

8<sup>th</sup> Annual

# Unlocked Voices

2017 Teen Writing Contest



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*Essay*

*Middle School Essayists*

Evelyn Chen  
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*High School Essayists*

Oriana Del Cid  
Angelica Fuller  
Paris Godfrey  
Amy Kang  
Angelica Shenouda  
Ceonie Washington

Evelyn Chen  
Middle School Essay



## Untitled

I breathed in the sweet scent of air as my family strolled across the fresh shrubbery on August 15, 2016 on 3:10 P.M. The young and sturdy trees were stretching their rough brown branches, clustered with collections of plush and tender leaves. The lush moss was still moist after a minor sprinkle of rain, but I didn't mind roaming on it. We were exploring Washington, D.C., Virginia during our summer vacation, shortly after our recent visit to the Lincoln Memorial and the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool.

The pleasant sky was a clear sapphire widening, embraced by the raised trees. Eventually, the rich green meadow transformed immediately to solid cement road, leading us to a short hill. The path was guiding us to a remarkably straight and tall building, so I easily observed a vast portion of the building, but it was not enough to impress me yet. We paused on the summit of the low hill gathering our triumph, and gawked, awed at the architecture towering over us in the dazzling sun, surrounded by admiring visitors. The Washington Monument!

My family relaxed idly on one of the thick wooden benches, and I recognized the majestic view appearing below, showing serene scenes of nature in the distance. Colors of the automobiles were driving along the black streets, and shallow hills rolled steadily across the valley. I was eager to explore the Washington Monument, but to my disappointment, an officer announced the Washington Monument was currently closed. However, I brushed my fingers over the even surface of the stones gently and glimpsed the sharp point of the monument, regaining my wonder for it. I examined the slightly different shades of crumbling gray stones on the Washington Monument.



The bright sun was a sizzling spark, heating the air gently yet firmly, and the leisure clouds drifted by slowly. The howling winds were fierce soldiers, shrieking their shrill wails. Many antique American flags waved, bordering around the ancient Washington Monument. The wild winds slashed vigorously at the air, blowing all the American flags so wickedly I heard the unmistakable noise of the American flags billowing and fluttering as loud as thunder. The wiry trees seemed to bow to the powerful construction, respecting the Washington Monument. Even the most immense trees were vulnerable and fragile plants compared to the mighty monument. I listened absent-mindedly to the enthusiastic shouts of children prancing about, praising the Washington Monument.

It is quite stunning how proudly the majestic building stands, despite the years. The Washington Monument is unanimously a thrilling experience!

Sohini Mandal  
Middle School Essay



## Andy Warhol

Picture this. You step into a modern art museum. Abstract paintings and sculptures dwell in every bit of open space as far as the eye can see. Each masterpiece has its own unique tenor, whether it's vivid colors or fascinating structures. Then, out of the corner of your eye, you see something different. Something plain. Something simple. The closer you inch towards it, the odder it seems. Then BAM! You see the full painting. Rows and rows of soup cans. Like many other people, the aura of the canvas lures you in. This gem was made by a true and pure mastermind. Andy Warhol, a man who added something divergent to art museums around the globe.

Although Andy Warhol's paintings are known internationally, you can't say the same for his early life. According to *Biography in Context*, he said, "I never give my background and anyway, I make it all up differently every time I'm asked." He is thought to have been born in the year 1927, in the town of Forest City, Pennsylvania. Pretty specific for a guess! For college, Warhol attended the Carnegie Institute of Technology and got a degree in pictorial design. Despite the fact that he earned an education from an outstanding university, Warhol had trouble getting publicity for his work. At first, he drew accessories and shoes for some prominent magazines such as *Glamour*, *Vogue*, and *Harper's Bazaar*. Finally, in 1960, he started painting what he loved: pop art. Most art museums and society in general did not accept his style. But by 1962, pop art seemed to have become the latest fad. Most of Andy Warhol's paintings highlighted random things such as Coca Cola, soup cans, Popeye, and Marilyn Monroe. In the 60s, he started making films in his studio which he

called “The Factory”. Instead of continuing films in the 70s, Warhol painted portraits. The 1960s and the 1970s appeared to be super decades for him. After a successful and inspirational career, Andy Warhol passed away on February 22, 1987.

Even though Andy Warhol’s artwork is still loved today, artwork was much different in his time. Back then, neo-expressionism was the prominent art form. Research in Context stated that neo-expressionism was a reaction against minimalism via art. The paintings include strong brush strokes and powerful color contrasts. Many of the pieces of art feature distorted figures that have understated yet profound meanings. Today, artwork is more often computer animated rather than hand painted. Sometimes it is very abstract. Most of it is contemporary. Both Warhol’s time period and today’s art is somewhat abstract. They both use vibrant colors and sometimes they have very deep meanings that are often not visible at first glance.

Still today I cherish the memories of the Museum of Modern Art (or MOMA) in New York City, where I first saw one of Warhol’s paintings. As we toured the city, my family and I visited many amazing art museums that aren’t available in Las Vegas. MOMA wasn’t my favorite one, but it was definitely one to remember. When we were exploring the vast corridors full of art, I spotted his painting of soup cans that is titled “Campbell’s Soup Cans”. It was so large; I just had to see it up close! My sister and I took turns reading off the flavors of soup which surprisingly took a good five minutes. I even found my favorite flavor, tomato. I’m still not sure why I love that painting so much. Something just drew me towards it, maybe the stark sameness of it all.

On a different note, I think that it would feel stressful to be Andy Warhol. It would be stressful because according to biography in Context, Andy Warhol’s pop artwork was not accepted into society at first. It was a few years before people started to take interest in his paintings. Secondly, after people dubbed pop art as the new trend of the 60s and 70s, Warhol’s workload probably immensely increased.

Therefore, I think that it would be stressful to be my artist, Andy Warhol.

Maybe one day you will also step into an art museum and get that same giddy feeling that I did when you see something truly spectacular. Many of the masterpieces you will see will be painted by someone you have never even heard of, but they will leave an imprint that will be with you for the rest of your life. That was how I felt when I saw a painting by a real gem, Andy Warhol. One of the best artists of the twentieth century.



Trinity Terriquez  
Middle School Essay



## Friends

*"I'd rather be hated for who I am, than loved for who I am not."*  
~ Kurt Cobain

When I first joined junior high, I thought there was going to be people who were more like me. People who dressed like me, liked some of the same things as me, and who liked the same music as me. Instead, I encountered the complete opposite. At first, I thought this meant I wasn't going to fit in, and slowly I'd be forgotten and unnoticed among the crowds. As luck would have it though, I did see some old friends and after some days passed, I started making some new friends. And despite our differences, we got along pretty well and I have managed to make, and keep, a good amount of friends. Sometimes I think about going into high school with a set of new people that I don't know and starting this whole process over -- the dread of feeling left out and not fitting in. However, I think it is more important to stay true to myself and never change who I am just to be accepted.



Oriana Del Cid  
High School Essay

## The Young Teen Mind

Have you ever wondered what runs through a young teens mind in all events of their life? Wondering what exactly they feel and what you can do to possibly help? Even as an adult or a young teen, do you ever wonder these things? As a young teen myself I can tell you it is quite the rollercoaster. I can honestly say from my own experiences and thoughts', being a teen is entirely confusing. As an adult reading this you may say, "What could possibly be confusing about a kid's life?"

As young teens we are raised to reach for the stars and be the very best we can be. But along that road to success there are confusing events and stressful situations that we sometimes keep to ourselves knowing that no one else can possibly understand. For example in middle school kids are confused with new feelings, new grades, and new teachers going into middle school and becoming a pre-teen. Everything is new including the way the school works. "Here we go," we think to ourselves. And so the journey to adulthood begins, with new experiences, new situations, new feelings, and new changes in general. From 6th to 7th and ending with 8th middle school is over, the experiences of changes within, feelings that we've never felt, and 6 classes a day with the same teachers repeating in a cycle.

On to the wondrous new adventure of high school, starting out as an underclassman and slowly making it to the top. First day of school, the campus is so big and there are so many people you don't know, teachers are stricter, and life is getting serious now. This is the beginning of the road to graduation; everything must be exactly how you plan. But

life is getting harder, you are determined to do a sport or figure out how to get a permit, job, you want to do something with your life now. But teachers are overloading you with what feels like so much homework. It's now time to go to lunch and you don't have friends but you see everyone else sitting together in groups. Sitting alone is your last resort so you find a cozy spot, sit, and silently eat your lunch with headphones covering both ears drowning out the crowds. As you head back to class the hallways fill with people. Someone talking into your ear, another close behind you, there becomes one impatient person that shoves through everyone. The time finally strikes signaling that it's time to head home. This same cycle repeats as you gain more friends, lose others, get more homework, have days off. Suddenly time stops and you find "the one" you've been looking for. This is the time where most teens try to figure out what exactly love is. I am bias on this opinion being a teen myself so you may have your very own opinion. But here's mine, teens don't really know the true meaning of love, yes, we are still trying to figure out exactly what it means. Unlike adults our relationships come and go, heartbreak occurs and then happiness comes back the next day. We have depression and confusion over this person we thought would always be there one moment and then get over them in a few months or so. In rare times it takes years to even get over one person.

And then you move on up the line to sophomore, junior, and senior. Finally graduating and accomplishing all you worked for. Teens may not seem like they have much to deal with but deep down. There is so much that most adults don't know, I always thought there were two types of teenagers. Those who stay quiet and tell no one anything and then there's those that crave the drama and tell every tale there is to tell. As an adult you might say "all they have to worry about is school." It is much more than that, once they get friends or get into relationships the world seems a lot more complex than intended. Friendships turn into mazes and relationships turn into complicated stories. The so-called friends they always thought would be there end up

hurting them more than they thought. The so-called “relationships” turn into a war zone, from one person to the other arguments and drama arise.

I could go on and on about the young teenage mind with my own thoughts, experiences, and observations but it wouldn't mean anything if you, as an adult didn't stop to see the troubles of your child or a teenagers life. Or as a teen, you didn't stop to see the troubles in your fellow peer's lives. Some way somehow the vibe from people could be better.



## Turtles

My brother did this weird thing with turtles. He was only ever used to having a puppy. Jeff, his furry companion, loved getting his tummy rubbed. It was always little things like this that my brother noticed. He would take these small seeds of knowledge he collected from the world around him and make connections to other related aspects of his life. He really was very smart. We tried to remind Jenny of this the first time it happened.

I think it was about four years ago, maybe more. We were at a family barbecue hosted by our great aunt. Austin was thirteen or fourteen. He had never seen a turtle before that day, but he took an instant liking to the peculiar green creature. His eyes widened with excitement as he pointed and shrieked.

“Do you like the turtle, Austy?” I asked.

He nodded excitedly and extended his arms in front of him before rapidly pulling them back to his torso to create a soft slapping sound against his chest. This gesture was his way of expressing his desire to hold the turtle. He repeated the motion two or three times for added emphasis, and it was clear his great enthusiasm could not be ignored.

With the greatest caution I could manage, I lifted the turtle up off of the ground. Austin began to shift his weight from foot to foot in a repressed rocking movement, and it was clear how hard he was trying to contain himself for the sake of the turtle. I could see in his eyes that he was filled with an anxious desire, but I was certain that my gentle brother would cause no harm to the innocent turtle. He just needed to calm down a little.

With one arm cradling the animal, I rested a hand on Austin’s shoulder to steady him. When his dance ceased,

I took his hand in mine and began to make soft stroking motions on the turtle's shell. Austin was noticeably thrilled, and so this continued for ten to fifteen minutes until the call of "food's done!" erupted from across the yard and brought our attention elsewhere.

After dishing up Austin's plate and getting him settled at the picnic table, I returned to the meal station to get some food for myself. It was at the end of the line when I was trying to make the big decision between Jell-O salad and peach cobbler that I heard Jenny's ear-splitting shriek.

"Erin!"

I turned my head, my gaze following where her finger pointed until my eyes landed on Austin holding the turtle on its back and rubbing its belly.

Like a puppy.

We rushed to Austin's side and returned the turtle to a safe position sitting right side up in Jenny's arms. She scowled at my brother menacingly as she stroked her beloved pet, murmuring things like, "it's ok, Tucky."

Our Aunt Susan tried in vain to explain to my brother the dangers of holding a turtle on its back, but I could tell even then that this was not going to be an isolated incident. Aunt Susan, however, refused to believe that she couldn't get through to him, and she thoroughly patronized him on this occasion and each one like it, and there were indeed much more like it following this day.

Austin just didn't understand. How was he to know this was wrong? His experiences did not yet warrant caution around his funny green friend. This was how he showed Jeff affection. Why would the turtle not like it also?

It was always little things like this that he noticed, taking small seeds of knowledge he collected from the world around him and making connections to other related aspects of his life. Austin really was very smart, and that's what I tried to remind people whenever my brother did his weird thing with turtles.



Paris Godfrey  
High School Essay



## Untitled

Sunday cookouts have always been a staple down south. From fried fish you could smell cooking from a mile away to collard greens with bacon bits and fatback giving it a meaty savory flavor, loud music to soft gospel, most African American families can relate to this traditional gathering in one way or another. However, discussions over controversial topics have become as key a component as the pasta salad. The transition from the laughter-filled back room where the children ate into the heated debate that existed in the living room marked my transition from childhood to adulthood.

In the African American community, there exists a universal fear that at some point in time, our lives can be taken and this event can be ultimately determined as justified. To counter this, my family finds it important the younger generation of our family is articulate, respectful, and understands the plight we face as African Americans. Discussions over race, police brutality, and sexism are intense in my family. However, children are not welcomed in conversations labeled “grown folk talk”. It’s a challenge to move from room to room, conversation to conversation. This physical move from the back room where the children ate to the lively living room taught me that I could be a valuable contributor to the narrative at hand. The wall separating the two rooms made me feel like adults and children were a world apart. When I became a teenager I realized many of the things discussed either impact the lives of the youth, lacked the voice of the youth, or could be wisdom for the youth. One day, I decided to sit and listen. The first conversation discussed whether or not it was acceptable for my black cousins to bring home someone of a different race. Being from Las Vegas, I quickly realized

how different my perspective was. I transitioned from child to adult when I abandoned the belief that everyone held similar viewpoints as me or would understand where I was coming from.

My opinion is occasionally pushed aside, much like one would walk past the unfamiliar dish at the cookout, wondering who made it and why, unwilling to try it out or, try to understand it.

Although I am not always valued as a commentator, I appreciate the space my family has created. As I don't have much room for input, my commentary has to be concise and evidence based or my uncles won't hesitate to dissect it. When I am not speaking, I listen and absorb every perspective spoken. Listening has molded me into a more understanding, well rounded young adult with a lot to say and a lot to contribute to the lively living room discussions. Like the pasta salad, I have become a key component to the cookout conversation offering a new outlook, encouraging my kin to look at things from a larger perspective. Like the pasta salad, I offer a new taste from the traditional fried fish and collard greens.

Amy Kang  
High School Essay



## A Little Bit More Effort

One-step... two steps... three steps. I walked down the tremendous hallway of Bob Miller Middle School. I held the white, rectangular note, that had a check mark next to the word immediately, tightly in my hands. I almost got lost in the maize-like school, but I arrived at the counselor's office. With hands trembling, I managed to knock on the door. As it creaked opened, I felt something strange, like a tight feeling in my chest and it felt tighter when I saw that my parents were in there too.

Did I do something wrong? How could I have messed up on my first day in a new school that quick? They gestured me to sit down. With my short legs, I jumped onto the tall chair. My heart wouldn't listen to me. I was scared that the whole world could hear it racing. My counselor spoke with sincerity, but the only thing I remembered her saying was that I was going to be a 7th grader. Wait what? My mind went blank. I couldn't process the shocking news. I wasn't even sure how to react to such information. I sat there like a statue, dumbfounded.

This occurred in February of 2014. I just moved to Henderson from Cerritos, California. In Cerritos, elementary school went up to 6th grade, so transferring into a middle school as a 6th grader during 3rd quarter was already a big jump for me. But oh man, skipping the rest of 6th and going to 7th? That was a humongous leap. All of the make-up work? I could imagine the piling stacks of paper on my desk. Just thinking about that hurt my brain. But papers were signed and I was enrolled again. I worked hard, and never gave up. I stayed up an extra hour every night trying to memorize everything and I even drank coffee for the first time to keep my eyes open. At times, I had to pinch myself to focus in class and to stay awake at night. In the beginning, everything was difficult, and I doubted myself countless times, but I didn't give up. That's why I am here now, in the library, entering a writing competition.



Angelica Shenouda  
High School Essay



## To Withstand the Waves of a Masquerade

My choices were the ocean. Currents pulled me in opposite directions; one led toward land, the other towards a more powerful, dangerous tide. A tide so controlling, it would make me lose control of what mattered most; the understanding I held for others, and my individuality that set me apart from the rest of the pigeons. Pigeons who flock too close together, who do only what the others do; pigeons who don't think, but conform<sup>1</sup>. Both waves whispered to me and ushered me to their side, but I was indecisive; I stood on a rock between them. Slowly, throughout the span of a year, I slipped into the wrong current. And Melanie, even though she doesn't know it, pulled me out.

Middle school Melanie and 9th grade Melanie were immensely different people. In sixth grade, she used to climb to the tops of the gates across our middle school, and sat up there with a massive grin, gazing at her friends from the top like she ruled the world. During my 6th and 7th grade years, I desperately wanted to be friends with her. Sometimes I spoke to her in the library before school, and every time I did I held more and more idolization for her. Every story, every drawing, every word she said was so innovative and flawless and enchanting; I wanted to be like her, full of boldness. But time passed; I transformed into someone else, but I didn't change for the better. I held onto my insecurities with a tight grasp, and I became incredibly close-minded. I became a pigeon, a conformist, and it has stained me.

It was conformity who pulled me into the wrong tide.

My English teacher adored Melanie, as most people who loved literature did; we could appreciate her talent. Her writing was bulletproof and her drawings were irreplaceable. Melanie's talent was impossible to ignore, although, it

wasn't impossible to hate. I'd hear girls saying rude things about her but I always came to the same conclusion; Melanie was like glitter, vivid and enchanting, but not everyone could see that. Some people find glitter just plain annoying, getting in all of their things and sticking to everything, and they just wanted glitter to go away. But I wasn't one of those people, so why should I care? But I was a pigeon. I cared anyway. So I hardly talked to her.

Conformity's tide can change people into a silhouette of what they once were; if they survive, it takes them forever to fill themselves back into color. My color faded slowly; I was halfway into the wrong current, but I still had a weak grip on the rock.

In high school, Melanie and I shared no classes, but one day I caught a glimpse of her during passing period. I couldn't recognize her. Her long brown hair was no longer tied, but shoulder-length and freely bouncing with every step she took. Instead of flannel shorts, she wore worn-out black skinny jeans. Instead of a plain cotton t-shirt, she wore a green day band tee. And instead of the vibrant wide-eye carefree look usually imprinted on her face, Melanie's eyes were focusing on the ground in a desolate demeanor. A small frown replaced her usual vibrant smile. Immediately I knew something was wrong; she was never sad. Immediately I was taken off guard. One of my "friends" followed my gaze, and wondered who I was staring at so intensely.

"Melanie looks really sad. Something must be wrong. I've never seen her like that before..." My voice trailed off.

She quickly turned away from me and whispered something in my other friend's ear. They both looked at me and raised their eyebrows. Why is she whispering? I wondered. There must be something I don't know.

"What's wrong?" I tried to find out what was going on.

One of them pursed their lips. "Nothing..." It clearly was something.

"It's just that... I've heard that Melanie started to drink, and do...stuff like that." She widened her eyes, raised her



brows, bit her lip, and then quickly changed the topic.

