knife in my front pocket and leave my phone on my nightstand. I yank my sneakers off my feet and exchange them for combat boots.

I open my bedroom door and Callum is there, his right hand poised to knock. His hand drops to his side.

"Don't do this--"

"How can you say that?" I cut him off, "She's your sister!"

"You didn't let me finish," he replies, "Don't do this without me, Autumn."

My lips stretch into a sly grin.

"Let's go get our sister back."

It's already dark when we reach the warehouse. I search for

security cameras but find none. Odd. Not trusting that there are no cameras, I stay in the shadows, away from streetlights, and against the walls. Callum mimics my actions.

I stop at the end of the wall and peek around the corner. Callum crashes into me from behind and I gasp as I fall forward, bracing for impact with the ground. The impact doesn't come, thanks to Callum's reflexes.

He pulls me back toward him by my waist, not letting me fall onto the gravel and risk making too much noise. My breath hitches when he doesn't let go. He's holding me against him and I can feel his heart beating rapidly and his chest expanding against my back with every breath he takes.

"Callum?"

"Autumn."

"Your sister's waiting," I whisper.

"I know." He turns me to face him. I gulp, raising my eyes to his. His Adam's apple bobs in his throat. I can see the indecision etched into his facial features. Except... Indecision over what?

I look down at our hands. At some point, his hands moved from around my waist to hold my own hands. Why can't I remember anything that happened before this moment?

I look back up at Callum as he leans forward without any warning and kisses me. I gasp and my eyes widen, but he doesn't notice. He pulls away after letting his lips linger for just a moment. I bite my lip and stare at him, feeling heat creeping into my cheeks. His eyes search mine. I know I'm blushing, but I don't care.

I push myself up on my toes and kiss him back. At first, the kiss is hesitant, and I'm afraid he won't kiss me back. But he does, wrapping an arm around my waist, holding me close, and burying the other in my hair. One of my own hands finds its way into his short, soft, hair and the other rests on his cheek.

Only when I lose my balance and Callum catches me, his lips never leaving mine, do I realize where we are. What we're doing. My mind pulls me back into reality and I break the kiss.

"Right," Callum says, "Ah-- Eve. Um..."

"You're pretty cute when you're nervous," I tease with a joking grin.

We both look up when we hear the sirens.

When the police apprehend Eve's kidnapper, she immediately runs to us yelling, "You called the police! Thank you!"

Callum and I just stare with our eyes wide and our jaws dropped.

Gizelle Seekatz
Middle School Short Story



The Story of Sierra, a Horses Wild Heart

Hello, my name is Sierra. I come from the Springs Preserve. My story starts here so follow me on my peculiar adventure.

In my earliest memory, everybody was sniffing me, and it was very strange. My legs were wobbly, so I could hardly stand. I took a sniff at the dusty air. It smelled like rain.

My mother told me that I was born in Las Vegas, a dry place with little rain. The smell of rain was only the sage bushes growing all around. One day I was old enough to graze on my own. I began to wander the desert hills in search of tempting tasty tufts of grass.

After a while of meandering amongst sharp and colorful rocks, I could make out some odd shapes in the distance. As I approached the structures, I realized that they were actually buildings which belonged to people. My mother had told me about people. I became afraid.

I was about to turn around when those very people started to race after me. They had ropes, and other horses. I ran like the wind but sadly it was not fast enough. A rope tightened around my fuzzy little brown neck. They took me back to a town and put me in a small corral. I was overcome with sadness. I wished I had never left the safety of my herd. What would happen to me?

As the sun set in a brilliant glow of yellow and orange, a young girl with a smiling face approached me.

She offered me a slice of sweet fruit. She spoke in a gentle manner.

“Welcome to Boomtown,” she whispered.

“I just bought you at the auction but now I’m going to release you to your freedom!” With that, she unlocked the gate, so I could run free. I galloped straight back to my mother as swiftly as my stubby legs could carry me. When I reached my herd, they were shocked yet excited to reunite. I had so much to tell them. As I recounted my story, I realized then, the great kindness of that one

small girl who had cared for me when I was hopeless.

Although I am free here in this vast desert by the Springs Preserve, when the wind blows on cold winter days, I some times traverse the rocky desert to visit that compassionate girl.

Lanae Sullivan

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

In December of 2000, Misty worked on her plan to have the best Christmas ever. She had started getting ready three months before, and the special month had finally come. She made sure her nails were done, her clothes were set out, and she had the perfect tree for Christmas. What a perfectionist she is.

“This Christmas will be perfect!” exclaimed Misty while petting her dog, Rocky.

She was just about to finish decorating her Christmas tree when she heard a knock at the door. She knew that her extra decorations had probably arrived, and she was correct. They were the decorations for her stairs and table, which included her table liner, her centerpiece, and her red carpet to go up the stairs. There were also extra decorations just for in case, such as extra ornaments, an extra centerpiece, and more napkins. Now, she had everything she needed to finish decorating.

All of a sudden, she heard another knock at the door. This time, though, she did not know who it was. She already had all of her decorations and supplies.

As she went to open the door she was feeling worried because nobody should be there if they were following her schedule. To her surprise, it was her PARENTS!!!!!!

“What are you doing here, you know I don’t like surprises like this,” asked Misty in confusion.

“We thought that you would enjoy having us here early and having people to help you with all of this work,” her mother explained in a cheerful voice.

“Well, I don’t need help! Maybe you should go stay with Damien until my Christmas party!”

Then, her father was filled with rage and anger because of how she was behaving. “I guess we will go stay with your brother! He will actually like his parents to stay at his house for a while! You are a very unthankful 25-year-old woman who should know how to act around her parents.”

This argument made Misty feel bad for a second, but she got

back to work without letting it distract her. She knew that nothing could stand in the way of this HUGE achievement. She thought of it as a once in a lifetime opportunity!

As Misty continued, she had a feeling that she didn't have everything that she needed. She had the table liner, and the centerpiece, and the punch bowl, and the snacks.... That's when it hit her! Like a meteorite fell from space and landed on her head. She forgot about the star to go on the top of the tree! That is the most important part, and the stores were probably sold out. So, she had to improvise. She decided to make one out of cardboard and tell everyone that she wanted to put something homemade on the tree. Even though the star came out really bad, she was sure that her excuse would fix everything. After this, though, she really wanted to make sure that everything else was better, and that this would not be the end to an almost-perfect Christmas. She knew that this was just a small, unfortunate event. She continued.

Everything else went great. Her house looked great, the cake and snacks were out on the table, and the tree even looked good. It was 2:00 PM on Christmas day, and guests would start arriving at 3:00 PM. The only thing left to do was to take out her large bowl of punch and set it next to the chips and guacamole. This was something that scared her a lot because of how high of a chance there was of her spilling it everywhere, so she had to be extra careful. However, she still spilled some on her clothes and on the tablecloth. When she went to get one of the replacements that she ordered, she remembered that she only ordered extra ornaments and towels. She would use the tablecloth from the year before, but she went to her uncle's house last year. Even if she did have Christmas at her house the year before, she would have thrown everything away so that she could buy new things the next year. This was making her stress a lot more, but she figured that she could just change her outfit and take off the tablecloth instead of replacing it.

Misty's brother and parents were the first people to arrive. They were still angry about the argument, but they were not going to allow that to stand in the way of a great Christmas. When everyone arrived, Misty reminded them of the schedule for the evening.

"First, the kids will play with a piñata while the parents catch up. Next, we will have a nice dinner, followed by a chocolate cake dessert. Finally, we will open presents. If you have any questions, feel free to ask," Misty said, knowing that the

rest of the night would be amazing.

As soon as the children were finished with the piñata, things started to get crazy. The kids would not stop running around the house, and this caused one of them to trip, break the punch bowl, and spill all of the juice. That is when they FINALLY stopped running around, but one of them now had a large cut on her foot. Also, when it was time for dinner, nobody was hungry, and people slowly started gaining hunger and serving themselves fifteen minutes after Misty announced that it was dinner time. This made Misty sure that she was wrong, and the night would be a wreck.

After eating, the adults had the great idea of roasting marshmallows over a fire, and that surely was not on Misty's schedule, but she decided to join in anyways. It turned out to be fun even though she had not planned it herself.

At the end of the night, while everyone was opening presents, Misty announced, "I know that the night did not go as planned, and I also know that I am the only one who cares about that." Everyone nodded. "However, I learned that I don't have to plan everything or have everything to go as I did plan in order for it to be great. The old me would say that this was a terrible Christmas, but I realize that this is the best possible way that Christmas could have turned out. Thank you for coming, and I wish you a holly, jolly Christmas."

From that point forward, Misty did not want everything to be planned and extra organized. That is why everyone now likes spending time with her more than they used to. (She also made sure to apologize to her parents before they left.)

Ginger Tie

Middle School Short Story

Where'd You Go?

There was once a girl named Charlotte and she was bullied quite a lot. Every year, her parents hosted her a birthday party hoping she would have made friends and obviously nobody came. Until in 5th grade, she met a girl named Layla who eventually became her best friend. They came across each other at church when their parents sat next to each other and started talking. Charlotte and Layla sat around until a Twenty-One Pilots song came on the radio. They quickly bonded over that one song. What better way to begin a relationship, right? Well, we've been best friends ever since but in 6th grade, everything changed for the worst...

August 6, 2005

Hi, the name's Charlotte Isabelle Inging or Char as my friends and family call me! My whole entire life had been sadly full of constant bullying until a transfer student from England transferred in 5th grade. We encountered at church where a Twenty-One Pilots song started playing and before long, we were dancing and singing along to it. So yeah, that's how we've become best friends and now it's approximately a week before middle school begins and we are having our annual Before-the-School-Year Slumber Party! But this specific year, we invited the new kid in the neighborhood, Jolene. It's was quite amusing watching her sit in the corner scrolling through her on her Facebook account while Layla and I are playing Chutes and Ladders on the side. But now it's 11:30 pm and we should probably go to sleep.

August 7, 2005 (11:30)

The girls have left and I've sent Layla my satisfaction survey through the cell but she hasn't responded. I'm getting nervous like what if something occurred to her. I know her mom is strict but I don't think that she would hurt and hide her own kids. Ok, the deal is, she usually replies in 5 minutes but it's been a literal hour and she hasn't posted the pictures on Snapchat we took yesterday

either. Whooooo, calm down, she perhaps just forgot to charge her phone after she went back to home since she's still tired. I'll give her some time but if she hasn't answered by 8:00 tonight, I am going to literally freak out!!!!

August 7, 2005 (8:30pm)

I'M FREAKING OUT!!!! She still hasn't responded and it does NOT take your phone 9 stinking hours to charge. What in the world is going on over there at her house?! There's hasn't been a single movement over there. I mean, she's my next door neighbor too and nothing looks wrong over there. There's hasn't been any screaming or anybody leaving the house. The only thing is, Layla's room is right across from mine and since the time she left my house and got to hers, I haven't even see her open that stinking door even once. Not even the curtains have budged. What am I going to do???!!!! I must investigate this.

August 14, 2005

Today is the first day of school and Layla still hasn't responded to my message and she isn't here today... I'm really worried about what could have happened to her. Is it even possible for a kid's own mom to murder them or is that illegal? I don't think her mom would harm her though because the worst thing I've seen Layla's mom, Michelle do to her is put her in time-out for 5 minutes. 5 MINUTES!!! Like I said, her mom's rigid but she wouldn't ever do anything to hurt her. Maybe she went to a frat party and never came back. I'm so afraid of her right now but I truly have to focus on reviewing this calculus test we will have next week. UGH.

August 18, 2005

There is absolutely nothing to do here without Layla here... I even told my mom about Layla and she wasn't even fraught with the tiniest bit, instead she answered with a lame: she's presumably on vacation. Layla has never missed a day of school before and this just doesn't seem like something that she or her mom would do. The only question I can actually concentrate on right now is what happened to Layla and her family. She hasn't called, texted, or even opened her window for about a week. I am dying to talk to her or just see her. Maybe she's in the hospital? I think I'm going to skip class tomorrow and go look for her. I would do anything just to have my best friend back or I don't know how I would go on living life like this. It's already tough enough.

