

9th Annual

Unlocked Voices

2018 Teen Writing Contest



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Jayden Barr
Middle School Essay

Written examination of project/ use of tools (animals used) COBRISC

My project is a deadly creature in the jungle. Well, I used the magic wand tool, text, crop, magnifying glass, and the move tool. It is called a Zobrist; a Zobrist is combed version of a cobra, a daddy long legs spider, a lizard, and a yeti crab. It can grow back its skin in one millisecond.

Cameron Dunbar

Middle School Essay

Battle of Antietam

As the blood was stained in the grass, dents in the floor and the broken church that would replenish the souls of people today and in the future. As those people look at the graves and the gray bridge on the bottom of the blue colored Antietam creek that stood as tall as an elephant. Looking at those memorials people would wonder what happened during the battle of Antietam.

The battle of Antietam known as the bloodiest day in all battles, but how? The battle of Antietam also known as the battle of Sharpsburg got its name from where the soldiers fought. On the dreadful day, September 17 1862 during the Civil war, Soldiers fought in the Maryland, Sharpsburg, Washington County, Maryland, and Antietam Creek. Therefore, it left blood stained in the grass, women as nurses, and people on the floor dead less than 5 minutes in the battle. It was a fight against two armies that contained The Union that was in the north, and the confederate that was in the south. Before the battle, there was 75,300 in the Union Army and 52,000 in the confederate Army. The battle of Antietam had been awarded the bloodiest day with 23,582 people either killed, captured, or injured. Both the armies lost a huge amount of men. The fight against both armies was 12 hours long. The leaders of the two battles both showed hatred to one another and only one of them could win.

The generals had very irregular items and ideas that both generals didn't see coming. Their names were General Robert E Lee who was the leader of the Confederate Army. While George B. McClellan was the leader of Union and let Burnside command the army. Robert E Lee and his troops went off and went to Maryland to get some of their slaves and bring them to the south. Despite the fact, Burnside saw Robert E Lee walking with his troops looking like they were going to attack. He quickly commanded the men to be in a defensive stance that George Washington used in the Revolutionary War. On the morning of the battle, McClellan left flanks against Robert E Lee's left side near the Antietam creek. This made people scatter then going into Antietam creek, Sharpsburg, and Washington County. Big cannons were firing, gunshots were louder than a train, and yelling running for their lives was all you could expect during the suspenseful battle. By noon, "After pursuing the confederate general Robert E. Lee into Maryland, George B. McClellan of the Union Army launched attacks against Lee's army, in defensive positions behind Antietam Creek." stated the cite Women of

Antietam. Lee had been defeated due to the smart plan and only having 52,300 men. With the Union army winning this would affect the future dramatically though they didn't know what to do.

The aftermath of the bloody battle made people more connected and to have a better chance to end slavery. After the battle, the Union soldiers were rushed to women nurses. There were 70 people injured in the Union. Meanwhile, Robert E Lee pleaded for McClellan not to kill him therefore, McClellan let Robert invade Maryland. According to History. Net Abraham orders was to seize Robert. "McClellan failed to pursue Lee aggressively after Antietam; Lincoln ordered that he be removed from command on November 5, 1862. Although because of the victory of the battle against the Codient he would present the Proclamation of Independence to Maryland." As the nation approached its third year of bloody civil war. The proclamation declared, "That all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states, "are, and henceforward shall be free. This speech was presented September 22, 1862. The battle did change people lives in that time zone. It made some of the slaves in the Union area free so that no one could invade or try to fight because of slaves. The whole battle was full of surprises, shocks, and people saving their live for their state. For another reward Robert E Lee and George B. McClellan both got statues surrounded by wooden fences. They are located in Washington D.C. Zooming into the future now the present the south and the north is united as one. The battle and wars have been not recent against the Confederate and the Union. The battle of Antietam and Civil war itself has helped us with people getting more collided. Over all, in contiers, states, land, and family people in the end are always united at one when other people need it the most.

"A land without memories is a people without liberty" ~ Robert E. Lee

An Ode to My Late Golden Year

I suppose I should speak of something that I've learned. Something wise and timeless. Something that may be of help to you. I'm probably preaching to the choir, but I'll do my best to say something good. Let this serve as a time-stamp of me.

Summary is pretty difficult with a million thoughts floating through our heads every day. It's even more difficult to get ourselves to do the things that truly matter, like build relationships with people or acting on our dreams. But I find that we do our best. We take our best shot, even if from the hip. I always overestimate the things I'll be able to accomplish in one day. If it were my way, I'd spend a moment with everyone I've ever met - everyday. Distant family, long-gone loves, that guy who is having a hard time and needs a buddy. My family - and especially them. I hate to miss a second of their lives.

I guess this is what makes life so interesting though. The press of time. I'm reading a book called *Steppenwolf* by Herman Hesse. It's a book that isn't meant for someone of my age, then again, maybe it is. So far it's book about depression and the darkness and loneliness that can seep into our hearts. I have to admit that some of it leaked into my life in this past year, whether it was because of this book or because of life circumstances. It was a restless sadness an almost reasonless depression, an ennui. It did not belong, and I became afraid of this book. I blamed it for my ennui. Nevertheless, I continued to read it.

I am a slow reader, and I find value in it. I have plenty of time to analyze every thought the author is putting forth - and I am in no rush to get to the end anyway. In the book, the main character is on the edge of destruction and is distraught. I, myself, feel astride him, maybe not to the same degree, but nevertheless, distraught. In what seems like his final moments, he meets a girl. She mocks him and tells him that he need not to take himself and life so seriously. She asks him to dance. He says that he cannot. She asks, "How can you be so distraught with life, when you haven't even bothered on living or to learn how to dance?"

I find this scene particularly wonderful. I believe the human mind can fool itself into believe whatever it is trained to, for better or worse. We can trap ourselves in irrational miseries. You are what you eat, so be conscious of what you are taking in and feeding yourself. This is not to say that sadness by any means is a bad thing. It's natural, and it has a reason. It's when life is unbalanced that emotions like sadness can take over, because sadness is addicting to a certain extent. Sadness is

powerful, it makes you feel! It inspires you to write, and reach out, and change. When you have it, use it. Create something, do something that will make someone smile. Learn something! In the words of the great Joni Mitchell, “life is for learning.” And in the words of Louis C.K., “misery is wasted on the miserable.”

We may have escaped the predatory food chain, but you are a fool to believe that you can escape the emotional food chain. This is what I like to call, “the tragedy of the king.” I am not insinuating that I am a king my any means. I merely mean that we all seek to be the masters of our own destiny. One of the greatest follies of man is that many of us believe that one day we will reach a certain point where life will be nothing but suede and butter from there on. Because after all, what more could a king want? What does a perfectly contented man, a king, dream about? I’m not really sure. But we can look at examples like Chris Cornell. He was a king among men, yet he was still a man. You can spend your whole life accomplishing your dreams, but you will never transcend humanity. So balance yourself and don’t lose sight of what’s really important. Take a step back and gaze at the stars, smell the trees in the wind, and love as deeply as you can those around you. Take time to enjoy the mortal things. Time presses with an even flow, but, in the words of Hesse, you can find the “eternal in the momentary.” In the ending lines of the opening song to Father John Misty’s album Pure Comedy when the sarcasm and extreme objectivity has faded he says earnestly - “I hate to say it, but each other is all we’ve got.”

I hope I have conveyed some sort of something here.

Gabrielle Everett
Middle School Essay

Bigfoot Project

Somewhere in the Deep, Dark, Woods, there lies a scary creature name Bigfoot. But none has found him
Yet I don't know about you but I hope someone finds him. This introduction won't be long I just want to keep it short so we can get on with the essay . If you don't know who bigfoot is bigfoot is a scary creature who doesn't show itself to people there have been over 1,000 sightings but before I get into that

I want to talk about my first main idea.

First, People wonder “why does bigfoot hide” where does he hide” so here are some facts to answer your question “We assume Bigfoot crossed the road to get to the other side, as the old joke goes, but with the enigmatic hominid, nobody knows for sure. Here's what we do know: On June 22, 2009, at around 6:30 p.m., a 19-year-old college student was driving on a curvy back road near Rhinebeck, N.Y., on the way to a rehearsal at a nearby performing arts center, according to the BFRO report. As he swerved to miss an object on the road — a shopping bag containing, oddly, an open cereal box and a small log — he glanced in his rearview mirror and saw someone or something darting behind his car, apparently to retrieve the bag,” according to animalplanet.com. If I were Bigfoot, I would hide to because people try to catch him and kill him.

Ever wondered how tall Bigfoot is well here is you paragraph where i have all the basic facts about Bigfoot. Bigfoot has existed for over a hundred years around the world. David Thompson was the first to discover Bigfoot. He found a set of footprints in 1811. David Thompson (I don't know for sure) measured the foot to see how tall he was. Bigfoot is about 10 feet tall.

Lastly, Bigfoot's most sightings are in Washington in the county Pierce there were 76 sightings in pierce and with all the county together there were 528. There are over 2,000 across the world. There might be more than one Bigfoot there could 9 or 10 bigfoots.

As a result, Bigfoot is very popular. Bigfoot is known across the world for all of his stories and books about him. I would love to keep talking but this story has gone on too long and it is time to end. I hope you enjoyed the book.

What Are Non-Newtonian Fluids?

Have you ever played with that weird ooey gooey solid but liquid material that you can't stop playing with? If you have, you probably were playing with a cornstarch and water mixture called oobleck. This fun mixture is a Non-Newtonian Fluid. Most people are puzzled when you ask them what is a Non-Newtonian fluid, well if you want to know now you're in the right place!

Non-Newtonian fluids are extraordinary in the way they work. Like how Non-Newtonian fluids are liquids that can change viscosity (thickness) when pressure is applied. There are four types of non-Newtonian fluids Dilatant, Pseudoplastic, Rheopectic, and Thixotropic. Dilatant is "Viscosity of the fluid increases when shear is applied," said Sara Peters. Pseudoplastic is the opposite of Dilatant. Rheopectic is "Rheopectic is very similar to dilatant in that when shear is applied, viscosity increases. The difference here is that viscosity increase is time-dependent," said Sara Peters. "Fluids with thixotropic properties decrease in viscosity when shear is applied. This is a time-dependent property as well," said Sara Peters. The particles of non-Newtonian fluids clump making it have a thicker more solid viscosity.

Starting to wonder what some non-Newtonian fluids are and who discovered it? Sir Isaac Newton was the one to discover this weird fluid. One of the most well known Non-Newtonian fluids is oobleck, this cornstarch and water fluid is a lot of fun and easy to make. Here are some dilatant fluids Quicksand, oobleck, and silly putty. Ketchup is a pseudoplastic fluid. Gypsum paste and cream are Rheopectic fluids. Paint, cosmetics, asphalt, and glue are Thixotropic fluids.

Not only are non-Newtonian fluids extraordinary but there are lots of fun things to do with them. For instance, many people have done with oobleck is fill a kiddie pool and try to swim in it, it's a lot of fun and you'll get a good laugh out of it. Another thing much more simple is filling a balloon with oobleck and you've made yourself a homemade stress ball. If you put it on a speaker it will look like it's dancing. Have a project in school to make something from a drop use oobleck though you do want a bit more than just an egg in a cup of oobleck.

Coming into this project I only knew of one Non-Newtonian Fluid, oobleck! After a few hours of research, I learned so much more and I hope you did too. Non-Newtonian fluids are crazy, easy-to-make, hours of fun, ooey gooey solid but liquid fluids that you'll love!

Arianna Loudermilk

Middle School Essay

The Question That Baffles the World is Should the Death Penalty Still Be Allowed?

The method of execution as capital punishment has been around for centuries across thousands of cultures. The death penalty is highly debated in Western countries such as the United States. The pros, cons, and risk factors vary from case to case. Some people say that the death penalty is inhumane and should be against the law. These reasons and more will be discussed in this essay to justify this form of capital punishment.

Prisons in the United States are being overfilled and people with death penalties are usually given the lethal injection to lower the occupancy. The overflow of inmates leads to economic problems. Since prisons are being overfilled, it is leading to problems such as people sharing beds or unclean and unsanitary needs. And for those people who do not commit such crime and have to stay in such environment is not fair. People that commit less harsh crimes should have as lengthy of a punishment as those who commit more serious crimes. These economic problems start with the cost to taxpayers for each prisoner.

Each inmate costs taxpayers approximately thirty-two thousand dollars each year, not including New York as they have one of the highest operating costs that are approximately sixty thousand dollars per inmate per year. There is also an average of three thousand people on death row each year. If we take the average operating cost of an inmate and multiply that by the number of people on death row we see that it costs taxpayers nearly ninety-three million dollars each year.

In my research, I noted that there are about three hundred million taxpaying Americans. If we divide the cost over the taxpayers it costs three hundred dollars per American to pay for only the people on death row. Of course, the exact amount varies by an individual's income, but this is just to show the high operating costs. Aside from the high costs to Americans, other people believe that crimes so horrific deserve a capital punishment such as execution because retribution is the only option. The reasoning for this is logical and provides closure for the victims' family.

On debate.com people stated their feelings and beliefs about death penalties, this is what an unknown user said. "What about those serial killers. What about the serial rapist? Do you really want those people on

Should the Death Penalty
Still Be Allowed

this earth? If they can't control themselves during the time they were free, they should not be allowed to remain part of society and get what they deserve for all the pain they have caused others.” In my opinion, I believe that that is a good reason.

Sean O'Lee
Middle School Essay



Biking Catastrophe

My first bike was a blue bumblebee with training wheels sticking out from the sides like wings on a bird. I loved how easy it was to move fast with such little force. I was satisfied being a novice with training wheels for about three years, but then all my friends started going faster than me. I asked my dad, "How can I go faster?"

He replied, "Let's take off the training wheels."

Learning to ride was catastrophic. My dad held the seat of the bike and told me not to stop pedaling, but I could tell the difference when he let go. The handlebar would shake uncontrollably and I would unintentionally head toward the sidewalk. I learned how to jump off a bike to avoid crashing before learning how to properly start riding. After a month, I couldn't take the pain. The bike seemed very hostile towards me. I left bicycling alone.

A year later, I got back on. I just pedaled as fast as I could and didn't know when Dad let go. Riding felt like flying. I would get home from school on a calm, dry day and ride my bike, feeling the breeze on my face. I still couldn't turn though, only ride in straight lines. At summer camp, a counselor told me to lean which way I wanted to turn. I tried, and was able to very, very slowly start turning on my bike. Looking back, I concur with my parents that karate helped me learn how to keep my balance. Eventually my best turn was 180 degrees, and my pedal touched the rode, but I stayed on. Bicycling is fun, and it's okay to take a break for a while, as long as you get back to it. Like anything worth having, you have to work to accomplish your task.



Friend or Foe?

1.

It was hard for me to believe that she could behave that way. Supposedly, she was my friend of three years. We had gone trick-or-treating together last Halloween, been to her birthday party twice, and practiced tennis together many afternoons after school. Just the night before, we had treated her family to a nice pasta dinner, complete with her favorite chocolate fudge ice cream, in celebration of our win together in doubles. So, it was hard to understand why she did it.

Even long after the end of that fateful point, I still couldn't understand Carrie's actions. When it was my turn to return serve, it was obvious that I was not ready. My back was turned to her as I was fixing my cap, tightening the strap around my ponytail. When I turned around, the ball was already flying by me. I looked at her wondering what had just happened, but she looked back at me with steely eyes and took the point.

A lot of the girls wanted to win at all costs. Often opponents would try to annoy me as a way to distract me from the game. One girl even cried real tears and timed her bawling outbursts only when I was serving. Amazing. One strategy is to serve to the opponent when the opponent is not ready. The quick serve. These stunts are pulled more often by players who are losing. And she was losing. But I let my guard down thinking she was my friend.

All those thoughts ran through my head in a split second. So I quickly regained my composure and went on to playing the next point, trying to overlook the fact that my friend had just stolen a point from me. Even though Carrie did not quick serve me again for the rest of the match, she started doing other things to annoy me, like calling close balls out, questioning my line calls, and not calling out the score as she was supposed to.

How could she be so ruthless in trying to win this match? Didn't she care about the consequences? Didn't she care about our friendship? In the end, I won the match but that happy lighthearted triumphant feeling of winning was not there. It was replaced by an unfamiliar cold and painful feeling of betrayal. I stopped playing doubles with her after that match. Now whenever I see her at tournaments, my heart races and I have to decide if she is my friend or foe.

2.

Today was different. The early morning sun was starting to warm my hands. I held onto my new racquet, endorsed by Djokovic in all the tennis magazine spreads. And like Djokovic, I was going to win. I had been playing tennis since before kindergarten. Initially it was the thrill of hitting a cone and earning a buck that kept my interest. Then I started to enjoy the spectators in the park who would clap when a cone was knocked down. I loved the excitement in their eyes and smiles. These days, I loved the excitement of playing a hard-fought game even if the results didn't turn out the way that I want.