I didn't believe it. I couldn't. The Melanie I knew wasn't like that.

I wondered what had changed.

For almost the rest of the year, I saw her for a short second every day while I was walking home. She came up the hill, towards the school. I tried to make eye contact with her and smile, but she was always looking down.

Earbuds in her ears, she didn't hear me when I would call her name. I unconsciously studied her for the short second I saw her; at least, until the group of boys who all walked the same, talked the same, and strived to be the same would walk in between us. Pigeons. All doing the same thing the same way without even thinking.

And I didn't realize it then, but I was already one of them.

An elastic tattoo choker used to embrace Melanie's neck sometimes. Underneath, I could've sworn I saw the unmistakable crimson red of a cut or a scab or a scar. I wondered what it was, but I dismissed it. If it actually was a cut, it was probably because she was always climbing gates and doing reckless things. I focused on other questions I had.

Where is she coming from? I wondered. School just ended, how did she get here so fast? Maybe she was ditching and is embarrassed, I thought. Maybe she doesn't want me to start a rumor. So I never started a rumor about Melanie; I judged her, though, which is just as appalling. Being the conformist I was, I viewed her supposed "ditching" as evidence that what my "friends" said about her was true, and I started to believe that she drank and did drugs and "stuff like that".

A few weeks later, as I walked up to our lunch table, I heard one of my other "friends" mention Melanie's name. Immediately I jumped in the conversation.

"Oh, I know Melanie, she draws really good!"

I received a quick glance before their voices quickly subsided; I could tell by their faces that the conversation wasn't about the good things Melanie has done.

I should've asked Melanie herself what was wrong. But I lost my grip. I was fully engulfed in the tide and I couldn't feel my rock anymore, let alone see land. I was a pigeon, I didn't defend Melanie when I should've. I know that it doesn't matter anymore, there's nothing I can do about it now. But the point is that I let other people's assumptions shape how I thought of somebody, and that is never okay. Mistakes are meant for learning, not repeating.

And I won't let them repeat.

April 24, 2015, around 2:30 pm; the last time I spoke to her. One of my friends went into the orchestra room to get her violin. I stood awkwardly by the door until the rush of teenagers clamoring to get their things could scamper out of school, pigeons in a hurry to escape captivity. My ears filled with her laugh, which was part giggle, part hearty chuckle, and always genuine. I hadn't heard her laugh in a long time, and the sound sent an ocean of cool relief rushing over my chest. This was the Melanie I remembered. I promptly made my way to her and smiled, she smiled back. This was the Melanie I knew!

"I like...your arms..." I laughed because we both knew how awkward that sounded. An authentic smile formed on her lips and she let out a laugh; only Melanie could tolerate my awkwardness and find humor in it. She pushed her arm out for display so we could both admire the drawings that she drew on herself. They could've easily been mistaken for henna but the black ink was smearing and gradually becoming a soft shade of blue. She drew it on with pen, like how she used to do in middle school. My eyes followed the designs up to her mid-forearm, where the blue started to fade into a mix of red and pink.

These were definitely not made with pen. They were not drawings. They were cuts. Neat, two-inch lines drawn out a few millimeters apart. These were not a consequence of the follies of a child. These were not from falling off the gate that led to her house. These were cuts. Intentional cuts. My heart leaped despite the smile that was still painted on my face. Should I ask her about them? I furrowed my brow,



and I think she noticed me looking because she quickly pulled her arm away.

“Thanks,” she smiled and laughed again. “Sometimes I just get...bored.”

I opened my mouth to say something but she was already walking out the door, chatting with some of her friends. She seemed so happy, like middle school Melanie, I just couldn't imagine her doing something so painful ...on purpose. My gaze went out the door with her, and she looked so vibrant and alive and enchanting, I began questioning my own eyes. You imagined it, I told myself. Just LOOK at her. Does she look like she would cut to you? My answer was no.

And as usual, I was wrong.

May 1st, 2015, after first period; the last time I saw Melanie alive. Throughout the months, I've been allowing the memory to fade in order for the wound to heal. But I can still conjure the scene like it was in slow motion, like in the movies, with a viewer feeling the need to get up off their seat and scream at the main character to tell them what to do. I can picture myself yelling at the screen, telling myself to run to her! Grab her shoulder, make her look at you! Tell her that she doesn't need to do it! But of course, I don't do those things; I let her slip away. Her face...she looked like she had a horrible stomachache and just really wanted to go home. She looked as though every step she took hurt her, the rush of the pigeons around us hurt her, every breath of air in her lungs hurt her, everything hurt. And I will never understand why. Because I never took the time, in my conformist mind, to think about whether or not my friend was hiding something behind that smile, maybe she wasn't as happy as she seemed to be.

No one can ever truly know what people hide behind closed doors, behind laughs, behind smiles. Melanie taught me that. Nobody deserves to be judged based on assumptions. Melanie lost her life for reasons that, to this day, I still do not know. I don't think I will ever know. But I try to understand, and I have come to peace with her passing.

But the sprinkle of glitter we lost will not be forgotten. I can still remember fighting a war between my eyes and my tears the entire day on May 4, 2015, when the whole school found out. And I can still remember losing the battle while I was walking home, by the spot where I always saw her come up the hill, the tears powerfully crashing from my eyes like the current of the ocean I was stuck inside.

And I am out of the ocean now. Melanie pulled me out and now I can feel the sand beneath my feet, warm and dry, comforting and safe. I can see those inside the sea from where I stand; some are on a rock like I was, and some are swimming towards me. I have a lifeline in my hands, and I can look for the signs and save those who need to be saved, the way I couldn't do for Melanie because I just couldn't see.

And Melanie, thank you for saving me, even though I couldn't save you.

<sup>1</sup>Inspired by the analogy of conformists being like pigeons, created by AP Psychology teacher, Aron Anderson.

# Ceonie Washington

## High School Essay

### Through My Eyes

Welcome to my life. It is more fascinating than roots growing from the ground. From the second I wake I hear the screech of my alarm. It reminds me that, "I am still alive to get up and rise". "Through the haze and daze that lead to the lonely ways, "I always think of my bitter dayz. This makes me reflect on the the flows that go like the dove on a wedding day. When I am reflective, I get to think of my philosophies like love, like what I want to be. Like what I want to see in Ceonie.

This is my life not yours, you don't understand my thought or feelings. Your definition of what pain means is different than mine because in my world isn't around you, I have pain that you can't carry, no it isn't like dairy, but through my eyes, you might see a surprise. Welcome to my life. For fun I like to jam in the shower for hours. It makes me happier than what I appear to be. In the electric heaven I call milk & honey. I always make sure that my G will guide me on the right path. In my life, my favorite person is my mommy. She is as sweet as cake as tough as concrete. She makes me feel many emotions every single day. When I hear the silky sound of her soothing voice. It takes me into the blissful heavens and never makes my life seem like it. Is bad because I have to live for something which is my future that holds all my possibilities.

Welcome to my life honey. In my world all you see is scenery, possibilities, memories, and growing for miles. In my world the style is my fashionista. The styles are what you define to be. As for me, I'm like the fashionista in my inner being. My personality is like the bubbles you blow in the air. My main purpose in life is to be like a tree, grow into something you wouldn't believe. It is as if I am as strong as I want to be. When I achieve my goals I feel like I am watering my tree, honey I will be something even if you can't see. I want to share my world with you, honey. Because in my life I feel like a tree. I grow into something but people want to stunt my growth with coffee, but I never let that stop me because my mommy taught me to drink water. If there were three words to sum up my life, they'd be: ce the tree.





*Fiction*

***Middle School Storytellers***

Rebekah Dayton  
Annison Harhay  
Allison Hill  
Kamaya Sanchez  
Ellie Welch

***High School Storytellers***

Deja Acosta  
Piper Bell  
Heaven Boles  
Rylie Ann Clothier  
Gabriella Delgado  
Chisato Jacobson  
Sariyah Jerome  
Sheen Kim  
Christina King  
Jacob Langsner  
Kalei Navalta  
Holly Piper  
Lauren Rose  
Willow Seymour  
Kiara Talley

# Rebekah Dayton

## Middle School Short Story

### In Another Place

The best thing that ever happened to me, was because of a tragedy, my mom deserted my father and me when I was three and then my father became too obsessed with work to even notice me. Consequently, a year later my father passed away and I got sent to an orphanage. I have become friends with three very unique people. First, there is Marinette with curly, light brown hair and piercing green eyes she is the ever logical thinking one in our group, she always has a level head no matter how insane or unbelievable the situation and has gotten us out of some pretty tight spots. Then we have Julian, the defender in the group. Julian is enormous, standing at 6 foot and still climbing, he has a herculean build to him. He was deported to the United States from Asia and he never puts up with bullies. Next up is Sebastian, this carefree bud of mine, is always the jokester. With his wavy blond hair, and sparkling blue eyes, he knows how to keep a situation light and ease the tension between any of us. This group was my lifeline through the first few years at the orphanage. And even though we have Marinette, we always seem to have the easiest times getting ourselves in way over our heads.

The biggest trouble we ever got ourselves into was when Marinette started researching an old folktale about a mysterious island which only appeared once a year that would grant you the answer to your innermost desire. I told her it was not worth the disappointment of finding out it's not real, but she just glared at me and I didn't bring it up again. That is, until that fateful Sunday evening.

Sebastian, Julian, and I we just hanging around the common room when Marinette sauntered up to us and dropped a pile of papers onto the tan coffee table. "It's real," she said and pointed to the stack of papers. After a quick glance I realized she was still going on about the Island of Keely, orphans will believe in anything that gives us hope. "I've done all of the research," she continued in a hurried whisper, "Everybody I've asked has told me that there is always some truth to every story. But I've asked

Miss Cherise, you know the owner of the orphanage, to tell me more about the island. She told me that there was a princess who needed an answer to a question that would determine the fate of her kingdom and she had two options, she decided to risk everything to find the Island of Keely and disappeared for two years. She came back a changed woman, but her kingdom prospered the most under her reign for the first time in generations. I've checked everything and it's all true. I think we should go."

"Not, to put a damper on things," I started and cringed inwardly as I saw a murderous look forming in her eyes, "but I don't think that we should just jump on this crazy idea, and go on some crazy adventure. Not to be rude or anything, but isn't Miss Cherise losing it in her older age? I just don't think we should go on an insane journey because you got some crazy idea from a questionable resource, Marinette." Julian and Sebastian stared at me in shock, while I slumped deeper into the armchair I was currently residing in. Being the logical one was hard.

My thoughts were momentarily interrupted by Julian who said, "I disagree with you Liam, if Marinette says the Island of Keely is real then it is, I don't need anything else to sway my mind. Marinette is the most mentally sound person I've ever met if she says it's real, than it is." I swept a glance around our little circle and sighed, Julian made a fair point.

"You're right," I agreed and Marinette cheered.

"Great," she exclaimed, "here are your packing lists we leave in the morning so get a good night's rest because..."

"Hold your horses," Sebastian interrupted, "what do you mean 'we leave in the morning'?"

She sighed, "Well, when I asked Miss Cherise about the island, she also said that if I was considering embarking on an adventure I could have leave for three months. So I filled out a form for all of us requesting time to go visit abroad. They were signed minutes ago and we will be leaving in the morning. Your welcome, by the way, and enjoy your last night in a comfy bed, because it's the last time you'll be sleeping in one for a while." And without so much as a backward glance she headed towards her room.

We started at each other for a minute before following her example and slowly I started to pack up what few belongings I had. As I lay in bed I contemplated what question I would seek an answer to if the folktale was real. Several questions swirled through my mind, some more inviting than others. Why did my



mom abandon me? Was meeting my friends worth the loss of my father? Is Miss Cherise a crazy psychopath or a blessing in disguise? Eventually, in the chaos of words, I drifted off to sleep.

I woke up the next morning and saw that my room was a mess and confusion washed over me. Then I remembered the night before and groaned. I grabbed my backpack and headed downstairs, and was waved over by Marinette, who was already sitting at a table with Julian and Sebastian studying a map.

“Good morning Sleeping Beauty,” Sebastian called out to me. As I sat down to the table I punched him in the arm, as he chuckled good naturedly. I was quickly caught up in the plan carefully laid out by Marinette. My muscles ached just thinking about all the walking she had planned for us, but sadly it wasn’t the worst I’d ever done.

After the briefing, we had a quick lunch and headed on our way. We walked past the point of where you are absolutely positive your feet will fall off if you take another step multiple times over the next few days until we finally reached our destination.

Stretching off into the distance was a rusty railroad track that looked unsteady. After we stood there for a minute, a high screeching sound pierced our ears. As I studied the foggy horizon, I saw a shape moving towards us. I immediately tensed up ready to fight or flight, whichever response I chose in the spur of the moment. As the mysterious shape moved closer and became more defined in shape and stature, I realized it resembled a small sailboat, with the exception of wheels added on to allow movement on land. After a moment of staring, Marinette moved toward the vehicle and I followed, then the two other boys. After we all piled in, I braced myself for the deafening sound again, but was greeted by almost silence. It would seem that the added weight was just what the cart required. As we continued to move into the distance, a castle like structure appeared out of the gloom. In that moment, I realized, whatever my question, if there was an answer, it lied within the foreboding walls of that building. And I would find it there.





have the question answered by the time they've asked it..."

Blah... Blah... BLAH! We've heard it on repeat at school and everyone just can't wait! Wow! I am amazed by this invention, purely amazed. I'm truly amazed by how many kids aren't smart enough to think about their future as brainwashed humans walking around like they've only gotten 30 minutes of sleep. Really, I'm truly stunned. I thought maybe, some of the kids in this school would be able to think about this. Just because they're in accelerated doesn't mean they're always thinking about their future. And just because they're in regular doesn't mean they're not thinking about it either!

Back to the topic, these so-called "geniuses" that everyone keeps praising, have become addicted to these computers and will only ask the computer questions. If everyone knew about this, I'm sure they would not be so inviting to these computers being installed every 50 feet. I got this information from government files so no one knows about "the thing" except me and their assistants (who have become quite hesitant towards the geniuses might I add). I know what you're thinking, then why not tell people about this incident? Well smart one, I've already done that millions of times. I've written tons of articles for the newspaper saying that this should not happen but they are rejected because of "false information". I got it from official government files, what more do you want? You also might be thinking, 'you couldn't be liable so, why would it be rejected?' well, freedom of the press has been repealed. Yeah, that has been rejected by Mr. President, he doesn't feel everyone should have freedom to speak what they want. So, everything I write has to be monitored to make sure it doesn't show signs of rebellion. I, Grey Asheville, intend to do the opposite of that, I am going to rebel. But not in the way that they expect.

It is only 6 months until the machines arrive, and everyone is overjoyed. The machines don't even need to come to brainwash the human existence because all people talk about these days, is the machine. At the dinner table, Father brings the topic up, again. This is the 5th time today. Once in the morning before school, twice during school, once after school, and once right now. My head is about to explode from all this talk about the machine. Everyone, I mean everyone is talking about how it will 'revolutionize the way we think'. Seriously, am I the only one to think about it in a negative way? Well, I guess I can't ask that question because only one other person I know agrees with me. Luka Panaca is the only person who does. I know what you're



thinking, and the answer is no, we are just friends. He is the only person who thinks that the machine is a terrible idea, and should not be mass produced or produced at all. He is probably the only one who even listens to my ideas. Luka and I have been friends since the first grade, and have always had similar opinions and strong debates with each other. Even though we are in the same grade, he is about a year older than me. While he is 16, I am 15 years old. His skin and curly hair, are as dark as chocolate, but his eyes are a caramel color. Contrary to my abnormal name, my hair is as bright as the moon and eyes as dark as the sea. Luka is always making fun of me because of my eyes. He says, "Your name is Grey, shouldn't your eyes be gray instead of blue?" When I was younger, I did have grey eyes but they changed over time to be blue. My skin, though, is like vanilla ice cream, but lighter. We have always gotten along great, (even as were polar opposites), but now we share a stronger bond because our families are both crazy about the machine. Up to now, no one wanted us to spend time together because he is an American and my family has a Swedish background. My family is thought of as lower class because we are immigrants. Instead of listening to our parents, we just sneak off to the woods and talk about problems. I am now hardly making it through the days because no one will stop talking. I hope that the machine will arrive soon so I don't have to live with this any longer.

Six months have passed, the machine is here, and they are being distributed. My family's machine is scheduled to arrive in three days, and everyone is counting them down. I am sick. I keep asking myself "Why? How can this be happening?" Luka and I have become scared and now avoid school since the machine has been installed on campus. These computers are going to destroy humanity to the point where there probably won't be "humanity" anymore. During the day we go out to the woods and talk about the future.

On the day the machine is scheduled to arrive at my house I leave early in the morning to the river. I meet up with Luka and walk to the river, where the government isn't patrolling the area. On the way there he says, "They've done it, they've really done it." I walk with him in silence because I can't sort out what to say. Finally, words come out, "I know, I know I've lost them, I'm going to lose my family," I say to him quietly.

I utterly despise the government, I am filled with hate, so then why am I holding back tears? They are ruining our lives, to the point where we won't know that they are ruined anymore. I

can't take it anymore, I start quietly crying. "I... just didn't... think... it would...affect... me this much..." I say in between sobs.

"Hey...hey... it'll be okay, you know what is right, and I know it's hard but you will stay strong." he comforted. "I know, it's just going to be so difficult waking up everyday and seeing them going mad," I choked. We proceeded to walk while he used his kind words to comfort me. Once we got to the river we just sat and talked about what our lives would become. Would all humans become living zombies? What would happen when the government found out Luka and I aren't using the machine? I guess the computers will come to find us since they will now rule the world.

As we walked we found some strawberries and devoured them as fast as we possibly could. These days there isn't any foods that you can find in the store anymore that isn't genetically modified. After sitting quietly for some time, Luka and I stood up to walk home. It was silent except for the scarce birds chirping in the distance. The walk home was not my problem, the walk inside my house was.

I stepped inside my silent house. This eerie quietness is frightening me, it was coming today, and my family had been waiting too anxiously for this very day.

As I stepped into the foyer, I didn't see anyone but my beloved dog, Walker. He ran up to me and jumped into my arms. I put him down on the couch and walked into the family room to see if anyone was in there. I already knew that they were probably insane by now. I started into the family room to be stopped by the machine. They blocked off the entry door with it! How was I supposed to see if my family was officially gone or not? After multiple attempts, I found a way to get into the family room with a small crawl space in between the floorboards. Luckily, I was able to find a loose wood panel to get into the family room like I found to get into the underground tunnel. I slowly lifted up the floorboard when I saw it. I saw my family clawing themselves to get a turn at the machine. I cried out... but then covered my mouth quickly and closed the panel so that they would hopefully not be able to hear my tremble. Of course, my older brother heard the noise and walked over to the panel right where I was hiding, and seemed confused. From a small crack, I could see him. His cloudy eyes looked down upon me. What had it done to my family? Once he left, I decided to pop open the floor panel again to make sure I wasn't seeing things. I saw the

most terrifying thing you could possibly see, your own, loving mother tear away the skin of your younger sister. My dad doing the same to my brother. All they cared about was the machine. Disgusted, I close the floorboard, to get out of the crawlspace, and ran into my room. I closed and locked the door so that I could not hear the life they were now living. I would never touch the machine with my own hands. I would rebel and live the life I never thought I would have, in hiding and watching humans slave over the machine while tearing their lives apart. Way to go, geniuses, you have now created an epidemic without a disease. Now, families will be torn apart, while I hide in my room and hear the screams of my family down below. Though I had never expected my life to take this an abrupt turn, I always knew humans had it coming, it was just a matter of time before we found out too much.