August 19, 2005

Today I skipped school in order to investigate Layla's disappearance and got yelled at a bunch of times by my mother but it was worth it. I think I eventually know what happened to Layla. I passed by a cemetery on the way home and I saw a gravestone engraved with Layla A. Arone. I don't know what Layla's middle name really is but I definitely hope that's not her. I snuck into the graveyard to get a closer look and it said Layla A. Arone 1994-2005. And then on the other side of her was Michelle F. Shah 1972- . Could it just be a coincidence or is it really true that my best friend has left me? It would be so very sad to know that she had actually died but it would be even worse because I would not know how she died exactly. For all I know, she could have died of cancer or have been murdered. Either way, I am going to get to the bottom of this mystery no matter what it takes! Why does life have to be so difficult??!!

August 21, 2005

I want to know what happened to my best friend! I've been searching the internet and the only things that have been popping up are her social media accounts. But her social media accounts haven't been updated since before our Before-the-School-Year slumber party. That just makes me miss her even more. Wait, I think I found something, hold on (10 minutes later) SHE DIDN'T DIE!!!!!! I found a website all about her and nothing about her said anything about dying. Her middle name doesn't even start with an "A" but, now I have to figure out what really happened to her. This is honestly nerve wracking. I didn't know if I could handle it anymore which is why, I got an assistant. This kid named Stan from my school heard about my investigation and decided to join me. If I were to be honest, he's kind of cute. That would be kind of creepy though if we dated. It would be like every date could possibly be our last one. Wait, need to get back on track. Ok, the website states that Layla now lives in Missouri. You know what, I think I'm going to see if I can find them in their house and if I can't, I'm breaking in and looking around. Good luck to me and I hope she is in there!

August 24, 2005

There was no one home at all, not even their dog was at home. So, we went into the Arone's house and I found a tape recorder and inside there was a recording labeled "To My Bestie." I brought it home and listened to it with Stan while

everybody was at work. She told me she did move to Missouri and she got a new number. How could she do this to me though? She should have texted me right after the sleepover or she could have told me there. I mean, she has been acting different these past few weeks. But then I called her number and a man answered. Michelle is divorced but is it possible that she has found a boyfriend that quickly. No way, could they have moved because of Michelle's new possible "Boyfriend?!" OMG! I have to convince my mom to travel to Missouri (is it possible that Layla lost her phone because I think she's sharing with that man?)!

August 31, 2005

It's been 7 days since I last wrote in this diary. Stan and I traveled on our first date together to Missouri and I won't explain everything except for the fact that when we arrived at Layla's new house, it was completely abandoned. In fact, we asked the next door neighbors and they said that the house hadn't been occupied since 1994. For all I know, she could be in England right now. It's not like mom will let us travel the whole entire world. I mean, she barely had enough money to for this trip. (She only let us go because we said that it was a school field trip and we were partners.) Stan has been lovely to me though, he helps me out a lot and comes by every day to check on me. I'm sure he'll get annoyed sooner or later. I'm just glad to have him right now. Hold on! I just made a breakthrough!!! What if they do live in Missouri, it's just that Michelle and her boyfriend are going on a honeymoon and because they don't know anybody, they had to take Layla with them. Nope, they would have to find someplace for their dog too. Oh well, I'll figure it out soon.

September 13, 2005

My neighbor said that she saw Layla just yesterday! My question is, how come I didn't see her? Could she be hiding from me? Did I harm her in some way? I really want to know where she is. I'm going over to her house right now. And I am bringing Stan too. I don't want to get attacked so easily.

September 15, 2005

Layla left me some very obvious clues that led me right to her! She's been hiding in a storage cabinet in the back of her house in her mom's office this whole time. Her mother got sent to jail because they were abusing her but she doesn't want to be

sent to a foster home. So, now she's living with me! That's an absolute dream come true. Best friend and best friend living together in the same house. Now we can do everything together! We even brought her dog over here. I was so worried about her that I didn't notice she had been hurt. That must have been why she was quiet this entire time. She also didn't answer me about the sleepover because that man I was suspicious about shoved her into that cabinet. Layla dropped her phone in there and it ran out of battery so she couldn't text me or even see in there. She survived off of crackers and stinky cheese for a whole entire month. I feel so bad for her. She's as skinny as a stick. But, right now, I'm just glad Layla's back and safe and sound.



High School

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Shelby Alford

High School Short Story

Untitled

I hate the bar scene, but I love my friends. I had had a tough day at work and I had to come home to an even more tough roommate to deal with.

“Please, Becca, what can I do to make you come? There is a really cute guy going to be there tonight from my modeling agency,” remarked my roommate Ally as she picked out a dress for tonight.

Yep. I was stuck working in a company I hated, stuck with dead hair and teenage acne all over my face, but my best friend is a model working with handsome boys all day.

“I have a report due soon at work and I don’t want to be the girl sitting in the corner while my roommate is drooling on drunk boys, thank you very much.” I hissed through front teeth sitting down on the couch.

“What if I give you a makeover, and then after you can decide if you want to go?” asked Ally.

“Fine,” I said forcing as much distaste in my voice as I could muster.

An hour of tweezing, plucking, and curling and I was finally ready. I truly did not look half bad. For once I actually looked my age, not like a 14 year old.

“Oh, but look at the time, we took so much time making me look good. It's too late to go. Poor us,” I groaned as I examined myself in the mirror.

“Well that's just great because now we will be showing up fashionably late, and trust me you are fashionable,” Ally said smirking.

I did keep my promise and I ended up going to the bar with her.

We arrived at the bar late and as I predicted even with my new look I was stuck at the bar the only person to keep me company, the bartender. I was not complaining though, he was actually very interesting. His name was Blaine. We had gotten into a conversation about art work and how neither of us understand it.

“No, I totally agree abstract art does look like the painter was drunk.” he said as I drank my club soda.

I glanced up at the TV watching the 11 o'clock news. While most of the TVs were on sports or a reality TV show this was the only thing that was true on TV and it still was terrifying. The story was on a boy from Hannah Marks High that had killed himself last night. I glared and rolled my eyes wishing not to look at what was a world folding in on itself. That boy's life was so bad that he had to take his own, I say I hate life but have never thought I would come to hate it that much.

I was so tuned in to my distaste of the world that I did not see the Blaine staring and admiring me. Or not much me but my thoughts on the subject.

“I know it was so sad there was another one yesterday to her name was Jade and she had depression but I had not seen much on it.” He said not letting his stare drift from my eyes. Before I could respond he started on again. “Would you like a drink? On the house anything you want.” He asked.

“No thanks I don't feel like alcohol tonight I have to work tomorrow” I replied even though it would have felt so good to have a drink.

“Are you sure?” he said trying to make it seem like he was not prying.

“Fine,” I muttered wondering if it was the best decision. He did not even know what I wanted before there was a drink in front of me. He could see the worry in my eyes for sure.

“I just knew you would like this, go on and try it I promise,” he said with only the slightest hint of urging in his voice. I took a drink and felt the cold liquid burn down my throat. The sensation of whatever this was made my skin crawl. The way it ripped down my throat and burned. What had I just taken a drink of? My vision had started to fade and get blurry before it was just a black void that I could see. I went to get up when he grabbed my hand and my vision cleared.

What I saw was not the world I had known. There was a gray cloud of dust and smog everywhere around us, I could only see a few feet in front of me. There was a buzzing that only seemed to grow louder every second that I was sitting there. I looked out the only window in the bar to see a rampage of fire, explosions and guns. Bodies were hanging from trees and light posts, while graffiti decorated the sidewalks. I turned to look and everyone from the bar was still there sitting talking and having fun. I looked back to Blaine with only a blank expression on my

face that he could obviously read.

“What I just gave you is called a cure and what you are seeing is our true society. Will you join the resistance?” he asked as he slipped a paper into my hand. I stumbled backwards and out onto the street, I had managed to make my way back home and into bed but I still did not fall asleep. I had stayed up the whole night playing what he had said over and over again in my head. I still did not have the courage to look at the paper.

I don't know what set me over the edge that day, it could have been a number of things.

The update on the news of that boy who killed himself and me actually seeing what everything looked like. I saw everything and it was still truly setting in the way that the annoying birds I hated truly looked so different from the bright blue feathers. The plants were wilted, and there was still sounds from what seemed like world war three ragging at my front door. Like I said it could have been a number of things but even before noon I had looked at the note and was on my way to:

*5624 Riverway
Apartment 214*

The whole way up to his apartment I was shaking, in the cab, up the stairs, my cab driver must have thought I was insane. I knocked on the door with little pressure, but it still pushed open. Walking into the old apartment, there was an older TV set sitting on the table with a VHS tape being ready to be pushed in. I wonder what this apartment and neighborhood looked like before I was given the seeing thing. I pushed the tape in, reluctant to sitting on the ratty couch in front of it.

The video was of poor quality and the audio was terrible. It started as a black screen with caution signs that I would normally never read but this seemed to be important so:

What you are about to see will decide the fate of the resistance, this is not to be recorded or shown to anyone but, Becca Shapher. Do you agree to these circumstances if so press your finger to the OKAY button on the remote.

I reached for the remote and pressed the button and the TV continued. It showed a photo of the world I knew and what I

thought was real, the flowers were bright and the birds were chirping. Then the screen faded to the world I see now. I continued to go through the photos of both visions. Finally when it was finished a girl in a gray bandana popped up on the screen. She had pixie cut hair and a leather jacket on.

“Your government that you hold in a high esteem, is nothing but liars and deceivers of the human eye. Every day the air purifiers you see are pumping a gas into the air to manipulate the one thing we thought was sacred, our minds. While it took years we can administer an antidote and you are one of the lucky few we saw the hope and light in. Will you be one of the lucky few to see with us the one true sight.” the lady said as she walked off screen.

Then the screen faded to black and the words popped up again. “You can see it” was all it said. I started to look around and noticed a door on my right hand side. I walked to the handle and turned it slowly debating with myself on whether or not I would want to step into their world. I walked through the door and just saw a black chair. I slowly turned around and I saw the girl from the video she nodded, and turned back to face what I don't know. Before I could ask I was taken from behind and that was the last thing I remember.

I woke up in a room, but half a room. There were three walls and a bright light to where all I could see was the eggshell white of the walls. I would not be the first to talk, so I sat. By the time someone on the other side of the light gave in I was blind.

“Hello, Miss Sharper,” said the woman in a commanding voice that made me want to hide.

“Where's Blaine? I want to see Blaine. “I spoke as I tried to muster as much power and strength into my voice.

“Blaine will be here soon we figured you might react like this. However until he gets here it is my turn to talk. He saw something in you and I trust him so that means you might actually be worth the expense. What we are here is not just a team or something that in a few years you'll look back on and reminisce in the good old days. We are a family and if you want to do this then I want your word.” she exclaimed.

I didn't speak for a while I was running through everything in my mind. What would I miss who would miss me? Sadly I knew the answers to both of those questions, nothing and no one. I had no friends and no parents just one stuck up roommate which proved tonight that I simply am not of much importance to her.

“I'm in” I said the two words that I would never take back.

Blaine stepped out of the back from behind her with a smirk on his face.

“See I told you she would come,” he remarked.

There was much movement after that, on a train on a boat in a car, there was just very little talking. They started me on training when we were on the boat. Simple things like kickboxing, and sparring. All of which I knew too well from when my parents were alive. They died when I was 11. I never really knew what from they were always so secretive the only time I truly like being with them was when we were sparring and training. They said it would prepare me for what was to come.

By the time we were getting out of the car it had been a month since I had been at home. Where we arrived was much better. I had no clue where we were all I knew is it did look like the world I used to know or at least a place in the world I used to know.

White sandy beaches crystal blue waters, and salt in the air that made your lungs dance. I walked into the compound and the first thing I see is my father.