My heart began to race as we pulled into the parking lot of the tennis center, but my mind slowed it with a verse from Frozen: "Here I stand in the light of day." There was no hesitation. I was tired of losing. This time I was going to show my parents that I could win. Something like "the wind is howling like a swirling storm inside" was telling me how I was going to do it.

It was not a quick warm up. I did my routine: one-hundred jumps on the weighted rope, Carioca running drills, high-knees, butt-kickers and finally deep low lunges. In that order. Every time. I could do them with my eyes closed.

Then it was almost time to check-in. Focus. Remember Plan A: serve to the opponent's backhand with a slice. If that didn't work, go to Plan B. Hit an angled ground stroke to her backhand and then go down the line. If both fail, then Plan C. But there was no Plan C. Help! Keep breathing. Don't forget to breathe out when jumping into the serve. Right. I would be alright if I stuck to the plan. Finally, behind the long row of palms, stood the tiny, almost hidden check-in-desk. The overworked lady at the desk with the rushed, pulled-up hair glanced up quickly at me and snapped, "Your name?" in the most unpleasant and grouchy voice. "Pastel," I replied, still sheepishly after all these years. "Court seven. Be at the court in an hour. If you're not on time, there's a point deduction . . ." And I could finish the sentence each time I was told, but I'd always swallow hard knowing that someday I might be late and get penalized. Luckily it had never happened... yet. Better not to tempt fate.

I took a step back from the lady behind the desk and asked, "Who am I playing?" She searched through the draw sheets. I nearly fell backwards as she drawled, "Carrie Z., she's your opponent."

"Thank you," I said hastily and sped off.

For the remainder of the hour, I continued my warm-up dynamic exercises, rehearsed my battle strategies. Before I knew it, time was up. I heard the loud speaker announce that Carrie Z. was already on the court and asked for me to go to Court Seven. I hoped that today would be a lucky day because my favorite number was seven. But what if that's Carrie's favorite number now? After all, it had been nearly two years since we last spoke.

At the court, Carrie and I gave each other swift smiles and brisk hi's. She had changed her hairstyle, keeping her brown hair longer, now tied up neatly in a swaying ponytail sectioned into thirds with three blue hair ties. So nice. What happened to the bangs?

"Do you want to spin your racquet?" Carrie's voice punctuated the silence. "Arrow up or down?"

"Arrow up," I replied and watched the racket land arrow down so Carrie was going to serve first, and I picked to start on the side of the court against the morning sun. I knew she had become a lot better player. Something about her composure. Had she forgotten about what she'd done to me just two years ago? Should I return the favor and stab her in the back? No, I forced myself to hum the words in my head, "Let it go, let it go; turn away and slam the door." Then the words just blurted out loud, "It's time to see what I can do," as I tightened my cap strap around my ponytail.

An hour and a half into the match, I felt the sun's rays pouring down on me; palms and brows salty and sweaty, I felt my ribcage heave and swell around my bursting heart. It was difficult to maintain concentration. I was mentally and physically exhausted. But I was ahead 6-1, 5-4. Still, I was taken aback that Carrie had not used any of her old bag of tricks this time. The line calls were fair. There was no questioning my calls. Now I just had to focus. One more game and I would win. This was crunch time. When I was up, I had a bad tendency to relax and my mind could wander, allowing the other play to catch up. Then I would have to play a third full set. And I hate third sets!

Just split, run to the ball, load, feet solid on the floor and swing. Remember to rotate the shoulder and hip to complete that full swing. Relax. I had done it thousands of times in practice. But Carrie surprised me and gave me an awkward ball that landed right in front of me so I sliced defensively. The ball landed short. Before I knew it, the ball flew by me. Minutes later, I had lost the second set.

My turn to serve. The sun was directly in my eyes, fiercely bright. I ineffectively tried to shield the light with my other hand. As always, I bounced the ball seven times. Would Carrie carry out her old tricks now? Just really focus. Do the deep knee bend, trophy position, and jump into the serve. I could see Carrie's sharp silhouette, jaguar crouch, swaying right and left waiting to pounce on her prey... me.

All the same, I was confident I could do this. I had been playing tennis since I was four years old. I took a deep breath and my knees dropped synchronized to my arm bend in perfect trophy position, hip leaning forward, then in a flash my legs sprang up, and my racquet ripped the ball. My slice serve landed right where I wanted it. But the spin did not fool her; she knew me too well. Each of us were hitting and dashing hard corner to corner until I saw Carrie coming to the net. I sped back, taking advantage of the perfect moment and lobbing the ball deep and high over her head. She turned and ran with her back to me, quickly scrambling to outrun the ball, and at the last moment lunge hit

the ball back over the net. While Carrie was still turned away, the ball landed on the outside margin of the line. It was difficult to say if it actually touched the line or not. It was my call. In or out? Friend or foe?

The ball had already bounced twice before Carrie turned around. She looked at me with wide, imploring eyes. “It’s good,” I said, clapping on the strings of my racket head. And with that, Carrie screamed, “I won! I won!” and ran towards me, throwing her arms around me in a warm, strong embrace. This was the first time I loved tennis more for its losses than wins.

As we put back our racquets into our oversized tennis bags, I turned to Carrie and said, “Congrats. You played really well,” and quickly added, “I like how you did your hair with all the pretty blue ribbons.”

Carrie smiled again and said, “Hey, do you want to get some chocolate fudge ice cream? My treat.”

As we walked off the court together, I did a little dance in my head to “Here I stand in the light of day.” Well, Mom and Dad, I told you I was going to show you I could win—back my friend.

Mathilda D. Seekatz

Middle School Essay

My Life

Since you are little you want to grow up as fast as you can. One day you are four years old and the next day you are eighteen and about to graduate. Then, time stops. You realize you about to be on your own for the first time in your life. Adults even say the years went by so fast I couldn't even see them. The day might feel long but days turn into a weeks, weeks turn into months, and months turn into years. Then years and years go by and you don't even notice. We may have memories, but do you really remember everything. We forget and the only thing we can remember is in the present, but what happens to the present? The present turns into the past.

I have always thought I want to be older like my mom, dad, and brothers, my role models, but I look back at photos and I realize how easy life was. The older I get I realize how much you have to do, how much responsibility I have to my family and myself. When I was about six, I put on makeup so I could look like my mom. My brother said, "Take that off you don't need to grow up too fast try to stay as little as you can for long as you can." As a kid, I thought my big brother is just trying to tell me what to do. Then about a month ago, I went to my aunt's house and saw my seven-year-old cousin putting on makeup. My heart stopped and realized what my brother felt like and didn't want to feel that. I told her to take it off and she didn't listen and a little piece of my life came full circle. About half of my life I've thought of college. Anything I do in school I think of the long term or the future effect of things. I have had obstacles, I get in trouble, I get bad grades, I make mistakes, and that's what it is like to be a human. As I get older I notice problems that were so big at the moment turn into nothing later, and sometimes they even turn into something good. At the moment we can only see what is front of us and what is happening at the moment we can't see the bigger picture. Which means that what is happening to you seems so big because it is in the moment, but there is so much more that is going to happen in your life and those big problems turn into just a memory. It's just a pebble on your enormous mountain of life. When I was about eight years old I found out my parents were getting divorced, I thought it was the end of the world. Later I found another role model my stepmom Kathy she is one of the smartest, sweetest people I know, and I was proud to call her part of my family when my dad and her got married. I felt honored to walk her down the aisle. After I met Kathy,

I started looking on the bright side of everything. I have two families that means twice the amount of love. Kathy and my dad also gave me one of the greatest gift of all, the gift of being a big sister. I had so many things to be thankful for. I am a lucky person luckier than a lot of people. I have a great family with a lot of people, and I see kids complain about not getting the newest phone or not getting a cute dress. I get mad because they take for granted how much they have, how lucky they are, and how blessed their lives are. As I get older life gets harder and these are the things I think about every time I have a bad day. I go through problems every day I am going through a problem right now and all I know is that I will make it, and come out of it stronger than before. Right now when I think about my future I imagine it to be perfect. having a great life having no drama no complications and no mistakes, but I know now that it isn't going to be like that it's going to be full of drama, full of mistakes, and full of complications because that is life.

Through my years I have heard these important lessons about life, and this is my life hearing and learning new things everyday. I am still learning my lesson and it makes me stronger and smarter. These lessons are taught to me by my beautiful and loving mom, my amazing dad, my sweet step mom, my mom's boyfriend, and my fantastic brothers. Family and friends are precious things to me, and I couldn't make it through life without them.

Brandon Tompkins


Middle School Essay



Zero

The year of 2016 was the best and worst of all the years I've lived. At the beginning of the year, we found a family who needed someone to foster, or take care of, their pit bull. This was a hard choice for their family, but they were moving to Canada. The dog had a bad disease, and he couldn't travel in a plane because it would kill him. Also, he had already survived cancer. This dog's name was Zero. My mom told me that we could take him and foster him. When he first came, I fell in love with him; he was already my best friend. Unfortunately, our other female pit didn't approve because she was the alpha. It didn't take long for them to start getting along though. I was always so excited to go to my mom's house, so I could see him. Every single day I would play with him. He slept in my bed with me every night, watching over me, making sure I was safe. He was my protector, and I was his. We took him to Dumont Dunes all the time and he loved it. Before we had our RV, we would drive there in our truck. Since he thought he was a lap dog, I would usually end up with a 90-pound pit bull on top of me for two hours. I didn't care; actually, I was happy because he was happy.

Later that year, December 18 to be exact, was the beginning of the worst day of my life, and I didn't even know it. It was Christmas break at school, so I spent most of my day at my neighbor's house. That night I was at my neighbor's house when my sister ran over, grabbed me, and told me Zero was lying down on the ground in the kitchen and wouldn't move. I ran home to see my best friend dying on the ground. I immediately started crying and giving him hugs and kisses, which, today, I don't feel was enough. My mom and stepdad had to convince me to let go of him because if I didn't, they couldn't save him. As soon as I let go, I somehow knew it would be the last time I would touch him or see him, but I was still hoping he wouldn't die. They took him to the vet to see if someone could save him. I went back over to my neighbor's house and just stared out the window, thinking, and waiting. When they finally came back, I ran out the door to see him, but he wasn't there. The vets said that he passed because of fluids surrounding his heart. I was still in tears from earlier that night, but I cried even harder. Today, I sleep on my bed without Zero, I drive to Dumont without Zero, and I do everything and go everywhere, without Zero. At least I know his spirit is still with me everywhere, and he doesn't have to suffer any longer.



Essay

the essayists

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Chloe Dell
High School Essay



The Worst Musician

For the years that I studied classical piano, I stuck to my bounds like a royal composer, commissioned to stay confined within the limits of the page. Only after being thrust headfirst into the world of jazz did I receive a lifeline from someone I least expected to hand me one.

Mr. Peter “Effin” Bowman was scary. A tall, looming figure with intense eyes that could detect shadiness from miles away. He had a booming voice along with no filter whatsoever. He told you how it was, and his candor was often met with sheepish nodding, as we all knew it was his way or the highway. To combat his intense personality, he wore equally ardent bright, colorful socks almost daily. He made attempts to match them to his shirts of various styles, often to no avail. Cup of coffee in hand, he walked with confidence, always letting everyone know that he had the authority. He pushed the band to work harder no matter how good we thought we sounded. Criticisms and straightforward comments towards others’ playing, playful threats, and jokes were his game. When it came to jazz, the man was an unlikely genius, harboring more knowledge and wild stories than any of us could dream of having.

The decision to audition for Combo, a class for small jazz groups given public performance opportunities, was fueled by peer pressure along with an aspiration to prove myself in my new major. Mr. Bowman judged the audition along with various others. Somehow, through shaky hands, the lack of color in my chord voicings, and my questionable solo tactics, I made it in. I’d embarrassed myself, of course, but nonetheless, my name was on the list of musicians who had made the cut. As a sophomore, I was happy, I had proven to my future jazz teachers that I could adapt to playing an unfamiliar genre. In my naive mind, I thought of combo as an easy class that I could relax and have fun in while still learning how to play. I had what many like to call “a big storm coming.”

The second week of school came and with it more Combo. I was adjusting to my group and the feeling of playing with a smaller set of people. I hadn’t played a gig yet, and I was happy to evade that responsibility. It was the Friday of our first test, and we prepared “Relaxing at Camarillo” by Charlie Parker in the style of a samba. It sounded awkward in theory, but for us, it worked. Surprisingly, Mr. Bowman found the piece appealing and complimented us on our creativity and cohesiveness. “You’re getting into the groove of it,” he told me. I couldn’t have been happier.

My happiness would be short-lived, however, when the secretary for the jazz program, Dr. Mann, would pull me aside and ask me to play a gig next Saturday. Ordinarily, she would have given it to the other pianists, as she knew that I hadn't been playing jazz for long. The others were, conveniently, busy that weekend, so that left me to fill in. As she informed me of the details, my face grew warm, and I felt a lump in my throat. My nose started to sting, my eyes got watery, and my head started to hurt. I couldn't concentrate on what she was telling me, as the only thought I had was, "I can't do this." It took every ounce of self-control not to lose it as she was speaking and keep my cool through other groups' pieces. Shaky, labored breathing and looking up frequently to deter the tears from crawling out of my eyes, as the stress built within my mind was all I could do at that moment. I commended my anxiety for at least having the decency to stop me from running out of the room.

After the tests, we were dismissed to our practice rooms to begin working on the next assignment. My group began discussing songs to play as I sat back and contemplated my plan of action to prepare for the upcoming gig. Should I beg one of the other pianists to make time? Should I beg Dr. Mann not to put me on it? Should I create some last minute plans? Should I suck it up? That last option was a last resort, as logical as it may seem for it to be my first. Suddenly, the bassist spoke up.

"Hey, are you okay?" he asked with genuine concern on his face. My lip trembled, I felt my nose start to sting again, the dull pain in my head returned, and my vision started to blur.

"No," I answered quietly before breaking down completely and sobbing quietly into my hands. Shaking and choking, whispered and broken fragments of the phrase "I can't do this" spilled from my mouth. Eventually, I began making minimal noise and was left to shuddering and gasping for air. I let everything out with no chance of reeling any of my emotions back in, lucky I didn't wear makeup that day. Suddenly, I felt comforting hands on my back and shoulders, and I felt better knowing that my other bandmates had the urge to console me rather than laugh at my irrational response. I made my way to the empty bathroom, where I was able to ugly cry without worrying about who would hear me, letting out all my frustrations and anger towards myself. Lamenting the fact that I hadn't practiced enough over the summer yet failing to provide myself with the proper motivation to push myself to learn what I needed quickly, it was a constant cycle. After my mental breakdown had subsided, I came back into practice, ready to receive the information on how to start the next assignment. My stress was pushed to the back of my mind as we went over the arrangement.

The option of begging another pianist to make time became my plan of action due to the overbearing feeling that I was a complete and utter coward when it came to stepping outside of my comfort zone. The pianist agreed to talk to the organizer of the event he was attending, and

he said he would get back to me when he had answers. That left the rest of that day to get through with this looming responsibility and ball of stress hanging over my head. I pushed it out of my mind and made it past lunch and into my jazz class with Mr. Bowman. Soft, rounded, wooden tones of the marimba filled the air, refusing to be drowned out by jazz talk among the other musicians. In the midst of my teacher's playing, I was mesmerized. My eyes followed his every move as he bounced back and forth demonstrating polyrhythms and an excellent sense of time in the music, even without another drummer or metronome to rely on. Suddenly, he stopped and turned to me.

"Whatchu want, girl?" he boomed characteristically as he resumed playing. I immediately blushed with fear, feeling as though I'd upset him. I responded quietly and tried to move along to the case room in order to get ready for rehearsal, but he stopped me, pulling me aside while everyone else was preoccupied with tuning up.

"Hey, are you alright?" he asked, voice laced with genuine concern. My heart sank into my stomach. He had heard me earlier. I felt embarrassed, knowing that the only reason I did so was because I was afraid of stepping outside of my comfort zone. I answered honestly.

"Yes, I'm just stressing out about the gig on Saturday. I know I'm not ready," I started to tense and felt my tears return.

"Hey, hey, hey," he interrupted my train of thought, "you need to relax." It wasn't a request but a command. I nodded remorsefully and stepped back in shame of my emotions. I was baring myself to a person that I knew I should keep a wall in front of. When I went into the jazz program, the two pieces of advice that stuck with me were "don't take anything Bowman says personally and never let him see you cry." I had broken both rules in one day.

"If there is something I know about you," he stopped his mallets, "it's that you care about this. You care about how you play, and that's important. But you start to care too much, and that's when things get ugly." I nodded in agreement, knowing that my perfectionism was a long-standing issue. Jazz was the art of improvisation and experimentation while classical music focused on accuracy and precision. Jazz itself reflected the opposite of caring too much, the opposite of what I'd been taught since I was nine years old. I was not a jazz pianist. I did not belong.

"There's something great," he said, resuming practice, "about being the worst musician in the room." I was taken aback, and my immediate thoughts in response were that he thought of me as the weakest link. My face began to warm, but I swallowed the lump in my throat before it could even form. I tried my best to focus on what he was saying rather than how my mind decided to interpret it.