Allison Hill  
Middle School Short Story



## The Phantom Hero

My heavy, brown boots stomped down on red and gold leaves as I made my way through the littered sidewalk. The forest was coming into sight, marking the end of a purposeless walk. I kicked an old Arby's wrapper out of the way with one foot as my other foot stepped on a cigarette butt. Stupid smokers and fast-food-eaters: leaving their trash everywhere but the can. I sighed, changing courses and jaywalking across the silent, empty street. My feet took me into a suburban neighborhood complete with look-a-like houses, yellow grass yards and the occasional bike strewn across a driveway. Since it was 6:00 in the evening, most people were inside gathered around a table probably eating dinner... except for two guys smoking what smelled like the new but still illegal drug, Sway. I shoved my hands into my pockets and called out to them.

"You're gonna get in trouble for that." One of the guys turned to look at me and scoffed. He set the cigar down and rolled his eyes, propping his goateed chin on his palm.

"And what are you gonna do about it?" He smirked while his buddy chuckled, high-fiving him. I smirked back, pulling out my cell phone.

"I could call the cops," The two straightened their backs as I waved my phone in the air. "Or I could just take care of you myself." They looked at each other and then back at me before bursting into fits of hysterical laughter.

"Yeah right. You wimpy little girl think that you can take us down? I doubt it." The goateed man shot back, popping the cigar back in his mouth and raising an eyebrow.

"Ah, see you don't know what tricks I've got up my sleeve." I slyly grinned, putting my phone back in my pocket and walking over to them. "I've got quite the illusion to show you." I murmured.

I approached the small TV tray set up in between the two guys. A package of cigars rested on top of the tray along with a lighter. I picked up the package, examining its labels. It was

designed to look like a package of typical, legal Marlboro cigarettes but as I looked closer, there were secret messages written along the ingredients that definitely weren't about how much nicotine was in each package.

"Ah, so you gentlemen have gotten ahold of some Sway. This is extremely dangerous and harmful," I shook my head, making a tsk noise with my tongue. "If you're looking to die young, this is definitely for you."

The two guys shook their heads dismissively in unison. "What exactly is in this that is so dangerous?" Goatee's friend asked, leaning forward in his seat and snatching the cigars from me. I smirked and began to lie about all sorts of chemicals and drugs. I only knew the evil purpose of it. Goatee shook his head again and turned to his friend.

"You know, I think she's lying. I think she's just trying to stir up some trouble." He laughed, an ugly smile planted on his lips.

"If that's really what you think." I shrugged, rolling my sleeves up. Black electricity began to swirl from my fingertips and around the two guys. Both of their eyes widened as the electricity crackled. I shifted the position of my hands and the electricity went up their noses, in their ears and mouths. Mind you, it wasn't actually hurting them. My powers were just giving them a little scare.

"Who... are... you?" The goateed man cried out in between strangled breaths. I smiled and said, "Your worst nightmare." The other let out a scream and yelled to stop. I snapped my fingers at him and his mouth immediately shut. I leaned in real close to Mr. Goatee.

"Now tell me who you're buying these murderous drugs from. I wouldn't recommend lying to me." I waited for the man to answer as he looked at his friend nervously. I slapped his face. "Tell me or I will do something worse!"

"Alright, alright." The man choked out, obviously not wanting to be hurt. "Vernon Havera but he goes by The Wolf. He has a shop set up by the tutoring club on 3rd and 52nd. He does a good business selling these on the internet. That's all I know." Then he added, "Please don't hurt me."

I smiled, satisfied with the information I got. I took the cigar package from the other man and stuffed it in my pocket. I snapped my fingers again and the electricity disappeared back into my veins, leaving the men heaving.

"Thank you so much gentlemen. Now I would suggest not smoking anymore of that death garbage otherwise I really will



call the police." I smirked as they nodded vigorously. Turning on my heel, I left them to shake in their seats.

A week later I found myself standing outside a Vitamart Pharmacy trying to blend in with the common folk. The tutoring club across the street was just closing and the owner wouldn't hang up his phone. His hands moved in wide circles and his fingers curling and pointing to absolutely nothing as he talked excitedly into the phone. After about five more agonizing minutes, the man left in his pristine, silver Nissan. I looked both ways, then darted across the street. Nobody was in my sight so I turned the corner, hoping I wouldn't regret my choices.

The dirty alley was pretty much what I expected. Lights that hung from way up high cast gloomy shadows across the walls. A huge, rusting green dumpster was turned on its back with keep out signs posted on the closed lid. Ripped umbrellas created a sort of roof above the dumpster that seemed to go on forever. An abandoned shopping cart was parked in the corner. I walked forward, cringing as I stepped on pieces of trash and quite possibly a rat carcass.

When I reached the huge garbage can, I took a deep breath and let small bursts of black energy crackle between my fingers. I hid that hand behind my back and entered what seemed to be The Wolf's hideout. This had to be it. With the many encounters I'd had with this man and what I'd heard from others this had to be where he lived. Taking a few steps at a time, I looked around his living space. Pizza boxes, beer bottles and four coolers were spread about the area. A ratty mattress laid in a corner and a lawn chair was by the dumpster. There was no sign of the actual Wolf himself.

Cautiously, I shuffled over to the coolers. I didn't have to open them to know what rested inside of the coolers. The stench of Sway filled my nostrils and I gagged. As I backed away from the obnoxious containers, my foot stepped on something causing my balance to give out. I landed face first on the disgusting ground. Once I regained any composure I had left, I scanned the ground for what caused my fall. My eyes landed on a large dark hole where a sewer cover must've been. My weight must have caused the cover to fall through. I frowned, wondering how my weight could have caused the cover to fall through... unless, the cover wasn't the real solid metal most covers were made of.

Suddenly, I realized why it seemed like the Wolf had abandoned post. He hadn't. Mr. Havera's real hideout was down this sewer hole. I sighed and stood up. Quickly, I turned around



and started to walk away from the wretched site. I squinted, cringing when I got to the corner. Cars drove by and a dog walker gave me a confused look. I sighed, turning around again to face the alley. I had to find this man and stop his treacherous plans. But I didn't want to go down there. I couldn't go down there. Still, my feet brought me back to the opening of the sewer. I would be going down there no matter what I wanted. This was my duty.

Begrudgingly, I climbed down the installed ladder inside the hole. Instantly, a putrid stench hit my nose, causing me to gag again. The bars of the ladder were sticky and weird substances covered the walls. Finally, my feet touched ground. I looked around. Flickering lights were spread about ten feet apart each. As I examined the bulbs, I noticed that they weren't part of the original layout of the system. These lights had been added later, confirming my suspicion. I followed the path of bulbs down an almost everlasting tunnel.

As I descended further into the tunnel, I heard a deep, raspy voice conversing with somebody. That was him. The man I had wanted to defeat since the day I began crime-fighting. This was my victory moment and I couldn't blow it. The rotten smell of Sway was thick, still a putrid stench. Soon, I reached a large, metal door with caution tape pasted onto it. A darkly tinted window sat next to the door and I could barely make out the shapes inside the room. I pressed my ear to the door, listening intently.

"I've already sold 98 tons of it, boss! You'll have America under control in no time!" A quivering voice squeaked, obviously intimidated by whoever he was talking to. I frowned. Oh no, I thought. He's really following through with the plan and succeeding! This didn't sound good. I pressed my hand down on the doorknob and turned it, letting out a sigh of relief when it swung open silently. I crept forward into the huge room, glancing at the various gadgets. A huge wall of screens with security footage playing from various places across the States. The Sway smell worsened as I forged deeper into the lair. The Wolf was over by the screens playing footage. A tall, lanky man stood next to him. They conversed back and forth about evil plots.

"I've told you Ronald, this will work. The mind control drug I put in the Sway is the key to taking over the country. Maybe one day the world. I have another buyer wanting to get the rest of our supply. He's gonna distribute that even further." The Wolf laughed maniacally and Ronald, the tall man, joined in. I

smirked and walked over to a set of computers in the corner. The computer was already logged on, so I scrolled through a list of emails until I found the big buyer the Wolf was talking about. Quickly, I replied, telling the buyer that the Wolf had canceled. I pulled out a black flash drive and plugged it into a slot on the side of the computer. Immediately, the computers sparked and the screens died. I laughed and walked over to the giant tank full of Sway.

“Shut up Ronald, someone has broken in.” The Wolf snarled and I heard him begin to walk around the lair. I pulled a lighter out of my pocket and began to climb up the tank. Once I got to the top of the ladder, I lit a couple sticks of dynamite from my bag and threw it into the open-cover tank. Within seconds, I was running for my life, firing blasts of black lightning at the overhead lights. I passed a power generator and fired bolts at that too, causing all the power to go out. I heard footsteps behind me and soon a hand pulled my shoulder back causing me to stumble.

“Who are you?” The Wolf growled, his words echoing throughout the pitch-black room. I laughed and pulled my hood over my eyes. He growled again and Ronaldo’s hand lit with fire, light cascading across my shadowed face. Nobody would know my identity.

“Like I’ve said before, I’m your worst nightmare.” With that I disappeared out of the sewer and into the shadows like a phantom hero.

# Kamaya Sanchez

## Middle School Short Story

### Untitled

One day in 500 B.C. all the mummies would gather up on the highest pyramid to think of a plan to collect money. One said, "I think we should dress up as people and rob a bank. "But the top boss said that plan sucks." Another one said," We could borrow money from the mummies downtown." But the big boss said" no because they always want they money the next day." Finally someone said," We should start a pyramid scheme." And finally the big boss said" that sounds like a great idea." But as soon as they thought of the idea the mummies fell of the pyramid one by one they were all dead. One survived out of all of them and her name was Jania. She said," I will find a way to get this plan started."

Here we are in the future 3000. So the mummy stayed alive long enough to get the plan started. She said," first I have to find clothes to match the appearance of these people in their time". So Jania went to old navy and found shorts and a tank top. A day later... Ok there is a bunch of people who looks dumb enough to get this plan started. So she pondered and pondered until she said" look at that guy over there he is so dumb he must know his own name. So she walked up to him and said" would you like to earn money instantly and of course that person said yes. But she asked herself" how do I show him he can trust me" and she finally said," Here I will sign a contract that says I will pay you the money" But she was a trickster. The contract she sighed said" you just got pyramid schemed ha-ha". The dumb man of course did not read the contract and he walked away. She kept asking dumb people to dumb people until her.

So as the day went by she had made over \$1,000,000,000 dollars. Until her, and her name was Jazzi. She had looked dumb but on the inside she was a lawyer/police officer the smartest lawyer the world has ever known. So Jania walked up to Jazzi and said would you like to earn money right now on the spot and the lawyer said yes. She knew it was wrong but she could find out if something is going on. So the lawyer gave her the fine and then



Jazzi got the contact.

But what happened was unexpected. Jazzi actually looked at her contact. And then she called Jania back and said” you're under arrest any words that you say could count against you in the court of law”. The mummy could not pay for a lawyer so she got assigned to one. The court day was February 28, 3001. That day was finally here the jouje called recess twice so Jania lawyer said” how could this lady pull off something like that when she has been signing contracts. Then the defined said” I have proof she said this is a contract stating she has been doing a pyramid scheme for the past two days. Then finally the jogja came to a vertex that Jaina is guilty with no probation and will spending the rest of her life in prison.

Ellie Welch  
Middle School Short Story



## The Peculiarity of the Browns

Mr. Steven Brown, Mrs. Margret Brown, and their 16-year-old son Marco Brown lived in a normal town like any other. Mr. Brown worked as a lawyer. Mrs. Brown was a stay at home mom with a degree in law and psychology. Marco was a straight A student who was to graduate from high school two years early, and was already accepted to go to law school, like his parents.

Every morning at 6 o'clock on the dot each family was to take their daily Joy pill. The Browns were firm believers in taking their Joy on time every day. One morning Marco wasn't feeling very well. He slept through the 6 o'clock time so Mrs. Brown set out his Joy for him to take when he got up. When Marco got up he completely ignored his joy and headed to the bathroom, he noticed that everything seemed darker and dirtier than when he had gone to sleep. The walls were covered in dirt and their family pictures seemed sadder than usual; they were standing in front of a bare tree that he had remembered to be very beautiful. When he got to the bathroom, the mirror was cracked and the sink was rusted, when he turned on the tap, the water came out dark brown. He turned it off and backed out of the room and went downstairs into the kitchen where his mother was making lunch. She had a dead mangled cat on the counter her hands were covered in its crimson blood, its entrails and hair were in a bowl to her left.

"Oh Marco you're up, were having chicken for lunch do you want it grilled or fried?" She smiled and he just shook his head and walked hurriedly out of the kitchen into the backyard to the garden. When he stepped outside it smelt of rotten eggs; the garden was brown and all of the fruit was rotten. He saw his father kneeling next to the watermelon, which now was an orange color.

"Does this one look good to you?" his dad held up the biggest and most rotten melon, "your mother wants it for lunch today." Mr. Brown picked the fruit and brought it to the kitchen.

Marco looked around, the world as he knew it was normally

bright and colorful but now everyone else's houses, which were always black and white, were run down and dingy shade of brown. Most of the windows on the houses were broken, the shutters were broken off and the doors were off their hinges. Marco ran into the house and out the front door to look at his house. The white house was now a dirty cream color, their black roof was caved in in the middle, and the whole house seemed to be slanting to the left. He then went back inside and ran up to his room to finally take his Joy. Once he did, his vision blurred for a minute, when his room became clear he walked out into the hallway. The walls were nice again and the family pictures looked how he remembered them. He walked to the bathroom and turned on the sink, the water came out crystal clear. When he went downstairs his mother was cutting up chicken not a cat as he had seen; the watermelon his father had picked was the biggest and freshest he'd ever seen. Before he sat down for lunch he went back to the front of the house to see how it had changed for the better. When he stepped outside and looked up at his large house, he saw that everything was back to normal. The house was once again a beautiful white color.

During lunch he looked at his father and asked in his most serious voice, "Dad what would happen if someone didn't take their Joy." His father looked at his mother, who nodded.

"The last time someone didn't take their Joy, they recorded it in writing. They said that everything looked duller and the world as they knew it had changed. As you know, after the war was a hard time for our great Nation, the Government issued that we all take our Joy at 6 o'clock sharp every day to decrease the chance of another war starting. For 50 years no war has started, the country is a much happier place now." Marco nodded trying to understand what his dad meant.

"What if someone refused to take their Joy?"

"The government would find them and send them to Ellis Island."

"Is that why no one is permitted to go there anymore?" His Farther nodded slowly.

"It's now filled with people who do not wish to enjoy the benefits of being a Joy consumer. When the government was looking for a place to put these bad people they choose Ellis Island."

"They had to add on to it of course, they put 50 acres of steel all around it so the people would have more room around the island to live." His mother cuts in. This said she just stared down



at her chicken trying to make the whole situation clearer for her son, who was asking a lot of questions she thought of too when she was his rebellious age.

“Yes, your mother’s right the island got too small for how many people were being brought there. So they added on to it.”

“Only bad people are sent there Marco. For our sake please don’t be one of the bad people. Joy is good for us, Marco, it helps us stay strong and happy.”

At this one moment, Marco promised himself he would always take his Joy. This experience would haunt him for the longest time; getting so bad he’d wake up in the night covered in a cold sweat. For over 60 years, he always took it. Until he was on his death bed, he hid the Joy he was supposed to take under his pillow. Everything went blurry for a minute, than when he could he saw that the room was as he’d seen when he was a boy. The hospital was a rundown mess just like his house. The bed was a metal table with straps, and the window which had had a view of the lovey city was boarded up.

The IV that he thought was putting medicine in his body was pumping a bright green liquid in his veins. He pulled it out and put a bit of it on the tip of his finger then licked it off. It tasted like a mixture of green Jell-O and vomit. He spit it out and stood, walking wobbly out of the room and down the hall. Everything was moldy brown. He walked to a large window at the back of the hall and looked out. What he saw made his old, weak heart stop. The city was like an apocalypse scene, the buildings were half-broken and rusty, the trees were all dead, and the whole city was a rusty weedy mess. He fell to the floor and shook uncontrollably for a few seconds before he went completely still. His eyes glossed over and his breathing came to a rough stop.

On 18 May, 2063, Marco Francisco Brown was officially dead. In his last moments he had mustered a smile that stuck on his face; at the realization that the world that he’s known, his whole country, was one big lie, all held together by a small pill.

Deja Acosta  
High School Short Story

## Untitled

"Tell me about him," he said.

"About who?" She replied with confusion.

"The one who really broke your heart, how he did it and such." he asked while he blew out his smoke.

"Well, he wasn't my first love nor I wouldn't really call him a "love" for what kind of shit he did to me. He was the type of guy any girl would fall head over heels for. His charm and his wittiness made him who he was when I met him. His curls were a thing of beauty and the way he dressed made me all "googly eyes" all over him. He had it made for him; the family, friends, girls and his money. But what made me really fall for him wasn't the money or his charm, it was probably the way he made me feel special when we talked.

He made me feel like I was his whole goddamn world. Like I was his sun in the sky and the moon at night. But somehow, there wasn't always sunshine and rainbows.

We fought and argued way too many times with each other constantly every day. I guess he took it as a joke and i took it seriously. I didn't want to believe he was talking to other girls at the time, or well I hope it did not happen.

I guess you can say we had trust issues at the time when we met. There are days where I'm doing good, like spending time with family or friends. But that one moment if I were to hear his name or his favorite song on the radio my heart breaks down and I think about him nonstop. My good nights turn into bad nights and the liquor in my throat begins to burn whenever I say his name. I never started smoking until he left without me in his arms and now even my lungs are sad. To this day, I don't hate him or I'm not sad anymore over him. I just wonder if he's breaking another poor innocents' girl's heart just like how he broke mine."

Piper Bell

High School Short Story

## Untitled

"My tongue can extend a foot out of my mouth."

The corner of his mouth twitched into a smirk. "Really now?"

"Just humor me."

He nodded, his face still a picture of sarcastic interest. "So what, you can shoot your tongue out like a frog?"

"No, it rolls out of my mouth and gets longer."

"And what do you do with it?"

I smiled at him, eyes shining.

"Lemme show you."

I flicked my tongue through my lips, the muscle extending, flopping against my chin.

I grabbed him by the shoulder, my eyes crazed and bloodshot, pupils small.

I licked upwards, my course tongue flapping up and tracing the side of his face.

My tongue flicked back, rolling into my mouth, the flesh dissolved behind clenched teeth, tinted red.

My tongue had ripped that strip of his flesh off, blood gushing out through the gap in his face, leaving a thin layer of tissue, wrapped around the skull, his teeth now visible through his cheek.

He screamed.



# Heaven Boles

High School Short Story

## Little Ghost Girl

I've begun to see a ghost in my house. She's five or ten or twelve. I couldn't say just from the glances I've let myself see of her. At night, while I am staring into the darkness I hear the door whine as she comes into my room. I shut my eyes hard when I feel her scrawny body crawl over me. She joins me beneath the covers and curls up beside me with her forehead against my back. She's scared of the dark. I hold my pillow over my head and draw my feet further into the mess of blankets. I pretend I don't hear her. She knows I see her though because I look away when she looks at me; I stiffen beneath her touch.

In the morning when she is sitting at the dining table waiting I crawl deeper into my sheets. Today she got tired of waiting. I felt a small hand on top of me as she gently tried to wake me. But I fight and dig my oily face deeper into my pillow where it's dark. I continue my broken dream again. Hours later I finally decide to wake up. The light is spilling across my bed and catching on dust in the stale afternoon air. I pull back the sheets and she is there again. It must be because I'm alone. She likes to hang around when I'm all alone. She sits next to me and does everything I do less heavily. When I begin my trudge downstairs she is trailing behind me scooting her butt down every step and asking if I'm going to make pancakes.