“Becca!?” and that was the last thing I heard before I had passed out. What had I gotten myself into?

Emily Carter

High School Short Story

Untitled

“Lillian Kelsey.” The whisper escaped the girl’s lips before she could recall forming it in her thoughts, soft enough only to be heard by the girl’s own ears, but echoed, impossibly, across the vast room. “Lillian,” the girl started again, tasting the sweet, savory feel on her lips as she said her name softly to the darkness. She listened as the sound of each letter left her mouth individually, trying to hear each one out as she envisioned her signature- the big loopy l’s and curving form of it. The voice scattered across the small space, and the short trill of it - the softened, high-pitched, smooth sound of her voice-repeated back to her, causing her to shudder violently in the darkness. The words were spoken in a hushed tone, barely even audible, yet the mere sound of them brought waves of memory crashing over her. She was forced to stop as she took a sharp intake of breath, trying to keep from releasing the rising sob. Closing her eyes and breathing deeply, she cleared her thoughts and started once more.

“My name was Lillian,” she claimed, “Lillian Clarabelle Alexandra Kelsey.” Her world began once more.

Previously, the girl had thought everything to have occurred so long ago, in such a different place, that it must have been impossible to recall a single moment of it, she discovered quickly, however, that this wasn’t the case. Oftentimes, her mind would take her, before she was conscious of its doing so, back to the memories she hardly knew still existed; back to the place that was so blissfully wonderful it brought her excruciating pain to recall it in this moment. Now, her thoughts were seized suddenly by light and beauty and color- all of it all-too-familiar. The faded oranges and burning reds of the autumn leaves were bright in her vision, accompanied by a feeling as bright and beautiful as the color - nothing like the monochromatic blur of a world she knew was all she could make out of this new, flawed place. Faces flashed in her sight. She saw her parents, her brothers- her friends. She saw a girl walking in a forest of maple trees beyond the place she’d called home- blond, thin, tall, beautiful. She could hardly bear to think

this strong, jubilant girl had been herself less than a few months previously.

“Lillian...” she whispered again, her voice disappearing as fear formed its paralysis in her thoughts, stopping her from speaking. She heard the name- her name- whispered in her thoughts by different people- her mother’s happy, confident speech, and her brother’s playful, accusatory tones. Their laughter echoed in her thoughts, her mind seemingly an empty cave, the walls of which the sound bounced off. The aching feeling pressed inward. The name pounded in her ears- sounding foreign on her tongue as she chanted along with the voices. Who was she now? The girl didn’t know. Who she was back then, however...she was different, surely, but still extremely familiar. Her mind took her to the beginning, and she watched the flashback of images as they progressed gradually before her.

The world began with the leaves. Brilliant flashes of light and color were all they were to Lillian’s new, curious eyes as a child, but she saw the exquisite beauty in them early on, though she never understood their significance in her lifetime until much later. Every memory she held, from the faintest flash of color, to the complex conflicted emotions she’d discovered by the time she was nearly a teenager, revolved around the leaves.

Clenching her teeth with the agony the memory brought her, the girl refused to believe the story to be true. Excruciating pain laced her every thought, simply at the idea of the contrast between her old identity and the person she had become. Falling to the floor, fingers curling through her chin-length hair, she released the short, choked sound of a screech. No, she had to remember.

“Clarabelle...” the name whispered silently in her ear every night as her mother brushed through her daughter’s silky blond hair with her fingers, tucking every strand of it gently behind her ear. It had been her mother’s sister’s name. She'd heard the story mentioned multiple times, after all. How she'd passed, what had happened to her- it was a story so familiar to her, she was able to retell it word for word as her mother had. It had all happened to long ago at this point, Lillian knew speaking of the situation brought little pain to her mother at this point in her lifetime. “Alexandra...” Lillian’s grandmother’s name. Though she couldn't recall a single moment with her mother, Lillian knew it brought Taylor Kelsey a great deal of pain to think of her, for she could remember feeling the ache of the bruises trailing down her thighs and the burning red hand marks covering her back, where

no one could see them. Taylor could remember still the longing sensation to he loved. "Rose..." Liam Kelsey's mother; the only woman ever considered as Taylor's family once Clara had been killed. The final whisper, "Kelsey." It cut short at the end, and the fingers stopped their soothing movement. The name - the reminder of the family's unite many through a love Taylor Kelsey had vowed to maintain eternally, to save her daughter from the pain this world held. Believing her daughter to have fallen asleep, Taylor Kelsey would clutch Lily tightly to her chest at this point, letting the tears soak her hair. Sometimes, she would stay all night like that.

Colors blended and the images changed.

Lillian Kelsey ran the faucet's chilling water through her thin hair, allowing her fingers to trail mist of it along her hairline and down her back. "Breathe." She forced the word out of her mouth, speaking through the short, desperate gasps her fear brought. She choked on a breath, then ended up vomiting in the sink when the nausea arose once more in her theist as she bent over to cough. She'd made sure to escape to the guest bedroom bathroom, instead of risking waking up her parents. She knew, at this point, that this was the only way of escaping the dreams and the visions safely. She couldn't tell; she had to hide it. The secret was the only deadly part of the whole situation.

Lying the knife beside her, unaware of her having picked it up, the girl carefully examined the cuts along her thighs and upper arms. Blood leaked in a pool around her. The memories were getting too close. Forcing her eyes tightly shut, she tried in vain to recall something different. Pain struck her, forcing another scream through her lips, and creating a ripping feeling down her chest, and she knew she'd reached a mother memory. Lying the knife beside her, unaware of her having picked it up, the girl carefully examined the cuts along her thighs and upper arms. Blood leaked in a pool around her. Putting her hands to her face, she found that the sticky scarlet substance caked it, too. She felt sick as she pulled her hands roughly, away, glimpsing the trail of blood running down her hands. The memories were getting too close. Forcing her eyes tightly shut, she tried in vain to recall something different. Pain struck her, forcing another scream through her lips, and creating a ripping feeling down her chest. She knew she'd reached another memory. She let the tears trail slowly down her face, trying to prepare for the burning of the remembrance, knowing, though, she would never be able to.

The world ended with the burning, but the end was only the

beginning... Flames flashed, threateningly close in front of me. Smoke clouded my vision. I couldn't breathe suddenly, and, choking on the polluted air, my breath came out in quick gasps and rough coughs. I reached wildly in front of me, my feet tripping on everything that came across my path- fallen, burning beams of wood from the house roof, shattered fragments of windows, fallen doors and cabinets still hanging desperately from their hinges. Tears streamed down my dry, burning face. I felt them as they cooled me slowly, only easing the pain slightly and momentarily.

They started at my eyes, trailing down my cheeks, my lips, and my collarbone before they dried in the thick, blisteringly warm air. The end will come soon now, I told myself. This is where it all ends. I attempted desperately to convince myself that the ending was a good thing- something that could provide me with a new start- but I couldn't help but feel overwhelming terror at the thought of leaving my life behind. I couldn't leave - not now; when my life had merely begun. I couldn't leave anyone. Not my loving, protective mother, my cautious father, or my playful younger brothers I'd sworn from the moment of their births to protect. I couldn't leave behind the few, loving friends I had; couldn't ignore the fact that I was leaving everything that mattered to me. What was the reason in starting over, after all?

The lingering fact remained, however; the simple fact I'd been contemplating for weeks now. If this moment was inevitable, I had to be brave as long as I lived through it. I had to be brave like my mother had, years previously, when she'd suffered through the same experience. I would be brave... and strong, and confident. Just like my mother.

The thought of my mother brought me to the floor, sobbing with strange convulses as I thought of her limp form, being enveloped rapidly by the flames. She was burning-dying-and there was nothing I could do about it. Hysteria rose in my throat with a wave of panic. What was I to do now without her? My knees dug into the burning tiles below me painfully, my flesh peeled away by the sharp edges. Though I knew it seemed impossible, I was now aware of what I had to do in this moment. I had to face it head on.

Inhaling as deep of a breath as I could manage, I held back my sobs, stepping into the crackling flames.

Gasping, I lurched out of bed, cold sweat pouring down my body and into pools, soaking into the aquamarine bed sheets around me. I glanced frantically around my bedroom, yanking

the covers down around me in a panic, jumping out of my bed and standing on the floor in as rapid a motion I could manage. I scanned the room for what I knew I didn't want to see. The burning red-orange of the flame-the destruction of my house, my family, my whole existence-however, was not visible anywhere. I released a breath, running my fingers through my oily chin-length bangs smoothly. Seven months after the dream had begun, I still awoke every night screaming, terrified I might wake up to find the same terrible fate waiting for me. I choked back a scream with difficulty.

I wrung my hands angrily in my pillow, terror accompanying my every emotion as I let the tears soak it slowly, not knowing what to feel, or who to be. All I could focus on was the pain and the hurt the memories brought. Everything was gone now. Including Lillian Kelsey. Lily, I called internally, knowing there wouldn't be a response. Where are you now? I need you now... I wrapped my arms around her body-my body- tracing the burn scars along my arms and legs. Clenching my teeth to avoid the glow of the hospital lights blaring behind my eyelids, I forced myself to forget what came next. The saving, the 'near-death experience.' I forced the pain of having to remember everything roughly from my thoughts.

Ashaura Espinoza

High School Short Story

Untitled

"Any last words my dear"? He stared at her his face hidden from her line of sight his expression that of twisted amusement as he watched her form twisted and turned as she tried her best to stare at him her expression cold as pure ice, "Only regret for letting a traitorous bastard like you live that night, I should have killed you when the time was right, and the chance was given to me but instead I let you live and turned a blind eye as you ran like the coward you are". She spit at him before crying out as he lifted her slightly slamming her back down upon the slab with force growling low in his throat his voice sending a chill down her spine as he spoke "Well then, it looks like you won't have to live much longer with that regret now will you"? And as he spoke those final words he swung his sword in a long, graceful arc taking her head off in one clean move, her blood splattering on his face, grunting in disgust he cleaned his sword and then his face as her head rolled to a stop a few feet away her expression one of shock and horror, her eyes lifeless.

Faith Evans

High School Short Story



Sporkish

Herb Addleson woke up before dawn to break into his neighbor's house. He strapped on his favorite pair of orthopedic shoes, left his teeth in the cup by his sink, and carefully adjusted his comb-over. Everything had to be perfect.

Thin beams of sunlight crested over the horizon, turning the skyline green and lighting his way as he tiptoed to Michael Gold's side of the backyard. Yesterday, while visiting Gold, Herb had discreetly unlatched the sliding back door.

"Would you look at that," he had said, pointing out the window with one hand, quietly flipping the lock with the other. Gold had fallen for the oldest trick in the book, hook, line, and sinker. As Herb snuck into Gold's kitchen, he smiled to himself, recalling his successful duplicity.

Now, through the dark morning haze, silhouettes of dishes stacked high in the sink looked like haphazard cairns, and the shadows of furniture cast eerie shapes on the floor. Luckily for Herb, he did not need any light to find what he was searching for. He strode confidently through the gloom toward Gold's refrigerator and reached up to find its top. His hand sifted through dust bunnies until his finger struck a small metal object. He pulled down the iron spork and tucked it into his shirt pocket. As he turned to make a quick getaway, a hulking shape caught his eye.

A voluminous shadow sat in the middle of the hallway. It was wide and low to the ground, with a bulbous lump in the center. Herb froze, staring at the oddity. He inched toward the sink and found the light switch next to the garbage disposal.

Michael Gold lay on top of an overturned ladder. His leg was twisted awkwardly beneath him. Glassy eyes stared heavenward. The attic panel leaned against the wall next to him.

Herb stumbled backward in shock. Head spinning, he rushed out the backdoor, crossed the duplex yard, and careened into his own kitchen. He threw up into the sink.

Staring down at his mess, Herb frantically wondered whether or not he should call someone. There was no use in getting an

ambulance; Gold was already dead. If he called one of Gold's children, he'd have to explain how he found the body at six in the morning.