"Do you know what I mean when I say that?" he asked, pulling me out of my own doubt. His hands hadn't stopped their movements as he looked up at me in time to see me shake my head. "There's so much

you can learn from being the worst musician in the room.” In the moment, those words left his mouth, my building anxiety dissipated. I didn’t have to be confined to the rules of the Baroque, Romantic, or Impressionistic periods anymore. I am a jazz pianist, and I have a lot to learn. I can focus on Bill Evans and Duke Ellington and forget about Scriabin and Mozart. I can learn how to sight read chords and still be able to make a rainbow. I can make mistakes in my playing and turn them around into something amazing.

Opportunities and advantages stretched far and wide outside of my comfort zone. The worst musician in the room learns the most from others and grows just the same. When surrounded by talent, you have to use it to foster your own. I learned to listen and watch rather than shut down and convince myself that I didn’t belong. I am a jazz pianist, and I have a lot to learn.

Mr. Bowman is still scary. He still has a booming voice and no filter, eyes that stare into your soul, and a looming figure. He still threatens his bands with the phrase, “You gon’ catch my full wrath.” But even in all that madness, he emerges as a true jazz musician that has collected experiences that I would give anything to have. He harbors thousands of tips and lessons and although seemingly scatterbrained, he proves to be an unlikely genius, one I am happy and eager to learn from.

In learning about my advantages as an inexperienced player, I also learned something about my fear of the stage. Stage fright is selfish. The band is counting on the rhythm section. The band is counting on its pianist, bassist, and drummer, to carry them and support their melody. In other words, I don’t have the time or the right to be nervous, I have to play. Two days before the gig, the pianist finally answered that, yes, he would substitute for me. I never got the chance to play that day. However, had it not been for that last minute placement, I never would have been given the single piece of advice that I remember and remind myself of daily. Mr. Bowman’s words regarding being the worst musician in the room stuck with me. The worst musician in the room is the luckiest; they can learn so much.

Emma Domschot

High School Essay

Untitled

Every single day, I fail. I fail at accomplishing trivial and important things alike. In the scheme of things, failing a test is a minor failure that does not teach you something truly meaningful other than that you did not know the material well enough. In contrast, failing a person is a significant failure that can teach a much more valuable lesson that can be applied toward life. I've failed a multitude of people within my short lifetime: my mother, my sisters, my step dad and many more. Yet, I've learned that the most important person I've failed ended up being myself.

Failing yourself and others is a part of life; it is how you learn. The most valuable failure I have experienced has been my failure to resist my anxiety. For almost my entire life, I have had anxiety. One specific time I remember in which I experienced anxiety and failed to fight, it was when I was invited to a friend's birthday party. This was during the beginning of my first year of high school, and I had not grown extremely close with this friend yet. I remember initially being excited about being invited to her party, yet I felt oddly restless about it. I smiled and thanked her as she handed me the invitation while simultaneously feeling that familiar sinking sensation in my stomach. I did not know what to expect at her party and instead of going and discovering the unknown, I chickened out at the last minute and succumbed to my anxiety. This was not the first time I had to come up with an excuse as to why I couldn't attend someone's party. I could not count the amount of times I have decided against something because of my anxiety. It's always the same cycle: I end up choosing not to do something due to my anxiety and end up regretting it afterward. I feel defeated and helpless because I understand and know that I would have been fine doing whatever it was I had anxiety about. By not going to that party, I had relented to my anxiety and allowed it to control my life. I was and still am completely capable of standing up to the anxiety that seems to be in total control of my every action. I fail every single day by not doing that. I fail myself by not standing up for myself. My anxiety is my demon that haunts me every single day; it whispers everything that could go wrong and nothing that could go right to me. If I had just chosen then to fight my anxiety, to not allow it to restrain me from living normally, I would not have failed myself. It takes much effort to resist anxiety, but it is possible nonetheless. I failed myself by not choosing to search for and find the strength within me to get there, all because I thought I was not capable of doing so. My ultimate failure, despite being such a painful time, is

seemingly actually the method of finding my strength.

Failure teaches you not only what your mistakes were, but how to succeed the next time. Each failure to resist my anxiety brought me closer to learning that how I feel is a choice. It taught me that being happy and feeling content with life is not something you just stumble upon, but something you must fight for. Anxiety is a mental affliction that is not easily avoidable or disposable. The best way to defeat it is to learn how to manage it. I have learned from my failures that anxiety is unavoidable. However, this does not mean I must yield to. My anxiety will always be there; it is my choice as to how I handle it. Not only does this apply to anxiety, but truly to anything I choose it to. I may not always be in control of what occurs in my life, but I am in control of how I react and what I choose to do in response to those circumstances. My one aspiration in life, similar to many others', is happiness. If I truly want to achieve happiness, I must choose happiness. I now understand that if I am anxious it is because I allowed that for myself.

I used to consider my anxiety and my failure to initially resist succumbing to my anxiety to be my biggest limitation and hindrance in life. In reality, my anxiety has never hindered my success; I have. It has taught me that everything in life is a choice. I am grateful for my anxiety and the failures that come along with it as I have been immensely strengthened by them. As any normal human being, I will have my good days and bad days. Ultimately though, the decision is up to me just how badly I want those bad days to be, and in what way I want the daily failures of life to affect me.

Penelope Duran

High School Essay



Sled Ride

Life is a sled ride. Wild and fun though sometimes challenging. In life, one has to learn how to overcome steep slopes and boulders and how to enjoy it for what it is.

I remember finding my first sled underneath the tree one Christmas, some years ago. It was plain, wooden and unremarkable -- just like me. It had my initials carved onto the bottom, and it seemed both solid and fragile at the same time, with its small frame and sturdy material. Despite it being so plain, I was fascinated by it, and quickly ran outside to go sledding for the first time. My younger siblings dropped their toys and presents and followed me outside in hopes of also getting a turn.

We went to a hill at a nearby park to go sledding. All three of us hopped onto the sled, me sitting on the front and holding the reins to steer. My hands brushed against the cold snow, and then we were off. Racing down the hill was a terrifyingly incredible experience. Though it was a challenge to keep our balance in order not fall over, and to avoid obstacles like trees and boulders, we were still having a good time. With the excitement in our souls, the adrenaline rushing through us and the wind in our ears, we couldn't help but smile. At the same time, my mind was screaming in fear as the trees seemed to rush past us, but I was also laughing as the wind touched my face. My siblings' laughter sounded like silver church bells, and they both radiated with joy. The expression "going downhill" ironically took on a positive meaning as we sped across the snow. With all our energy, we almost forgot our time and place. Even as the day came to an end and air became colder, all we could feel was the warmth in our hearts.

I saw people walking through the park with cold grim expressions on their faces, as if the cold were making their soul bitter. I saw ducks huddling in their nests as if cowering from winter. I saw still leafless trees, which would never have the opportunity to go sledding unless they were made into one. I wish often that I and others could both literally and metaphorically go sledding, so that we could see the joy that winter holds and not only the cold and lifeless landscape.

It is incredible how small moments can symbolize the world, and how even the smallest experiences can impact someone's life so much. Through things from my childhood, such as sledding, I have learned to take a different view on life. I have learned to see the good in challenges and make it a happy memory. The most satisfying thing in life is being

able to overcome challenges and to find joy where others may not. Yes, maybe sledding is for children and not for adults, but perhaps it is exactly this way of thinking that allows children to see the world in its best light. That's why sometimes we have to accept challenges as they are and learn to ride with it.

My Ambiguous Feeling

As I am sitting against the stage in a crowded room filled with hundreds of competitors, my heart rate starts accelerating. My back and neck are aching; I'm dehydrated, and thoroughly sleep-deprived. As I am stressing about all the work that I have been procrastinating throughout the day, I can't help but have an ambiguous feeling, an overwhelming mixture of curiosity and anxiety.

Speech and Debate tournaments are how I express my competitiveness. These weekends are filled with constant struggles, both mental and physical. It's a combination of being able to focus again and redirect the negative energy you get from being defeated, and the physical struggles that involve running around a high school for twenty minutes, trying to figure out which room you belong in. Speech and Debate is the activity that has brought challenge in my life. Being involved in several activities is not that difficult when you thoroughly enjoy what you are doing and you can thrive in each one of them. Although Speech and Debate was an activity that I loved, it was not something I was phenomenal at. It tested my emotional boundaries by making me break down in stress from the sleep deprivation, yet laugh hysterically with my team members at other times. Overall, this challenge has continuously been worth it, for that ambiguous feeling I get when awards are about to be given.

When it is finally time for the award process to start and I am exhausted while also feeling the repercussions of not eating lunch, I feel an extreme amount of nervousness. Sitting cramped in a room, I can only think about whether or not I received an award, and also if we are creating a fire hazard by the amount of people compacted in the room. Although this situation tends to be quite uncomfortable, it gives me time to reflect on my different goals and what I have been doing to accomplish them overall. As awards start, the head coach of the hosting school usually goes on some big tangent about whom they would like to thank. Most of the times I actually enjoy the speech; sometimes, I am praying for it to end. When we finally get to my events in the award process, I question whether my name is going to be called. This activity is not something that I am naturally talented at. My energetic and spirited competitors are very talented. Because of this, it is difficult to be awarded with a trophy. For that reason, I genuinely do feel accomplished when it happens.

As I walk up on the stage, I get that ambiguous feeling in my chest again. I cannot quite pinpoint what it is, but it's a complicated mixture of emotions all bottled up. It's confusing. As the "voice of golden desert" slowly announces the winners from sixth place to first place, my heart rate continues to accelerate. I look out at the audience and stand with the best posture and confidence that a 6'1" teenage girl can possibly have. The countdown continues, "and in fourth place..., in third place...." I start to feel hope around third place that I may have gotten the ultimate trophy. "In first place from Green Valley High School...." The amount of joy that overwhelms me during this moment simply cannot be expressed. It is one thing to obtain your normal accolades for accomplishments that you work hard in. But when you are constantly and consistently defeated and you finally win, you get a feeling of reassurance. That feeling of validation after toil and hard work. This indescribable feeling is the reason I travel eight hours on a bus to compete at a tournament in California. It's the reason that all of us work so hard after always losing. It's the reason that sometimes we like to focus on something that we aren't the best at, when we are the best at several other things. It's the reason we like the challenge. It's for that moment when that ambiguous feeling becomes clearer than ever.

Alyssa Tudor
High School Essay



Birthdays

At some point in my adolescence, my fears changed from being afraid of the dark to fearing my birthday. There came a time when I stopped hoping my birthday will come sooner and I started wishing I could go back to my last one. For most people, it happens around the time they get their first wrinkle, or when they realize with age comes responsibility. For me, it was all of the above and the realization that I wasn't special anymore.

When I was little, I knew I was special because everything around me was big and I was small. Different and special were synonymous. My tininess only added to my immense cuteness, I had chipmunk cheeks, a smile that took up half my face, and the squeaky voice of a mouse. I identified as adorable it became my safe haven. When people think you're adorable they let you do and say whatever you want because all of it is cute. I was sarcastic and mean, but no one noticed. They all thought it was funny, cute, sassy, and I leaned into it. I grew up unchecked and unfiltered because no one knew to take me seriously.

My birthdays began to be the highpoint of my existence. Everywhere was my stage because I was the not just the main attraction, but the only attraction. I fed on attention and adoration until I had room for nothing else. My birthday became a symbol of my cuteness and a pillar in my identity.

As I got older, my usual tricks stopped working. The compliments and over exaggerated awes no longer flooded in at an alarming rate. People started expecting things from me. They expected me to be kind, have manners, and think for myself; I was unprepared. I never dreamt of the day I would be treated as a person and not a puppy. I remember my first birthday party as a living breathing human and not the goddess of cuteness. I remember that was the first time I realized I was actually getting older. Birthdays weren't just a celebration of my existence, they were road signs marking my progress. All of my friends were over at my house, laughing and being the twelve year olds they were, but at some point I looked around and realized I didn't want to be there. I left my own party to hide in my closet until my mom came in to ask what was the matter with me; it was the first birthday I cried on. I sat in my closet for about ten minutes holding a stuffed animal trying to hold on to whatever was left of me. I didn't know what was wrong then, I just knew this was not what birthdays were supposed to feel like.

Ever since that day birthdays have been somewhat of a dangerous beast to conquer. They bring an icy feeling of mortality to the forefront of my mind and a wave of nostalgia for a childhood crashed against the rocks.

However, they also bring the ghost of a happiness I long to get back to. I fill my birthdays with a thick layer of padding; I pack in love, friendship, family dinners and all things lovely. I create a thick silver lining in hopes I can break the inevitable birthday fall.

Today is November 30, my 18th birthday. I stuffed this day fuller than I have stuffed any birthday before it. I filled it so full, hoping that maybe; I wouldn't remember I'm an adult. No more Blue's Clues birthdays, no more "I don't know let me ask my mom". My birthday ended up being funnier than I intended it to be. I planned to spend the day with my boyfriend of six months, then get Five Guys with my friends, and then go home and get ice cream with my family. My birthday started at midnight when my boyfriend told me he wanted to go on a break, all of my friends except two bailed on Five Guys, and my dad won't be coming home from a work trip until about 1AM. So here I am, at 11:41 at night, having the most honest birthday I've ever had to have. No more fluff or denial, just an identity crisis and an abundance of used tissues. I write in the last minutes of my birthday the travesty of a whiny brat who finally got a well-deserved reality check, but maybe it goes beyond that. Maybe the reason growing older terrifies me is because I haven't been doing it. I've been desperately clinging on to the identity and life of an egotistical six-year-old for twelve years; I haven't been growing, I've been unknowingly dwelling. I'm not going to say I enjoyed my annual fall from glory, however I might have needed it. Ever since the cute mold cracked, I've been trying to squeeze myself back into it. It's taken me too long to realize I'm more than that now. Quick identities are for two-dimensional people, such as a bratty six year old. I am not one thing and I never could be even if I wanted to. I cried in my room again this birthday, however, my mom didn't have to fish me out this time. I'm not sure what to

make out of adulthood, it sounds like a ticking clock to me. But as I near December 1st, I'm less terrified. I feel as though this is my first time walking without a crutch. I am no longer weighed down by identity but I can't hide behind it anymore either. I am made up of too much to ever be reduced to something as rudimentary as "adorable". That being said, I guess my new life objective would be to embrace all the oncoming complexities adulthood brings. More than that, I want to embrace my own complexities. I am the most persistently interesting person I'll ever know and I should treat myself as such. After an extraneous day of existential crisis and full-blown meltdowns, I have officially decided I was right to be more afraid of the dark than my birthday.

Untitled

If fantasy indicates childhood, and a forced transition to reality marks the beginning of one's adulthood, then what exists in one's teenage years? This is a question that plagues all perturbed souls stuck in the awkward time period between adulthood and childhood—more commonly known as adolescence.

During this time of life, I witness my friends struggle through various conflicts, such as depression, self-doubt, and broken relationships. As someone deeply engrossed in the topic of scrutinizing people's minds and thoughts, I discovered the root to all of these problems: all of us have created a fantasy for ourselves that reality fails to satisfy. We and our surroundings often fall short of our created images. In our own fantasies, we live in a utopia with the perfect version of ourselves, surrounded by immaculate variants of our companions. We never wrong each other because of our perfection, and more significantly, we are saved from hurting ourselves due to our nonexistent imperfections. Our expectations align with our existence; thus, nothing goes astray. Yet this is only so within our own dreams.

In childhood, those who shelter us attempt their best to maintain our vision of utopia. Mostly untainted, we carry on this sense of perfection and superb expectations of ourselves and the world into the next phase of our lives. However, when directly encountered with unfiltered reality, fantasy shatters. This dramatic transition often cultivates a sense of depression and pessimism that pervades our society today. But we can't dare let go of my dear childhood friend—fantasy. Others tell us that this time of our lives is when we have to cast away our unproductive dimension and mature into an adult. Does our desire to live in fantasy strip away our maturity and inhibit my potential to develop into a responsible adult? I urge my fellow teenagers to refuse to succumb to such lies.

Fantasy hinders our capacity only when it becomes a delusion. Undoubtedly, we should differentiate between reality and fantasy. Let us not cling to fantasy in hopes of escaping reality. Rather, let fantasy stand as a constituent of our reality and identity. In our fantasy, we dream of ushering in new possibilities and hopes for the world and its inhabitants. Forgetting this piece of ourselves will transform us into a series of soulless machines that merely study and work without purpose, with nothing to look towards except endless despair and futility. So let us protest the commonly held concept that the best form of transition from

childhood to adulthood is the abandonment of the former for the latter; rebel. Do not merely ingest what society forces down your throat. Stoutly deny that conformity is the only natural path of maturation. Instead, desperately hold onto your fantasy and shape it into reality. Do not be consumed by your fantasy, but do not dare forget it either. Strive for your fantasy in reality.