I pour steaming water into a mug full of dry leaves and sit in a corner taking bites of a stale biscuit. That's when I see the other ghosts: her ghost mother and ghost brothers. They hang over each other's shoulders and argue about who cooks the best egg. They are just children. Eggs are the only thing they can cook. Their mother sits with them watching television and their father is off at work in these sunny hours. At the table the little ghost lays her head on her arms like a pillow. She's waiting for her mother to finish making breakfast. I go into the kitchen. I put my cold mug into the sink of other half full mugs. They spill onto the counter like maggots. I know I should clean them before my father comes back.

But when I hear him at the door I scurry into my room. Downstairs I hear keys drop onto the counter and the news comes on the television. The family moves around the father calculatingly. They don't get too close but they don't need to hide. She throws her arms around the bent man at his beckoning and he returns the gesture with a light kiss on her temple that she doesn't like.

The little ghost tries to feel comfortable with her father but doesn't feel any warmth from him as with her mother. I hear him talking to them about the mess over the blaring television. He tells her to clean up the kitchen irritably. He throws cups around the sink and calls her disgusting. "How can you live like this?" She washes the dishes and her brothers help her. Her mother tells her father to calm down.

After I get out of the shower, when I wipe off the water that blurs my image, I see her again. I see her vibrant face rotting. I see her jubilation crushed under my heavy frown. Her eyes were so bright like the sun shining through low hanging leaves. I can't look her directly in those eyes that remind me of a better time. I put my hands up to the mirror and push. I cover her swollen eyes with my thumbs and just push. I try so hard to gouge out her eyes through the mirror that my flesh comes back pierced with glass. I broke the girl.

That night too she comes stumbling through the dark and launches herself into my bed forgetting any violence I had done to her. She says "I'm scared of the dark. When's mommy coming home?" I tell myself she's long dead. Despite this her presence still prompts me to withdraw my feet deeper into the blankets.

There's a ghost in my house. She's as dead and gone as her family who have fallen out of her life. She used to be able to stand in her father's gaze and tell herself it was okay. But I'm not a little ghost girl who needs her mom to protect her from the dark. I just don't smile like she does. I don't let him kiss my temple. The ghost of who I was is cracked in bloody pieces stuck into my fingertips and though I'm still living in her corpse the little girl that used to cherish this place is dead. As I am now I don't need her mother or brothers. I'm not scared.

Rylie Ann Clothier  
High School Short Story

## The Start of Something

There were quite a few things Boni undoubtedly knew about life. She knew life wasn't fair and everything had a price. Boni knew that the easy way isn't always the best way, but it's okay to ask for help. Most of all, Boni knew that the world was filled with both good and bad people; she just had to keep the ones she cared about close and safe. Boni also knew that her two new friends were either going to kill each other or end up killing themselves.

Boni was new to her school in every way that mattered; hardly anyone knew her, could recognize her, or remember any moments that may be potentially embarrassing. She would have been an item of interest for the rumor mill if it weren't for the student who actually was new to the high school. A boy no one had ever heard of changed schools just before he started senior year. The reason why was still a mystery to everyone when Boni first encountered him.

The blonde girl moves through the hallway quietly. A few greetings are sent to those who call out, but she is otherwise undistracted until a tall boy with azure eyes stumbles into her path. He manages to catch himself, but all of his things end up scattered across the floor.

A small, polite smile grows on Boni's face, "Oh, let me help."

"Thank you so much, you really don't have to do this," a grateful look is sent from the brunette.

"It's no problem really," the gentle look in the girl's cognac eyes shifts into mild curiosity, "I'm Boni by the way. Who are you?"

"I'm William, William Lanford. It's nice to meet you," William states sheepishly.

"The pleasure is all mine, William," the two of them finish gathering the books leading the blonde to stand, "I hope I'll see you again, but I have to go. I'm glad we got to talk, though." Wide blue orbs blink and follow Boni's path, "We'll definitely be seeing each other again."

Boni just turns and sends a wide smile over her shoulder



before continuing on her way.

Boni's first encounter with the new student was sure to leave ripples later on. So many that it may throw him off course entirely. However, he was more than happy to meet the friendly girl. William Lanford could no longer play a fool to his whims alone. He was not the only one who felt the weight of this new loyalty.

Boni was new to her school in every way that mattered, but she wasn't actually new at all. Boni had been going to that same high school for as long as she had been in high school. In fact, she had been in the same schools as most of her peers since elementary school. She would have been remembered and recognized by the people at the school if it weren't for the other person who was paid attention to. A girl everyone knew but didn't like all that much. She constantly grabbed the attention of those around her for her due to her abhorrence of their society's bedrock. Her revulsion at the very thing many practically worshipped caused quite the controversy. Nothing much had changed since Boni first met this girl, not by the time they reunited at least.

Boni continues her trek through the halls, arriving at the theater. The room is vacant of everyone except a frazzled teacher who appeared to be leaving.

The teen approaches the professor, "Excuse me Mr. Darhill, I have those copies you needed."

"Thank you, Boni. You are a lifesaver! I'll write you a note for your next class," Mr. Darhill looks around for a pen.

"No need," the blonde responds, "I have a free period this hour. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Oh, good. See you tomorrow, Boni. Have a good day," the teacher rushes out of the room.

Boni moves backstage and leaves her backpack. She begins to clear an area for herself. Props are moved out of the way, and the bright-eyed girl sits on a ledge that leaves her above the stage. A peaceful look settles on her face as she grabs random script and begins to read it.

"I hadn't realized this stage was taken," a cold, nearly emotionless voice calls out, "I guess I'll be leaving."

Boni looks up in surprise to see a classmate of hers standing at the front of the stairs, "Oh, hello Grace. You don't have to go; there's more than enough room for both of us to be here."

"Thanks. It's been awhile since I've been to a theater," Grace slides her dark hazel eyes around the room, "Boni, right? What

are you doing here?”

“Yeah, I’m Boni. I like it on stage, backstage really. I like being surrounded by all of these things that tell such amazing stories,” Boni looks around the room with a smile, “That’s a little dorky, isn’t it. Anyways, I didn’t think you would recognize me.”

“We’ve been in the same school since sixth grade, and you’re one of the few people who don’t outright avoid me. Of course I know who you are,” the brunette moves onto the stage and sits down.

Boni nods in acceptance, “That makes sense. So, what are you doing here? You said you haven’t been in a theater in a while.”

“Well, I used to go to the stage whenever I wanted to escape. The stage is one of those places where the real world doesn’t matter so much. I’m no actor, but I can appreciate the allure,” Grace pats the ground almost fondly.

“It’s a wonderful place,” light eyes are hidden behind lids, “The theater, I mean. It’s a wonderful place in an okay world.”

Dusky hair is swept out of a pensive face, “It’s only wonderful because there is something out there that isn’t so great.”

Boni giggles, “You’re so confrontational. If it weren’t for sadness we wouldn’t know joy. If it weren’t for evil, we’d never have good. If it weren’t for the typical and nasty parts of the world, how could there be wonder. It’s all sacrifices and appeasements.”

“People are willing to pay too much, sometimes. They go for the easy route instead of working for what they want,” the statement is clearly stained with disgust.

“And so the price is met; the deal is struck. There isn’t much we can do about the rest of the world, but that’s why you’re here, isn’t it?”

A bark of laughter escapes Grace, “That would be it. I hate the way the world works, and I’ve given up on changing it. What can you do?”

“I guess all you can do is make your own path and leave it for others to follow,” the smile in Boni’s words is clear.

Grace nods, “That sounds about right. Thanks, Boni.” Boni left her brush with the problem student well off. Both of them were pleased with the other and ready to face the world head on. Boni knew she had just made a friendship that would last for as long as she knew of the other senior. Neither could



change much of the other, but both saw someone that could be fallen back on if it were ever needed.

Boni wasn't new to her school, not at all. She was a senior ready to graduate after completing this last year. Boni was a girl who wasn't known by many and hadn't made any real friends until this last year. Boni was going to keep them close and do all she could for them, even if all she could do was keep them from killing each other. Both William and Grace were idealists; they had very specific views on the world that were set in stone. Grace didn't believe in taking a shortcut for anything; nothing you can get that easy would be worth the price. William praised these bypasses as the only way to get what you wanted. Boni didn't much care either way, but she was caught in between these brutal clashes of doctrine. It was one of those confrontations that solidified her role with her friends.

Boni is calmly walking away from the school as the sun sets behind her. The blonde's face is calm, and she's enjoying the remnants of the sun. With not a single sign of hurry, the girl walks towards her home. Everything was going smoothly until the snarl of a familiar voice grabs her attention.

"So you would give up everything for a taste of glory?" hazel eyes burn with indignation.

A voice soaked with anger returns, "And you wouldn't give up everything when there was something you wanted that bad?"

Boni turns a corner; her new position allows her to see Grace and William at each other's throats. The blonde was by no means surprised by the sight of this. School may have just started, but the idealists had gained a reputation for arguing viewpoints almost every time they were in the same room as the other. However, these quarrels would swiftly fall into less than pleasant territory that no one wanted to see. It was due to this that Boni decided to step in.

Grace bristles at the boy, "There is nothing I could ever want that is worth everything."

"Well, Freckles. Then you obviously don't want anything worthwhile," venom filled blue eyes took a much lighter tone when they rest upon Boni, "Oh, hey Boni. I wasn't expecting to see you here."

"Neither was I. It seems we all share a similar path home, unless you've gotten so caught up in your argument that you didn't notice where you were going," the blonde says the accusatory words quite gently.

Dusty brown hair is blown out of green eyes, "We were



absorbed in our little disagreement, but I at least knew where I was going.”

Before William can retort to the barb, Boni intervenes again, “That’s good. We’ll probably be seeing a lot more out of each other, then. I’m glad. You two are both great people, and I’m pleased we’ll be spending more time together.”

Another glare is shot from azure orbs before a breezy laugh is released, “Yeah, I guess it would be bad if something happened to one of us then. Fine, we- no I’ll play as nice as I can for your sake.”

“I’ll do the same, just this once,” Grace shakes her head, “I’m going home. See you later, Boni. See me in your nightmares, William.”

“Bye, then. I’m heading off, too. Take care, William,” Boni’s smile is pleased.

“I will. Be sure not to, Grace,” William takes off in a different direction than the girls as they all leave the scene.

Boni was proud to have her friends. Boni was well aware of how stubborn they would be, but at she knew that they wouldn’t go too far. If nothing else, she could always step in, and she would. Boni had two new friends who she would be sure to take care of.

There were quite a few things Boni undoubtedly knew about life. She knew life wasn’t fair and everything had a price. Boni knew that the easy way isn’t always the best way, but it’s okay to ask for help. Most of all, Boni knew that the world was filled with both good and bad people; she just had to keep the ones she cared about close and safe. Boni also knew that her two new friends were either going to kill each other or end up killing themselves. What Boni didn’t know was how much of a mess they were going to drag her into.

# Gabriella Delgado

## High School Short Story

### Untitled

Matt didn't want to believe it. He couldn't believe it. Derek was still alive; he was sure of it. Nothing bad had happened to him. Nothing at all.

He had told himself this repeatedly. But he couldn't manipulate his heart. He couldn't lie to the aching pain in his chest, the pain that caused him to cry and shake every single second that he was awake.

No. He couldn't believe it; because believing it meant accepting it was the truth. Believing meant that Derek was actually dead, and he just couldn't.

He missed his warm touch that emitted from his body whenever the other would snake his hands around Matt's slim waist. He missed his adorable laughter that never failed to make Matt himself smile and laugh. And he missed the kisses full of passion that Derek would always, always, give to him-- telling him that he loved him without even using words or syllables. He missed everything about him. And he wanted him back so badly.

But it was impossible. He had screwed up. It was all his fault. His fault that Derek was gone. His fault that the person he loved had slipped out of his strong hold. His fault that Derek couldn't open those star-filled eyes once more.

Matt hardly ate his meals. He almost never left his sheets and pillows. He never was aware what day it was, or the time. His life seemed almost like a black and white canvas. Nothing was new, nothing was interesting. Nothing here was Derek.

He didn't feel a purpose anymore in this lifetime. This painted canvas had no color, no meaning, no warmth. This life wasn't a life anymore, it was a television screen stuck on static.

Matt would always find himself upon his apartment complex rooftop. Standing near the edge, looking down upon the walking pedestrians and passing vehicles. He never knew for how long he would be standing there at that edge, watching the sunrise and sunset each and every day. It felt almost that gravity was pulling him closer, the screams of his consciousness plugging his ears.

Derek. Derek. Derek.

The edge didn't feel as terrifying as it did the very first time they had been up there for their second date. He remembered his lover's mocking words, matching perfectly with his hand somely sly smirk. Now as he looked out, it seemed almost inviting to him.

His eyes landed down to the dimly lit screen of his phone, still locked but showing his wallpaper of the person he cared for most. His heart clenched as he felt his eyes begin to water. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. This was it.

No more painful hours of crying. No more cold and restless nights. No more being alone in the home that used to fill him with such comfort and joy. In just a few moments he would be with him.

One-step. He felt the harsh wind slap his damp hair against his forehead. Another step. He could feel his heart pounding against his chest. Just one more step. He opened his lips once more as he tilted towards the street.

"Please. Let me be in your embrace once more."



Chisato Jacobson  
High School Short Story

## Populus Tremuloides

The first thing I heard when I came here was her voice. Like the waves lapping the shore, her sounds gently enveloped me in its soothing tones, in its steady waves that washed over me with therapeutic comfort. Serene and good-natured, glowing and energetic, her melodies symbolized all the light had to offer.

I came from a dark place. I was born in the dark and lived the beginnings of my life devoid from warmth and brilliance. It was as if I had never felt the light of a single day or even a minor ray. Yet coming here changed that. Reaching her changed all that my life had been up to that point. She was the dawn that had broken an eternity's night.

It was this sun that I first saw when I arrived at the edges of her pristine domain. Before all the other newfound wonders that I saw, it was she that caught my attention. Her radiance extinguished the darkness that had previously dominated my being. With a single glance, a single drift, any movement she made gave off glimmers of hope and brightness that charmed all things shadowed into the fires of life. Even during times when it seemed as though the light had left our lives, she reflected us the stars that continued to glow brighter in dark as her light shimmered to led us all through the night.

It was later when I learned that she had Superior in her name. No other name could she have been given that would have been more fitting. Her name itself embodied all that she was. Superior. But this only further emphasized how unattainable she was.

She was far above anything that I ever was or could hope to become. She was so beautiful, so influential, so powerful and eminent that my single lone existence could not even be a shadow beneath her presence. All throughout the community and even those who lived beyond were dependent upon her. Certainly I was not alone in this reverence. Her popularity far exceeded anyone—or anything—that existed here. Any being with life adored her. To those of us here, she was what maintained our lives. With all the attention lavished on her, under no conceivable

circumstances could or would she regard me. Nearly without doubt was I certain that she knew not of my existence. Why would she, the single most powerful presence in our society, ever take note of me, when there were others who were taller, grander, more magnificent than one such as I? I was merely another one of the masses that blended in with the trees, unidentifiable amongst so many others who seemed to resemble me.

Lack of acknowledgement will not shake my feelings from their roots. Even after many years go by and the change in seasons reflects both on her body and my appearance, even if the entirety of all I continue to simply and solely be is an aspen tree bordering her shores, I will always admire Lake Superior. To her I may modestly be a tree, yet to me Lake Superior is what gives me life.

Sariyah Jerome  
High School Short Story



## Dreamcatchers

Every child is given a dreamcatcher when they are born, which is placed inside of them for the purpose of trapping nightmares.

So, what happens to all of those nightmares caught in the dreamcatcher? How many are in there? Is it like a balloon that will burst if stretched too much? What would happen then if the nightmares escaped - would they all come back at the same time and frighten the children more than ever?

Well, there are those known as Dream Hunters, whose job it is to empty the dreamcatchers before they overflow and escape. Throughout the night, they go into children's bedrooms while they sleep and carefully remove the nightmares and consume them. However, sometimes a Dream Hunter loses control of the nightmare's powerful dark magic. So, what happens then?

I am the Dream Eater. My job is to get rid of the Dream Hunters when this happens. I don't get rid of all of them, of course, only the ones who cannot contain the dark power. There are a few senior Dream Hunters who have succeeded at controlling nightmares or have discovered new ways of disposing of them so they won't be released among the children again. But, there will always be some Dream Hunters who won't survive the ongoing battle.

"This is going to hurt . . . a lot," I said as I casually flipped my knife in my hand.

"Whatever, just hurry and get this over with before I shift again," panted out the Dream Hunter beneath me, the darkness beginning to take over.

I smirk, plunge the knife down, creating a long slit down his front as a haunting nightmare slithers throughout his body. I slip my knife back into its holster before reaching down and taking hold, slowly pulling it out, little by little. Once it is free of the Dream Hunter, it writhes and flings itself about as I use my hands to mold the darkness into the size of a volleyball. Holding it close to my chest, I look down at the fallen Dream Hunter and whisper



reverently, "Thank you for your service. You did your job well and have earned a well-deserved rest." Then I am silent for a moment, honoring our fallen soldier. With a sigh, I bring the nightmare to my lips and pause, just the briefest of moments, before I begin to suck the dark magic into myself, relishing in the feeling of replenishing my own power.

The dark magic from nightmares doesn't affect me. I feed off the magic, my own power having the same dark properties, which is exactly why I cannot empty the dreamcatchers. If I were to try, the nightmares would escape due to my weakness and inability to subdue them. When a Dream Hunter consumes it, the nightmare tires out in its effort to take back control. Although tired itself, the nightmare's dark magic is still powerful and fully replenishes me.

Glancing down, I watch as the Dream Hunter's body turns to sand, the breeze blowing it off the roof. This will probably be my last meal for the next few days.

More and more Dream Hunters are sharing ideas and endangering my job. They don't seem to understand my part in our world. They only see me as a threat that is slowly picking them off. I have been around since before the Dream Hunters came into existence. There was a time, long ago, when the first few Dream Hunters appeared, that they were unsure as to their purpose. Because of their inability to control the nightmares, I had to kill them all - but one. That survivor passed his skills on to novice Dream Hunters, again, and again, until he finally died, leaving the next generation to teach the new ones, and so on.

Even though I have hunted the weaklings down, their community still thrives, and their numbers grow, gaining in strength and knowledge. If only I had paid better attention.

Several weeks later . . .

As it turns out, quite some time has passed before the tinkling of a small bell catches my attention. I can tell it is coming from far to the west. I know it is farther than I would have otherwise wanted, but it means another Dream Hunter is dying. I know I have to go, but I also know that if I do, I may not make it in time. You see, I am dying, too. Without the constant flow of nightmares from the Dream Hunters, I have been slowly fading away. If it is closer than I think it is, I'll be okay. But if it's too far away, then I'm a goner. Oh well, I don't have much to lose anyway, I guess. If I don't go, I will still die before the end of the week.

With my mind made up, I begin to run. I run as fast as I can,

leaping off the roof and onto the next. I could run on air, but I am already using up my power so as to enhance my speed.

Using it to run on nothing would be my demise.

I am close. I can feel it. The question is, “Am I close enough?” I’ve been running for three days now. My body has gone numb, and I can’t even feel my power anymore. If I wasn’t still running so fast, I would think that I had already run out. I can’t hear that soft little bell either. Looking down at my hands, I see where my fingers are supposed to be, but my fingers are beginning to fade away. What am I supposed to do? I am out of time. I can see the Dream Hunter, just a few buildings out in front of me. My steps falter. My gaze jerks downward to see that my feet are now beginning to fade also.