The weight of the situation crashed down on his shoulders, and sudden exhaustion overcame Herb. He pressed his hands over his ears and swayed back and forth.

As his wits returned, he washed his bile down the drain and made his way back to bed. Birds began to chirp outside as he kicked off his shoes and pulled the covers over his head.

Before he could get settled in, something poked him in the chest. Herb pulled the spork out of his breast pocket and tossed it onto his nightstand with slight frustration.

"Someone else will find your body," he said to the empty room. "Not me. Someone else."

Two decades prior, Herb had warned Gold that it was bad luck to buy a headstone before he was dead, but Gold didn't listen. When his wife passed away unexpectedly, Gold had gone ahead and bought himself a double-wide marker and a plot next to hers, thinking that this would ultimately save him money.

Now, his grave was covered in lilies and carnations, the cheapest funeral flowers that money could buy. As he watched women rearrange scrappy bouquets across the casket and say their final goodbyes, Herb noted that Gold's family took after him in frugality.

The cemetery was emptying out quickly; the service had ended almost an hour ago, and the only people left were Gold's children. As attendees wandered toward their cars, Herb glanced around discreetly and approached the headstone.

"I can't carry this anymore," he whisper-yelled at the ground. "It probably belongs to you, anyway. Take it back!" He pulled the spork from his breast pocket and knelt to lay it on Gold's marker, happy to be free of its weight.

As he stood shakily and brushed off his knees, a hand came down on Herb's shoulder.

"What's that?" Gold's son, Mikey Junior, asked, staring down at Herb's offering.

Herb's eyes widened in surprise. "Oh, it's nothing. Just a gift, you know, inside joke type deal. Your dad was a great man..."

"Inside joke, huh?" Mikey asked with a snort.

"It's just..." Herb blustered. "I really don't think you'd understand... Old friend stuff... You'll get it when you're older..."

Mikey merely quirked a questioning eyebrow.

Herb huffed in discomfort. "I guess it's no big secret. I could probably tell you, of all people." He wasn't sure why he was being so evasive, but he already felt a creeping embarrassment coming upon him.

Mikey motioned for him to continue.

He cleared his throat. "Well, see, it's like this. Your Dad had this spork last week, but he took it from me because I had it the week before. Then I took it from him because he had it the week before that, and..." Herb stopped. He was speaking nonsense but he wasn't sure how to correct his course. "...And it goes on like that all the way back to Vietnam," he finished with a firm nod.

Mikey's lifted eyebrow creased into a troubled frown. "So wait, is the spork yours? Or did it belong to my dad?"

Herb sighed. He never imagined how difficult it would be to explain the feud between him and Gold. "That's the thing," he said. "Back when we went to war together, one of us lost the spork from our mess kit. Since we shared everything, neither of us knew who the true owner of the remaining spork was."

"And you've been fighting over it ever since?" Mikey asked.

"Yep."

Mikey chuckled quietly and shook his head, letting an insufferable moment of silence stretch between them. He scratched his chin. "I bet my Dad was the one who lost the spork," he said finally.

Herb guffawed at Mikey's vote of confidence. He opened his mouth to protest, but no words came out.

"No, listen," Mikey said, grinning. "My dad was charismatic and courageous and really fun, but he was also a bit of a jerk," he glanced down at the grave and crossed himself quickly. "That totally sounds like something he'd do. Lose something really important, and try to shift the blame."

Herb bit back an irreverent laugh and shook his head. "That's what I've been trying to convince him of for fifty-something years," he said. He hesitated for a moment, feeling a creeping guilt for so easily condemning Gold. "Either way, I figure now is the time to put old things to rest," he said.

Mikey nodded in return. "I can respect that," he said. "Not to change the subject too quickly, but me and the family are going out to lunch, and we'd love for you to join us. That's what I was supposed to tell you when I came over here."

Herb rubbed the back of his neck. "I, er, well, actually I have to get my things out of the duplex before the end of next week.

It's a bit of a rush, but with Gold gone, my daughter, Meghan, is forcing me into a home. I have to get out before next month's rent is due."

"Ah, that old deal," Mikey said. "I should actually do the same for Dad's things. Would you like to go through his old war stuff with me?" He laughed grimly.

"No, no, your family should be the first to pick through his things," Herb said. "I'll leave that up to you."

Mikey reached out for a handshake. "I guess it's time for both of us to go then. Are you heading to Green Estates? The kids and I would love to visit you sometime. Having you around...it's like having a piece of Dad."

Herb smiled and nodded, giving Mikey a half hug. "Room number A12 if I recall correctly. They've already booked me a suite."

All of Herb's most important belongings fit into eight medium boxes, which fit perfectly in the trunk of Meghan's car. She unceremoniously shoved in the last container and slammed the door.

"Should we do a final sweep through?" Meghan asked, smiling softly.

Herb resented that this was a happy day for her. She had long wanted him to move to Green Estates; it was closer to her house, and she worried that he needed more care than he was getting.

"I guess," he mumbled, trying to keep up his grumpy-old-man facade. She linked arms with him, and they made their way back through the front door. Meghan's heels clicked against the hardwood floors. The sound they created echoed eerily through the empty house. Herb was unnerved by how fast the world was crashing down on him.

The pair wandered through Herb's room, his office, and his den, not bothering to check the kitchen. Their promenade seemed more for memory's sake than an actual hunt for forgotten belongings. They stopped in the foyer.

"I think we got everything," Meghan said, her statement sounding more like a question. Herb nodded, staring at his shoes. Meghan squeezed his hand. "I'm sorry, Dad," she whispered.

As they exited to the front porch, Herb handed Meghan his house keys. She had promised the landlord that she would lock up and complete any final paperwork in Herb's stead.

He turned to look out over his quiet neighborhood one last time and noticed that the flag on his mailbox had been turned

down.

“Looks like the mail came,” he said. “How well-timed.”

Meghan clicked down the walkway and reached into the box to pull out a few small letters, accompanied by a package wrapped in brown paper. She lifted an eyebrow and handed Herb the package. “It’s from Michael’s son,” she said curiously.

The envelope had a bit of weight to it, as if Mikey had stuffed a small rock inside. Herb hooked his thumb under the fold and tore open the top. The first item, a slightly crumpled piece of notebook paper, carried a message in sloppy handwriting.

“Sorry I couldn’t stay to hand-deliver this,” Michael wrote. “Figured you should have one of Dad’s old keepsakes. Found this in the attic.”

Herb peered into the envelope, wondering if his vision had finally gone. “It can’t be,” he whispered, tipping the package toward his palm and giving it a slight shake. The paper rustled. An iron spork fell out.

Myriah Joy Grabish

High School Short Story



Breaching the Well

I wail. I wail and beat against the cold, solid stones with my fists, pounding the walls surrounding me until my hands are bruised beyond repair and the pain of the blows smothers all other feeling. Darkness, thicker than the water surrounding my ankles, oozes around my thin frame, chilling my bones and stealing my breath as it clutches my throat and squeezes with a viselike grip. I choke with the sobs welling from the inmost reaches of my soul, and the lack of oxygen causes the muscles in my body to scream, my head to float away while it still feels so infinitely heavy. I slump against the slimy, damp stones of the wall I tried to breach only minutes before, and slowly I sink to the ground, not even caring when the icy water at my feet encases my legs and torso. Let the water numb my body. Let it numb my pain. Nothing else ever has. I doubt anything else can.

I stare up, up through the tangible darkness and through the shadows, up towards the top of the well I am imprisoned in.

Light used to break through the top of the well, shining down onto my tear-streaked face, soothing the unfathomable pain in my spirit.

But where light used to shine, the Shadows now float, smothering all color, staring at me with red, malicious eyes. They bound me to the floor with shackles of heart-ripping, breath-stealing, unbearable pain, and they laugh whenever I try in vain to escape.

A tear slips through my eyelids and marks a jagged trail down my cheek, eventually dropping into the two inches of water beneath me with a hollow plink. It always ends like this. I fight to escape this deep, dark well, and always I fail. Always, I am alone.

“Ashira?”

A voice. I force my eyes open.

My younger sister stares at me with worry, her blonde eyebrows furrowed. “Why are you crying?”

I raise my own eyebrows in surprise, and reach up with one hand to touch my cheek. My finger comes away wet, and I stare at

it in perplexity. Strange. Normally I can confine my emotions to the well inside my soul. It's rare that I allow them to escape so easily.

I furiously scrub my face dry with my fist, and wave off Ariel's question. "I wasn't crying. It was allergies. I'm fine."

"Are you sure?" Her blue eyes widen in genuine concern for my emotional well-being. "You're making that scrunchy-face again."

I scoff, willing the cement between the stones of my well to hold, to keep the flood from breaching my sanctuary. Although it is a prison, it is also my armor. "I'm sure. Stop worrying, Ariel." The effort causes my voice to sound harsher than I mean it to. Ariel sighs, and turns away. "Sorry I bothered you." She trudges out of the dining room and up the stairs to her bedroom, her feet padding softly against the wooden floors.

I almost beg her to stop, to come back, that I didn't mean to snap at her, but then I give up. It's better that I deal with my problems on my own.

My problems.

The pain instantly follows the images that drip into my head from the top of the well, as I grab my empty plate and run to the kitchen to clean up after my lunch. The Shadows laugh at my futile escape. They whisper that I cannot possibly outrun them. They throw more images at my head, like snowballs in a backyard fight. The images are paired with bursts of sound—dissonant, wailing screams and roars.

The snowballs pound into my head as I toss my paper plate into the trash can, and I remember.

I remember last night.

I remember what I saw Dad do.

I remember watching him staring at those images on the TV screen with wide, glazed eyes. I remember thinking that that could easily have been me on that screen. If it had been, would Dad have been so quick to satisfy his addiction? Would he stare at his own daughter like that?

I slam the lid down on the trash can and gasp for breath, straining against the shackles binding my wrists and ankles, fighting to escape the crushing grip the Shadows have on my throat. The Shadows laugh and squeeze my throat even harder, shouting a hissing wail into my ears.

I grip my head and sink to the floor of the kitchen, gritting my teeth and lowering my eyelids. My limbs shake, and my heart pounds a steady rhythm of fear in my chest.

Inside the well, I hear the rumble of water just outside the stone walls. Drops begin leaking through the eroding cement. In desperation, I thrust my hands against the stones, willing them to stay together, to hold back the flood which is sure to drown me. But the water streams through my fingers in increasing increments.

Above me, the Shadows swirl, laughing, tossing snowballs at my head, squeezing my throat, smothering any light that might have ever shined through this vertical tunnel.

I finally give up on holding back the flood, on breaking down the wall, on fighting the Shadows, on breaking the chains around me. It's useless. Hopeless. I'm alone. So alone. I am only one person. The Shadows are many. The flood outside the well is an entire ocean. How can one person stand against so much?

The pain in my soul becomes too much to bear, and I bury my head in my arms, sobbing for all I am worth. I rock back and forth on the floor, my spine knocking softly against the kitchen cabinets. I barely even feel it. All I can feel is the pain in my chest. The pain in my soul. All I can feel is the Shadows' talons, the ice-cold water soaking through my clothes, and the loneliness surrounding me.

I wail. I cry.

The cement erodes further, and the two inches of water I'm sitting in suddenly becomes five inches, eight. Still, I cry without reserve.

Dimly, through my sobs and through the knocking of the kitchen cabinets, through the Shadows wailing and the water roaring and rumbling, I hear a distant voice.

Dad's voice.

"Ashira?" he says, his voice shaking. "Ashira, what's wrong?" I feel him kneel beside me in the kitchen, setting his tool bag and work backpack on the floor around us. Keys jingle as those, too, are placed down. Dad's focus is entirely on me. He strokes my hair. "What's wrong, Ashira?" he repeats, his voice soothing.

I recoil at his touch, stone bricks crumbling from above and splashing into the water around me. "Stay away!" I cry, although my voice sounds half-hearted, and my heart screams for my father to cling to me and never let go.