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the storytellers

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Iris Bontrager

Middle School Short Story

August 12, 1978

Nora laid on her stomach as she read; her rusty red hair covered her shoulders in a tangled mess. She could hear the occasional dripping of the leak in her roof hitting the metal tin can she had placed under it. Her blue eyes read attentively as she was pulling up to the thirty-seventh chapter of her book.

“Danny was in the east-wing hallway-” she stopped reading as a loud thump came from the outside of her heavy oak door. She looked over her shoulder. The ten-year-old girl climbed out of bed and stood at her bedside.

“Mom?” she yelled, no answer.

Nora whimpered, she didn't know if she should open it or not.

(What if her mother fell and she needed her help or what if-) the door handle rattled. Nora's heart stopped. She looked at the door as it flew open. She turned to look at the thing who barged in.

(Who- WHAT is that!)

The shadow of a tall skinny (too skinny to be human) woman fell over her. Her frightened mind didn't know what to do. The tall pale woman had a grieving face, her eyes looked to be swollen shut. Now the only sound was the cracking of the woman's joints as she walked towards Nora and the creaking floorboards that the woman stepped on. Nora backed as the beast moved forward.

“GET AWAY!” she cried, her blue eyes seemed to glisten in the dim light of her wooden room.

“MOM!” she yelled her throat sore and raspy.

The woman laughed.

“Silly girl” she smiled her eyes opened tears stream down her face as she laughed maniacally

“N-no one will come for you...” the woman opened her mouth exposing rows and rows of teeth.

Nora cried for help. Her cries seemed to echo through the whole room continuously bouncing back into sweet Nora's ears. The woman began to laugh, and then stopped.

“Bye baby girl” she whispered, and then charged at Nora.

June 20, 1985

Nora laid in the cold bathtub filled with hot steaming water. The room

was foggy and damp, the mirror fogged up from the steam that rose from the bathroom. Her blue eyes looked blankly at the ceiling. Her rusty red hair swirled around in the water covering her breast.

“Nora! Hurry up!” yelled her friend from downstairs.

Nora shook out of her daydream and she sat up, water trickling down her freshly washed hair.

“Okay! Hold on!” she yelled from the upstairs bathroom. Her voice echoed in the small bathroom. She stood up and unclogged the drain. She quickly wrapped her wet body in the warm damp towel.

Nora rushed downstairs in a band t-shirt and high-waisted jeans, her curly red hair carelessly tied in a bun.

“Well, then let's go!” Nora teased her friend

Carrie looked at her in disbelief

“Come on. You're really wearing-” she examined her friend.

“That?” she raised her dark eyebrow and pressed her tan hand against her hip.

Nora rolled her eyes. Her toothy smile widened as she passed her friend. Carrie rolled her eyes and followed Nora outside.

As they headed outside Nora was quickly blinded then bright sun. She squinted.

“Hey Carrie you driving?” she asked and turned her head towards her.

Carrie showed Nora the car keys to the old VW Bug.

“I really have no choice, I'm the one with driver's license.” she teased Nora.

Nora chuckled her toothy-grin seemed warm and inviting. She turned her head back to the car and started to walk. Her smile turned to true horror. She stood in disbelief. She noticed that across the road a tall woman with a thin body stood between the two oak trees.

She could see its thin pale face with a grieving expression. (She could never forget that expression). Nora stared at the thing, it stared back at her. She seemed to be in a trance, one she couldn't get out.

Nora heard some muffled talking she thought it was the woman, but she looked towards Carrie and saw her mouth moving, but only muffled noises. She then heard the chirps of birds, cars revving and buffering, and her frantic friend screaming ‘what's wrong?’

“Nora!”

“What?” she asked her friend, she knew she had blacked out for a bit. She thought maybe she could play it off.

Carrie looked angry as if she had done something wrong.

“WHAT? Is that all you have to say! You stood there for at least for 30 seconds saying nothing, doing nothing!” she yelled at her still horrified friend.

Nora shrugged, her eyes darted towards the two oak trees where she had seen it. Nothing was there. She looked shocked.

“W-what? it was-” she was interrupted by Carrie.

“What! What was there?” she asked turning her head towards the two oaks.

Nora shrugged not knowing what to say.

“The- car keys?” she hoped Carrie believed her terrible lie.

“I thought I brought them...out” she smiled nervously at her now annoyed friend.

Carrie took her hands off Nora's face. She walked passed Nora, her eyes followed her.

Nora had the chills. Something chilling about the way she looked at her. She shrugged it off and followed her friend into her car. She slammed the door as Carrie started the car.

A little after 6 pm the girls headed home after the long night partying. Nora and Carrie laughed all the way to the front door. Nora laughed as she opened the door and took off her shoes. Nora tripped over her shoes she had just taken off. Carrie laughed.

“Nora!” she laughed, as she laughed a little snort came out of it. They both laughed harder.

After they settled down, they both headed to the kitchen. Carrie started to head to the cupboard.

“You hungry Nora?” she asked her.

Nora had her head on the table a small groan came from her.

“I'm guessing that is a yes!” Carrie grabbed chips and ranch.

Nora looked up her red hair still covering her face.

“Ranch and tortilla chips?” she asked her nose scrunched in disgust.

“Hey! They're really good!” she argued.

Nora rolled her eyes and placed her head down gently, but still made a loud clunk when she placed it.

Carrie sat next to her at the dimly lit table.

“Hey what happened earlier, like when we were about to leave?” she asked Nora, who was clearly tired.

Nora made a sort of growl.

“It was nothing, like I told you; I thought I forgot the keys.” Nora huffed

Carrie thought for a moment.

“But, I showed you th-” she was interrupted by Nora's angry shout.

“I told you! I thought I forgot the keys!” she roared angrily

Carrie jumped at the sudden outrage that had just come from her friend; she knocked the bag of chips to the ground. She stared at the spilled chips. Tears formed at the corners of her eyes.

Nora looked to the ground where had Carrie dropped her chips crumbs and full chips everywhere. Looked up at her friend who was still staring down at the spilled chips.

“Listen, Carrie im-” she paused as Carrie started to sob.

“I don't wanna hear it.” she got up and walked towards the stairs.

Nora sighed and looked towards the pile of spilled chips. She got up from the green wooden chair and headed towards the broom and the dustpan.

Nora woke up the next morning. The warm light hit her face from her water-stained window. She slowly opened up her cold blue eyes and

moved into an upright position. Her pale arms moved back lifting up her shirt she wore the night before. Suddenly guilt hit her; it felt like she just had been punched in the stomach. She remembered her argument with Carrie about that afternoon. Nora looked at her window and saw the dull cotton candy colored clouds.

"I'll go apologize," she said to herself. She got up, put on her socks, and walked down the hallway to Carrie's room. She knocked on Carrie's door a sign read 'The Beatles'. She smiled, as that was her favorite band. Nora leaned against the brown heavy door. She heard a rustling of the bed sheets and then footsteps.

"Carrie? Hey, look I'm sorry. I didn't mean to yell at you. Will you forgive me?" but nobody answered. She heard slight mumbles. Nora couldn't hear anything now.

"Carrie?" she jiggled the locked door handle. "Come on Carrie! Open up!" she yelled. Then she heard the slightest of humming. The door handled unlatched. She forcefully pushed open the heavy door, there she was, lying on her back with blood coming from her thin tan neck. Nora let out a scream as the woman was hunched over her friend's bloody body.

"GET OFF!" her voice was shaky and saddening.

The woman turned her head all the way around facing Nora.

"Hi Nora" she had said in an eerie, but calm voice. Nora could see her bloodstained mouth. The once grieving face became horrid and distorted. Nora let out a sob as she saw her friend's neck gashed open from the woman's rows and rows of her thin bladed teeth.

"CARRIE!" she cried her heart pounded in her chest almost like a bird banding against its metal cage. The tall women's thin and tall body spun around her head stayed in the same place, not even a slight jerk from her body spinning.

"She can't HEAR you," the woman hissed at her. "She can't see you, or talk to you" she smiled grimly at her. "She's dead Nora and it's your fault," she giggled, it was almost childlike, but it had a mature sound to her laugh. She seemed to disappear whenever you weren't looking.

All Nora could do was sob. "I didn't kill her!" she cried then she stopped, as she couldn't see the woman who was standing in front of her.

"O' poor girl. You know nothing!" she said harshly. The woman appeared behind her. Jumped and turned around to see the woman behind her, creeping towards her like a sheepish dog, or a delicate lamb. She stopped crying, she stopped trying. Nora allowed the thing to come near her. The woman grabbed Nora's petite face with force and then pulled her in close. Nora could now smell the distinct odor of blood. She remembered when she played that game with her friends, that stupid game where if you didn't follow the rules; anyone who played it died, or that's what they said. Nora and her friends never believed the story, but now she wished her young naive self wouldn't have played it, and she wished she had believed it. She looked back at her life, what she

did, what she had said, what she will never get to do. Her life was about to end, she was the last one to go.

“I punished all of your friends,” she said in a deep harsh voice. “And you know when little girls and boys don't obey the rules-” she chuckled with a deep sinister voice. “They get punished” she smiled exposing her row of thin sharp teeth.

Nora closed her eyes, accepting her fate. The warm tears seemed to stream down her small face it dripped onto the thin bony hand. The woman's hands slowly wrapped around Nora's long thin neck.

“Bye baby girl” she whispered in a motherly voice. She bit Nora's head clean off. The then tense thin body of Nora went limp in an instant, blood seamed down the woman's hand. The woman looked at Carrie and smiled. She had done everything she had needed to. She carefully placed the limp body of Nora on Carrie's bed then proceed to walk out of the small room.

She stopped when she got to the stairs. She looked down the spiral staircase, and then walked down. The wooden stairs that would normally creak or ache now were silent. The whole house was left in silence. She seemed to deteriorate as she walked, getting duller and duller until there was nothing left.

The Inventor

Ever since David was eight he was fascinated with taking toys apart and putting them back together. Soon, his family got a T.V. He was fascinated on how it worked, how the pictures were shown in a box. He then took it apart, as his mother saw him with the T.V took apart and was outraged.

“What is wrong with you young man! Taking the T.V. apart! You are grounded for the next three months!” His mother yelled. David replied, “I had already took it apart, I was putting the screen back on look.” He took the screen, connected some wires, and put it back.

He plugged in the T.V. and turned it on. Worked perfectly. Note that David was eight. His parents knew then he was going to be very successful in life. He was a famous inventor, creating things like the Ultra-Shaver, which dispensed shaving cream from the razor as you shave when you press the button.

He created many successful things until he made something he could use to make something bigger. He was now studying life and biology. He soon made a plant growing serum that grew plants in a second. Soon, he wanted to make life, a companion since he was so lonely.

He worked 5 years until he figured it out, “I need animal DNA so I can replicate it into something else.” He said. He went to one of his neighbors and asked if he could get some hair from his dog. At first, he didn't agree but then convinced him.

He took the hair and replicate it into some fur ball that sprouted into a creature with harmless eyes and a harmless enough smile as it looked, as it then sprouted fangs and bit the inventor. It ripped him apart and ate his flesh. It escaped the lab and is still out there, waiting to kill.

Katelyn Chan
Middle School Short Story

The Princess Knight

Once upon a time...

In the great kingdom of Athena, there lived Princess Elizabeth and her 5 older brothers. Princess Elizabeth (or Ellie for short), wasn't like other princesses, she wanted to become a knight. She would rather learn to bravely wield a sword and shield than learn how to have impeccable table manners during a boring castle ball. She would always dream of becoming a knight and soon her dreams will come true.

One sunny afternoon, her father, the king called his family for a meeting. "Hello everyone," bellowed the king, "I am getting older and need to pick an heir to train to become king. In the Lagoon cave near the firefly forest, there lays a ferocious dragon living in the cave and is keeping merchants from getting in and out of the kingdom. I would like you to find the dragon and help solve this problem." As, her older brothers prepared for their quest for the crown, she slowly walked out of the throne room. Princess Ellie quickly gathered a bundle of fruits, curing medicine, a sword, and walked to the castle's stables to find the fastest horse. When she arrived, the only horse she found was her royal horse, Majesty. She wasn't as fast as her brother's horses, but she managed to battle through firefly forest and stumbled upon Lagoon cave, the dragon lair.

She noticed four of her older brothers bravely fighting the ferocious dragon, but her youngest brother, Alexander, was quietly hiding behind a rock near the cave's entrance. "What are you doing," yelled Princess Ellie, "You should be helping our brothers not cowering behind a rock!" "Ellie! What are you doing here? You should be home with mother and father, but since you're here I might as well tell you why I'm hiding. I want to be king as much as our brothers, but I can't fight, the dragon is huge compared to me." said her brother. After an inspirational talk to fearful Alexander, they bravely ventured into the cave, but saw an unexpected sight, they saw a young, sick dragon.

"We need to help him," said princess Ellie, "It needs our help." She slowly unpacked her fruit, curing medicine, and poured a few drops of medicine onto an apple to give to the ill dragon. As she leaned closer to the dragon, the dragon slowly opened its eyes, looked at the apple, and ate the fruit whole. "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY BABY!" said a screeching voice, they turned and gazed at the angry mother dragon.

“AAAHHHHH!” screamed Alexander with terror, he shrieked so piercingly that the baby dragon finally opened his eyes and looked around. “What’s happening? Where am I! Hey, I know you two; you gave me that weird-smelling fruit that made me feel better.” Greeted the baby dragon and ran to his relieved mother, “Mama! Mama, look at me I’m all better and these human helped me.” “Ralph! Oh, I’m so happy you’re safe. Thank you, um, who are you exactly? Sorry, I’ve been so stressed lately since humans started coming near our cave. They would explore inside my cave and I would have to scare them off. They would always bother me and my baby.” Questioned the curious mother. “I am Princess Elizabeth or Ellie for short and this is older brother, Alexander.” Ellie said acknowledging her brother, “Also, would it be a problem if you could give us a ride home. You kind of scared our horses and it is a long journey home.” The happy mother looked up from hugging her son, “Oh! Of course, think of this as a thank you for helping my son. Hop on!”

When they landed, they found their brothers talking to the king in the royal courtyard. “I am very excited that you came back so quickly,” said the king, “so, which one of you has finished your quest for the dragon.” The four eldest brother stood there in silence, but it was soon interrupted by the flapping of the dragon’s wings. “Hello father,” called Alexander, “We have found the dragon, but please don’t hurt her because she is going to tell you her side of the problem.” So the mother dragon told the king that the merchants were always bothering her. “But...but...but that’s not fair, Alexander didn’t slay the dragon, like you said, he shouldn’t become king!” stuttered their oldest brother. “No, I didn’t say slay the dragon,” corrected the king, “I told you to find the dragon. Since Elizabeth and Alexander found the dragon, Alexander will train to become an honorable king. Elizabeth, what would you like for finding the dragon? A new gown for the ball or a pair of shoes, perhaps?” Elizabeth knew this was her chance to make her dream come true. “Actually, what I really want is to train to become a knight. It sounds very exciting and being a princess is kind of boring.” said Elizabeth. “Hmm” said the king, “If that is what you really want, then you may train to become a knight.”

So from that day on, princess Ellie worked hard and trained to become a brave knight. Prince Alexander overcame many obstacles and later became a great future king for the kingdom of Athena.

The End

Isabella Cordoba

Middle School Short Story

Air Star

Ring! Ring! Ring! The work bell chimed, ending the workday. The exhausted workers sighed in relief and slowly began to gather their belongings. Rosalie shoved her oil stained gloves and her tattered notebook into her handmade bag, smiling at the thought of going home. She pulled on her dark denim hat and flew down the long hall that led to the back end of the factory.

The lights were dim, but Rosalie dashed through the cluttered break room and to the exit. She excitedly threw open the back door into the crowded streets of Factory Lane. The smoke clung to Rosalie as she filed out with the other workers. It filled her lungs, slowly clogging her sense of smell. Rosalie did not care though; she was too excited to get home.

She ran through the garbage-covered alleyways, trying to quicken her pace. Soon she was in the shambles of her uninviting neighborhood.

Rosalie jogged along the street of houses until she reached hers. It was small and run down, yet it struck love into Rosalie's heart. She could not wait to see her mother. She dashed over the brown lawn, if it could be called that, into her house.

"Mom," she started, "I'm home."

"Hi Rosalie," her mother greeted Rosalie as she walked toward her.

"You cannot believe what I thought of today!" Rosalie cheerfully remarked.

"Is it another one of those flying, what did you call them, drones?" her mother retorted with lovingness.

"No, not this time," Rosalie explained. "This time it's different."

"Really? The last time you said that you ended up causing a black-out."

"Well," Rosalie agreed, "I did do that, but Mom, I've been thinking about it. It sucks here, and I got bored, so I thought, maybe, just maybe, I could make something incredible." Rosalie pulled out her prized possession from her bag, her old notebook. She flipped open to her newest entry, which was an image of a box filled with vents and many intricate wirings. The drawing had many erase marks, but it clearly showed how much thought she had put into it.

"Rosalie, that's amazing. It really is stunning," her mother said amazed.