“I can make it, just a little farther!” I chant to myself. The Dream Hunter is one jump away. I can make it. Gathering my thoughts, I steel my resolve and jump, landing hard on the other roof. Moving to get up, my body fails me, my strength now fading too quickly. There isn’t enough power left in me to get up.

“I’ve been waiting for you . . . .” Fear shoots through me as I struggle to look up into the eyes of the Dream Hunter. “I’ve been waiting for you to finally find me and fall into my trap.” He presses his foot against my temple. “I’m not dying - I faked it all!” he says triumphantly, as he shoves my head away and sneers down at me. “You’re the one who’s dying, and I’m just helping by making it quick for you,” he snickers, reaching down and slipping my knife from its holster. “This is going to hurt . . . a lot!” he laughs, running his fingers along the blade.

“How dare you!” I pant. “You are going to get yourself killed!” I yell, using the last of my strength trying to convince him. “I won’t be here when all the others begin to shift, and chaos ensues.”

“Exactly. Now, if you please, I have places to be, and I’ve waited long enough.” He plunges the knife down without warning, taking my breath with it. “Thank you for your service. You did your job well and have earned a well-deserved rest.”

I glare at him with all I have left in me, the light beginning to fade as my eyes glaze over. I can feel myself quickly shifting to sand . . . my body no longer my own.

“Farewell, Dream Eater.”



Sheen Kim  
High School Short Story



## Untitled

“CATFISHED: ELDERLY MAN FOUND CHEATING ON WIFE,” Belle mouthed, reading the two-year old Brea Journal. She tricked an old man looking for some loving. She had profited \$40,000 off of that scheme; the old guy had been absolutely loaded.

“VICTIM OF ROMANCE SCAMMER LOSES THOUSANDS,” screamed the cover page of the Orange County Register. Belle hadn’t existed then—she was Eliza, a wealth addict who hadn’t realized it—and she fell for an ignorant young man who gave her everything she wanted, while she stole it all and fled.

“SUSPECT IN LOVE FRAUD,” hissed the OhLA! magazine. That was when the media's damn hound nose finally sniffed her out. She began to realize none of it was worth it anymore.

It was a Friday night after a failed date with another entitled scumbag. When his shrimp scampi arrived, she shoved the entire bowl into his face, letting the shrimp swim atop his skin in a river of pasta. She spit on his Cucinelli shirt and swore to herself that she wouldn’t give up her dignity or feelings for wealth. Her life was in her hands.

So Eliza hopped onto that red-eye flight without a regret, and when she landed in the night air, she was Belle.

And Belle lived for love, not money.

She savored the scent of the city. The lights of the buildings flickered on and off.

Someone yelled down the street for a cab. The multicolored lights of the city blended together into a crescendo of color. She absorbed the scenes of brightly lit stores filled with people shopping... of crowded sidewalks, of a group of roaring drunks exiting a bar in a haze of alcohol and happiness—

“This is your place, right?” asked the driver.

The building was plain, a midget among giants. “Yes. Thank you,” she said, paying him.



She slowly grew used to the heartbeat of the city. At her modeling job, her soft dark brown hair was groomed into a short cut, contouring her smooth pointed face. Her soft lips were painted as they worked around her petite nose, complimenting her double-lidded, chocolate brown eyes.

Her previously empty apartment gained a small bed, a cheap TV, and a couch and table thanks to Craigslist. It was... home.

She met him at the club. The lights roared around her, the thumping bass louder than her own heartbeat. She spun around, and she found herself so hopelessly lost in his hazel eyes. They danced. Suddenly, he threw her up in the air with immense strength, and she felt herself floating. She looked down at the flashing lights and the dancing people and his smile fixated on her as she fell back down, landing in his arms. He ran a calloused hand through his sweaty black hair. He reached up and tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear. The hair on the back of her neck rose.

She headed home that night focused on thoughts of a person rather than the city. As she washed her face that night, she smoothed back her hair and told her reflection, "Stay away from the money." Staring at herself, she unlocked her phone with trembling hands and called him.

A couple of months passed in a pink haze—she truly fell in love for the first time.

It was a stupid butterflies-in-your-stomach, pink-on-your-face kind of love... an immature breathless-greetings, heart-on-fire type of love and Belle savored every moment of it. She had been so starved for genuine affection.

Instead of buying one vanilla latte, she bought two and delivered it over to Mikael's office. He happily worked for a famous magazine as a photographer.

She stayed away from asking about money. Belle felt that she would return to her old ways if she was given the chance. Abstinence was the best solution. She loved him so much--she couldn't possibly do that to him.

He kissed her, smoothing down her white fur coat. "Hey, sunshine."

She kissed him back. "I haven't seen you in forever."

He laughed. "It's only been six hours."

"Too long," she giggled.

He was a cup of hot cocoa on a freezing day. They looked at cherry blossoms in the garden, watched sunsets curled up together in one blanket, ducked into alleyways during storms.

The city never seemed brighter.

She was heading over to his office to meet up with him after a day of modeling as an "oriental" beauty (whatever that meant), when a familiar piano melody floated out of her bag. She unlocked her phone and looked at the screen—it was an unknown number. Instinctively, she answered.

"Hello," she started. "Who is this?"

"This is Eliza Yoon, correct?" The voice was altered, mechanical to the point of it being unnerving. Her eyes widened. The voice continued on. "You can kill Mikael Nikolaev and receive ten million, or you can die by his hand."

She laughed at the absurdity and brevity. Mikael had mentioned to her that, as a controversial photographer, he often received death threats for revealing the seedy underbelly of the city. "This is stupid. Don't call me again. Good-bye." She hung up, pissed at the caller's false accusations. Mikael couldn't possibly have done a thing—unless his crime was trespassing for photographs.

When night rolled around, she had completely forgotten about the call. They smoked in his apartment. She draped herself across his legs, taking a sip of champagne. "It's almost your birthday!" she yelled, slurring her words. "We should celebrate tomorrow!"

"Sure, sure," he chuckled, playing with her hair. "Celebrate me getting one year closer to death?"

"Always," she whispered. She had meant to tell him about the strange call, but the alcohol drowned any thought. The night was full of laughter and love. The moon grinned on

Belle had a plan: she would surprise him by placing an invitation to an extremely exclusive Italian restaurant on his couch. She had seen him reach into the third crack in the sidewalk with a pocketknife and dig up a key. She managed to pry it out.

His house was eerily silent, the fireplace off and the couch dirty—but more importantly, she had to pee. The bathroom door was closed.

She opened the door and froze, her hand quivering on the handle. There was someone in the tub.

Red dripped from the sides of the tub into a growing puddle.

Despite her screaming instincts, she took a step forward. The tub was filled to the very top with red. A pale, slender hand peeked out over the edge of the porcelain—a grotesque reminder that it was a young girl.



She approached, drawn by a visceral horror.

The head on the side of the tub lolled over to look at her. If her face had been recognizable before—it wasn't anymore.

Her hair and teeth were missing, her eyes no more than two milky white balls embedded in her head. There was an indent on the top of her head as if someone had smashed her skull in, a bruise around one of her eyes. Blood trickled from her nose and into her gaping mouth. The girl was bathing in herself. Belle felt the bile in her mouth. Her nose wrinkled. The strong metallic stench of blood came emanating from the tub, mixed with the disgusting odor of rotten meat. Belle backed up, horrified. She put her hands over her mouth, trying to keep from vomiting.

In silence—adrenaline pumping—she closed the bathroom door, locked the front door, and replaced the key. She felt like prey running from an unknown predator.

She took the quickest route home.

There was a box waiting at her front door. She grabbed it and walked in, sitting at the couch with her head in her perfectly manicured hands.

Silently, she speed-dialed Mikael.

“What’s wrong, baby?” came his concerned reply.

“I’m really sorry, Miks... I'm not feeling well,” she lied. “I feel horrible. I know it’s your birthday tomorrow, and I wanted to celebrate today, but I have a horrible stomachache...”

“No, no. It’s fine. Do you need me to come over? Call the doctor for you?”

“I’ll be okay if I take some medicine and sleep... you don’t have to come over,” she persuaded him.

“Alright, but I’m going to call you in a couple of hours, okay? If you don’t pick up, I’m coming over.”

“Sure,” she said through gritted teeth.

“Oh!” He sounded excited. “I know! You get out of work at around noon tomorrow, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Come by my place! I’ll take you up to the rooftop of the building—trust me, it’s the most beautiful thing you’ll ever see.” She forced a laugh despite a growing sense of dread. “Okay, I’ll try.”

“Feel better. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

The box held a \$10,000 Louis Vuitton purse. She unclasped it gingerly. There was a thick stack of bills inside. She counted



them with shaky breaths, shaky hands. One million dollars.

There were also Polaroid's; as if she needed more proof! In both the pictures, a knife was in his hands— bodies at his feet. Mikael stared at the camera, his eyes glowing in the exposure. She quietly set the money and pictures aside, mind whirling. Belle held her face over the purse and vomited, ruining it. It was his birthday.

He stood on the edge of the rooftop, dangerously close to the fenceless edge. "I LOVE YOU, BELLE YOON," he shouted into the skyline. She rigidly smiled, coming next to him and cupping her hands around her mouth.

"MIKAEL NIKOLAEV," she yelled across the rooftops, facing forwards. His bright smile widened. "WHY DID YOU KILL HER?"

His face paled suddenly, his smile fading. He looked at her, hazel eyes dawning with horrific recognition.

With a burst of strength, not so unlike the one he had thrown her up at the club with, she pushed him forwards. His face morphed into sheer, deadly panic.

Rather than floating upwards as she had, he fell downwards. She silently watched his body descend, his hands scrabbling for the air as if he could grab some invisible ladder. She heard a dull thud as he hit the sidewalk, completely still.

The world went silent, as if mourning the loss.

And as quickly as the silence had started, it stopped.

He deserved it— she tried to convince herself. He was a murderer.

She looked down. Passersby simply flowed around his corpse like water around a rock in a river.

Her cheeks were wet.

She lit a cigarette a week later on the same rooftop. Her feet dangled off the edge of the building, over a wicked 25-story fall. The smoke drifted lazily up into the deepening pink-red sunset; a ghost of her past.

She ran her fingers through a stack of coarse bills. She had received a large duffle bag, filled with exactly \$9,000,000. Money for love. A few bills were stained red, accompanied by a metallic smell. The girl in the bathtub rose to her mind.

She could quit her job. Buy a penthouse. Fly to Switzerland. But what was the point without him? The world was open, but she had locked herself in a cage.

Yeah,—money, not love, she tried to tell herself. But with increasing dread, she realized that she had made the wrong

choice. She didn't need the money! She was afraid! She didn't want to die! But she had loved him! She had really loved him! She threw a handful of bills over the edge. They floated adrift for a moment, then dove to the ground like green birds.

Mikael's body was gone.

The smell of blood festered. She felt calm, exhaling a puff of smoke. She was no different from the poor girl in the bathtub, she figured.

Eliza had spent so much time trying to make her life better than she had lost the reason for her life in the first place. She emotionlessly took the cigarette out of her mouth and threw it down, watching the embers extinguish themselves before the thing disappeared in the distance.

She followed it.

# Christina King

## High School Short Story

### Untitled

When you were a child, were you afraid of the dark? Were you afraid of the monster under your bed? Many children are. They may spend their waking hours running, climbing, and playing without a care in the world, but once bedtime comes around, kids suddenly fear the very bed they hid under during a game of hide and seek. Many children claim to see monsters in the darkness of their bedrooms. This is the story of how I came face to face with one of those monsters.

My name is Rhoswen Thorne. I am 19 years old, and I got my first job as a Nanny babysitting four-year-old Sophie Philips. I arrived on the front porch of the Philips' house five minutes early for my trial job. If all went well, I would become Sophie's regular nanny. I took a deep breath and tucked a lock of curly brown hair behind my ear. I gave my jeans and crisp white t-shirt a quick inspection before ringing the doorbell. Mrs. Philips let me in and introduced me to Sophie; a tiny blue eyed girl with wispy blonde hair. After Mrs. Philips left, everything went smoothly. Sophie was a charming little girl. She smiled a lot, and her favorite game was making up stories about the shapes in the clouds. Then came bedtime.

I lifted the pink blanket up to Sophie's chin. "Nice and cozy?" I asked. She giggled and nodded. I smiled. "OK, goodnight, sleep tight, and don't let the bedbugs bite" As I stood up, her nightlight flickered ominously. My smile faded, and I hurried to the kitchen and began rummaging through the cabinets remembering what my neighbor and former Nanny had said about nightlights. "Remember Rhoswen, Children aren't afraid of nothing. When the light goes out and the child cries it's because she truly sees something in the dark. Something we can't always see, so always be sure the child's nightlight is working good and proper before tucking her in at night."

Why hadn't I asked Mrs. Philips where the lightbulbs were kept? Eight minutes and a dozen cabinets later, I found the lightbulbs in the laundry room. I raced back to Sophie's room



with a package of bulbs in hand. I could see the light flickering through the open doorway. Just as I reached the door, the bulb went out with a soft pop. I stood in the doorway for a moment realizing too late that I should have left my pocket flashlight with Sophie. I pulled the cold black torch from my left pants pocket. I found the switch and reluctantly turned it on. The beam hit a mass of darkness looming over Sophie's bed. I pulled off my shoe and threw it at the monster, dropping the lightbulbs on her dresser. The mass somehow turned its attention to me. I took a step forward, my heart thumping in my chest. "leave her alone!" I whispered. The monster moved suddenly towards me. I dove to the right, but it was like dodging a liquid shadow. The monster expanded, cutting me off. I shone my flashlight where its face should have been, and it recoiled. I lunged toward Sophie's bed. The darkness solidified in front of me. I tripped over my own fallen shoe, landing hard on my left shoulder. My flashlight rolled under the bed. A soft cackling sound came from the darkness. As I stared up at it, dark figures began to form. Shadowy clowns took shape in the mist, but instead of cheerful, they seemed menacing. I knew I was seeing the clowns as Sophie saw them, but that didn't make me less afraid. The clowns leered down at me with painted on smiles, they multiplied, and swarmed around me, blocking out the light. They cackled evilly and danced wildly around me closer and closer until they vanished in a puff of smoke. I was surrounded by a crushing darkness pressing on me from all sides. I whispered "Help!" but no one answered. My voice was empty and hoarse. I was alone in a dark void. There was no way out. There was no one to help me, and there never would be. I fell, spiraling into nothingness, my stomach, and all the rest of my organs leapt into my throat as I fell, farther, and farther. I tried to scream, but my voice refused to work. Farther, and farther I fell, silently screaming. Suddenly, an image flashed before my eyes of a little girl. She lay on a mahogany bed, surrounded by pink blankets, her golden hair spread over her pillow, her eyes closed, and a small smile on her face. Sophie. Suddenly, I remembered putting Sophie to bed and the nightlight had going out and her monster's appearance. I remembered my regret at not leaving my flashlight to protect the little girl. My flashlight. It had rolled under the bed when I tripped. I reached my hand out into the darkness and felt the cold metal on my fingertips. I switched the flashlight on. the darkness lifted and backed away from me. I stood and positioned myself in front of Sophie. "now," I said, addressing the monster,

“you will go back to whatever hole you came from and if you ever come back, I promise I will make you regret it!” my voice shook slightly, and my left hand, which was holding the flash light, wobbled a bit. For a moment, nothing happened, then the darkness swelled and then shrank and disappeared under the bed. I breathed a sigh of relief. Then, I lay my flashlight on the floor with the beam shining under the bed. I picked up the lightbulbs and replaced the faulty one in the nightlight. Just then, I heard the front door creak open. “I’m home” Mrs. Philips called softly. I met her downstairs.

“Welcome back. I just changed out the lightbulb in Sophie’s nightlight.”

“Oh, thank you dear. You Know, she’s afraid of the dark. She claims there’s a monster under her bed.”

I thought about Sophie’s monster and her fear of being alone. “maybe we all have monsters and we just can’t see them.” I said. Mrs. Philips smiled.

“Perhaps we do.” She opened her purse and handed me a check. “I was a nanny when I was your age. Thank you. I know it isn’t easy.”

“Oh, Sophie was an angel!” I said hurriedly.

“That’s not what I meant.” She showed me to the door. As I walked the two blocks to my apartment I thought more about the monster and it occurred to me how the darkness was only able to attack when there was no light and only with the light was I able to send it away. We all have our monsters, but perhaps all we need to overcome them is a strong light.

Jacob Langsner  
High School Short Story

## The Stop

The bus bathroom was an afterthought.

He ran his fingers along a rail above the toilet and immediately regretted the motion. Grabbing a fistful of cloth near the bottom of his shirt seemed illusion enough to purge his hands of stratified grease, and he proceeded to further distract himself with the thought of a freckled girl's smile. She probably smiled at everyone.

The rail proved vital as the bus pitched towards an off-ramp, but matters of sanitation conceded to focus on falling waters. In a sixth grade science textbook, there were three graphs explaining the difference between accuracy and precision. The former, he assumed, came from personal performance; the latter from holding a bar to keep the stream precisely away from his own shoes.

A soap dispenser nuzzled into his side as the bus lurched left, but beyond a weak stream of foam burped onto his jeans, it was empty. So was the bottle resting in the sink. The casual redundancy served only to frame countless others who held the greasy bar, danced with off-ramp potholes, aimed for an accurate precision, and thought about the nice girl who smiled at them, and them alone—all without using soap. And somewhere, on a torn-out page, there was a graph noting connection.

Before the sixth grade textbook, there were carnival games—ones where the player shot a target with a squirt gun. It occurred to him that this was the adult carnival game: see a man about a horse on a bus.

He remembered a little girl who beat him at the squirt gun game, though he couldn't recall her face. She laughed like a boy, and she probably had freckles, and he was too young to care that the gun was greasy. Eleven open seats at the arcade bench, and she chose the one beside him. He had watched her face, which he didn't remember, and her light-up Sketchers, which he surprisingly did. He considered her habit of recurring at the strangest moments—while he sipped coffee, or rode a bus—and for a brief



instant, he could picture her nose. Then, the lights in the bathroom went out.

It was a new adult carnival game: find the doorknob in the dark. The floor continued to shift under his feet, now with a mechanical downbeat sounding vaguely of old coins, falling. He ran his hand along the plastic door, feeling for a release lever. He tried to remember where the handle was, but he thought only of soap and freckles.

It was shocking when the light returned, but only because he was facing the mirror, and he was smiling, though he didn't remember doing that. He imagined himself retelling an embellished version of the experience at a bar in Los Angeles, careful to exclude the part about textbooks. He would add more jokes—peeing in the dark was good material—but it seemed the better story might be in the girl, or the game.

The games ended soon enough, and the freckled lady smiled at him again as he left the bathroom. But it wasn't a friendly smile. She chuckled from the back row, laughing at him like she would at everyone else, tripping down the aisle and trying to aim away from their own shoes. And the girl at the carnival? Well, he found her on Facebook several months ago, and he pushed no further after seeing enough evidence that she wasn't still a child. These were the better stories, but he accidentally grabbed a bald man's head while walking back to his seat. In a flight of humiliation, they faded.

Thirty more miles, and the bus stopped entirely. The man sitting beside him said, "shit", and he responded by blowing air out of his nose slightly harder than usual. An hour before that, the man had eaten one of his french-fries without asking, and he couldn't tell if it had been a mistake. Now, the lack of seatbelts provoked a strange anxiety even though the bus wasn't moving, and it spoiled any remaining thought on the ethics of fast food theft.