Dad hesitates, his hand resting on my head instead of stroking it. He sighs. "Come on, Ashira. Please, talk to me. You can tell me anything."

"No." I open my eyes and lift my head, glaring at him. The Shadows hiss around me. "I can't tell you everything," I say, tears

dripping into the thirteen inches of water surrounding my torso. “Not if you can hold secrets. Horrible secrets.”

Dad looks confused for a split second, but soon his eyes widen in realization. Then his face lowers in shame and regret. He pulls his hand away from my head and leans against the cabinets next to me, sighing wearily, running his calloused, plumber’s hands through his hair. He closes his eyes and remains silent.

Another sob racks my frame, and my eyes shut in the acute pain I can’t escape from.

I look up again and see the top of the well, blocked by the swirling, swarming Shadows. They growl and glare at me. They seem agitated for some reason. Their eyes flit to my side.

I glance to my right—and gasp through my tears.

Dad’s in the well with me.

He sits against the crumbling wall, the water rising almost to his shoulders. His tears add to the pool. He buries his head in his hands and sobs.

His wrists are bound in the heaviest, blackest irons I have ever seen. The chains bear the scratch marks of the Shadows that attack without end.

“I’m sorry, Ashira,” Dad says through his tears, through the roar of the water outside the well. “I’m so sorry. I don’t know how you could ever forgive me for my addiction, and I don’t blame you. I can’t even forgive myself. I have no excuse for my actions, for what you must have seen last night. I hate myself for it, and yet I can’t stop. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, child.”

I suddenly notice that my tears have stopped. As I stare at the chains around my father’s wrists, I slowly come to realize that the Shadows that ensnare me with fear and loneliness are the very same Shadows that have, over time, ensnared Dad in this addiction he now suffers from.

I suddenly see my dad for how broken he is. And, despite the pain, despite what I’ve seen and how much I hate what he’s done...

...I love him.

And I forgive him.

And I want to help him heal. More than anything, I want my father to be healed. Maybe, we can even heal together.

I sob one more time, throwing my arms around Dad. “I forgive you,” I gasp. “I forgive you, and I love you. I want this to be over. I want this pain to end.”

Dad places his arms around me as well, his shoulders

shuddering. “Me too, Ashira,” he replies.

“I want this to be over too.” He glances into my eyes contritely, hesitantly. “Maybe...maybe we can do it together?”

Fear of the long process ahead of us causes me to hesitate, but then love takes over. I nod vigorously. “Yes,” I breathe.

The Shadows suddenly scream in surprise and fear.

A deafening roar overtakes my senses, and the walls around me and my dad crumble away. Water pours in. It rips away the well surrounding us and tears apart the chains binding our limbs. It covers our heads and scatters the Shadows.

At first, I fear the water, but then I realize it is warm and soothing. It washes away my fear, my pain, my loneliness. It fills my heart with peace.

Dad and I swim to the surface of the flood, and I open my eyes to see light filling the well, shining on my freckled face once more.

I glance at Dad, who is still sitting beside me in the kitchen. And I smile at him.

Madison Greenstein

High School Short Story

The Liar from Outer Space

“I can’t believe that we’ve been working here for two years James! Two years and not a single sighting!”

“Jimmy...”

“Why did I think this was a good idea?! We could’ve kept our old jobs but no, I had to be convinced to get us new jobs as UFO sighters!”

“Jimmy!”

“And we don’t even get paid any more than we did at our old jobs!”

“Won’t you look at the screen Jimmy!”

“Huh? Oh... that ain’t good.”

Landing in 3, 2, 1...

The escape pod crashed into the fresh soil. It was the dead of night and a young man stumbled out. With his eyes that have seen too much, he looked around at his new surroundings. He was in a field left undisturbed until his sudden arrival. With his ears that have heard too much, he heard the hustle and bustle of a city nearby. He went towards the noise until he reached what looked like a downtown area. Starving and wounded, he went into a store and bought some bandages and a bag of chips.

With his wounds and stomach now satisfied, he wandered around the city; for he had nowhere to go. He soon reached a suburban area which looked like it was taken straight out of a 50’s show. He heard something shatter near the house he was walking by and went to investigate. He saw a boy much younger than he was standing by a shattered plate looking anxious. The young man knew of this type of situation all too well.

The young man went over the gate leading to the backyard and knocked on the house’s back door. The boy was even more terrified than before and went toward the door. The young man put his hands up to show that he meant no harm. The young boy thought for a moment and reluctantly let him inside. The young

man got down to the boy's level and started talking to him.

"Are you okay?"

"No. I'm really scared and I don't know who you are."

"Call me Lyle. What's your name and why are you scared?"

"I'm Thomas. I-I broke my dad's lucky plate and I don't know what to do."

"Just lie and say you didn't break it."

"But isn't lying wrong?" Thomas asked.

"Adults lie all the time, it's actually safer for you to lie than to tell the truth. I would know."

"How do you know

"Years of experience taught me that lesson the hard way.

"Okay..."

Thomas and Lyle cleaned the mess up as quietly as they could.

"Don't tell my dad okay?"

"I promise."

"Thanks for helping me Lyle. I hope you get back home safely."

"I don't have a home. Not anymore."

"Why don't you have a home?"

"Long story."

"Okay. Do you wanna stay with me?"

"Sure. At least for one night. If you need me, I'll be outside."

"Okay..."

Lyle walked out of the house, shutting the back door ever so quietly. He thought for a moment about how many Thomases there were, and how many would suffer the same fate as he did long ago. From that moment on, he knew that he must share his life lessons to this new world. Even if they were lies like so many things he said were. He passed out behind the tree in the backyard feeling the fresh earth underneath his fingertips.

Everyone expected Larry to still be mourning the loss of his parents by now. But Larry was an optimistic young man. An optimistic young man who was left with all his parents' money and luxurious estate. He had been patiently waiting for this day. For you see, Larry always wanted to be a superhero and everyone in Fruitville knew it. And it was finally the right time for him to show his true potential.

"That's it! That's the signal!"

"Huh?" Henrietta asked drowsily.

"Someone needs my help! Henrietta, get me my superhero costume!"

“Yes master Larry.”

Larry quickly put on his casual clothes, mask, and cape and ran to the basement. There his car was in a lustrous purple and yellow the same colors as his costume. Larry drove towards the glaring signal as fast as he could. When Larry arrived, two panicked men were waiting for him.

“Vancian! We’ve been waiting for you!” James exclaimed.

“What happened?”

“We saw something fall from outer space!” Jimmy replied.

“Are you sure it wasn’t a meteor?”

“We’re sure! Look!” James and Jimmy replied as they took out a tablet.

All three of them looked at the footage taken at the estimated landing site, a young man with shoulder length hair and many wounds came out of what looked like an escape pod.

“We need you to find them, who or whatever they are.” James said.

And with that, Larry Vancian set out on his first real adventure.

Finding the mysterious young man was much harder than Vancian first anticipated. Finding an alien is one thing, but finding a man who doesn’t want to be found in a city like this is a Herculean task. After a week of searching, some strange things were happening in the city. The amount of crimes committed were going up every day with no sign of going down anytime soon. It was as if the whole city was shrouded in lies and deceit.

Another week went by before even getting a glance at the young man. He was standing in an alley with no real purpose in mind. Vancian wanted to play his cards right and decided to walk peacefully towards the young man.

Once the young man spotted Vancian, he dashed in the other direction. Vancian followed close behind.

“I just want to talk to you!” Vancian shouted.

But the young man said nothing. They ran through civilians, moving cars, even a construction site with little regard for their surroundings. They eventually climbed to the roof of a single story building.

“I don’t mean any harm!” Vancian said, getting out of breath. Still, the young man said nothing. The young man jumped off the building and tucked and rolled to the ground.

Vancian jumped off too and landed on his right heel. The sound of bones breaking quickly followed. A painful sensation went through his spine as he fell face first to the ground. He tried

to get up but to no avail. The young man stopped in his tracks and looked back to his pursuer.

“Please, call 911! I can’t get up!” Vancian cried softly. The young man just looked at him with indifference.

“Please... I’m in serious pain!”

The young man slowly walked towards Vancian.

“What do you want from me?” The young man said angrily.

“I-I just want to talk to you.”

“I don’t believe you for a second.”

“Whatever you think I want from you obviously can’t happen now, and surely there’s no harm in talking?”

The young man eyed Vancian closely and picked him up by his shirt collar. “Fine, let’s get this over with quickly. I’m Lyle.” he said with disdain.

“Lyle, huh? That’s a nice name.”

“Enough with the small talk. Do you have any questions for me or not?”

“Where are you from? I saw you in an escape pod and I wondered if you’re an alien or not.”

“I’m not an alien, I’m just as human as you are.”

Vancian wanted to press Lyle about where he was from, but he knew that he was already walking on eggshells.

“Why did you come to Earth?”

“No reason. I just happened to land here.”

“Why were you in that escape pod anyway?”

“To escape.”

Vancian really didn’t want to press him, but he knew that this was going nowhere unless he did.

“Escape what?”

“Them.”

“Who’s them?”

Lyle stood dumbfounded and silent. The hurtful words, the searing pain, the painful scars that he inflicted to cope with the hell he was in. All those feelings and more came rushing back to him.

Vancian knew that he had to break this unending silence but he didn’t know what to say. With the throbbing pain in his ankle, he didn’t exactly have a clear head either. If he had just a glimpse into Lyle’s thoughts however, he would’ve known what he’s about to say would only add fuel to the fire.

“Surely they aren’t that bad?”

Lyle had finally reached his boiling point. The other painful feelings and now this supposed superhero’s ignorant statement

only made everything worse.

“How would you know?!” Lyle screamed angrily as he thrust Vancian to the ground.

At that moment, Vancian saw the colorful bandages on Lyle’s legs that hid the true nature of his wounds. Lyle turned around and started to walk away. With Lyle’s words, actions, and now the bandages only confirming his recent suspicions, Vancian now knew what he was up against.

“Wait!” Vancian cried.

Lyle stopped in his tracks.

“I didn’t know any better! Please give me one more chance!”

“You’re just like them Vancian. You’re just like all the other adults I’ve met.”

“But I’m only 16! See, I just got my driver’s license!”

Vancian pulled out his driver’s license from his pants pocket. Lyle examined the card closely. The picture showed a very different Vancian. His eyes showed a young man that was at least partially dead inside.

“Ok, so I don’t smile in pictures much. But see, it clearly says that I’m 16. You can trust me!”

Lyle examined the card a bit longer and threw it at Vancian’s feet.

“Let’s face it Larry, you’re just a little rich boy playing superhero. And 16 is too old to still be playing this game.”

Vancian was in shock and the pain in his ankle was only getting worse, but he knew that he had to keep finding the truth about Lyle and his intentions.

“Enough about me, what are you doing here?”

Lyle pondered whether he should tell the truth to the supposed superhero. He’d rather lie, but Vancian hasn’t been letting him get away with that.

“...I’m teaching people.”

“Teaching people what exactly?” Vancian asked.

“I’m teaching people to protect themselves.”

“How?”

“I mean you won’t get hurt if they don’t know what you did.”

It took a while for Vancian to get what Lyle was saying, for he was never good with subtleties.

“You’re teaching them to lie?”

“Only to protect themselves.”

“But telling the truth is better for everyone involved! It allows people to trust you and without it, justice wouldn’t be served.”

“Well that’s not how it worked for me! Every time I told someone the truth about my pain, they’ve either dismissed me or just flat out call me a liar! If that’s what they think I am, then that’s what I’ll be!”

“I’m not denying that you were hurt, I can see that. But not everyone is like that. There are good people in the world. There are people that you can trust!”

With those words came complete silence. After a minute of this silence, Lyle had tears flowing from his eyes. He didn’t know what to say or even what to think.

“A-Are you sure about that?”

“Yes. At the very least, you can trust me.”

Lyle apologized for his actions and called for an ambulance. When the ambulance got there, the sun was starting to rise.