"Yeah, it fixes the air. It filters it and all that stuff. It's one of my newer designs." Rosalie flipped a few pages back, showing her mother

drastically different designs.

“Honey, that’s amazing. I love the thought you put into it, but it's going to be hard to find all the parts and the money for the parts. It’s going to be too much,” Rosalie’s mother explained, sadly.

“I know. It’s just an idea, that’s all.” Rosalie said, her words illustrating how desperate they were.

After a moment of silence, Rosalie swiftly said, “What are you making? It smells delicious.”

Her mother responded and they sat down to dine. Afterwards, they went to bed.

As the sun’s bright colors started to shine, Rosalie woke up. Her alarm screeched her wakeup call right into her ears. She slammed the floating device, a model from years ago, down onto the ground. Rosalie groaned as she rose from her creaky bed. She quickly changed and packed her bag with her usual items: her sketchbook, gloves, and a tattered jean jacket for the chilly workrooms.

After double-checking to see if she had everything, Rosalie flew out of the house and onto the street. She began a slow pace to her job.

The road was covered in trash that reeked. She continued her walk to the factory until something caught her eye. She stopped, looking over a filter from an old droid. Rosalie realized it would be the perfect filter for her new design.

Rosalie picked it up and inspected it. It was dirty, the pad that normally caught the dirt from entering the droid was turned a greenish black color from the mold and dust that it had filtered. The filter would work though. It fit into her design perfectly.

Rosalie opened her pouch quickly and pulled out her notebook. She opened to her newest design to double-checked her plan. The filter did fit.

“Oh my gosh,” Rosalie breathed out. “It will work.” She tore out the pad and put the filter in her bag that was almost too small for the filter.

Although her pouch was almost full, her hopes got the best of her. She quickly searched the piles of garbage.

After being in the piles of garbage and only finding pieces of metal for the frame of the invention. Her bag was stuffed, with barely enough room to fit the last piece of metal. Rosalie stood up, the bottom of her overalls were covered in chunks of rotten food and black grease. She couldn’t care less though. This was the beginning of her first invention.

Rosalie stood there for a second trying to take in all of her future possibilities, until she realized she was going to be late for work. Dread struck her heart in a painful sear. She could not be late again.

Rosalie took off down the street, checking her watch along the way.

6:57. Rosalie could feel herself starting to cry. She was going to have to make a thirty minute walk in three minutes. It was almost impossible.

6:58. Rosalie whisked down the allies, almost tripping over garbage cans and stray dogs and cats.

6:59. Rosalie bounded onto the Factory Lane, seeing the factory in the distance. She sprinted down the almost empty street. She was almost there. She was so close

7:00. Rosalie heard the work bells chime one at a time as she reached the factory.

7:01. She flew open the doors and sprinted to her desk, but it was too late. Her boss, an old man who always smelled of peppermint, was standing there.

“Ms. Castillo. You’re late...again,” he stated. He looked up from his tablet to view Rosalie. He looked her over and shook his head. “And, I see you have new work attire,” he voiced rudely.

“I know, sir. I’m sorry. I just lost track of time. It was a simple mistake. Now, if you wouldn’t mind, I have a workload to get done,” she gestured with her hand toward her desk piled with assignments from days ago to the ones assigned that morning.

“Ms. Castillo, I’m afraid it was not another simple mistake. This is your third tardy this month. Do you know how many people want your job?” he asked, starting to get worked up.

I do, sir. It won’t happen again,” she answered.

“I’m afraid it won’t because you’re being terminated. Droids 006 and 095 help Ms. Castillo gather her belongings so she can leave.”

“Please,” Rosalie began, “I can’t lose this job. I need it. My mom needs it. Please.”

Her boss didn’t respond even as the droids came to grab her. They held her by the arms and dragged her out of the factory as she continued to plead. The droids threw her out onto the street and shut the doors.

Rosalie ran up to the doors and slammed on them.

“Please! Please!” she continuously screamed as she slowly slid down the door crying. After a while, she stood up, wiping the tears off of her face and walked home.

She arrived at the same time her mother was leaving.

“Hi mom,” she said dejectedly.

“Rosalie, what are you doing here? Why aren’t you at work?” her mother asked completely confused.

“I got fired,” Rosalie whispered.

“You what? Are you serious Rosalie? We needed the money. What were you thinking? How could you?” her mother screamed.

“Mom, I found things for my invention and lost track of time. I’m so sorry. I’ll find another job,” Rosalie responded practically shrinking into herself. She hated being yelled at.

“What other jobs? We got lucky the factory took you. There are barely any other jobs that will take a seventeen year old girl!” her mother yelled back.

“How is it my fault I can’t find a job? I don’t have my high school diploma and that already puts me at a disadvantage. What do you want from me?” she screamed back.

Her mother shook her head, calming herself down. “It’s fine, it’s

fine. I'll figure it out. I have to get going." Her mom turned and headed down the street.

Rosalie was shocked her mother defused that quickly. She turned the other way and entered the house. She dropped her bag on the counter and headed to her room. She rummaged through her drawers until she found her secret stash of money. She put it in her pocket and headed to the alley.

Once she arrived, she dug around the trash. She threw the pieces of half-eaten food and other disgusting things off to the side. Every time she found a piece to her puzzle of an invention, she stashed it in the ripped pockets of her overalls.

After what had to be hours, she found everything she needed for her invention. Rosalie then walked over to the mechanic's store. She ran up and down the battery aisle until she found the ideal battery to purchase. Rosalie picked it up and quickly bought it.

Afterwards, she rushed home and started assembling. Each bit fit together flawlessly. She added new filtering pads to the filters and secured the battery in place. The invention came together in what seemed like minutes.

Rosalie stepped back to admire her work. The invention, which she wanted to call the Air Star, was a floating box with two pipes at each end. The front end had a visible fan attached to it while the other was only a filter that could pick up the smallest particles. The inside had many wires, filters, and a battery that worked together to clean the air.

Rosalie was eager to turn it on. She reached up and pushed a button that was supposed to start the fan. Rosalie waited, but nothing happened.

"No, no, no! What's going on?" Rosalie said frantically. She opened the Air Star up again and examined the insides of the intricately designed device. She readjusted wires and filter placements but nothing would start it up.

"Come on! Why won't this work?" she screeched, frustrated at herself for not making it work. "What did I do wrong?"

She took deep breaths. She thought it over and over again. "What is it? What is it?" she repeated to herself. It struck her. The fan's wires weren't connected properly. She would have to switch them and then reconnect them to the correct places.

She ran up to the device and redid it again. She sealed it shut and restarted it. Rosalie held her breath. She kept on thinking, Will it start?

It took three agonizing seconds for the Air Star to initiate. It worked, it really worked. Rosalie squealed, delighted that her invention was done and working. It was operating smoothly, filtering out the grimy air and turning it into something breathable. Rosalie was excited. She flew down the hall with her Air Star and into the street, starting a new route to a place that would use and needed her invention. Little did she know, she was going to shape this world into something better. She was going to change the world like she always knew she would.

William Evans

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

“Hello it is I the fellow reporter man, today I am at the site of the snowman protest. We will be interviewing this random snowman from the crowd. Hello Mr. Snowman before I begin may ask what your name is?”

“Hello my name is Billy.”

“Well hello Billy the snowman can you tell me why you are here today?”

“Yes, I am here for the right for snowman to run for president and vote. So many snowman want rights, we will stay strong.” Said the snowman confidently.

Snow Lives Matter.

“Mr. President do you...”

“I see the mob of snowmen.”

The President tightened his tie and began to walk down the stairs. He opened the door confidently and yelled, “what is going on!”

All the snowmen looked in his direction. A mad looking face came upon them and they looked in his direction.

“Get him!”

All the snowman grabbed him and until he was mobbed by snow.

“Where am I?” The president looked around in the dark room with nothing in it.

Suddenly a bright light hit him in the face. He squinted from the brightness.

“You know why you are here,” a black figure in the dark said.

The President struggled in the rope and realized it was no use.

Suddenly the floor beneath him swing off. The rope tightened and the President looked down below. Hot boiling, lava was directly below him.

“WHAT IS GOING ON?” He screamed.

The shadowy figure replied, “You have let us melt, with no feelings toward us, now you will know what it is like.”

The rope slowly lowered him in.

The end

The Little Polar Bear

Once upon a time, there was a little polar bear named Boo. Boo was the youngest of her family. She had two older brothers that always got themselves in trouble because they loved to fill in the narwhals ice holes with the fresh layer of powder. Boo's mother always keeps her company when she was learning to fish because her brothers seemed to have already learned from the snowy foxes (that might be the place they found to be so tricky).

When Boo was learning to fish, she met a very nice gray whale and her newborn baby named Spots. At first Boo thought that they were going to eat her, but they don't eat big mammals like her. They like to eat tiny shrimp also called krill. Boo was relieved and as quick as a flash Boo and Spots were best friends. Boo promised Spots that she would learn to swim so they could play all day in the water and then they could also have a snack or two if they got hungry.

Today Boo was going to look for a snack to eat, but on her way, back she found herself lost in a snowstorm that was getting thicker by the second.

Back at Boo's cave, her mother was frightened that her only daughter was probably lost in the emerging snowstorm. She cried, "BOO! BOO! WHERE ARE YOU!" but there was no response. Right then on that very second Boo's mother went sprinting off to go find her beloved daughter.

Boo was as frightened as much as her mother, but since the snowstorm was so thick Boo did not realize that she was going to fall into the ice cold water of Antarctica. Boo did not know how to swim yet, so she was in big trouble.

It was over. Boo had fallen. She was gone. Never to be seen again by her mother, brothers, or her best friend Spots.

Boo's mother found her the day after the snowstorm on a drifting ice sheet with a slow heartbeat. But the thing she did not know, was Boo was sleeping from teaching herself how to swim out the storm.

Boo awoke the next day in her beloved cave cuddling next to her mom who was awake looking for a slight sign that her only daughter was alive. Boo nudged her mother, so she knew that she was alive. Her mother shot up and touched Boo to show her love to her daughter. It was the next month and everything was back to normal, Boo was playing with Spots in the water, her two brothers were off playing tricks on the nearby caves and Boo's mother was hunting food. Life could not be better on Polar Bear Island.

Amanda Hernandez

Middle School Short Story



Soar

Drip.

Drip.

Drip.

Cara watched as the murky brown water trickled down from the small, barred, window, before dripping onto the cool metal floor.

Drip.

Drip.

Drip.

She slammed her foot against the metallic wall, huffing in frustration and annoyance. The constant dripping was driving her insane little by little.

Cara leaned back, staring up above at the low roof, her burnt, cut hand skimming across the smooth surface, dipping lightly as she traced the familiar dents. The scars on the walls showed proof of all the times she had tried to escape; and failed.

Cara squinted, trying to see past the sturdy bars towards the deep endless sky above. How long had she been here? She had no idea. She'd lost count long ago. Endless days and nights stuck in the same cell just because of who she was... Or what she was.

Being called a monster was a little harsh, but she wasn't exactly human. A shifter was what she was, someone who had the ability to turn into a specific animal, such as a wolf, or a fox, or in this case, a dragon.

Born into the Ice Dragon clan, she was born with the ability to soar. It was something she had cherished and loved from the very beginning, that was, until she was kidnapped. Knocked unconscious in her own home and placed in a cell, which was almost impossible to escape. They studied her, trying to understand how it all worked. At first, she fought back, but all her efforts ended in vain.

Now all she could do was hope. Hope that her family would come save her. She knew they would, but they needed to find her first, and at that moment, she herself had no clue to where she was.

The sound of her fingers hitting the metal echoed through the air as her mind drifted off. Why was she even here in the first place? Why her? Did she deserve this? Freedom was one thing a dragon shifter could never live without, and taking her prized possession away was the cruelest thing they could do to her. She had never hurt anyone; her only mistake was refusing to join the others when they left the village to go

hunting, leaving her completely unprotected.

Cara was pulled out of her small trance as the small metal slot suddenly slammed open, a thin tray sliding in. The contents were a small piece of bread and a wooden cup filled with filthy water.

She dragged herself over to the tray, picking up the stale bread. She had gotten used to the hard bread and foul tasting liquid. It ran down her throat, a nasty taste filling her mouth as she tried not to gag.

The cell was far too small for her to shift. She had tried it so many times, and every time she had ended up making large dents in the walls and her body, earning painful bruises and scratches.

A thin white paper fluttered slightly across the tray as she picked up the contents above. It was... a note. Cara picked it up, opening the folded piece carefully. She tried to read the hurried scribbles on the thin paper.

'Stay close to the wall away from the window,' she read slowly. Cara read it over and over again. Was this some kind of test they wanted to try out? But the signature changed all her suspicion. 'Be ready. Love, Carter.'

Cara's heart leapt with joy as she read the name of her brother, her eyes unable to look away from the paper, her eyes trailing down to the familiar dragon seal filling the bottom half of the page.

She didn't waste any time scrambling up from the cold floor, pressing her body against the wall. She didn't know what was going to happen, but she knew her family was finally coming for her.

A cool wind burst through the room. She shivered as a familiar coldness reached her bare feet. She glanced down, mouth going dry at what she saw. It was...ice!

Slowly the frost spread across the rest of the wall. The metal groaning as it was overpowered by ice. A small smile reached her lips as Cara quickly pressed herself even closer up against the wall, shutting her eyes as she waited for impact. What came next was a large blur. The right wall was ripped off as something large slammed against it, ripping the metal chunk off completely.

Cara gasped at what she saw. The large green fields were below her as she glanced down with the sharp wind hissing past her. She was in a tall building, miles of air beneath her. The yellow sun was hidden behind hundreds of dark clouds bunching together above her, but even that was not what made her gasp. White and blue-scaled dragons flew above it, white snow falling from every corner of the sky, the sun having no voice in the matter.

"About time," She whispered as she steadied herself. She ran towards the entrance, wind rushing through her hair, and without another thought, she jumped.

Cara shut her eyes as she relaxed, feeling the cold air against her pale skin. She laughed as her skin began to glow a bright gold. A familiar tingle ran through her. Slowly, she felt her body change, arms spreading widely into large white wings, body growing larger as she

continued to fall. Her senses sharpened immediately as the air caught in her strong wings, her body riding the wind as she soared.

The long lost feeling felt even better than she imagined as she could spot everything in sight. It was amazing! But that peace and awe was quickly destroyed as sharp arrows and spears whizzed past her, followed by yells and loud sirens filling the air. She flew above the dark forest, hoping to lose them as she tried to weave through the canopies of the tall trees.

The pain came after the realization. Blood poured down her side, an arrow grazing her blue scales as it managed to pierce through her thick skin. It didn't hurt that much, but the shock threw her off. Her flying pattern faltered as she fell, tumbling down below.

Cara saw the dragons fly above her as she fell, her body glowing once again as her hands slowly formed back followed by her legs, turning completely human once again. She screamed as her body hit the trees, which thankfully broke her fall. Leaves and sticks scraped her arm as she hit the ground, her body rolling down a small dirt hill.

"Ow..." She groaned, sputtering out a mouthful of dirt.

"Over there!" Cara's head shot up at the voice. Familiar red uniforms blurred through the brown trunks. Panic ran through her body as she quickly scrambled to her feet, desperate as she forced herself to run.

"Keep running!" She heard a familiar voice above her. A young brown haired boy flew above her on the back of another large ice dragon, the frost freezing the trees behind her.

"Carter!" She exclaimed as she saw her brave, older, brother. She was so happy she could cry, but she knew this was not the place to do so. If she wasn't careful, she would be captured, again.

To her horror, her foot got caught on a lifted root, sending her tumbling down the dirt. As quickly as she could, Cara tried to get to her feet, but a thin-wired net crashed over her from above, sending her smashing back down into the harsh ground.

She yelled out in pain as she tried to move, the wire cutting into her body, making her flinch in agony. Every move earning her more unnecessary pain. She heard roars and growls from above, each dragon feeling her pain at that very moment.

Cara's vision blurred as the guards grew closer, swords and spears in hand, but they never stood a chance. As soon as they approached her, a cold wind ran across the forest, turning into thick fog as the dragons above attacked the men, roars and yells mixing into the air. She felt familiar hands grip the wire around her and yank it off, grabbing her arm as they lifted her up. "Carter," She murmured, able to see her brother through the thick, cold, fog.

"Cara, come on! We have to keep going!" He yelled grabbing her wrist tightly as they ran. They couldn't shift. Not here. The trees were very close together, forming a thick arch above them. They would surely break something, either a tree or a wing. They didn't know, and didn't want to find out.

Crimson blood trickled down her arms and legs at the harsh scrapes. Carter gripped her arm tightly as they continued to sprint down the grass, towards the steep cliff in front of them. Cara managed to make out the familiar crashing of waves below as they grew closer, panting breaths mixing in with the roaring wind.

“Wait! The oth-” Before she could finish worrying about her family, which were still behind, Carter jumped, pulling her along without a word, rocks crumbling below.

Cara tried to shift, but only managed a light glow around her fingertips, and began to panic. She barely had enough strength left thanks to the lack of food during the long months she had been imprisoned and her recent struggle.