The driver said they were somewhere between Nevada and California, which he later decided didn't make any sense. With very small eyes and grey hair anchored to his scalp by something akin to margarine, the driver was a distinct type of man—one he couldn't imagine wearing pajamas. Such depth he would never see. How strange, that those only capable of existing professionally often scorched his memory.

In lower school, there was a groundskeeper who sat in his orange cart and supervised autistic children as they threw pennies at a tin of raspberries strewn across the blacktop.

groundskeeper smiled, repeating the phrase, “y’all are special” in broken English as they inexplicably launched into verses of Hot Cross Buns. This man would trade his rigid button-up for an old t-shirt before watching reruns of *The Price Is Right* — possibly with a wife, or children. It was so strange it almost hurt. These people—complete people—just bouncing off of each other, and they would all go home and wear pajamas and not think of anyone else. But he would sit at a bar, or on a bus, and he would think of them all.

Several months ago, he ran into the groundskeeper at a bar in Manhattan. The groundskeeper said, “Well, shit”, and he responded by blowing air out of his nose slightly harder than usual. They had a brief conversation about foreign cinema, though neither knew the first thing about it. China, man. It was all moving to China. The groundskeeper was wearing a rigid button-up, and after two mojitos, his memory of pennies on the blacktop was dubious at best.

Now, watching the bus driver and reflecting on past connections, he had a vague notion that this too would make a good story. But he didn’t write it down. Maybe, if he embellished it at a bar in Los Angeles, he would run into someone else who spoke in broken English and didn’t wear pajamas. And still, for lack of a greater narrative, he wouldn’t write it down. There really was no story to be told. In the sixth grade, his father left for a pack of cigarettes, and later that night, his father returned with a pack of cigarettes.

Outside, there was nothing but desert. He was sitting just above the front wheel, and a small puddle had accumulated around its print in the loose dirt. In New York, he had played a game where his friends named their price for taking a sip of water pooled in long troughs beside the curb. The offers often ranged from one to ten million, depending on the concentration of cigarette butts or exotic fluids. He enjoyed negotiating—asking if they would still do it for nine hundred thousand when they asked for a million. Too bad he never had the money.

Still, he asked the man sitting beside him how much it would take to have a swig of the desert water, and the man thought for a moment.

“Five.”

Thirty minutes after the driver announced a mechanic was ten minutes away, there was still no mechanic. It was noticeably hotter without air conditioning, but the couple behind him remained hidden under a large blanket. They were wrestling some



where in the folds, and the girl was giggling and telling her boyfriend to stop. He tried to stop listening. No one seemed to notice when she wasn't giggling anymore.

There was another couple across the aisle, but he paid them very little attention because they looked like the people he removed from a picture frame before adding a photo of himself, and his dog.

And so it grew hotter. The woman in the back groaned while taking off her sweater, and he didn't like that she brought two large pillows, and she didn't like that he was looking at them. He stuffed himself past the aisle seat, and he didn't mean to be facing the guy beside him but it was too late. A man in a straw fedora stood as well. The man made a joke, and several people laughed, but it didn't break the ice. He could have made a joke about the ice having already melted.

An older woman stood next, attempting to put a large purse on the rack above her seat. She couldn't raise the bag above her shoulders, and she didn't stop trying—standing with a mild tremor, purse at chin level, pushing it up several inches and letting it sink back down, like a very sad piston slowly firing. He pushed the bag for her, and she looked at him with a great deal of fear and confusion. Neither said anything, so he returned to a seat feeling equally confused and somewhat sad.

The man with whom he had originally shared the row fell asleep with his legs spread uncomfortably wide, so he sat beside a young woman with very defined veins, and he watched her sketch charcoal rabbits in a small leather notebook. He had once owned a similar notebook, which held poems written on summer afternoons. On one particular afternoon, while writing about love in the atrium of an assisted living complex, a gentleman with severe Alzheimer's had grabbed his hand. The encounter filled him with an inexplicable terror, which he would remember for the rest of his life.

The poem from that afternoon ended with:

*Life wears a knockoff cologne called nostalgia, which smells like the corduroy pants your father wore to work.*

He had always thought that was brilliant, but few people seemed to agree. A young woman was once delighted to inform him that her father often wore corduroy pants as well, and he smiled, but he never made it back to her apartment. Sitting next to the new lady and her rabbits, he felt inclined to recite the poem once more. However, earlier that day, while buying his french-fries, he had watched a man in white ankle socks drink a



soda alone. The man looked up and said, “Pepsi is good” to no one in particular.

He decided not to say any poems.

An hour later, the bus smelled like people, and it was too hot for anyone to say something of interest. Someone played a pretty song on a portable speaker, and it made him think of mistakes. A girl with dark hair sat in the first row, and he watched through the driver’s side mirror as she cried softly into a cup of sandwich crusts nestled between her legs.

The older woman brushed past him as she approached the driver, and he decided she looked like a desert tortoise. She said something unintelligible, and the driver shook his head. Her weight shifted, but her grey curls remained frozen in a tight panic, and her left hand continuously grasped and released a fistful of cloth near the bottom of her shirt. He was shaken by the involuntary nature of the action before looking down and finding a fistful of cloth in his own hand.

She turned towards her seat, and their eyes briefly met despite his efforts to appear fixated on the great deal of nothing happening outside. He felt her watching him pretend to watch something else, but there was nothing else to watch. They were alone. Everyone was alone.

When the bus was unloaded on the side of the road, somewhere between Nevada and California, the passengers were told to walk towards the nearest town. They watched the sun set, bounced off of each other, and walked, all in different directions, towards whatever might come.

In the beginning, he accidentally grabbed a bald man’s head while walking back to his seat. Shortly after, the bald man died of a heart attack. His name was Frank. Anyone who noticed Frank would have thought he was asleep, but not surprisingly, no one did.

## Persephone and Her Underground Flower Business

Persephone walked through her garden. It was one of her favorite things to do when she was with her husband, Hades, in the Underworld. She'd walk through rows of silver flowers and black trees filled with ruby red pomegranates. Today, Hades was with Thanatos, discussing different ways to better contain the souls of the dead, so Persephone was alone. She didn't mind it. A goddess has to have some quality time to herself every once in a while. She stayed in her garden for a little while longer, and then she returned to the main throne room.

Waiting there was Hades, who was talking to someone. At first, Persephone thought it was Thanatos, but when the stranger turned around, Persephone stopped in her tracks.

"Zeus?" Persephone asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Yes, dear brother," Hades said, "What are you here for?"

Zeus was unusually nervous. He swallowed before saying, "I need to talk to Persephone."

Hades crossed his arms, "Whatever it is you need, you can talk to both of us."

Zeus laughed, "What? You don't trust me to be alone with your wife?"

Hades looked at him.

Zeus chuckled softly.

Hades glared at him.

Finally, Zeus sighed. "I need to talk to your wife about . . . flowers."

Both Hades and Persephone were taken back. Hades raised his eyebrows. "Okay. If you don't mind, I need to see Thanatos. I haven't seen him all day and he's been expecting me." Silently, Hades left the throne room.

After he left, Persephone placed her hands on her hips. "Flowers? What kind of an excuse is that? What are you really here for?"

Zeus sighed, "I have a new girl."

“Uh huh,” Persephone smirked, “And you need to make up with Hera?”

“Well, no,” Zeus chuckled nervously, “My new girl is obsessed with flowers. I’ve asked her what she wanted, and all she wants is flowers. Then she started listing off all the flowers she wants, like daisies and pansies and lilies and other names I’ve never heard of.”

“So, why come to me?” Persephone asked, “Demeter is closer to you, isn’t she?”

Persephone tapped her chin thoughtfully, “I don’t know. I don’t think Hera would be very happy if she found out you had a new girl. It would be better if I told her as soon as I can, rather than get in trouble because I was helping you. After all, I have no reason to help you, and your wife would be so glad to know about your new scandal.”

Zeus scoffed. “You have to help me! You must help me! I AM KING OF THE HEAVENS—!”

“And I’m queen of the Underworld, and you’re in MY territory. I—out rule—you,” Persephone jabbed her finger into Zeus’s chest, “So what’s it gonna be?”

“Uh . . .” Zeus didn’t seem to know how to handle the queen of the Underworld’s sass. “. . . I’ll give you anything you want. And . . .” Zeus swallowed. “. . . and I’ll take all responsibility.”

“Huh,” Persephone replied, “You drive a hard bargain . . . Okay. I’ll do it.”

“Really?” Zeus sighed in relief, “For a moment there, I thought you weren’t going to.”

“But,” Persephone cut him off, “You might have to send someone down here instead of coming yourself. You’re making all the spirits restless.”

“Oh, right,” Zeus nodded, “I’ll get going. I’ll need about five bouquets in twenty minutes.”

“Okay, got it,” Persephone nodded, “Now, leave. Your wife will probably start wondering where you are.”

“Alright. Goodbye, Persephone.” And with that, Zeus transformed into an eagle and flew away.

After Zeus left, Hades quickly returned to the throne room. “Persephone, are you okay? Did he try to make a move on you? I stayed near the doorway just in case you needed help—“

“Oh, I’m fine,” Persephone laughed, “I just have a secret mission given to me from the king of the heavens.” She paused for a moment. “Is it alright if I go outside?”

“Outside . . . into the mortal realm?” asked Hades.



“Yes,” Persephone nodded, “Just, like, right around the entrance. I’d like to plant some flowers, but they require sunlight and here . . .”

Hades seemed amused, “Sure. Be my guest.”

Hurriedly, Persephone dashed out of the throne room, quickly thanking Hades, and headed out into the mortal world. There, she quickly gathered seeds from many different plants and started growing rows and rows of chrysanthemums, daisies, lilies, daffodils, and any other flowers she could think of.

Soon, Persephone had grown a little army of pinks, yellows, whites, purples, and blues at her command. Suddenly, she heard a quaint gasp. Persephone turned around and was face to face with the goddess of beauty herself. “Aphrodite!” she exclaimed.

“Persephone!” Aphrodite returned, “I never get to see you this time of year! How are you?”

“I’m great, Aphrodite,” Persephone smiled cautiously, “I didn’t expect to meet you here!”

“Me neither! What is it, winter?” Aphrodite giggled, “What do you have here?”

“I, uh, needed to get away from the Underworld for a bit. You know how the spirits are, being dead and restless and everything,” Persephone tried to mimic Aphrodite’s carefree laugh and desperately hoped she wouldn’t notice.

“Oh, Persephone, don’t you grow tired of working with flowers all the time?” questioned Aphrodite.

Persephone couldn’t help but cross her arms. “Well, I don’t see you being sick of being beautiful all the time.”

Aphrodite patted the Queen of the Underworld on the shoulder, “You’re such a laugh! Seriously, if you want to take a break, you should visit your mother! It wouldn’t help to have a little quality time with the family, wouldn’t it?”

Aha! Persephone swatted the beauty’s hand away. “If you think you can get me away from my garden so you can steal Zeus’s flowers—!”

“Oh,” Aphrodite stopped. “They’re for Zeus?” Persephone slapped a hand over her mouth. Oh, no. How could she just give away herself just before Zeus expected his first delivery?

Aphrodite raised a delicately shaped eyebrow. “You know, I’ll keep this a secret from Hera, if you just let me have a couple of those roses over there.” She gestured over to where a small square of red and pink roses were.

Persephone groaned and smacked her head. “Sure. Go

ahead.”

“Thanks, sugar,” Aphrodite bounced over and stooped over them. “Do you mind helping me pick them?”

Persephone nodded solemnly and plucked a couple of the best roses. Aphrodite beamed and hugged the roses tight.

“Thank you, dear.” And with that, she changed into a dove and flew away.

Persephone fell to her knees and laid next to her flowers. “I think I’ll lay low for a while,” she thought to herself.

Unfortunately for her, her peace was cut short. “Hey!” a voice pierced through the temporary silence. “I need some, uh, flowers for Zeus.”

Persephone stood up. “Oh. Hello, Hermes. Yes, the flowers are over here. Which ones does he need?”

“Umm,” Hermes took out a scroll of papyrus. “He needs about fifty or so daffodils, daisies, and pansies, give or take. Maybe some petunias too.”

Persephone waved a hand over towards the daisies and daffodils. “Just pick ten of each, and I’ll get the rest.”

Hermes glided over to the daffodils and started plucking each flower carefully. “Hey, Persephone. Oh, wait, I’m sorry. Queen Persephone—“

“Hmm?” Persephone looked up from her fistful of pansies.

“Why are you outside? Don’t you know your mother’s on her way?”

Persephone nearly dropped her bouquet. “. . . what did you say?!”

“I couldn’t help but overhear when Aphrodite returned to Olympus and started talking to your mom. I didn’t know what Aphrodite said, but the look on your mom’s face was PRICELESS! I do not want to be you!” Hermes started laughing until he saw Persephone’s face. Then he calmed down and shrugged, “Hey, don’t get mad at me. I’m just the messenger.”

“Well, guess what?” Persephone cracked her knuckles. “Today’s your lucky day.”

Hermes’s eyes widened. “Oh, no. There’s no way that I’m doing that. No, no, no, no, no!”

Persephone snapped her fingers, and suddenly, all the flowers around Hermes weaved together to form a cage. “It’s not an option, messenger,” Persephone smirked. “You’re taking me to Zeus whether you like it or not.”

“THERE IS NO NEED!” a voice boomed from above, accompanied by thunder and lightning. Suddenly, the head man



himself, Zeus, appeared. He had a wild look in his eyes.

“Persephone! How could you?!”

“Excuse me?!” Persephone shouted, “EXCUSE YOU! It’s your fault for cheating on your wife! And now my mom’s gonna hang me just like Hera’s gonna hang you!”

“EVERYONE CALM DOWN!” Hermes yelled, “IF WE DON’T STOP DEMETER, WE’RE ALL DEAD, SO STOP YELLING AT EACH OTHER AND MAYBE WE CAN STOP THE NEWS FROM SPREADING ANY FARTHER!”

Persephone and Zeus glared at each other, until Zeus finally said, “Fine. What can we do?”

They all looked at each other silently for a while. Hermes shrugged, “What if you got all the flowers left over and gave them to Hera?”

“That’s . . . actually a great idea,” Persephone said in awe, “And it’s a good thing we have all these flow—!”

Suddenly, all of the flowers in Persephone’s field died and withered from green to brown. Persephone’s face turned to red and she stomped her foot. “MOM! HOW COULD YOU?!”

“Persephone, it’s okay,” Hermes said softly, “We still have everything we picked.”

Persephone gazed dejectedly at her small handful of pansies and sighed. She then looked up at Zeus. “This better be enough.”

“Yes, it’s good!” Zeus nodded, “Now, LET’S GO.”

Persephone, Hermes, and Zeus all rushed to Mount Olympus. As they ran up the steps, Hermes and Persephone shoved the flowers into Zeus’s hands. Zeus’s eyes filled with worry.

“Do you think she’ll like these?”

“Think she’ll like what?” Persephone, Hermes, and Zeus all looked up the steps to see Hera standing there majestically with Demeter and Aphrodite by her side.

“Hera!” Zeus exclaimed, “What a surprise!”

“What a surprise indeed.” Hera glanced at her cohorts. “They told me everything.”

“Really?” Zeus groaned, “That ruins my surprise.”

“They told me about your—.” Hera stopped. “Wait, what?”

“Well, who else would these be for?” Zeus nervously held out the small bouquet, “This is all we picked before the flowers mysteriously wilted.”

Demeter was at loss for words. “I, uh, well, um, it’s winter! And, umm . . .”

Hera just stepped down the stairs gracefully and took the



flowers. “Zeus, this is the nicest thing you’ve done for me . . .”

Zeus beamed. Hera raised an eyebrow at this. “. . . but it could use some help. Come with me.” With that, Hera grabbed Zeus’s wrist and walked him into Mount Olympus. Aphrodite winked at Persephone and Hermes and then followed Hera’s lead. Demeter just stood there awestruck.

Persephone shrugged, “Looks like I gotta go. Goodbye, mother.”

“Wait!” Demeter walked down the steps to face her daughter. “I just want to say that I’m proud of you.”

“What?”

Demeter laughed, “Trust me; I’d do anything to mess with Hera and Zeus. It almost makes me glad that you married Hades.”

“Uh, thanks?”

Demeter smiled at Persephone. “I wouldn’t go if I were you. I’d want to stay and watch what will happen, just for a little while.”

“Mom, what are you talking about?”

Demeter barely contained her laughter as she whispered into her daughter’s ear, “Hera is allergic to pansies.”

# Holly Piper

## High School Short Story



## Untitled

This era, they met in a college coffee shop. Time, worn and with bags under her eyes, still learning to manage herself, and Power, in black heels and dark lipstick, with a steaming coffee in one hand and a folder of papers in the other. Power bought Time a cappuccino.

They started as study partners. Power forcing free the hours for them to work and Time fitting in homework and conversation. Power could slam words on paper and own every syllable like the ink was her blood, but Time could pace them and plan so they it was finished early and every sentence was in tempo with the heartbeat of the reader.

Power took business and politics classes, dabbling in psychology and the sciences. Time studied history and architecture and linguistics. Time was at one with physics and excelled at any long-term lab work.

They were already so entwined by the time Power asked Time on a real date, not just an efficient combination of study and food, most had thought them already a joint item.

They made an odd but complementary couple in appearance.

Time wore classic clothes that have stayed somewhere in fashion for decades. She wore tailored suits and waistcoats, buttoned up shirts and slacks, overalls, clothes that come and go from style but never truly leave. Fashion is on too fast a scale for Time's tastes.

Power is about intimidation and confidence. She wore shoulder pads and studded leather. Sharp heels and metal-toed boots. Cargo pants and sports bras. Anything to get an edge.

It was hard to find Power without Time and difficult to have Time without power.

To Power, it seemed college and graduate school flew by in the blink of an eye. For Time, it took exactly the number of minutes it did, but she appreciated the sentiment.

They graduated from college and from the limbo-adulthood of school.

Power's ambition was as strong as her toned body. She threw herself into ascending the occupational ladder. Time was content to wait for her calling.

Time got a job at a history museum, the antiquated items in the rosewood display cases offering nostalgia to the hazy memories of her past century incarnations. She wasn't the best museum guide or display author. She remembered too many details or too many things relevant at the time of the piece's creation but lost in the ages to the bigger picture.

Power wanted to get married. Time wasn't opposed but felt they were rushing. "After all we have all the time in the world"

It had been the wrong thing to say. Power - loath to admit any shortcoming- had bitterly uttered "No. Our immortalities are different. I am fated to fall."

Time had scoffed. "You are not always required to be an Icarus. Look at Rome, you lasted longer than I did there."

"And then I crashed and burned and was torn asunder into the growing powers scattered around the globe."

"That's hardly likely to occur again." Time, more than anyone, knew of history repeating itself, but she had seen none of the usual harbingers of power shifts.

"That's what you said about the British Empire."

"That was a confusing time for me. If the Sun never sets then how do I keep track of days?"

Life went on. They danced around the commitment issue. In a rarity, Time was the one weathered by the passage of months.

When they married this time, Power wore a fitted suit and Time wore creamy lace. Last time Time had been the one in a waistcoat, his pocket-watch ticking next to a sepia photo of Power wearing the latest in Victorian fashion from across the pond.

That night, lying listless in a tangle of tired limbs on a queen bed that felt somehow different than it had when they had slept in it the evenings previous, they reminisced about past lives.

"Remember the Permian?" Time pondered.

"How could I forget? We were both sharks for nearly 500 years."

"You were an elegant shark. All sleek lines and razor biting force." Time said, smiling wistfully.

"You flatterer." Power flushed. "It was a long while after the Mesozoic before we were compatible species again."

"I try not to think about how fast the top of the food chain kept evolving into something different." Time said lightly.