“Thanks Lyle! Have a good one!” Vancian shouted as he was being loaded into the ambulance.

“U-Uh... you too I guess...”

As the ambulance was driving off in the distance, Lyle gazed at the sunrise and finally knew that telling the truth was okay after all.

Amanda Hernandez

High School Short Story



The Other Side

“Thief!” Talia ducked through the crowd, an apple in one hand and a loaf of bread in the other.

Her feet splashed against the black, murky, water which trailed down the town street.

The lingering yells finally seemed to cease as Talia reached the woods, darkness and danger oozing from its presence.

She pushed herself up, climbing over the large wall separating the town from the forest. She managed to shove herself over, her arms and legs flailing as she fell to the ground with a hard ‘thud’.

“Ow....” She groaned, cracking her eyes open, the endless black sky meeting her gaze. A loud clapping caught her attention.

“Bravo! That was beautiful.”

Talia sputtered out the mouthful of dirt and rubbed her jaw to make sure it wasn’t broken. “You could say ‘thanks’. That’s our supper, Luca.” She huffed and threw him the muddy food.

Luca grinned and helped her up. She groaned as she stood, feeling forming bruises.

“Don’t eat all of the-” Talia stopped in mid-sentence as she came face to face with a thin apple core. Luca stopped chewing and blinked.

She snatched the loaf, or whatever was left of it, into her own hands. “Can’t you wait?”

Luca was the one person who had been there from the beginning. Luca made life cheerful and carefree, but patience was something he lacked.

He swallowed. “Sorry, I can’t remember the last time I ate.” He replied with a guilty smile.

Her stomach grumbled in complaint as she tried to remember when they ate last.

When she was young, her parents were killed in a raid and she was sent to an orphanage. There she met troublesome Luca. Aside from Luca, the orphanage was pretty much prison. They were packed into a tiny house along with hundreds of other kids and were forced to clean and work with a little amount of food

and water.

Finally, a few years back, Talia and Luca had managed to escape and build their small 'home' in the woods, a place where no one dared to enter due to monsters, which Luca and Talia had not yet encountered. Was it luck or were they just stories meant to keep villagers from leaving the kingdom?

Talia moved towards the darkness, ignoring its eerie feeling. A familiar oak tree appeared from the darkness and Luca followed behind.

She gripped the hidden rope and began hauling herself up the tree. Shivering from the wind which ran through her thin clothes, she gripped the wood planks which were covered by the thick, green leaves and moved up into a dark room.

Talia heard Luca shiver behind her as he pulled himself up. "I-It's f-f-freezing." He complained. The hissing wind gave another cold blast, proving his point.

Talia moved to the creaking floor before ripping into the bread, thankful that she managed to get something to eat. They'd been running for years, but she didn't know how much longer they could do it. They both knew they were going to get caught eventually.

The only noise was her hard munching as she ate. Luca slid down next to her and there was a long silence as she finally finished her food. She moved her shoulder when she realized Luca was lazily leaning against it.

"Hey," She nudged him. When she was met with silence, she did it again.

Her only reply was a loud snore which tore through the silence. Talia sighed before her head rolled against the wood. Large holes covered the roof above allowing her to see the twinkling stars.

She sighed. She wanted to leave. She wanted to escape. She wanted to go somewhere where no one would find them. She wanted to go to the Other Side.

It was the only hope people like her held. It gave them hope. It gave her hope.

It was a place where no one cared who you were, where you could be yourself. A place where people didn't care where you came from, if you were rich or poor; a man, a woman, or a child. You were still treated with respect. It was a place where you could be free.

People talked about it all the time, but King Taminar had banned the other world. He refused to let anyone talk about it

and much less let anyone visit because he knew they would stay. He knew he would lose his crown, his throne, and his kingdom.

Slowly, over the years, the place was forgotten, the name was forgotten, and it became a bedtime story for children, but Talia knew better. Even if it was blocked off for years, she knew it was still there, waiting for her.

Many people tried to find the Other Side, but they never returned. They either found their dream, or were killed in the process.

Tamarin could keep his kingdom. She was determined not to be a part of it any longer.

Talia woke with a scream.

Her head buzzed as she jolted awake, a headache hacking at her forehead. Her vision blurred, but Talia managed to make out Luca's figure next to another shadow.

She shot up like a rocket at the sight of the intruder. The shadow held Luca by the collar, gripping it so tight he could barely breathe.

"Talia," He gasped, "I didn't mean to!" His words were rough and ragged. "I got thirsty and-" He coughed as the man jerked him back. A small metal cup tumbled from his grip. It was hard to find water in the forest, the only way were the wells in town.

"Let him go!" She yelled, making sure to keep her distance as her eyes hovered above the man's sword.

"Run!" Luca tried to yell but his face was slammed against the wall and his eyes rolled to the back of his head.

"Luca!" Talia's mind buzzed to life. Her legs moved and her knee soon connected with the man's stomach. She punched his face and stepped back when he gripped his sword.

Slashing her shoulder, he grabbed her arm and twisted it behind her back.

"Let go!" She cried out. The man did the exact opposite and only tightened his grip, sending another jolt of pain. She gave out a helpless shout as a sharp pain bloomed in the back of her head.

The cruel sneer above sent a wave of cold shivers down her spine. Talia managed to catch one last glimpse of Luca, who laid sprawled across the floor, blood dripping down from the corner of his mouth, before she collapsed into darkness.

"Luca," His name fell from her lips as soon as Talia began to regain consciousness.

"Right here," He rasped beside her.

“Where are we?” Talia winced at her cracked voice.

He watched her with guilt. “He was a soldier, I’m sorry Tai, I didn’t mean to, I didn’t know he was following me.”

“It wasn’t your fault,” She croaked, biting back a painful groan. Her lips were split and sticky red liquid clung to her forehead.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,”

“We need to get out of here,”

Talia responded with a nod, not trusting her voice. There was a long silence before he spoke. “I have an idea,” he whispered quietly. “Do you trust me?”

Talia blinked. “Of course,”

He groaned to himself. “This is going to hurt,”

“I can’t do it, Luca”

“You have to,”

“It’s going to hurt,” She told him.

“I know, now do it.” Talia hesitated as she lifted her fist. “Do it!” Shutting her eyes, she let her arm swing forward and crashed with Luca’s cheek.

Luca groaned and collapsed. Talia winced but moved on top of him and punched his stomach.

He let out an exaggerated moan that finally caught the guard’s attention outside the cell. “Hey!” A soldier came into view. “Quit it!” He barked. Talia ignored him and continued to assault Luca who now had blood dripping down his chin.

The jingle of keys made Talia’s heart leap. The door swung open and two hands yanked her back roughly. “I said quit it! Don’t test my patie-” While he was ranting on, Luca slammed his foot on the side of his head.

The man grunted and stumbled back, but before he could regain balance Talia kicked his stomach while Luca punched his nose. The soldier’s head crashed into the stone wall and he was out like a light.

“Man, that hurt,” Luca whined, rubbing his cheek.

“Sorry,”

“It’s okay,”

They moved out of the cell into the dark, eerie, hallway. Breathing was harsh and not a word was spoken as they moved up the stone stairs, pushing against the wall, when footsteps were heard.

“Let’s go,” Luca whispered when the soldiers passed down the corridor. He dragged her down the hall and moved towards a

large room.

“Where are we going?” Talia whispered.

“Uh, exit?”

“Luca!”

“I’m sorry I’ve never been in a castle before!” Talia would have laughed if it wasn’t for the loud rings blaring through the air.

They exchanged glances as yells filled the castle. “Run!” Luca pulled her arm and they sprinted down the hall. Turning the corner, they came face to face with a group of soldiers.

“Wrong way!” Now it was Talia’s turn to drag him away. Arrows and spears whizzed past her ear, skimming the skin below her cheek.

She ignored the blood and slid into an open room. They slammed the door close, blocking it with a wooden bar.

Talia winced as the door was slammed backwards, forcing her to use all her energy to keep it closed.

She grunted and pushed harder as yells passed from outside. “Talia,” Luca whispered. She didn’t answer, too focused on catching her own breath. “Talia!”

She groaned. “What?”

“Look.”

She turned her head and her breathing stopped. A large hole was in the marble floor with steps leading down towards a ghostly blue light.

“What is that?” She asked.

“I don’t know.”

“In here!” A voice yelled, making them both jump in surprise as the door shook.

Talia searched the room for any other door or window, but there was none. “What do we do?” Her heart pounded. Luca didn’t respond and continued to stare at the endless blue hole.”Luca!” There was no answer.

Then the door shattered.

Burning pain blossomed in her arm as arrows whizzed past, trying to hit her. She tried to hide while Luca stayed as still as a statue. “Don’t move!” A voice yelled and turned to the guards.

“Grab them.”

“Luca” She hissed as the guards came closer.

He turned to her as the soldiers appeared in front of them.

“Sorry,”

“For wha-” Before she could finish, Luca grabbed her hand and yanked her towards him.

Her scream was lost in the yells of the soldiers as they tried to grab them, but before they could touch them, they fell into the glowing blue of nothingness.

Bright sunlight streamed into her eyes as she blinked, immediately shutting them at the brightness.

“Ow,” She groaned at her sore body. She sat up as the memories flooded back and she turned to her side, finding Luca sprawled across the soft grass. “Luca,” She shook his shoulder.

“Five more minutes,” He groaned and rolled over. He was still for a moment before he shot up. “Holy moly where are we?”

“I don’t know.”

Fresh green grass, thick oak trees, colorful flowers, and a stone passageway lead towards the rising sun.

Suddenly, a shadow blocked the blinding sun, making them shield their eyes for a moment. She blinked and looked up at the cheerful old man in front of them.

“My, we barely ever get visitors anymore.” He mused.

Luca scrambled up. “Where are we?”

The man leaned against his cane and grabbed Talia’s hand, helping her up.

“You don’t know where you are?” They shook their heads and a smile formed on his lips warm and welcoming.

“Welcome to the Other Side.”

Allison Hill
High School Short Story

The Prophet's Song

Unlike the typical hustle-bustle that came with the year's holidays, today's busyness brought about an uneasy tension throughout my village. The white dove had flown in eight days before, a sure sign that he would be arriving with good fortunes. The town was in good spirits, until four days later when a tanager was found resting his wings near the watering hole in the town center. I remember the moment as clear as spring air at dawn... because I was the one there that morning retrieving my family's bath water.

The bird's blood red body haunted me throughout the week and continued to imprint himself into my mind during today's breakfast. There was less than one hour left until noon, when he would finally tell us our fate. I'd been anxious about his arrival, partly because I hadn't remembered the last time he payed the town a visit too well. I'd been seven when he came before, but that was eight years ago. I'd had no reason to pay attention to him then. Now my future, more or less, depended on his wise words.

I walked into the main room of our small cottage where my mother was dressing the twins in their Sunday best, even though it most definitely was not Sunday. It was expected that you present your greatest self to Great Prophet, as they called him. We all had our nicest clothes on; my father and I in shoes we only got out for special occasions like this and my mother and the twins wearing their prettiest ribbons. I felt mildly uncomfortable wearing such nice clothing because I was used to work clothes that I only washed at the week's end.

"Baruch," my father entered. "Do you have the rice and coins ready?"

"Yes sir, I put them in our nicest velvet." I replied, pulling the package out from my coat pocket. He nodded his head in approval, then began to help Mother prep the girls. I retreated to my room for a minute to grab my hat off the hook and to blow out the candle by my bed. The flame slowly flickered until it disappeared, leaving nothing but a trail of smoke. I watched the

smoke leave the blackened wick until I heard Mother calling my name. I returned to the main room, following my family out the door.

The walk to the town center was a grueling sort of silent. Not even the rambunctious twins made any sort of peep. Somehow in their young age, they knew the serious of the day's event. I kept my eyes on the ground, watching my feet pass over the dirt path, trailing behind my family. There had been this rocky feeling in my gut since I had woken up in the morning, even stronger than when I'd discovered the tanager. I felt as though something important was going to happen to me today, though I had no clue as to what. The alien feeling only strengthened my anxiety towards the Prophet.