“Carter I can’t-” She yelled through the air, but her words were stolen by the wind, her screams filling the air. She shut her eyes waiting for the impact, but it never came. Instead she tumbled across a cold, white, back, a large hand catching her in the air.

Cara glanced back in surprise to see Carter still in human form, gripping her tightly as the large dragon beneath them soared over the roaring water.

She managed to gain her balance, gripping the familiar scales. “Where are we going?!” She yelled over the wind.

“Home!” Carter shouted back.

“What about the others?” She screamed as she saw four dragons still behind her above the thick fog. Other dragons had joined them quickly, soaring alongside them, each one familiar to Cara, yet the four continued to stay behind, flying in a circular motion.

“They have something to do!” She yelled over the wind.

Cara was ready to shoot back another question when her words quickly died at her throat. The large secured building she had once been trapped in slowly began to groan, tilting to the side as ice and snow covered it, eating away quickly at the metal.

Slowly, it began to crumble at the weight, the heavy dragons slamming against it constantly. People screamed beneath them as her own nightmare crumbled to the earth.

Carter cheered in front of her while her mouth opened and closed in surprise. She didn’t enjoy watching things being destroyed, or others getting hurt, but at this moment, she couldn’t be happier.

The other dragons circled over the remains of the crumbling building. She couldn’t hold in a laugh as all her friends and family soared by her side. All the torture, the burns, the cuts, the pain, they were all gone.

With one last look behind her as the land slowly disappeared, Cara turned back to her friends. The sun slowly set, glowing bright orange and red as it claimed the blue sky. Then with the sense that that freedom brought, they traveled home. Together, they soared beyond the horizon.

Allison Hill
Middle School Short Story



The Phantom Hero – Part II

The frigid air seemed to burn my legs, whose only protection against the cold was a thin pair of tights. I smoothed down the knee length skirt of my navy dress, feeling uncomfortable in the expensive material. Despite my wealthy parents always looking better than extravagant, I wasn't used to the fancy clothing. Sadly, this wasn't my first time attending one of their Gatsby-esque galas. Everything was violently magnificent and lavish. There was no way I belonged amongst it all.

I stood outside the entrance to a high-end banquet hall, decked in lights and gold finery. A doorman stood near the entryway with a tablet providing a list of all the party attendees. I shuffled toward him, clutching a small, white purse. He glanced at me expectantly and I knew that was his indication for me to say my name.

"Ezra Kingsley, with Hudson and Claire Kingsley." I said to the man, my eyes glancing past him and into the glowing room behind his broad shoulders. After a few taps on his tablet, the doorman stepped aside, allowing me inside the sparkling venue. Glass chandeliers hung from the ceiling and servers in slick tuxes roamed the floor, delivering drinks and appetizers to the partygoers. I didn't remember the last time I attended one of these events. I'd stopped going long ago when the glitz and glam wore off and all I saw were uptown snobs. There was a specific reason I had gone that night and it was the only reason I'd ever go.

Just over a year ago, I'd accomplished my greatest feat as a vigilante. I had foiled the plans of my nemesis, the Wolf. He had been building up an illegal drug cartel in the Eastern United States. The drug, Sway, was most definitely illegal and contained micro, brainwave changing robots that would've allowed the Wolf to control the minds of anyone who ingested it. Luckily, I had burned all of his supply and prevented him from following through. The Wolf's name was Vernon Havera, a thirty-something year old man who only had a sight for evil. His assistant, Lionel, was a weasel of a man with a British accent and a Napoleon complex. I hated both of them.

"Are you excited for this year's gala?" My mother came up behind me and rested her hands on my shoulders. I nodded begrudgingly and shifted my body out from under her touch. I rubbed my arms, attempting to warm them.

My parents had this clear idea that I wanted to follow in the exact footsteps of them. When I was of age, I would take over the family

business: selling aircraft to the military and government. Sometimes I felt bad that my parents didn't know about my life of crime-fighting and vigilante persona. There was no way I would take on the company and live the life of luxury they had planned out. I liked too much to get in the rough and explore. Despite my extreme differences from them, I loved them. They were the only family I had and they treated me well. I'd do anything to save my parents and I'd never let them die on my behalf. I'd always worried that my work as a vigilante would harm them, but I wouldn't let happen... especially in the way that about to go down.

After a year of hearing nothing about the Wolf, he approached me in a coffee shop in Armonk. I was often in Armonk during my free time, and the barista who worked in the coffee shop on Main even recognized me. It was no surprise that when I was ordering my drink the Wolf handed over a five dollar bill and told the cashier to keep the change. He caught me off guard, but I didn't let it show. You can never let down your guard in front of an enemy, I reminded myself. Wordlessly, I grabbed my drink and took a seat at a table in the corner. The Wolf followed and took a seat across from me. He pulled a folder from his bag and slid it across the table to me.

"Your mission, shall you choose to accept it." The Wolf pulled off his sunglasses and chuckled. I frowned.

"I don't work for you. What is this?" I asked quietly and opened the folder. Inside lay a step-by-step plan, a profile of a government agent, and a picture of a young man.

"You don't, but I need you to complete this task or your parents..." The Wolf made a throat-slicing motion with his finger and clicked his tongue. "You will work with my new assistant, Harvard Williams, to eliminate Agent Darla Duke at the Entrepreneurs of the Year Gala. This agent has information of every crime I've attempted and committed. Shall you not complete this, I will have your parents eliminated and I will take care of you myself."

Normally, I wouldn't accepted anything like this but I valued the life of my one and only parents over the life of one of a thousand government agents. I agreed to the task and after everything was settled, we went our separate ways.

My family and I took a seat at our reserved table where a waiter brought my parents a bottle of high-end wine and me, a glass of sparkling water. The host of the gala went on the stage and said a little welcome speech, introducing each company that was represented there and what awards were available for them to win. I pulled out my phone to check the time as I chewed on my lip. It was now or never.

"Mom, Dad, I'm gonna go hang with my friend. He just got here." I whispered to them as the host continued to speak.

"Oh, your friend is here? I didn't know you knew anybody coming." My father replied softly and I nodded.

"I'll be back when the awards start." I promised and stood up. I walked away from the table, letting out a breath. If only they knew what

I was really doing. Following the instructions, I made my way to the bathroom hall on the second floor and stood across from the mirror.

Not too long after I had planted myself there, Harvard Williams approached me and took my hand. Like a gentleman, he took my hand and kissed the top of it. I held my tongue from telling him to not touch me, but I remembered this was our cover: a young couple.

“How has your night been, Harvard?” I asked with a big smile. I linked arms with him and nodded politely at an older woman who walked past us and into the ladies’ room.

“My night has been quite low key,” Harvard replied with an equally large smile. “I had thought the event would be more promising.”

I chuckled and we walked together out of the hallway. Both of us tried not to convey any uncomfortable tension as this was the first time we had met. I had to play happy couple with the enemy.

Harvard and I walked silently through the rows of tables to the one where Ms. Darla Duke sat alone, flipping through a magazine with the host of the event on the cover. Harvard pulled out a chair for me at the table and I took a seat. As Harvard sat down, I introduced myself.

“Good evening, my name is Ezra and my boyfriend is Harvard.” I stuck my hand out in front of her to shake, which she shook hesitantly.

“Good evening, I’m Darla, Darla Duke.” She smiled sweetly and took a sip from her wine glass. She didn’t deserve to die. This agent had a family, a well-paying job, and a nice house. There was no reason for us to kill her that wasn’t a selfish, ego-protecting reason.

Our plan of attack was straightforward, clean, and simple. As I reached across the table for a menu, I knocked over the magazine she was reading. I apologized and we both leaned down to reach for the magazine. In the meantime, Harvard quickly poured a small but powerful amount of hydrochloric acid into her wine. Duke sat back up with her magazine and laughed with me about clumsiness. She reached for her wine glass and my heart clenched. Slowly, she sipped from the wine glass. Her lips twisted at the odd twinge of acid taste. I let out a breath.

A server came over seconds later with a notepad, asking what we wanted to order. I replied with a Caesar salad and a side of fruit. Harvard ordered clam chowder with crackers and Duke got the cook’s signature soup. The server scurried off with our order and that was when I noticed the acid effects were starting to settle in. Duke was dabbing sweat off her forehead and the color was draining from her face.

For the next twenty minutes, Harvard, Duke, and I made conversation about life and politics. Harvard and I kept stealing glances at each other. Nothing can get you closer to a person faster than partnering up to kill a stranger. All of a sudden, Duke lurched forward, shoving her bowl of soup away.

“I-I have to go to the bathroom. I, um, don’t feel well.” Duke stuttered and stood up quickly. She ran off towards the same restroom where Harvard and I met up. I followed her and Harvard was right

behind me. On the way to the bathroom, Harvard snagged a key from the janitor's cart. Luckily, the bathroom was empty. Duke went to the sink and started throwing up.

"It'll be okay, it's alright." I cooed and rubbed her shoulder. As she hacked up more hydrochloric acid and chicken noodle, I reached for the knife in my purse. I grasped the handle firmly as I heard the bathroom door locked. Harvard joined me and Duke looked up.

"Wh-what's he doing in here? This is the lady-" Duke cried out, but Harvard pushed her shoulders to the sink counter. I raised the knife above my head. "Who are you people?"

"Well, he's the Wolf's henchman and I am the Phantom Hero." I replied with no emotion. The knife went through her and instantly she went limp, falling to the ground.

Harvard and I went to work quickly, cleaning up any blood spill. I washed the knife in the sink, dried it off, then stuck it back in my purse. There was a window towards the back of the bathroom that led to an alley. I grabbed Duke's legs and Harvard got her arms. Together we dragged her out the window and covered her up with a tarp he had put there earlier.

"Good work, Williams." I commented as we closed the window back up and threw away any trash. He nodded.

"You too, Kingsley. I'm impressed she was your first kill," Harvard chuckled. "Care to go have dessert and watch the awards?"

"Sure, why not." I let out a sigh and we exited the bathroom, leaving the lady outside with a suspicious look. We took a seat at a table by the door as the awards began. A server brought us chocolate chunk cookies, which I gladly took one. I took a few bites and they smelled vaguely familiar. But not in the way that it was a chocolate chunk cookie. In the way that it was the same scent I smelled when I took down the Wolf's stock of Sway. As I realized what I was ingesting, I set the cookie down.

"Harvard, that server isn't really an employee here and these cookies have more than just chocolate in it, right?" I stared Harvard down cold and he let out a sigh.

"You caught me." He put up his hands and in one hand, he held a remote. I watched as he clicked down a button and I lost control of my actions. Harvard picked me up and carried me out the door. My mind was panicking, but I couldn't do anything. My body lay limp in his arms. The doorman gave us a suspicious look and Harvard motioned that I'd had too much to drink.

There was a black car parked in the valet, of which Harvard strapped me into. He got into the passenger seat and when the driver turned to look at me, I saw the Wolf with a smirk on his face. With that, I disappeared from out of the party and into the shadows, like a phantom hero.

Mia Hutchison

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

I love my family; we play games and always have fun. We sit down around eight to have breakfast. My favorite is when mommy makes hash browns and scrambled eggs my daddy was a platoon sergeant and he's with my grandpa Papi now in heaven. Mommy thinks it's gross but I like my hash browns and scrambled eggs with ketchup just like my daddy. My mom doesn't spend as much time with me as we want but that's because she has to provide for us which is OK, my mommy is my hero. Today will be my first day of 2nd grade. I left to my bus stop but before I left, I made sure to tell my mommy that I loved her as always. It was amazing I met two girls; their names were Lelia and Jackie we spent all day together playing and getting to know each other.

I was excited to tell mommy all about it when I got home so I ran from my bus stop to my house as fast as I could. But she wasn't there and then I saw a note on the table and remembered that she had to start work again to. It said:

Hey sweetie, sorry but I might have to stay a bit late today. There's some macaroni in the fridge, go to bed early, and just make sure to be safe.

*Love,
Mom*

I was used to this, so I ate my macaroni and the started playing with my stuffed bunny Mr. Thumper I was running so fast that I slipped on my jacket and hit the stove knob "click" I quickly replied with "ouch that hurt". I continued playing it was around eight-thirty when I went to bed.

"Cough, cough, cough, it's so smoky. Cough, cough, cough, mommy help cough, cough." I slowly felt my eyes shutting as I fell to the ground. In the far, distant I heard blaring sirens. Just as my eyes shut.

I woke up to doctors all around me and nurses with tears in their eyes. I stood up and tried asking them what happened but they all ignored me I tried to stop one of them but fell through a wall, and I was like "wow, I'm a ghost. "I went to cold stone and got an extra-large chocolate sprinkles ice cream and I didn't have to pay I later went back to my house and went upstairs I started playing with my battleship game until I heard something fall. I went downstairs and saw my mom and that's when it hit me I'm dead. Our voice mail machine went off at that

moment and it said "Mrs. Hers we can't get a hold of you and we don't know where you are but... but you're daughter passed away in a house fire please call us as soon as you get this" Beep. She fell to the ground she started weeping and yelling "I'm sorry I should have been there I should have spent more time with you." I knew she couldn't hear me but I said "its OK mommy i forgive you". She looked up at me, we just stared at each other for a moment but then I felt the warm embrace of her hug. I was so happy but confused because I was dead and that's when I noticed the ash on her cheek and before I knew it we were fast asleep on a white cloud wrapped in each other's arms and the last thing I remembered was a tear rolling down her cheek and hearing the words

I LOVE YOU.

Life in the Ice Age

Prologue

My story begins in the ice age when I was seventeen. I was always taking risks for the fun of it. My fierce, dark eyes contrasted against my sun-bronzed skin and shaggy, golden hair. My Mom, Airing, was forty-two. She had dirty blonde haircut crudely short. My sister, Terra, was fourteen. She looked like a small, feminine, brown-haired version of me. My dad, Titan, bravely defended us from a pack of velociraptors but lost his own life doing so. You'd think that my Mom naming me Savage would have made me tougher, but it hasn't been easy being the man of the Ginnings family for the last seven years. But I can't think about that now, I have more important things to do today. Riding mammoths is the first thing on my to do list.

"Mom!" Terra yelled. "Savage is trying to ride the mammoths again!"

"Savage!" Airing roared. Savage was clinging to the mammoth's tusks. "Get down NOW!"

"I'll try!" yelled Savage. His voice quavered from the mammoth's desperate dance to get him off. Then, the mammoth stopped and shook his head vigorously; Savage was hanging by just his hands now. Airing gasped in horror. The mammoth gave his head one more big shake and Savage went flying off the mammoth straight into a giant mud puddle.

"Yuk." Savage said as he wiped the mud off.

"You're in big trouble!" Terra sneered. Airing marched over to Savage.

"You know you're not supposed to do dangerous stuff like that. Remember last time?" Airing scolded.

Savage stopped what he was doing. He tried not to think about back then. Last time, he took two dinosaur eggs; one for an omelet and the other for a pet. It ended badly. It turned out the eggs were *Albertosaurus* eggs and they were ready to hatch. When they hatched, nobody was watching them so the babies went on a rampage. The Ginnings survived but they almost lost Savage. He was being cornered and barely made it out. Savage looked down at his muddy palms in shame.

"There will be no dinner for you tonight, but you will be making it." Airing growled and gave Savage a challenging look. Daring him to argue.

"Awwwww, come on Mom; no fair. Can I please have dinner? I'll starve if I don't!" Savage begged, hoping for mercy.

"I'll hear nothing of it," said Airing turning her head away from him with closed eyes.

"You'll survive without one meal," she smirked. She was hoping he'd fall for her look.

"Yes, mother," Savage said sadly as he slumped off to get the ingredients for dinner.

"And clean yourself up while you're out!" Airing ordered. Savage was too far away by now to hear her, but he knew what to do. He wanted to take a bath. He looked, felt, and smelled dirty. Savage walked over to a small, crystal clear pond, plucked some moss off a log, unwrapped his mammoth fur loincloth, and jumped into the pond. The water wasn't freezing, but it was far from warm. When the mud had washed off he got out, plucked two leeches off his legs and one off his shoulder, put his loincloth back on, and went into the forest.

"Why do I have to make the dinner? That's a girl's job," Savage mumbled as he picked some berries and mushrooms. "Ever heard of transportation? Riding mammoths is the way to go." He picked some herbs. "I just have to tame one." He heard a rustle in the bushes, so he dropped his basket and pulled out his knife. Then a weak hiss came from the bushes. Savage stepped back a little. A baby saber-toothed tiger stumbled out of the bushes. It only looked about eight months. Its fur was matted and dirty and in some places there were bloody wounds. Savage slowly started to walk up to it. It looked up at him, meowed, and passed out; too weak to stay conscious. Savage scooped up the kitten and walked back to his cave with all the ingredients and the kitten. He started a fire, got out a rudimentary copper pot and started to cook. He placed the baby saber tooth tiger next to the flame and placed some extra meat in front of it. It was still sleeping, but when it smelled the meat, its eyes snapped open. It hungrily gobbled up the meat, gave another weak, but grateful meow, and went back to sleep. Savage overheard Terra and his Mom talking.