“How come you aren’t a jellyfish or a bristlecone pine tree? Aren’t they more timeless?” Time laughed.

“I’m whatever keeps time the best. Before that was the least changing species. But now we have humans. I think I’ll be a human for a long while. I mean they figured out the Atomic Clock.”

“True. And I as well. Considering they removed themselves from the food chain, I’ll be one until we meet aliens.”

After being married for two year, Power wanted a new house- she tired of renting and having to succumb to the whims of a landlord. Time outlined a schedule of finding land and building and furnishing.

Power told the crew where to lay the bricks. Time watched the mortar cure.

They modeled it after a small medieval fortress. Time enjoyed the history and Power embraced the heavy lines and impenetrability of the stones.

Power’s business had switched to online, where international trade overruled borders and time zones, Time alternated between marathons of television and bursts of research activity. She was a museum consultant, but there were only so many artifacts needing updating each year.

They hadn’t had this much leisure and information at their fingertips since a Spartan had set aside his sword for an Athenian scholar in the heyday of early philosophy. Even that couldn’t compete with the intellectual output of the current era.

They retired to an apartment and took annual vacations into space. Time was proud of these modern humans, accomplishing so much so fast.

If Time was pleased with humans, then Power was euphoric. She had never felt more pure, more genuine. Power with less than ever of the rivalry, the oppression, the means to the ends of control. Humanity was advancing beyond that.

When they died this time, it was peaceful. A gradual slip into oblivion. First contact had been made decades ago, but now Humans were legitimate players in this sector of the Galaxy. A new era was beginning and a new shift of importance and control.

This rebirth however, there was even more than the solar system to search before they found each other. More than a language or culture barrier. It was something new entirely. The time of sharks had ended again, but this chance they had more time for it. Lifetimes were longer, distances shorter, translators more accurate. This life was a fresh adventure.

Lauren Rose  
High School Short Story

## Untitled

I stand, my back pressed against the cold metal wires of the bridge.

I close my eyes and feel the delightful warmth of the setting sun on my skin. A cool breeze dances through my loose hair and tickles my cheeks. Blissful peace pervades my being. I let the fragrant smell of earth and flowers fill my nose. Leaves in the forest below glitter with sunshine that illuminates their emerald depths. The intensity of their color burns into my pupils. Within the confines of their pigmentation, I find infinite wisdom. Water laps gently on the banks of the onyx river below. A car passes on the road behind me. No matter, if they see me I'll be dead before the police get here.

What a wonderful day. After this I won't have to suffer another moment of the miserable muddy swamp called life. I won't have to deal with any of my perennial cataclysmic problems. I won't have to feel the ever present claw of guilt in my heart for not behaving as a normal teenager should. No more wallowing in my many failures, enduring the agony of the fight. No longer will I be completely surrounded by people, yet entirely alone. No need to worry about constantly pushing away the demons at the edge of my consciousness, taunting me with their words and promises. Every. Damn. Day. I release the tension that had been building in my jaw. It's okay, I can let go now; I've lost myself within my own mind. Come to me demons. You lovely creatures, I submit to you. I submit to everything. World, you win.

I open my eyes, look up to the clear sky, and smile. "Goodbye," I whisper. There is a faint siren in the distance. I take one last pure, clean, weightless breath, and let it fill my body's every crevice. It relaxes my muscles with its light. "Hello," chant my demons. I exhale, letting the luminescence leave me as it rushes past my lips, peeling away the facade of happiness I've spent so long carefully and diligently constructing. My true inner darkness revealed and left to consume me, I lean forward.

# Willow Seymour

## High School Short Story

### Noctambulant

Week 223:

There was a message on my wall today, “is anybody out there? “In bold letters, scratched onto the wall in red dust.

“Is anybody out there?” I ask myself the same thing every day. Since the ash came, I haven't seen a single soul. There is only dust and bone. Nothing dares to live here. Even the birds won't fly through the air. Are there even birds anymore? Something here is pretending to be alive, or my mind is playing tricks on me. It's not real, it can't be real.

“No,” I wrote underneath it.

“Nobody is left.”

Week 224:

You've been leaving more messages, “who are you?” “What's your name?”

“I'm so lonely.” Really, you think you're the only lonely one here. Amazing! That! You! Can! Feel! Alone! When! Everyone! Else! Is! Dead! I haven't even met you, and I already don't like you. I want to see you though. I'm desperate for attention. I haven't spoken in years, except to myself but I'm no good at small talk.

“Hi, there,” I wrote on the church's outside walls. “My name is none of your business and I'm your only friend.”

Week 225:

Another response today, “you're a friend.”

“Do you want to meet?” The answer is no, but I can't write that just yet. I asked the stars what to do. They didn't answer. I threw a rock at them. They threw the rock back at me. It made my vision blur when it hit me. The stars can throw pretty hard. I think that's a good answer though, I should've thought before I threw the rock, and angered the sky. I should think about this, before I anger you too.

“We should wait,” I said, digging my hands into the ash of



of the fountain, and carving my message. "I'm better at long distance relationships."

Week 231:

I don't think you liked my last response, "ok, that's fair." You leave me for 6 weeks, and that's all you have to say. Bit rude, if you ask me. I still didn't know what to do, whether I should meet you, or not. So I asked the ocean, and it just swept back and forth. Water doesn't talk much, it just waves, that was my answer. If I see you, I'll wave and I'll make a run for it that way, neither of us can shoot first.

"I'll tell you when I'm ready," I painted onto a broken, dead tree. "Then we'll meet."

Week 233:

Again, you wrote me, "how did you survive?" Good question. It's been three years, and I've asked it every day. I remember my box. It was too small to even breathe in, so I didn't and eventually, I didn't have to breathe. I left my box. My limbs felt longer than they should've been. My skin curled under the sun, the night was blazingly cold, the sky bled steaming acid, the trees breathed white-hot fire. I asked the fire what to say. It ate whatever it touched, growing bigger. It fed to survive, and it did what it needed to do. That's what I had to do

"That's easy," I scribbled on an unusable water fountain. "I just refused to die."

Week 236:

I decided something, "I wish I could see what you look like, "scribbled on the side of my house with coal dust. You're basically begging me. I decided to meet you. I haven't seen a mirror in months. I must look disgusting. I don't think you'll care though. You'll be disgusting too. We'll be disgusting together. I asked the horizon whether I should go through with it. I saw the way the ocean met with the sky. They were together, the only two of their kind. I wanted to be like that again.

"Tomorrow," I drew in the mud with a branch, "by the crossing trees."

Week 237:

I expected nothing, and I still feel let down.

"I'm sorry, I got nervous." I waited there for hours. The crossing trees were leaning on each other, marking an X on the

horizon. I stared at them for hours, staring until my eyes burned, staring until my body made me cry and you didn't bother showing up.

“I got nervous. “I was so happy, and now I can't help but feel angry. Look at what you've done. You've taken something beautiful, and you've spoiled it.

“It's okay, “I wrote, my hands shaking as I sobbed. “We can try again, we'll keep trying.”

Week 244:

I'm not sure if you're not writing because you finally died, or if you're avoiding me. I'm not sure which one I prefer.

“We should talk, “on a car's windshield, smoothed from dust and ash.

“Please,” it took you only a day to respond.

“I'd like that,” I don't know what to feel. Should I be happy? I miss you but I don't even know you. You could be a dog or a bug. Maybe something even more than human. I don't know what you look like, what your voice sounds like, I don't know if I like you. We'll see.

Week 250:

You didn't come this time either.

Week 253:

Did I do something wrong?

Week 261:

I just don't understand, I'm sorry.

Week 263:

I'm starting to think you've actually died. Maybe it's for the better. I can't handle being friends with someone, who refuses to be friends back. My hands are raw from writing, my eyes are red from crying. I was so close. I've been alone for so long, I thought anything would be better than this emptiness. It was stupid. Even if we did meet, we wouldn't fall in love. We might not even have been friends. Life isn't that romantic. You're not going to marry your high school sweetheart, your soulmate isn't sitting next to you on the train. If we do meet, I hope you're happy. That you've made me suffer like this.

“Thanks for nothing,” inscribed on a smashed park bench.

Week 268:

Still, no word from you. The waters probably got you. I've drowned before. It's not fun but what I don't understand, is that, if you drowned, you'd be back. Bodies always come back to the bay. Maybe you flew off, maybe you're a bird. I'd like to meet you if you're a bird. I haven't seen one in so long. I used to have a pet bird, she chirped and whistled, until the ash came. She didn't sing after that. You seem awfully smart for a bird, though birds don't have fingers either.

"You're probably not a bird," I wrote on a diagonal roadside sign. "So why did you fly away?"

Week 270:

Nothing yet. I decided I needed to do something. I can't just sit here. I'll go even more crazy. Whenever I move now, I get dizzy. I feel like I'm never breathing. The air is too thick. I was crossing the town and fell. I didn't trip, but I fell. I couldn't get up. My arms and legs lost all strength. I stared into the dirt. It was the same color as the night sky. Funny how things so different can be the same. I saw white pebbles like the stars, and moving creatures beneath the surface. I asked the soil what I should do. Below the topsoil, there was life. Things I wouldn't dare to imagine. That's my answer. Beneath the surface, something else is going on you're in trouble, That's why you're not responding. It's not your fault.

"Don't worry," scratched onto a wall with a sharp stone. "I'll save you."

Week 273:

I haven't figured out who took you yet. It's a weird question, but do you have feet? I haven't found a single footprint that isn't mine. Maybe you're something else that flies, like a butterfly. That would make sense. You could be in someone's cage, or in their jar. I hope they at least poke holes in the top so you can breathe. I was looking for you and I started choking. I couldn't breathe, like there were no holes in my jar. I coughed up something red, my throat hurt afterwards. What do you think is happening? Am I dying? I've never died before. At least I don't think I have. Does dying hurt, or is it just fear that makes it painful? I bet butterflies aren't scared so easily. You're lucky, butterflies aren't afraid of death.

"I think I might be dying", I wrote, most fittingly, on a gravestone. "I don't want to die."



## Week 280:

I woke up this morning. I wasn't in my bed, I was in the town center. Writing words that weren't mine, words that you would've said to me. You were asking me to meet you, I was asking me to meet me. Am I you? Is this why you left me? How can I leave myself? Is that even possible? I wonder if it's supposed to hurt this much, to lose someone you've never met. I must be desperate to go this far. I truly thought there was someone else. Please, if you're out there, find me. Help me know that I'm okay. I have to be okay.

## Week 283:

My legs stopped working again. I'm on the ground in town center. I can't move my head or arms. I'm stuck in my body. Staring up at the sky, unable to even blink. If you were here, you'd save me. You're a good person, I'm a good person. This is too confusing. Is there another person inside of me? Is the only time you come out when I sleep? I've dreamed before. Nothing like this, though maybe you're a nightmare. I'm already in a nightmare, I hardly need another one. I'd like to meet you, still maybe you'd be nice. You seemed nice from the letters. I've had a lot of time to think, down here on the ground. When everything was alive, I heard nothing but constant din, so loud that nothing else could be heard. Now that the sound is gone, I miss it. Then again, you must know silence to learn sound. In a lack of either is where the other is found listen to me, I could've been a philosopher, if I hadn't been too busy listening.

## Week 290:

I can't move. I feel myself sinking into the ground. I'm still here. Have you forgotten about me? Have I forgotten about me?

## Week 293:

I'm so hungry, but I'm stuck here forever. Promise me, if you find me; please put me in the water. So I can come back to the bay.

## Week 295:

You've vanished. My world is so full of cliffhangers, I realize. Life doesn't go on and sometimes, things just end.

## Week 301:

Goodbye, friend. I hope you flew somewhere warm.

# Kiara Talley

## High School Short Story

### Love

She was a girl. A broken girl, in her own little broken world whose heart so desperately yearned for the one she oh-so-loved. The one she believed could fix her. The one, oblivious, to her love. The one with eyes as blue as the ocean, that sparkle like a star. With hair as brown as the sand that lay across the endless miles of desert. He had a smile that had seemed to light up the world. The mention of him always seemed to make her smile. But it would slowly fade as she would come to the reality of him never loving her back. The pain. The heartache. She was a broken girl, in her own broken world. A broken world filled with fear and self-loathing. A broken world where she knew. She could never be with him. The one her heart so desperately yearned for. The one she couldn't have.

He was a boy. A jubilant boy, in his own little jubilant world who had taken an interest in the quiet girl who sat in her own little world. The one with broken brown eyes that held so much heartbreak. With hair as dark as the night sky. And a smile that was perfect. The sight of her gave him butterflies. The kind that never seemed to go away. But his reality was harsh. A girl like her would never want me, he thought to himself. He was the social butterfly who made everyone smile, and she was the girl who sat quietly in the back of the classroom. The saddening thoughts made his heart ache. His jubilant world didn't seem so jubilant without her. The one he couldn't have.

The broken girl sat in the back of the classroom, writing in her notebook. As quiet as a mouse. Sneaking glances at the jubilant boy whom she so dearly loved. She took in every detail about him. The way his face lit up when he talked about something he was interested in. Or the way his dimples showed whenever he smiled. The broken girl could feel herself smile as she looked back at her notebook.

The jubilant boy was surrounded by most of the class. He told a story. One of which he heard from when he was young. His smile widened as he recited the story perfectly. As the words

'broken and beautiful' fell from his mouth, he couldn't help but look at the broken girl, sitting quietly in the back of the class. He smiled to himself before turning back to his group of friends.

The mindless writing of the broken girl seemed to be the only thing she did in class. She was in her own little broken world. She hadn't noticed what she was writing. The words on her paper were something out of a love story, confessing her love to the jubilant boy. Her feelings on something so simple as a piece of paper. She smiled before gently tucking it away in her pocket. A sense of confidence arose in her. She would take the chance of confessing her love to the jubilant boy, who had her heart.

The jubilant boy smiled lightly as he thought about the broken girl. He was going to confess his love to her. He was nervous. His palms were sweating as he rushed out to meet the broken girl in front of the schoolhouse. A single rose in hand. One of which he took from the school garden. The doors opened and a sea of students rushed out. He pushed his way through the crowd of kids, looking for the girl who had his heart.

The broken girl broke through the doors of the school alongside the wave of students. She searched all around for the jubilant boy but couldn't seem to find him anywhere. Maybe he left? She thought to herself. Her hope slowly diminished every second she neared the gates to exit the school. Her newfound confidence seemed to slip away with the hope of finally confessing her feelings. But as soon as her hope was almost gone, she saw the familiar sandy mop of hair.

He saw her and she saw him. The two slowly made their way towards each other. It was like all of time slowed down for them. It was just them in that moment. With smiles so big and eyes full of hope. The broken girl reached for the note in her pocket. At the same time, the two handed the gifts to one another. The broken girl looked at the single red rose and ever so gently took it while the jubilant boy slowly took the letter out of her hand. The two smiled at each other once more. The jubilant boy then offered his arm out to the broken girl who gently looped her arm through his and the two started towards the school gates. Arms linked and smiles on their faces...





*Poetry*

***Middle School Poets***

Ami Aizawa  
Aiden Karandos  
Joshua Khin

***High School Poets***

Maddie Baker  
Maggie Devlin  
Faith Evans  
Hope Gilly  
A'Raya Glasco  
Harrison Griffin  
Savannah Hankins  
Katherine Huerta  
Hailey Krantz  
Andrew McKinney  
Harlee Miscovich  
Jasmine Mixson  
Parker Nelson  
Janet Oliver  
Jaela Pipkins  
Lillian Roshto  
Lea Sanchez  
Breanna Sasse  
Farin Tavecchi  
Jakai Turner  
Alistair Wallen  
Maxwell Wuebbenhorst

Ami Aizawa  
Middle School Poetry



## Missing You

I miss how we talked,  
how you were always there,  
how you always teased me.

I miss how you didn't care.

I miss your voice,  
your smile,  
your personality.

I miss how we used to be.

I want to see you again,  
talk to you again,  
be by your side.

I miss you.

Aiden Karandos  
Middle School Poetry



## The Wonders of Baseball

Have you ever wanted to be a star,  
but know it is way too far.

Don't give up be like me,  
and make dreams shine in the sea.

I want to be a baseball champ,  
and hear people screaming "go Aiden go" as a rant.

I love it when the ball comes to you and make the catch,  
it makes you feel like you won the match.

That is my opinion so let's get into the special things,  
that I'm pretty sure  
that will make you want to baseball kings.

Now this is where it starts,  
where I think we should have all our hearts.

To pick your glove and hat,  
to getting your own baseball cap.

Agree or disagree really I don't mind.  
But my opinion is my opinion and that is the final line.



Joshua Khin  
Middle School Poetry



## The Darkness

Wondering along the river of the Danube.  
The birds tweeting and humming the sounds of nature.  
The small breeze hitting the trees.  
The green leaves shaking.  
The moonlight.  
Shining unlike ever before.  
Quite a beautiful sight.  
I proclaim.  
Along the small trenches of soil.  
Built years ago to store rainwater.  
In front of me.  
A grand castle.  
Standing high on the top of a mountain.  
Overlooking the dark forest.  
And to the other side.  
The glistening emerald waters.  
With sparkling green trees.  
Further down.  
Dark Brick roads.  
Making their way up the hill.  
A beautiful white house in the distance just to the right of the castle.  
And behind me.  
A big black house.  
Walking through the forever getting lighter trees.  
I'm no longer left in the darkness.  
As I once was.  
Not knowing anything.  
Every step I know a little more.  
Walking out of the darkness.  
In which my friends have left me in.  
My family left me in it too.  
Feeling betrayed.  
I take one more step.  
Everything is lit up.  
I've made it.  
I am no longer left in the darkness.  
Being depressed and lonely.  
I have arrived.

Maddie Baker  
High School Poetry

## Flaws

My boots crunched softly  
as I carefully picked my way through the foliage.  
As I finally got past the line of trees,  
my eyes fell upon the hidden treasure  
that everybody always talked about.

Endless vines gripped the ankles of faded horses  
on the merry-go-round.

Leaves came bursting out of every crevice  
of the Ferris wheel.

Wild flowers of every color sprouted out  
of a long abandoned whack-a-mole game.

The broken window of a decayed ticket booth  
was decorated with honeysuckle and butterflies.

My brain could hardly comprehend the sight before me.  
The wondrous way decrepity and lovely human inventions  
could frame the ever-blossoming nature that didn't leave  
even though all the people did.

Rust and something sweet filtered through my nose  
as I climbed into a desolate teacup ride.

Perhaps long ago it was a bright and cheerful pastel,  
but now the dandelions surrounding it  
are 100 times more vibrant.

Maggie Devlin  
High School Poetry



## Pretty Girl, Pretty World

Pretty girl in pretty world loves her little life,  
and pretty girl in pretty world has no struggle or strife.  
Pretty girl has pretty world tucked underneath her thumb,  
but pretty girl won't be so pretty once all is said and done.

Pretty girl has lots of “friends” who seem like they should care  
but pretty turns to lonely girl since no one’s really there.

Lonely girl in lonely world mutes her pretty little voice,  
because lonely girl in lonely world feels she has no other choice.  
Lonely girl in lonely world feels like she has come undone,  
but lonely girl has no idea of what is yet to come.

Lonely girls think ugly things, and try as they might,  
lonely turns to ugly girl, what seems like overnight.

Ugly girl in ugly world is lonely, so she reads,  
and ugly girl in ugly world does not know what she needs.  
Ugly girl in ugly world hides behind a smile,  
but ugly girl hasn’t been okay for quite a while.

Hopeless girl in hopeless world cries her lonely self to sleep,  
and hopeless girl in hopeless world counts scars instead of sheep.  
Hopeless girl in hopeless world feels helpless day to day,  
but hopeless girl doesn’t know that she will be okay.