After too long of a trek, we joined the gathering of people outside of the church, not far from the watering hole. The only exchange of words came from the adults, greeting each other in a solemn prayer. The children stared at their hands, the nervous energy obviously consuming them. And then the ones in between, like me, not sure whether to blend in with the children or act like an adult. The line finer than ever.

The last family had just arrived when we began to hear the echo of the eerie music of his one-piece band. The one thing I remember from his last appearance was his affinity for a solid tune. The whole time I'd payed almost no attention to Great Prophet, my focus solely on the graceful mandolin player. Prophet's words seemed to deliver stronger, the harder the mandolinist played. His words turned into a song of hope and peace. The potential and growth of the notes led us into a prosperous eight years. Crops grew. Plague vanished. The Lord had been with us all.

I didn't know what I expected him to look like, but he looked exactly like that. As his horse came trotting over the hill, slow and dramatic, I got a good look of his face. A scrawny man, who obviously relied on his brains and not brawn, sat stiff upon the horse's back. He had a wispy white beard and old eyes that still seemed alive with life. His clothes were not the highest of qualities but showed no speck of dirt. Simultaneously, the crowd bowed their heads before him as he dismounted the horse. I bowed my head as well, but kept my eyes focused on him, not able to avoid my curiosity.

Like a flash of lightning, I was on that same horse, my hands wrinkled and knobby. I saw the crowd standing outside the white church, awaiting me, but I did not see myself. I felt like I was

dreaming, only imagining the point of view. Then as soon as I'd seen it, it disappeared and I was looking out at the duo who had stopped their horses in the middle of the path, dead in front of us. But I swear I'd been up there with them.

"The storm has gathered here," Great Prophet spoke for the first time and we all raised our heads. "And the cold of night has been summoned by your own hand. The estranged love that builds between man and woman, each gaining power, brings anguish to us all. The staled love shall bring you all an icy heart and no woman shall be fertile till the next Return."

Soft cries bounced throughout the people. His twisted words, though low in number held every meaning we needed. The tanager had not been a mistake. Great Prophet brought nothing but bad news. What once was a song of peace and hope was now a nightmarish ditty.

"Children of this land!" Prophet exclaimed. "You must flee from this land, escape the grey mortal's fate. You musn't make the same mistake as they will. The death of an unborn babe must not bring the village down."

Whispers concerning whatever unborn babe spread throughout. Slowly, everyone turned to look at a young pregnant woman towards the back; the only pregnant woman. If no woman was to become fertile again for eight years, it must be her babe that shall die in the womb. The twins started talking to each other frantically. He had specifically addressed the children, calling for them to flee the town. My mother was in such a state of shock from Great Prophet's words she didn't notice their commotion. My father did, however, and bent down.

"Listen to the madman, Basia and Basha," he commented quietly. "He speaks the truth when he speaks of your future."

I watched Prophet intently. His body was now even more tense than when he first arrived. His eyes had filled with fear, but not for himself. No, his eyes were scared for us. It wasn't his choice to deliver these predictions, it was his duty. I couldn't imagine being the one to let a village they were doomed.

"But what about the dove, Seer-man?" one of our brave neighbors, Abbas, called. "You shouldn't have sent us that dove, if only to give us negative prophecies."

I couldn't believe he had spoken out to Prophet like that, but his words held truth. Great Prophet did not make mistakes. If we received a dove and a tanager, then we received good and bad prophecies. The mandolin music turned to a curious trot, like a new page turned.

“Ah, yes, my dear Abbas. You are not wrong.” Great Prophet hinted at a smile. “The hope I have to announce is not necessarily in your favor, or anyone’s really. The time has come for me to leave with the wind and to ascend my way to the lord.”

A woman gasped, a visceral representation of all of our thoughts. If there was no prophet, what would our world be? We wouldn’t know anything or where to go with our life. There would be no knowing what would come next. My mind began to spin like the thread on a spool.

“Baruch Batair. Come here.” Great Prophet stared directly into my eyes. There was no longer fear in his grey eyes, but intensity and interest. My legs brought me towards him, my mind fighting the urge to run back to my family. He took me by the shoulders and turned to face me towards the crowd. The music grew louder with each passing second. “I am pleased to announce this is the Heir of Prophecies, the next Great Prophet, my successor.”

I had absolutely no words to describe how I was feeling in that moment. I felt numb, like an out of body experience. I tried to smile, but the corners of my mouth stayed put. My parents seemed shocked, neither happy nor angry. The twins seemed excited that Great Prophet had called my name. The silence broke when Great Prophet called the mandolin player’s name.

“May! Bring me my blade!” Great Prophet ordered. May set his mandolin on the ground and pulled a dagger from his boot. The blade was magnificent, the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen. He must have received that from a king. “Baruch, I have more faith in you than I’ve ever had in my prophecies.”

The next second took ten minutes to happen. Great Prophet brought the blade to his throat and slit his neck with no warning. His body slumped to the floor and I swear I could feel his powers draining from him and absorbing into me. We all stood frozen, staring at the now dead Great Prophet. May walked over to me and put his hand on my shoulder. In an accent I didn’t recognize, he broke the silence with: “I look forward to working with you, mate.” I looked at him, then back at the crowd who now had their heads bowed toward me.

Kaitlyn Kutz
High School Short Story

Not a Damsel

I know it's him. He hasn't told me, but it's pretty obvious, what with his sneaking out, ambiguous excuses, and standing me up for every date he doesn't ditch me in the middle of.

Yup. My boyfriend is a superhero.

He hasn't told me, but I've figured it out. It wasn't hard to surmise when he kept disappearing only for his armor-clad alter ego to appear at some battle or another moments later, ready to save the day--again--because normal people were too lazy to save themselves when they had the benevolent and all-powerful Solar Flare to do it for them, with his twin flamethrowers, arsenal of gadgets, and impeccable timing.

Plus I've been kidnapped four times. That's a dead giveaway. And guess what? All four times, I saved myself.

But I digress.

I'm not saying Kyle's other side is a bad thing--I think it's great how he's stopped the people that no-one else could: The Bomber, Skyscraper, Blackhawk, IQ, and even that super annoying evil mayor who couldn't keep his mouth shut. I'm just annoyed that he hasn't trusted me enough to tell me his secret when we've been dating for three years. Three. Years. He's been Solar Flare for four.

I figured it out a week and a half after we started dating. How no-one else has is a mystery to me.

At this point, I've considered telling him that I know the secret he's been trying to keep from everyone so diligently, but I want to know that he trusts me. What would keep him from telling me, his girlfriend of three years, after all? It has to be something important. Either he doesn't see a future with me or doesn't trust me. He's just deluding himself if he thinks keeping me in the dark will help at all to keep me safe. Case in point: I've been kidnapped four times without officially knowing anything.

Right now, I'm staring at my tv screen, contemplating whether or not I should tell him that I know. I've thought about this every day since I figured it out, though, so I doubt I'll change

my mind.

On the screen in front of me is the person occupying my thoughts: in a pre-recorded segment, Solar Flare is chatting it up with a reporter in his deep modulated voice. I stare into his golden-red visor, imagining the freckle-faced boy behind it, his piercing, ice-blue eyes peering into my soul. I can't tell him I know. I need to wait for him to come clean on his own, or...well, I don't know. I just think this is something he needs to tell me.

A knock on the door yanks me out of my reverie. I shake my head to shoo away the rogue thoughts wandering around in my skull, then flick off the tv. I get up and open the door to find the one and only Kyle Collins standing on my doorstep. My boyfriend. Solar Flare. A superhero.

Even his alliterative name is heroic.

Kyle's ginger hair is unkempt, his hands casually in his pockets. I think back to the recorded interview on the tv. He seemed perfectly composed there, but now he seems wracked with nervous tension. Of course, he's an expert actor (most of the time, and concealed his anxious tics in front of the reporter, but I know him better than that. I can see it in the slight crease between his brows, the worried set of his mouth, even his barely hunched posture, like he's hiding something he doesn't want anyone to know about. Which he is.

"Hey," he says, finally popping the thin layer of silence between us. "Can I come in? There's something I need to tell you."

I try to suppress the hope bubbling up within my chest, the hope that he might finally tell me the secret I already know, but it's difficult. I barely keep a straight face as I invite him in, saying, "Sure. Yeah, come in." I close the door softly as he walks in. Now he's wringing his hands: another one of his anxious tics. This has to be it.

Kyle fixes me with one of those intense and pleading looks he uses before ditching me mid-date or when apologizing for standing me up entirely. It worked the first few times, but now it usually just leaves me annoyed. Not now, though. Now, it looks as if he's trying to get me to understand something. Something important.

"What's up?" I ask. He stares at me for a moment before letting out a long breath I didn't realize he'd been holding.

"There's something I need to tell you, that I've been meaning to tell you for the past three years." Go on, I urge him in my

mind. Just tell me already. You can trust me.

Apparently telepathy isn't one of his powers. Not that he has any--I'm pretty sure.

After a long moment so full of tension I thought it might explode, Kyle says the words I've been trying to weasel out of him for three years, with not-so-subtle hints and pleading looks that were meant to speak to his soul but obviously didn't.

"I'm Solar Flare." Kyle blurts. He examines my face, cringing and waiting to gauge my reaction.

I burst out laughing.

I double over, laughing so hard and so long my cheeks and gut hurt. But I can't stop. He finally told me! I am so overcome with joy and I can't keep it in any longer. Instead of trying, I let it all out: three years' worth of pent-up frustration and anger and regret inside of me is gone in those few moments.

Eventually, I gain presence of mind enough to look up at Kyle. He looks cut to his core. He must think I'm laughing at him. My last chuckles die in my throat at his expression.

"I'm sorry my soul-bearing is so funny to you," he announces as he turns to leave. I gently put a hand on his shoulder.

"Kyle." He stops moving, but doesn't turn. "Look at me, Kyle." Slowly, his eyes turn to mine, dejected and forlorn.

"That's not it at all." Another laugh escapes my throat, this one choked out and sarcastic. "I've been waiting for this for three years."

Confusion crosses his face. "What?"

"I figured out your secret a week and a half after we met," I admit. "I've been waiting for you to trust me enough to tell me on your own, and now you finally have and I'm just so happy."

"How'd you figure it out?"

I smirk. "You're not as discreet as you think you are." I pull him into a hug. "Plus I was kidnapped four times."

He chuckles. "Okay, I see how that could give it away. And good job rescuing yourself all four times."

I pull away as a grin stretches my face, my cheeks still aching from my laughter. "Your supervillains are pretty incompetent."

"Yup."

"Why didn't you ever save me?" I ask, posing the question that's been on my mind since I escaped The Bomber's lair a few months into our relationship, completely unaided but for a bobby pin and some duct tape.

"I knew you didn't need it. You're braver than I am." My

smile stretches even wider as I feel a weight lifted from both our shoulders. I take a deep breath.

“You’re darn right. Where do I get one of those sweet suits?”

Elizabeth Monreal
High School Short Story

The Science of Evanescence

To Adam who is now in Heaven

Dear Adam,

You haunt me in ways I didn't know were possible.

For one short, culpable second I have the urge to clear my sight. To look into your empty room and see nothing. But I still see you. I don't want to accept it. Not the memory of you. But somehow, even when I am not staring directly into your lifeless eyes, I can see you. You slip into my thoughts, my dreams, and even my voice sometimes. But what did I think? Stars are hard to dim.

You died almost a year ago, but your death still kills me over and over again. I envy you. You got to die once.

Mother calls me by your name sometimes. I tell her that it is just me, but she doesn't listen. And so I oblige. To put her at ease, I have cut my hair and I wear your clothes. She screams and screams until the whole world has heard. "My son is alive! My son is alive!"

And to tell you the truth, I have started to believe her. But I have to admit, it is a terrifying thing to look in the mirror and see your face in place of mine.