"It's a good thing he knows how to cook." Terra chuckled.

"If he didn't know what mushrooms you can eat and you can't eat, we would be dead." Airing agreed.

"Are you sure we can trust him to make food that won't kill us?" Terra asked.

"Terra! How dare you! I trust him with my life, why, I taught him myself!" Airing protested. Savage chuckled as he listened to them argue.

"But Mom, don't you remember when he made boiled eggs?" Terra shuddered as she remembered the rotten egg smell.

"Yes I do, but that's no excuse."

"Dinner is served!" Savage said as he brought the food in and sat it on the table. "I hope you like it, it's minty-berry-and-other-things soup." Savage said as he set the bowls of soup down.

"I hope we will. You know you're not the best at naming things." Terra mumbled to herself.

"This is great Savage. Thank you," Airing thanked, oblivious to Terra's words.

“Thanks, Mom.” Savage thanked back and gave Terra the stink eye. Unlike his mom, he had heard Terra’s remark.

THE NEXT DAY

“Kids, it’s time to go hunting!” Airing called to the back of the cave. Yes! I can test out my new pet! What will I call him? Saber? Savage thought. Savage heard Terra scream.

“Mom! There’s a baby saber-toothed tiger in our cave!” Terra shrieked.

“Don’t hurt it! It’s mine!” Savage called.

“What did you say, Savage? I hope I’m not hearing correctly because I thought I just heard you say that the baby saber-toothed tiger is yours,” Airing questioned. Dang it! I hate Terra. Savage thought.

“Yes Mom; it’s mine. His name is Saber.” Savage told Airing shamefully.

“Kill it.” Airing said scornfully and plainly. Savage was shocked.

“You never let me have anything! I’m not going to kill him! He’s mine! Think of all the help it will be having a saber-toothed tiger on our side!” Savage argued.

“You don’t speak to me that way! Yes, it would help having a predator on our side but you never know when it will attack!” Airing said thoughtfully.

“What if Saber saves my life one day?” Savage said.

“But what if he ends it?” Airing added, holding back tears.

“Never mind Mom, can we not kill the kitten? Look how cute he is!” Terra asked, walking out of the cave. She was holding Saber who was sleeping peacefully in her arms. Terra stroked him gently and he purred. Savage finally got to see Saber in good light. Saber was brown with soft golden stripes and his snout was white. Airing sighed with a look of exasperation.

“Fine, but only if you train him properly. Train him to kill but don’t feed him meat. Terra, you can play with Saber but he is Savage’s cat.”

“Come on Mom! I’m the one who told you he was here in the first place!” Terra whined.

“No. Now let’s go hunting.” Airing picked up Saber and placed him in Savage’s arms, grabbed some spears, then headed out into the wilderness. Before they left, Savage put Saber back in the cave. He still needed to rest. After a couple minutes of walking, they stopped.

“There,” Airing whispered. She pointed to a young macrauchenia grazing on some grass a small distance from the rest of its herd. A macrauchenia looks a lot like a large tapir. “That’s your pray, I’ll hunt the mother. Savage, you help me,” Airing said. Terra and Savage nodded and inched forward until the only thing separating them and the calf was some tall grass. Savage gripped his spear tightly and Terra notched an arrow then they looked over at Airing. She was about to nod when the baby shot its head in the air and looked around. Nobody moved a muscle, once the baby macrauchenia lowered its head Airing nodded.

Terra released her arrow and it flew straight into the baby's heart. Savage would never admit it, but she was the best in the family when it came to archery. With a high-pitched cry, the baby fell to the ground with a thud, which put the rest of the herd on high alert. They bellowed fearfully and started to stampede.

"Now!" Airing shouted and Savage leaped out of the bushes. They charged towards an adult that was lingering by the baby; the mother. Airing wasn't much of a killer so she used a rope made of strong vines. She roped the mother's head and pulled tight. The mother abandoned her baby's corpse and started to run, dragging Airing behind her.

"Savage!" She yelped.

"On it!" Savage called as he threw his spear and it lodged itself in the macrauchenia's flank, causing it to slow down significantly. That gave Savage the upper hand. He sped up just enough to grab the rope and run along with the beast. He took out his father's dagger and cut the rope. Airing tumbled to a stop. She was a little cut up and bruised but she was okay so she got up, dusted herself off, and helped Terra with the dead corpse. Savage leaped onto the macrauchenia's back and cut its throat. It did a somersault as it crashed to the ground. Savage smiled a satisfied grin and lugged the animal over to its baby. "How are we going to get this home?" Savage asked lazily.

"Same way we always do." Airing replied. Savage and Terra groaned. "Quit being lazy. This'll feed us for days!"

"Fine." Savage grumbled and Terra pouted. Savage and Airing each grabbed two legs of the adult and Terra slung the baby over her shoulders.

"Where's Saber?" Terra asked.

"I left him in the cave. He was still too weak." Savage replied and shrugged.

"Help me, Savage!" Airing demanded as she yanked the carcass inch by inch.

"Sorry mother!" Savage apologized and helped her drag the macrauchenia home.

"Ugh!" Savage groaned when they got to the cave. "Why do macrauchenia's have to be so heavy?"

"The heavier they are, the more meat they carry, now stop complaining and help me get these things ready to store!" Airing said between gasps for breath. Together, Airing, Savage, and Terra skinned the animals, chopped up the meat, cooked it, ate some, and then stored the rest in a hole filled with ice under a rock. They got the ice from a nearby Pond that froze over in a snowstorm.

"That was delicious." Terra sighed when she finished eating.

"There has to be more to life than just survival." Savage said with a mouth full of food.

"This is how cave people have lived since, forever! We have the best life anyone could ask for! It doesn't get better than this." Airing sighed but Savage was still unsatisfied. Airing noticed and wrapped her arm around him. "You're not normal Savage."

"Geez, thanks." Savage muttered.

around him. “You’re not normal Savage.”

“Geez, thanks.” Savage muttered.

“Don’t cut me off! You’re the best hunter around,”

“Because we’re the only people around!”

“You’re always are looking for ways to... what do you call it? Evolve? I don’t know. But the point is, be happy with your life; most cavepeople would die for this life.”

“Okay. Thanks Mom.” Savage thanked and lied his head down on the stone floor of the cave and went to sleep. Tomorrow is a new day; and it’s going to be the best day on my life. Savage thought with a new perspective.

Austin McConnell
Middle School Short Story

First Day Rule Breakers – A Modern Day Fantasy

August 16, 2015

As the smooth wind blew in the late summer air, I knew I was not prepared for that day. As I walked to school for the first day, I met up with my friends, John and Rei. We talked about what kind of powers the other new ninth graders will have. The three of us just have your average ice, water, and wind powers, or so we thought. When we started to approach school, we immediately changed our mindset on what this year was going to be like; high school is a lot bigger than middle school. We were the top in middle school, but now we went straight down to the bottom. We went to first period, advanced magic control, and realized we knew no one there. After attendance, the teacher called each of us up to see what we can do. My name, Josh, was called. I went to the front of the room and made a small wind in my hand, but my teacher didn't seem too impressed. To improve my first impression, I made the wind a bit bigger and then kept it growing. After a while, I lost control and blew a hole in the wall and the roof. The teacher sent me up to the office, and I got detention. Then Rei came in. He had the same story; he lost control of his ice, but instead almost impaled a kid. Finally, John came in with a different story; he made a hurricane while trying to make a small rain for a rainbow. After a moment of silence and pouting, we all just started laughing. Then the principal walked in. He then gave us a stern look of disappointment. But not at us, rather at the teacher who gave us detention. He then said how the walls are repairable and that everything was fine. Without another word, he handed us our schedules with a note stating, "Starting tomorrow you three will be taking a different class. That's when we knew we were in for a ride.

Goner

I wake up in a strange dark place, alone. I look around to see my hands and feet were tied up with rope, killing my circulation to my hands and feet. Every movement I take, my body aches more and more. I feel tears burning my face when I move. My heart races. Suddenly, I hear footsteps coming to me in a slow pace. My heart stops in fear and I freeze in shock. The person comes closer, still in a slow pace. I try to speak for help, but there is no use, my voice, it is not working. My heart races again as I move to escape this horrible place. They stop in front of me; their red cold, heartless eyes stare into my soul. They're smiling at me, knowing that I am suffering in the chair, wanting to escape. They get close to my face to whisper something

“Say...sorry....now!” they scream in my ear with no hesitation.

“Go away...leave me alone!” I command.

My vision goes dark. I wake up in cold sweat with fear and relief. I get up slowly to the bathroom to take sleeping pills for my nightmares. My nightmares, I thought. They are getting worse. As I turn on the light, I look down to see my ankles, wrists are red and bruised, and my legs and my arms are bruised. I wash my face with cold water and pull the cabinet. I grab my medicine and water. I close the mirror door and all I see is Them. I drop my pills. Gasp in shock in shock and fear. I turn around to see Them. But to turn around to see nothing there. My hands start trembling, my heart races. I pause by a hot breath feeling on my head. I slowly turn back around to Them staring into my soul, happy to finish me off. They get closer and closer to me. They laugh in my ear gladly and joyfully. Tears fall down my face knowing my time is up.

“I...give up...please...spare me” I pleaded.

They laugh with delight. I start to cry. They get away from my face, slowly.

They stare at me into my soul with their heartless, cold red beady eyes. My eye get wider in shock. This is it for me.... I am sorry. I thought in my head.

“You should...be sorry.” they say as they read my mind. “You did this.”

My heart races more.

I scream... I am a goner....

The Ghost Girl

Annie was her name.

The girl who stood on mark street everyday next to the lamppost. Everyone walks by her without saying hi or without noticing her. They just simply walk through her in the dark. She screams at them asking if they can see or hear her but they just keep walking along.

There was just one person who thought she existed.

The man walked by her every single day. He heard her he could even see her. This man believed he had heard and seen someone similar to her. He know who she was. He was too scared to talk to her because he thought people would laugh, stare, and be scared of him.

He didn't care if any of those things happened. It would be his died daughter he would be talking to. He ran to her crying and screaming "Annie, Annie!"

As soon he came up to her she was gone. No one was there, but he thought she was there. To him was it someone or nothing?

Luca Taplan Ray

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

One day there was a video game player named Luca. He played video games whenever he could. One day he was playing his favorite game Minecraft when all of a sudden he started feeling nauseous and passed out. He woke up what felt like hours later. He knew where he was and got scared. He went to a tree and started punching it to get wood and put the wood in a little four by four square area. He got some square planks and put four of them in it again to make a bigger table.

He started to build a wooden pickaxe when suddenly a low hiss was heard next to him he ran as fast as he could but was blasted into a tree by a massive explosion. He flashed red once and then ran back to the explosion spot. "I hate creepers," He said. Then all of a sudden, a portal formed above the explosion spot. He ran over to it and stared in awe.

It was his friend Riley. He Ran over to him to see that he was knocked out. He ran over and dragged him out of the explosion hole. He quickly built a four by four house to put him in made another crafting table and started to dig down. He knew not to dig straight down so he started mining in a spiral. He dug down forty-two blocks and his pickaxe broke. He went up to make a new one but stone when he saw that there was a big room and a door around him. He also saw a rabbit that was eating a carrot he decided to take the carrot and look out a window to see an animal farm and wheat, potato, and carrot farm. He gave the carrot back and went to make stone tools. He crafted a sword first and heard a door open. He went to the second door and had his sword out. He waited for the door to open when he swung his sword at the thing that opened the door. It yelled "OOOOOOW."

He looked at who it was and saw it was Riley he quickly apologized as they heard a terrible noise come from outside. It was a high screech and then Riley stated, "Who could that be?" They ran to the whole and saw Timmy was there. He was short like in real life and was unconscious. Luca and Riley carried him into the house and then Luca finally said it "I'm going to kill it."

Riley asked with a horrified look "what?" he already knew what Luca was going to kill. Luca saw that He had 27 diamonds and crafted armor for himself as well as a sword. He made a bow from string Riley got and went out with 20 eyes of ender. He chucked them after 100 blocks with Riley dragging Timmy behind him. They were going to go to as back up if Luca needed it.

They finally found what they were looking for. A cave with buildings in it. They started to look around when Luca saw it a portal frame that needed the 12 eyes. He inserted the eyes and heard flaps. Then Luca said “if you hear me scream don't come if you hear me scream Riley then come in. Riley nodded and Luca jumped in.

Luca brought in 40 arrows to shoot with. He knew he had to shoot at the crystals. He shot 10 out of the 12 and then heard a flap turned brought out his sword and slashed. The dragon took some damage and went in the air to heal. Luca shot the other two and started raining down fire on the dragon. He shot all of his quiver and then saw the dragon was on one health point. He built up to the tallest tower and went to one end. The dragon looked at him and then came flying at full speed. Luca ran at the dragon jumped and then slashed and killed it. But the fall was massive. But then Luca remembered he had a bucket. He grabbed it and placed the water right before he fell. He landed safely and then screamed “RILEY.”

They saw the portal and then ran to it. Luca threw Timmy in but then saw an angry Enderman. He shoved Riley into the portal and killed the Enderman. But then more came and Luca grabbing up his water after the fall placed it again. All the Enderman took damage when they touched it so Luca kept placing it wherever he went until he got to the portal and jumped in the portal. Then he saw he was home and messaged Riley and Timmy if they were there and Timmy asked why but Riley said yeah and Timmy you don't want to know.

It's Not Your Fault

The nightmare was going on, and Luna couldn't stop it. She couldn't wake up.

It was the oddest dream of them all, and she couldn't wake up. No matter how hard she tried. She couldn't, her eyes felt stuck open, and even worse: Part of her knew this wasn't a dream.

She watched as her only family member she had: her older sister, was murdered.

Everything happened so quickly.

Luna was shaken awake. Her sister was looking over her in an annoying way, as if she was the one who was rudely awoken.

"What?" Luna said rudely.

"Wake up! You have to get ready for school." Luna's sister replied.

Phoenix was twenty-two, and had custody of her little sister, Luna. Their mother died giving birth to Luna. Phoenix was six. Their father didn't take it well. He ran away after Luna turned one. Their grandparents took them in, yet tragically died in a plane crash. By then Phoenix was nineteen and Luna was thirteen. By law, Phoenix could take custody of Luna. But they never had the best sister relationship.

Phoenix blamed Luna for her parent's absence; she even blamed her for her grandparent's death. Every night Phoenix thought "first mom, then dad, then my grandparents, and now my freedom." She would never actually tell that to Luna though. Luna was sensitive. And besides, Phoenix knew that Luna was all she had left.

Luna said goodbye to Phoenix and dashed to the bus stop. She didn't have that many friends. Her three friends Kathy, Ivy, and Jessica were already there waiting for her.

They got on the bus and headed to school. Everything was fine. They got to school and did their normal routines, but lunch seemed Eerie.

"Something doesn't feel right" Ivy spoke up.

They all nodded their head in agreement.

Suddenly, the speaker came on. The lady's voice boomed through the speakers.

"We are going to go into a soft lockdown. Everybody stay calm. This is just a drill. I repeat, this is just a drill."

Even though everybody was informed it was a drill, it was still pretty scary.

The drill for some reason lasted a whole hour. Until it was

announced for the students to go to their last class. Everybody went their normal ways.

LUNA arrived home and felt Erie. She was alone for two more hours, the Phoenix would be home. She doubled checked to make sure that everything was locked. Finally, she turned on the TV and fell into a deep sleep.

Everything was perfect for what seemed to be three minutes. Luna dreamed about her parents. She didn't know what they'd look like when they left, but she found some pictures in a box. Everything was perfect. Her parents were both there with the brightest smiles, and Phoenix had the biggest smile of all.

Unfortunately, Luna woke with a start. She heard a really hard knocking, then realized her sister was home and had to get inside. She opened the door and greeted her sister with a hug, as she always did. But, this time it felt different - like a real hug.

Then her sister announced that they were going out for dinner.

They ate at a fancy restaurant they were only allowed to eat at very often. They finished eating, and decided to take a walk into town. It was a pretty town at night with all the lights.

They walked for thirty minutes, when they decided to go home. They took a shortcut they knew all too well.

BANG! Something in the distance went off. Luna looked over at her sister to see her reaction. She looked taken away.

Then she fell to the floor. It took Luna five seconds for her brain to register what had happened.

Luna was having a nightmare and couldn't wake up. The thing was, it wasn't a nightmare.

She tried to keep Phoenix's eyes open. But she couldn't. Her sister's last words were "It's not your fault"

Midnight

There was a place on the coast of Atlantic Ocean that was never heard of until now. There was a small quiet and calm city called Midnight. The reason why it was called midnight is because, one day there was a mysterious abandoned school named Jefferson middle school. It is said that there was once a brother and a sister and the brother's name was Nick. He had fiery red hair and the breath of a dragon. There was the sister her hair as golden as a pure heart and face as pretty as snowflakes and her name was Haley. One day as they were walking home together they came up on an abandoned school.