Hopeless girls can change their ways if they try hard enough,  
so hopeless turns to changing girl because she’s grown so tough.

Changing girl in changing world is still lonely now and then,  
and changing girl in changing world decides to pick up a pen.  
Changing girl in changing world turns her wounds into a shield,  
so changing girl can change her world and prove that she has healed.



## Sparrows for Farthings

Have you heard the songs of the birds  
in their glowing gilded cages?  
They flock together,  
beings of feather,  
to barter in lyrics as wages.

Stock in the mind has gone down with the times;  
Thoughts go by pennies—a dozen a dime.  
But, one penny saved is a penny collected:  
We're no longer buying perspective.

Have you heard the whispers of birds  
in their fakely gilded cages?  
They flock together,  
creatures of feather,  
to barter in secrets as wages.

A coin per phrase is pure ludicrousness!  
An arm and a leg couldn't buy the stress.  
We'll all sell our souls just to pay off the debt  
of utilizing the alphabet.

Have you heard the cries of the birds  
in their crumb'ling gilded cages?  
They flock together,  
beasts of feather,  
to barter in mistruths as wages.

Silence is golden, but it can't be bought;  
We're wandering souls that just can't be taught.  
So, we will eat dogs, and we will all eat crows,  
'till the setting sun casts long shadows.

Have you heard the silence of birds  
long gone from our minds and our thoughts?  
We flock together,  
Humans of feather,  
to forget our treasonous complots.

## Letters to Delilah

Dear Lila,  
You were always so adventurous  
Each step you took was a whole new journey  
Was this your newest journey  
As you stepped backwards, out of my reach?

Do you remember the time  
You said we would always be by each other's side?  
That I was too shy  
And was better off following you?  
I did. I went wherever you went.  
But are you asking me to follow you now?

This adventure may be just  
A little too much for me.  
I followed you to the park when we were five,  
To the next town over when we were twelve,  
To the top of the mountain at thirteen,  
But now that we are sixteen  
I'm not sure I need to follow you anymore.

You always pushed me  
To go on a little adventure,  
To not only exist, but to live,  
But now that the goal is not to live  
I do not think I can follow your footsteps  
To the edge and then off it.

I write this letter to you  
To tell you that we are not always  
Going to be together,  
But I will see you soon  
When I decide I'm ready for  
The biggest adventure of all.

A'Raya Glasco  
High School Poetry

## Untitled

In all honesty I thought you were perfect.  
And I thought you felt the same.

That plastic smile you wore everyday  
was giving me false hope.

Your tattoos caught my eye when I was standing alone.  
Then I saw them standing next to you,  
the liars.

They told you they were filled with love,  
they said they were your friends,  
they lied.

I see them touching you like you were theirs.  
My body fills with anger  
because I know I can't stop them.

Then your eyes met mine  
all that anger was replaced with want  
which turned into need.

You walked over to me  
and asked me what my name was.

I replied and took you back to my place.  
We bonded over our love of gaming and animals.

We sat there and played and talked,  
but the longer we played the more cockiness you showed.



I started losing feelings for you.  
Days went by and we hadn't talked since that day,  
which I suppose was a good thing.

But I couldn't stop thinking about you.  
I couldn't stop thinking  
about our love of drawing and our hate for bugs.

It was all to go to be true.  
I checked my phone and saw a message from you.

The message talked about  
how I lied to them  
how I wasn't as trustworthy as I should've been.

I look up to the ceiling appalled by what I've read.  
It was them who had betrayed me.

It was them and their fake friends  
who had lied to me ever since day one.

I get up and head to the bathroom.

I look in the mirror  
and see my reflection staring back at me.

My family was right.

I was manipulative, a liar, and an overall bad person.

I look in the mirror one last time and tell myself  
I was the liar, I was the betrayer,  
I was the one with the fake friends.

I had to end it.

Adrenaline coursed through my veins  
as I slit my wrist.

The last thought in my head was:  
I was the problem all along.

Harrison Griffin

High School Poetry

## Little Brother, Your Ship

Advice is a hard thing to give  
because it varies from person to person,  
Some people experience great benefits,  
but some situations it worsens,  
I cannot save you, little brother,  
from anything life throws your way,  
No matter what I tell you to avoid,  
to near, or to hide from, within the day,  
Because life is a battle  
and challenges come in the fashion of waves,  
It is calm, it is choppy, large and small,  
you must remember this always,  
Despite what you have heard  
and what you think of a situation,  
There will always be an alteration  
to make for a more complicated combination,  
Do not take man's advice, despite it being true,  
The challenge isn't its factuality,  
but rather how it applies to you,  
What you will discover  
is that the strongest waves cannot be deflected,  
Nor will your idea of their formation  
be even slightly as projected,  
The trials are complex  
and you will be the first to live them, as did Adam,  
You are going to experience something  
your young mind cannot yet fathom,  
Seek the area of the wave in which you can bend,  
surpass or rip,  
But please, little brother,  
understand you are the captain of your ship.

Savannah Hankins

High School Poetry

## An Apple a Day Keeps the Pounds Away

I'm hungry.

No, you're not go make yourself pretty.  
Put on makeup, do your hair and paint your nails.

I'm hungry.

No, you're not go weigh yourself  
and see how much is left to loose.

I'm hungry.

No, you're not go exercise for an hour  
you're so FAT.  
NOT hungry.

I'm hungry.

No you're not sweetie go read a book  
and gain some knowledge  
the only kind of gain you ever should do.

I'm hungry.

No you're not go drink some water  
and keep your slim figure hydrated.

I'm hungry.

No you're not take those pills so you feel full

I'm hungry.

No, I'M not. I should, I should go... Clean yes that'll do it.  
I'M not hungry, I'M not hungry, I'M not hungry.

When will I stop being hungry and start being pretty?  
I'M not hungry, I'M not hungry, I'M NOT HUNGRY  
I'm thinner NOT hungry, pretty NOT hungry...

I'M always hungry...



Katherine Huerta  
High School Poetry

## Fire

The summer came,  
And that meant fires.

I always liked the way  
The forest fires looked.

The color of the sun,  
Exploding through the trees.

Everything disintegrating  
Into something dangerously beautiful.

Orange,  
Red,  
And yellows.  
Tall trees submerged in the flames.

It wasn't good to think  
So fondly  
Of these natural disasters.

But, it was a sight of beauty,  
So I began to ignite myself in flames.

And suddenly, the fires weren't so spectacular after all.

There was no incandescent burst of red and orange,  
Only cracking and pops,  
Of everything tumbling down,  
And breaking.

Experts say  
That after forest fires,  
Everything destroyed  
Is supposed to sprout back  
And regrow out of the ashes.

Everything is to be revived.

It was arson,  
And I couldn't seem to put the flames out.

I was always waiting for the next rain,  
Waiting for the downpour,  
To finally stop inhaling all this smoke.

But people are a lot more different  
Than a forest fire.

It's a lot more different  
When you try  
To set yourself  
Ablaze.

Hailey Krantz  
High School Poetry

## Good Nights and Happiness

Pancake breakfast Saturday,  
good nights and happiness,  
the brown suitcase ended life.

I peek from my shield.

He's leaving,  
without saying goodbye.

I run up,  
my voice breaks,  
tears blur my vision.

"Daddy, please?"

He turns away,  
"I'm sorry,"  
he walks out.

I hit the floor.  
Hard,  
and never resurface.



Andrew McKinney  
High School Poetry

## The Ones Who Are Lost

*This is a poem I wrote about the fear that females go through when they learn that 1 in 5 females report being sexually assaulted on college campuses throughout the United States.*

Growing up big dreams  
of things in which only you can foresee.

Down the road life takes it's toll  
and you realize dreams aren't for what they seem.

Make your family proud they say as they send you off  
to achieve these things called dreams.

But they never know, my sorrow soul,  
and the screams in which haunt me.

It was Friday night and I was feeling fine,  
didn't know one drink could turn to nine.

If God could have foreseen the horrid things  
then I would start to believe dreams are true.

As I squirmed away all I could think is  
God what did I do.  
What did I do, what did I do.

I lay there awake in my modern grave  
coming to the ultimate truth.

There is no way in this modern age  
to change this sexual abuse.

It is engraved at a young age that it is the girls fault,  
and not you.

Harlee Miscovich  
High School Poetry

## Biophilia

This is Charlie and she's in love,  
in love with life.

She does not possess fear,  
of being unloved,  
by a man who wouldn't know her middle name.

Anyway,  
she holds a phobia of,  
not watching every sunset available,  
not climbing every mountain in sight.

Not growing every seed within her bones,  
not absorbing every coffee cup straight into her veins.

She is afraid of not living.  
She is not afraid of dying, no.

For that is just another adventure,  
that she awaits for the train ticket to.

She is afraid of becoming another,  
chess piece.

Controlled by the hand of whoever,  
is willing to call her "baby" for the night.

She is afraid of having to explain,  
to her mother why she allowed,  
another one to toss salt in her eyes.

To distract her from what their right hand was doing.

She is afraid of watching her roses die.

Leftover from a love that lasted,  
much shorter than the flowers did.

Charlie does not want a life of sorrow and pain,  
caused by those who couldn't heal her.

Even if they tried,  
if Charlie wants sorrow, she will bring it for herself,  
because her life is a painting which she holds the brush.

She will add yellows of laughs and,  
blues of lonely nights.

Whether he wants her to or not,  
Charlie will see every color as vibrantly as she desires.

For this is her life,  
and Charlie is in love with it.



Jasmine Mixson  
High School Poetry

## Quote

Can I call them quotes:  
The ones I write with a pen;  
The ones that seem to flow out?

Can you quote yourself?  
Is that too arrogant, too pompous for words?

See, I was wondering if this thought without rhythm,  
If these one sentence lines  
could hold the same weight as a book.

Or is it restrained from movement—  
Always being stuck as one thing?

These words that pop out of my head,  
What are they?  
What are they named?

Because if a quote is bound to other people,  
Do they decide what you say?

Those ... and those can flip a meaning around,  
Dampen a thought.

So what is a quote?  
I guess I just have to wait to know.

Parker Nelson  
High School Poetry



## Of Life

She knows the potency of words.  
She knows the potency of love.

It's when the two are put together that a mess is made.  
Or a dream.

It's two extremes.  
Two hearts.  
Two minds.  
Two lives.  
But three words;  
One sentence.

When hate and love straddle a fine line.

When two souls are joined.

She's felt the anger,  
The rush of screaming words.

But she's felt the soft caress of whispers,  
That send shivers down the spine.

The agony as words shred the heart.  
The bliss as letters soothe fears.

The line is so thin.  
So thin.

One word.  
Two words.  
Three words.  
A sentence

And moments are either created,  
Or destroyed.

Lips have difficulty sharing secrets,  
But will not hesitate to be nipped at by trust.

He's a wolf.  
Baring his teeth;  
Curling his lip.

But she's tamed him.

And he murmurs words;  
Lets them caress her skin;  
Lets them curl like music around their bodies.

His sentences are beauty:  
Three words to cause a pounding heart.

Two hands to hold,  
One love to unite.

When objects become precious memory holders.  
When a mirror has seen a thousand emotions.

He's felt the heated slap of a word.  
She's felt the poison of guilt.  
But they have felt the fire, the passion,  
the beauty, the life  
Of love.

Have you?



Janet Oliver  
High School Poetry

## Reflections

I wish to be a writer with bold skills,  
Making my life into a fantasy.

Replacing my everyday life with thrills,  
stories of adventure for all to see.

The chaos of life influencing me.  
My friends, my dog, and my abnormal dreams.

I write what I want and make it lovely.  
But not each and ev'ry word is as it seems.

The unexpected turn of events soon,  
pull me in and begin to taint my mind.

Everything changes under the pale moon,  
and the lovely story is left behind.

A sea of eagerness washes ashore,  
As I write all night behind a locked door.

Jaela Pipkins  
High School Poetry

## A Letter to Heartbreak

I have to say, you got me good this time.  
You truly deserve a round of applause,  
a pat on the back,  
a job well done.

I hoped I'd never have to speak to you again.  
That you were a thing of the past.  
That I would finally have my forever.  
But you knew I'd be back.  
And more broken than our last encounter.

You know the power you wield  
and you carry it with confidence.  
Relishing in the sweet sound of your victim's pain.  
That loud crushing sound  
that only you and your victim can hear.  
A sound filled with a multitude of emotions.

You teeter on the edge.  
Waiting for your signal.  
Through the arguments and tears.  
Just waiting for the perfect time to strike.  
To end it all and to finally claim your prey.  
You slowly ate away  
at the happiness that surrounded my heart.

You feign to see the light be viciously taken away.  
For the light bulb to break.  
For the flame to die.  
For the flashlight to drain.  
So that you can come in with your satchel of darkness.

Aren't you tired Heartbreak?  
Tired of watching the disastrous ending.  
Aren't you lonely?  
Misery and Sorrow seem like terrible company.  
If I were you I'd be lonely.

I thought long and hard  
about how to protect myself from you.  
Should I lock up my heart and never love again?  
Or should I love expecting you to come along  
and not have a happily ever after?

I've decided to love.  
Profusely,  
passionately,  
perpetually.  
My three P's for cherishing every relationship.  
I won't give you the satisfaction of affecting my life.

I'm just wanted to say  
I'm writing this so that I may finally move on.  
And relinquish the pain.  
Mistakes and never-ending tears.  
But most of all the emptiness.  
Thank you for helping me  
burgeon into a smarter version of myself.  
Thank you for teaching me valuable lessons.  
Thank you for paving the way for what I will be.  
I realize now that I needed you.  
I don't regret you.  
Not one of the times that you came.  
I wish you well.

Sincerely,  
Your Latest Victim.



Lillian Roshto  
High School Poetry

## Love Songs are Useless

Why do you wait for me?  
I am a lost cause.  
I love you too but,  
We can't be together.

Why do you wait for me?  
I am a daft daydreamer,  
I am a lost cause.

I LOVE YOU!  
I Really, REALLY love you.

We can't be together,  
I am lost, broken, gone.

If you really knew me,  
you would know,  
I am a lost cause.  
I am worthless.

I am not good enough for you!  
Can't you see?  
You are a god,  
I am nothing.  
I grovel at your feet.

Please forgive me.  
You are just too good for me.

Lea Sanchez  
High School Poetry

## It's Her

Almost as if you are my accent.  
My sense of encouragement.  
My 'pick me up' when I've fallen,  
...not even in question.

Adoration at its peak.  
That's what it is, right?

When my heart smiles when yours smiles?  
When yours laughs.

When mine cries when yours cries?  
Mine can feel it.  
There's meaning to it

Jakai Turner  
High School Poetry



## Time / Lost

Time evades us like a bullet train in the spring.  
It rushes, pauses, and disappears within the breeze.

Flowers are left withering  
when they're pulled from their roots;  
the train pays no mind.

There's a destination to get to.  
Time vanishes like the clouds after a rainstorm.

What we think is a rainbow,  
turns out to be distant showers.

Fear of the end settles into our bones, so we,  
desperately try to will it away with the thought of,  
Time...bruises...  
Like a sunburnt arm.

Quickly. Easily. Painfully.  
It will not vaporize like the rays of the sun.

When the moon appears.  
It will not stabilize when you want.

To fix the past through your tears.  
It will not bend. It will not fold.  
Time is endless.  
Time is untold.



Alistair Wallen  
High School Poetry

## Untitled

I weep and sorrow.  
In this mourning grave.  
To tell away the pain you grieve.  
Til' it is tomorrow-so.

I mask behind this willow cage.  
And hide behind my fellow ways.  
The hopes it brings and my endless why's.  
My endless plea and endless care.

Due to my words of thought.  
Many things begin presenting.  
As they appear in glorious precision.  
My pain rots within its' tomb.

Daring through these months.  
Even processing continually.  
Never seeing my transparent conscience.  
My willow, my weeping willow mourns.

Magnificent bumbles and terrors.  
Excitement flutters out walking by.  
Glistening endless breezes.  
The night shines blinded by trumpets.

As the cages fill-so do my cries.  
Caring, pleading, endless whyings.  
Why, why, why, why, weeping willow?  
Jogging away from mass construction.

Present thine self I ask.  
 Til it is the tomorrow-so.  
 Begin my fluid sounds.  
 Amazing grievances screaming for appearance.

Never question my willow.  
 Oh-oh my everso weeping.  
 Willow standing near the black wind.  
 Powdered infused with decay wishes.

Can I reverse the true meaning?  
 Of willow cages and sunny hours.  
 Not against its definition hunting.  
 Oblivious to the yelling morals.

Bellows of hot summer rains.  
 Grabbing near the sucking life.  
 Helpless in the name of like.  
 Shriek and squeal in the news's reels.

Ever questioning this constellation.  
 Shows interpreting your freedom.  
 Willow regulates the system fraud.  
 Query after query lands no caught.

Though I do ask for a help.  
 Yet no one can present themselves.  
 They mask behind the willow cage- then.  
 They continue for another hell.

Weep, weep, weep.  
 Plea after plea.  
 Plentiful progress.  
 Willow is still weeping.

Drag along these boring letters.  
 Not once understanding.

This cycle will continue, no unity.  
Let it be the end, just let.

Conforming can never express.  
The breaking of this willow cage.  
Hate lingers constantly.  
And in the end.

It is time to give it all up.  
This slopes beyond a point.  
Plea-oh how I plead.  
Weep and underestimating.

Weep,  
Weep, weep,  
Weep, weep, weep,  
Weep, weep, weep, weep.

It slowly goes.  
Millions that can leave.  
Goodbye to the masked layer.  
Of bodies laid down by groups.

Never forget as they say.  
Yet they cannot remember.  
The history stuck on a repeating.  
Cycle and then the weep begins and it's sad.



Maxwell Wuebbenhorst  
High School Poetry

## Hollow

People see different things than what's in their mind,  
Like when they wake up, you can hear them,

Psy,

Instead of waking up with the future in their minds,  
They focus on the past with a look of demise,  
So if you study closely you can see most people's disguise,  
Think about it yourself and you should come to realize,  
That humans aren't really what they are suppose to be,  
They are just hollows of what they want you to see.

Breanna Sasse  
High School Poetry

## Maybe Someday I'll Find You

Maybe someday I'll find you.  
But I'll let you know now, it won't be to my own credit.  
You will have to be braver, and impossible to miss.  
I don't often look at things that aren't a fiery red.  
It's that I pay far too much attention to details,  
but never the right ones, not the ones that lie forward.  
The mundane green hue of the wall is noted,  
but the moment that takes place within it is ignored.

Beauty is entrancing,  
and I am taken by it, dumb founded.  
It pulls me closer and finally,  
I'm nowhere, and simultaneously surrounded.

You'll find me, you'll try to at least,  
but I'll be looking the other way,  
and you'll wonder hopelessly if I'm interested.  
But while you're leaning in, I'm far off, in disarray.

I'm sorry sweet one, you lovely kind soul.  
But I'm only ever looking for you when I'm lonely,  
the truth is that more often than not,  
That gap is filled by the vibrancy of life, you see?

You can find me in the future.  
And I beg you, do come looking.  
Find me in the collapsing of my own reality.  
Because when you reach me, it's to you alone that I'll cling.

Farin Tavacoli  
High School Poetry

## Untitled

Scorching blasts,  
bright rays,  
burn the wooden desk.

He who fell asleep in the dull blaze.  
Horrified.  
Skin blistered, peeled, and,  
thirsty.

Water boils, fries the throat.  
Innards erupt in fire.

Rasping, he drops,  
engulfed in thick, ragged pain.

Wishing,  
for a trickling stream nearby,  
not,  
this vast ocean,  
of salty tears.



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