Adam, why did you have to go?

Your sister who is still on Earth,

Eve

Alexis Olsson

High School Short Story

Emotional

I wander through the store, awed by the colorful displays and neon signs advertising elixirs for every emotion. I pass arrangements of tiny vials filled with electric green envy, vermilion rage, and sapphire sorrow, the colorful liquids rippling slightly as someone bumps one of the displays.

A group of boys near me laughs at the prank they plan to pull on a friend, clustered around a shelf stocked with deep green disgust. One girl stares longingly at a table covered in lemon yellow happiness, fingers twitching as if she wants to grab an armful and run, and another laughs while holding up a half-empty vial of rose pink surprise.

A group of girls hovers near a display in the center of the room, and I slowly approach as they leave, each carrying a vial full of a magenta liquid. A wide bowl full of magenta vials with little heart stoppers rests on a pedestal, and a heart-shaped sign in the middle of the bowl announces: “Finally get the heart of the one you love with this one of a kind love potion!” I gently pick one up, the pink liquid shimmering in the light. I almost turn to join the giggling girls at the checkout counter before I stop myself. This isn't what I want; it wouldn't be real.

I walk to face the other half of the bowl and am surprised to see the heart on this side has a crack running down the middle, and the sign states: “Perfect for all of the things you want to forget.” The liquid inside the vials looks clear at first, but I lift one up and realize it is tinged a faint lavender. It's beautiful. I glance back at the sign's words. There are many things I wish I could forget.

I buy the potion before I can change my mind and quickly slip the vial and its instructions into my bag. As I turn from the counter, someone catches my eye. Amanda, the girl that has tormented me since elementary school, is here. I try to slip to the other side of the store, but she has already seen me and is stalking towards me.

“Maddison!” she exclaims, a sickly sweet smile plastered

across her face. “What a coincidence, running into you here.” I nod, as if this isn’t the most popular store in town, and notice the collection of vials she’s holding. “Why do you need so many elixirs?”

“Oh, these?” she giggles. “They’re for this brilliant concoction I came up with! It requires a healthy dose of rejection and sadness, mixed with a hint of hatred, anger, and loneliness and just a smidgen of fear.” She lifts each vial in turn as she names it, first a bright scarlet, then deep blue, blood red, crimson, sky blue, and finally a midnight black. “It’s for someone very special,” she says with a wink before sauntering off to flirt with the cashier.

That was strange, but I don’t have much time to contemplate what it means before a familiar voice calls my name. “Ben!” I call back and race toward my best friend.

He holds up his bag holding the sunshine joy and pale blue peace the doctor prescribed to treat the depression and anxiety Benjamin’s mom struggles with. “Ready?” he asks. I sense he wants to know what Amanda wanted, but I just smile and nod. “Let’s go.”

I weave through tables in the school cafeteria, but stop before I reach my usual table to stare at the pretty Asian girl sitting next to Ben and the way she casually rests her hand on his arm.

“Hey Maddison,” a voice says, and I startle, my Styrofoam cup of water spilling over my lunch tray. Amanda is standing next to me, and I feel the heat of my rising blush, knowing she caught me watching Ben. “Here, you look like you’re about to collapse,” she says, handing me a cup of Coke.

She glances at Ben, then, as I gulp down the soda, hoping it will calm me down, she continues, “You didn’t actually think he’d like you, did you?” I almost choke, but her words are relentless. “I mean, just look at you. Why would he want you?”

A flood of emotion hits me. I can feel tears start to form, and I run to the bathroom, choking back a sob. Tears stream down my face as my back slides down the bathroom wall, and I hug my knees to my chest. I dig the heel of my hand into my chest; the rejection hurts. Amanda is right. How could Ben ever love me? I feel sad and alone. I hate Amanda for pointing out the obvious, Ben for flirting with every girl but me, and finally myself, forever believing there was a possibility. I am so stupid. Then the fear creeps in. What if someone sees me crying on the bathroom floor? The whole school would know. Ben would know.

The emotional overload is too much. I just want it all to be over, to never have to feel like this again. An image comes to mind, and I pull the lavender vial out of my backpack. My tears blur the instructions, but I am able to read enough.

Drink no more than half of the liquid while thinking of the thing I want to forget. I lift the bottle to my lips and drink, letting all of the emotions I'm feeling fill me. This is what I want to forget. The pain and anger and misery. And Ben. Not my best friend himself, but the way I feel about him.

Now he can be a friend but nothing more.

Calm washes over me, and I take a deep breath. I stand and step to the sink, splashing cool water on my face. That was worse than I have ever felt, the lingering emotions fading into nothing. I frown at my reflection. Amanda was mean, but there have been times I've stood up to her when she was much more cruel. And I had already accepted that Ben didn't like me that way. Nothing about what I just felt was rational. The rejection, sadness, anger. The loneliness and hatred and fear. "It's for someone very special."

Oh no. No no no no no. She wouldn't. But the soda. She did.

I sprint back to the cafeteria, my eyes darting around the room, searching for Amanda.

"Maddie," Ben calls, bounding up to me. "Are you okay? I saw you with Amanda, and then you ran off."

I look at him, and feel... nothing. Happy to see him, of course, but that's all. No more butterflies fluttering in my stomach or nervous energy wondering if this is the day I confess my true feelings. He's just... Ben. "Yeah, I-I'm fine. Thanks. But I really need to go."

He grabs my arm before I can run off again. "I know you saw Jasmine and me, and I thought maybe that was why you were so upset. But she doesn't mean anything to me." I give a small smile to show it doesn't matter, but he keeps speaking in a rush. "There's something I've wanted to tell you for a while." I tilt my head, wondering what it could possibly be, when he finally says the words I had once dreamed of hearing.

"Maddie, I think I'm in love with you."

Ellie Welch

High School Short Story

A Talk with Himself

He sits down at the diner staring at the menu in his hands. All of the words mold together, his hands shakily set the menu down at the corner of the table waiting for the waitress to see him.

“What can I get you David?” Emily, the waitress, asks her long slender fingers grip the pen in one hand while the other holds a pad of paper. Her short pink nails grip the pen loosely. Her curly black hair is pulled up into a small puffy bun that lays low on her neck. Her uniform is clean while the apron around her waist has a few stains spotting the white fabric. He picks up the menu again and hands it to her.

“Hot cocoa please.” She smiles at him and writes down his order. Her chicken scratch lettering would be hard to read to anyone but her.

“You got it.” She walks back to the kitchen. He puts his hands on his forehead slowly closing his eyes. The black that fills his vision is almost therapeutic as he lets his mind wander, thinking absentmindedly. Emily walks back over placing a baby blue mug full of hot cocoa on the table along with a plate with a few cookies on it.

“The cookies are on me.” He watches her leave, while the smell of cocoa clouds any rational thinking. He looks at the cookies and smiles softly putting his head down on the table with a cookie in his hand.

“Come on, silly goose you can’t stay sad forever.” He looks up and sees a five year old David sitting in front of him. His little blue eyes still so full of hope. The little David steals a sip of the cocoa, a bit of whipped cream sticks to his freckled nose. He smiles down at the boy. He can recall at this age how fun the world seemed, how anything was possible. “What’s even wrong with you?”

David sighs, the weight of the question pressing down on his lungs, he reaches over and wipes off the cream. “I don’t know buddy, just not feeling too good lately.”

“Well that’s stupid! You should be excited, you got into that

San Diego College didn't you?"

"Yeah, San Diego State. Go Aztecs" He says sarcastically, doing a small fist bump in the air. He thinks back remembering how long it took him to perfect his essay and how happy he'd been this morning when he got the acceptance letter, a small smile creeps on his face.

He closes his eyes and rubs the back of his neck where his buzzed hair was getting long, knowing his younger self was right. He has no reason to feel so unbelievably hopeless, but he does. The worst part is he has no way to explain why he feels this way. When he opens his eyes again, ten year old David is sitting in front of him, short shaggy hair looks like a mop on the boys head, a baggy green t shirt covers his skinny body.

"What're you doing at Patty's diner on a Saturday night? We should be home studying!" At this point in his life David believed school to be the only way out of his small New Mexico town. The town where he spent his whole childhood. A town he despises.

"We got into college dude, we don't need to worry until we move to Cali." The older boy sips his hot cocoa and finally takes a bite of the cookie in his hand.

"That doesn't mean crap! They could take away our scholarship! What would we do then?" David remembers why people hated him at this age. He hated himself right now.

"Calm down, we'll be fine." He drops the cookie on the plate and checks his watch. When he looks back up, sixteen year old David is sitting across from him, sorrow in his eyes. This boy is the embodiment of when David became depressed. Long shaggy shoulder length hair pulled into a sloppy ponytail. His loose fitting Metallica shirt and grey sweatpants are messy and wrinkled.

"Still feeling bad I see." Both of the boys sigh deeply and stare at each other for a long time. "I was hoping you'd tell me that this would all get better."

"Hate to be the bearer of bad news, but it only gets worse." David smiles softly and pushes the plate of cookies toward the younger boy. "Eat up, feeling like this will make you lose your appetite." His eyes shift down away from the boy and toward the cookies. He sees a hand just like his reach for one. When he looks up he meets his eyes.

This David is 18 years old.

This David has tear stained eyes.

This David is from only a few days ago.

David looks at himself. The other boy just wipes the tears from his eyes and looks around.

“We’re still alive?” He says looking down at the bottle of pills in his hand. The cap is off and the bottle is completely empty.

“Yes, we are.” David looks at the bottle and feels himself start to cry. “Yes, we are.” He says again. David looks up and all four of them are sitting on the seat across the booth from him. They display an array of emotions he remembers distinctly feeling.

Hope, pain, sorrow, and absolutely nothing.

Slowly one by one the versions of himself start to disappear from youngest to oldest till he’s at the booth by himself.

Emily walks back over. “You okay kid?” She asks grabbing one of the cookies.

“Yeah,” he sets a 10 dollar bill down on the table. “Keep the change.”

He leaves the diner and starts his walk back home.

Now, finally thinking clearly as the moon lights everything around him he knows he needs to prove to himself that he lived for a reason.

His life is waiting for him.

He just needs to grab its hand and run for the hills.

JD Willis
High School Short Story

Untitled

The sun was always something beautiful to look at. So beautiful to witness. The warmth twisting its gentle finger around the frozen ringlets that framed my face. Every morning, I was greeted by its welcoming smile. But not today. The sun was always something beautiful to look at, until I was unable to look at it anymore.

I plunge suddenly into consciousness when I hear someone call for me.

"Comet?"

"Comet!"

It took sixty seconds— one minute exactly to register that the distressed phrase-singer was coming from none other than Wolf. Never a moment late, nothing out of the order there. —Why were they so early?

"Comet, where have you been? We've been so worried about you!"

"I've only been asleep for a few hours. What's the rush, it's not even morning yet?" Sitting up slowly, I take in the intimidating overcast of the night sky, cold and unforgiving, a feeling I've come to claims with.

Wolf knit their brows together in concern, looking as if I just told them the grass on which we stand is brittle cartilage.

"You've been missing for four days. Stars above, Comet, it's the middle of the afternoon. Did you hit your head or something? Open your eyes, you can't see the sun? You always comment on how beautiful the sunshine is..."

Looking over their shoulder at the distant space-burst twinkling, I shake my head. "My eyes are open, but the sun hasn't risen yet."

Frustration colored their face as they pull me up to my feet. "There, lounging comfortably in the west. Comet look, you have to look."

I patiently entertain them by looking out into the misty emptiness, sighing finally. "The sun hasn't risen yet."

A sickly paleness fell over the face that I once thought of as a friend. Backing away, I watch as they retreat into the night, the darkness ripping them from the physical plane. Rest at last. The soft undergrowth welcomed me back with worried looks and glances.

"Aren't you going to greet the evening, Comet?"

My lids fall heavy once more, drawing me back into comfortable slumber. There was no need to worry.

The sun hasn't risen yet.

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