The brother said, "Let's go inside. I want to see what's in there".

The sister said, "No I'm scared". The brother said, "You're going to be alright, come on".

The sister reluctantly said, "Okay".

So they decided to go in. When they went inside all they could see was cobwebs and some red chunky stains. They looked around for a little bit. But all of a sudden, something caught their eye it was so dark they could hardly see what it was, but the brother squinted and saw a part of it. It looked like an oddly shaped figure. Its teeth were sharp and jagged. It had feet so crippled.

Nick was terrified and so was Haley. Nick was unsure of what he had seen. So he wanted to take a closer look. Nick persuaded Haley to come so he took her by the hand and she reluctantly went with him. Nick took her hand as she was trembling. As they walked slowly toward the unknown creature, they were able to see that the creature was over nine feet tall. It had eyes so dark that if you looked into them you could see the night sky, feathery black wings that are humongous. With hair as thick as rope. A tail that coiled as a corkscrew and ears as sharp as swords.

Nick and Haley were terrified so they ran upstairs and they saw three doors. They ran into the first door they saw, and it was a brick wall. Then they ran into the next door and the door had fire inside. At last, they ran to the last door, it had beautiful green grass, and the sun was shining so bright. They ran only to find out it was a maze. The mysterious creature outsmarted them and trap them in the dead end. It crept closer and closer until all you could hear was a scream at the stroke of midnight.

Poem Schway

Middle School Short Story



汤 (Soup)

The highlight of Nicholas' days were the routine trips he took to The Gluttonous Panda for lunch. These excursions to procure greasy Chinese food were more than a habit or a routine: they were an addiction, plain and simple. Nick daydreamed of the restaurant's signature Dictator Mao's Chicken like an alcoholic would daydream of six-packs glittering in the light filtering through a convenience store's windows. While at work, he would anxiously check his Timex watch with increasing frequency until the blessed minute arrived and he could bolt. Nick walked through the dented sliding doors, his palms sweaty with anticipation. His worn tennis shoes squeaked noisily against the scuff-marked linoleum tiles as he approached the buffet. There were only two people in line: a bickering Caucasian couple with elaborate dragon tattoos snaking around both their arms. The guy had a Chinese character tattooed on the side of his neck. Now, Nick was no expert on Oriental languages (yet), but he was taking Chinese lessons, and those lessons told him that the character meant 'soup'.

...well, at least the tattoo job was good. The lines were clean and dark, and he didn't see any swelling or redness. Nick wondered idly if maybe he should get a tattoo. Maybe it would make him look cooler. Maybe it would impress-

The couple's arguing hit a crescendo. From Nick's eavesdropping, they'd apparently decided to end a dedicated, seven-year relationship over honey walnut shrimp. Interesting. With a last, infuriated huff, the girl shook her head, sending neon blue hair flying into Nick's face. She stormed off, flipping off Soup Tattoo and disappearing through the sliding doors.

Soup Tattoo seemed at a loss for words for a moment, gaping at the space where his ex-girlfriend was like a floundering tuna. He looked remorsefully at his half-filled plate, before throwing a five-dollar-bill on the counter and leaving as well.

Suddenly the store was uncomfortably quiet. Where loud curses and extremely private information had been before, there was now only the low buzz of the wooden fan spinning diligently on the ceiling. Oppressive awkwardness filled the air-conditioned atmosphere. Nick started piling his plate on with every food available in a desperate attempt to justify his presence in the store. Only once he was positive that he could not possibly finish even half of the oily overly fried grub he was

buying, did Nick approach the cashier. A veritable Mount Everest of assorted entrees and sides wobbled on his tray.

Amanda, the cashier girl, eyed his plate with some trepidation. "Just... put it there," she said, gesturing to the scale with a gloved hand. Nick gingerly placed his enormous lunch onto the scale, watching the digital numbers on its side climb higher and higher nervously. 19.3 pounds! Holy guacamole! That's ten times the amount I usually get!

Nick swallowed. "Uh... how much would that be?" Amanda poked some buttons on the calculator fastened to the counter. "\$151.80 plus tax." She pronounced the words solemnly, like a coroner would pronounce someone's death. Nick hissed an expletive through his teeth, before drooping resignedly and reaching for his already-overburdened American Excess Card. He could practically hear his credit score crying out in anguish.

"Wait!" Amanda lurched forward, holding Nick's wrist firmly and stopping him from swiping his card on the register. Their eyes locked for a single moment, and Nick felt his heart jackhammering violently in his chest like it wanted to crack his ribcage open. "You come here all the time," continued Amanda. "I think I can take twenty percent off of your total for being such a loyal customer." She smiled beatifically, ivory teeth dazzling bright in the neon lights of The Gluttonous Panda.

Nick blinked once. Twice. "I... would like that, yes." Then Amanda - still smiling - reached under the counter, pulled out a '20% off' coupon, and handed it to Nick. He stared at the multicolored slip of paper and handed it back to her. In a short, jerky motion, he placed his card on the terminal and dragged it all the way from top to bottom.

PURCHASE SUCCESSFUL, announced the terminal cheerfully. "You're good to go," beamed Amanda, dropping two plastic-wrapped fortune cookies on Nick's tray. "Thank you," he said, placing his card back into his faux-leather wallet. He slowly lifted his wobbling plate from the scale, and made his way over to a small booth with faded stains on the table's vinyl tablecloth.

Nick ate slowly and contemplatively, moving his roasted eggplant around his dish with a bendy plastic fork. Sautéed mushrooms, sweet-and-sour pork, fried pot stickers, black pepper broccoli - obscure Scandinavian royalty would kill for this kind of food, he was sure. It didn't make him want to eat it any more, though. The truth was, Nick didn't like The Gluttonous Panda. It was too spicy, too exciting for his mild and bland palate. No, the only reason he went there so ludicrously often was...

His gaze wandered over to Amanda. Her glossy, chocolate-colored hair fell in thick, coiffed waves over her shoulders, her lipstick was the perfect shade of watermelon pink, and her almond-shaped eyes were playful and sparkling. Nick let out a dreamy sigh. She's absolutely perfect... so perfect that he was even subjecting himself to ridiculously expensive Chinese lessons, just so he could speak to her in her native language.

He sighed again, but this time it was sad and gloomy. He had no chance with her. Why would she go for a socially awkward geologist with no hobbies other than finding vaguely interesting rocks? Oh, right. She wouldn't. Nick finished off his water and stood up, pushing his plate away from him. He grabbed a fortune cookie from his tray and dejectedly left the restaurant, popping open the cookie's wrapper as he exited. The treat inside was a wonderful, toasty gold color, smelling of sweet vanilla and promising a delightful crunchiness. Nick snapped it in half, fished out the fortune inside, and threw both ends inside his mouth.

He walked over to a nearby trashcan, ready to throw out the fortune. But then, the strangest thing happened. He decided not to. Maybe it was because he decided he wanted some good news in his life, even though it was completely fake. Maybe he was simply curious about the mysterious and entirely bogus fate he was apparently going to have. Either way, he uncrumpled the tiny slip of paper and read the words printed inside.

You miss all the shots you don't take. True love will appear in your life... if you are brave enough to chase it.

Nick stared at the fortune. It's almost like it knew... No, that's ridiculous, he corrected himself. But even if it wasn't personalized for me, that doesn't mean it doesn't have some value. He turned his head to look at the distant shape of The Gluttonous Panda. The obese black-and-white bear on the sign seemed to be mocking him. I bet you won't do it, you pansy, he imagined it saying, waving its chopsticks at him infuriatingly. In a burst of irrational anger, Nick turned around and started running straight for the restaurant's entrance. By the time he entered through the sliding doors, he was panting and breathless. His normally pale face was flushed cherry-red with exertion.

"Amanda!" he gasped out, using a chair as a crutch to hold himself up. "Will you... will you go on a date with me?" He looked at her earnestly, forcing himself not to look away. His limbs were trembling, his heart was quaking, and his brain was spinning. Please, please, let that fortune be correct...

Amanda opened and closed her mouth a few times, as if she were going to speak. At last, she shook her head, a rosy crescent smile on her face. "I was wondering when you were going to ask! I mean, I would've asked you myself, but that's against store policy." She laughed. "Of course I will, Nick. Of course I will."

And though it would probably cause him to die of diabetes at age forty, at that moment all of Nick's trips to The Gluttonous Panda were worth it.

Emily Grace Seaman

Middle School Short Story

Don't Bring a Knife to a Gunfight

I was sitting at home right before it happened. In the dark room, a little bit of light was leaking out from underneath the hallway door where my brother sat playing with his toys. Then the light was gone. My mother screamed and I flicked on the light. I ran out to see what all the fuss was about. My brother was dead and now... my mother was too. Frightened I turned to my bedroom to find that the creep that killed my mother and my brother was standing right in front of me. As we stare into each other's eyes I can feel the tension between us grow. Just then, he reaches into his back pocket and pulled out a small flask. Took a sip of it and then gestured it out to me. I am only 16 years old and so I refused. He was mad I could see it underneath his mask that he was filled with fury. He took me by the arm and dragged me towards him. I had just barely gotten out of his grasp and ran towards my door remembering that when he was reaching for the flask that he had a knife in his pocket. I ran to my closet where I kept a safe full of knives and pistols. I grabbed my Glock and loaded the magazine and then shoved it in my holster.

He came back and threw me over his shoulder... just like my father had done to me when I was little... right before he disappeared. The last thing I remember about my father is that the day he was killed was the night we got a letter from an anonymous person that said, "I have started with your dad, and now I'm coming after you, tell nobody about this letter or you will not be happy." I did as the letter said and told nobody about it. But 3 years later here he is, the same guy that killed my father. As he carried me downstairs he whispered the words "don't struggle, it will only make things worse." He dropped me in the back of his truck and slammed on the gas.

We were in the car for about an hour or two before we stopped. He tied my hands behind my back and blindfolded me. I wasn't sure what was going to happen but I was sure that I was going to get killed. Not sure how but it was going to happen.

He took me to an airport and untied me. He said, "Just act like you're my daughter and I won't hurt you." I did exactly what he said and when he sat down and fell asleep, I made a break for it. I started running towards the nearest exit and before I could get my hands on the door, he caught me. He grabbed my arm and tied me to a chair. While he slept, I remembered that he still had the knife in his pocket because we hadn't gone through security yet. I ever so slightly reached into his pocket and

grabbed the knife. I started to saw through the rope and when I got through it and was finally free; I slowly backed away and then ran as fast as I could. I ran out the front of the airport building and ran to the bus stop. I had a few dollars on me because I was still wearing the clothes that I wore to school. I dropped my money in the box and sat down. Just as we were driving away this guy in a wheelchair decides to get on the bus. He was taking forever and as the bus driver was putting his wheelchair on the bus and helping him on. The guy that took me was on his way over to the bus.

I went out the emergency exit and darted like a bullet. I realized that he only had a knife and I had my Glock still on me. I stopped where I was and he stopped and stared at me. He pulled out his knife and I pulled out my pistol. The last words I said to him were "don't mess with my family." and I pulled the trigger. That was the last time I saw him. Until...

I knew I was going to get caught. I was going to go to jail for murder. I didn't know what to do. The first thing I did was go back to my house and gather some essentials, but when I got there... There were police surrounding the house. They told me that there was a robbery but they can't tell who because there are no fingerprints or anything in the house. I immediately thought of the guy that took me and I whispered "the killer." I blurted out "the killer! The killer did this!" They all had a confused look on their faces and were not sure what to say. Finally, after about 45 second one of the officers said "the killer?" "Yes, the killer. He broke into my house and he killed my mother and my younger brother. He then tried to kidnap me and took me to the airport where he tied me to a chair." I didn't know if I should continue with what happened but they didn't give me a chance to think for a moment because as soon as I was done speaking the officer said: "how did you get away?" I was silent for a few seconds and then lifted up the corner of my shirt to show the hand on the gun that I had in my holster. They told me that they would not arrest me because I made every attempt to get away and I was using it for self-defense. But they also said that I would have a warning this time but if it happened again, even if I was in the same situation... that I would be sentenced to jail for murder which would require me to stay there for 5-10 years. My mind was twisted with all of these precautions. Was I to tell the police the truth or should I keep my mouth shut and hide far away so that they can never find me.

My only option was to run away. I had to go somewhere so far away that they would never find me. So I ran to my room and I started packing. I grabbed some clothes, and All the money I could find. I blurted out of the door with my backpack full of clothes and I ran to the store. I got a flashlight, batteries, crackers, and some other essentials. Once they were all paid for I shoved them in my back and then went back to the airport.

When I got there, I immediately ran to the counter. "I need one ticket to Australia," I said in such a fast tone I'm surprised that she could understand me. One my ticket was paid for I hopped in line for

security. Once I got through security, I ran to the store that sold headphones and all sorts of electronic accessories. I grabbed a battery powered portable charger and more batteries. Just as I finished paying my flight was all ready to take off. I ran towards my gate and just barely made the flight. I jumped on the plane and we took off.

It was an 18-hour flight and we were just 12 hours away from our destination when the pilot made an announcement that we would have to land as soon as possible because we were about to run out of gas.

Just as we landed in a small airport, we were not allowed off the plane. Everybody was in full panic mode and then I lost my vision for a good 45 seconds and Then I felt the pain, I screamed in horror when I saw that he was alive. He had stabbed me in the back and was trying to choke me to death. I didn't know how he was still alive but he was and I could feel the pain. Four police officers ran onto the plane and got him off of me. Then I had about three to five paramedics sticking me with needles and attaching me to multiple monitors. I was in so much pain...

Ava Smith

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

There was a quaint little kingdom in the Valley of Fire. The Valley of Fire had rolling, grassy hills and, in some parts, large grey or black areas. It was named so many years ago because it was home to a colony of dragons that were contained there. At least, that's what I was told. I think it's a load of rubbish. What I think is that this kingdom has lasted a very long time. There is a rumor going around that there was a war with the dragons and the humans. The rumor also says that one of the ancient dragons survived. No one knows for sure, except for maybe my dad.

The reason my father is so significant is that, well, he's the king. And, yes, that makes me the Princess. I'm Princess Ashley Jasmine Serina Charlotte Beatrice Ravenwood II. I hate my name and being a princess. Anyway, back to the dragons. Everyone has them as a pet here, including the royal family. My dragon is Fire, but he likes to sleep a lot, so he hardly ever goes out of my room, unless I drag him out.

"Princess Ashley! Princess Ashley!" the butler, Charles, called. I know he's calling me for the lesson on the history of the royal families and this valley. Being sixteen is annoying sometimes.

"Yes, Charles?" I asked.

"It's time for your history lesson," he informed me.

"Of course it is," I muttered to myself. I would rather go to sword fighting lessons with my cousins, but no. I'm a princess and a girl, so I have to know these 'proper' things. At least the history of the valley isn't bad, so I actually pay attention to that.

"What was that?" he inquired.

"Nothing!"

"Ok, go to the schoolroom."

The schoolroom has a view of the training field, so I just stare out the window while he talks about the royal family.

"Yes, Charles," I sighed in defeat. He knows I don't like them. He doesn't like teaching me either. He says I'm too stubborn.

On the way to the schoolroom, I thought about my sword-fighting lesson later that night. My cousins teach me how to sword fight and battle in hand-to-hand combat around midnight twice a week. They know that I want to do all of the things they do, so they help me out. Last week I learned how to do a backflip to avoid a sword. That was so much fun.

When I got to the schoolroom, I took the only seat there was. It was

a perfectly pristine grey metal desk and chair. It is a small room, but big enough to learn in. There was a small window near the desk. I could see my cousins training on the field from the window. How I wish I could get out of this dress and go down there with them. Charles started talking about the royal family, so I drowned him out and imagined myself doing what the boys were doing. When he started talking about the valley, I started paying attention.

“Now, the valley has an interesting history, as you already know. There were dragons before people came to this valley. Your parents would not like me to tell you this, but there is a legend that the first dragon to greet the people here was bitter toward them. The dragon didn’t want humans destroying what they had worked so hard to build. Slowly, they started to become friends. The humans built around the dragons and the dragons learned to live with the humans. They slowly became household pets and did whatever the humans wanted. But, there were a group of dragons that didn’t want their lives to be like that. They rebelled against the humans and declared war.” He had started using random hand motions while he explained this and I could hardly contain my laughter.

“The humans used their own kind against them and it was said that all the dragons that wanted war fled to the mountain and slowly died there or were killed. The leader of the army was one of your ancestors and was handed over the crown by the king when he retired because he had no heirs. Your family has been in power ever since. Obviously, this is just a myth and the real reason is-” Someone just had to open the door and cut him off.

“Charles, Princess Ashley needs to get ready for the ball tonight.” Why? My handmaiden, Cosmia, had to remind us about the ball later that night. It was in four hours. Who needs four hours to get ready? My dad knows my views on these kinds of things and it was actually his idea for my cousins to teach me what they know. My mother, however, has a completely different idea of how things should be run. She thinks that every lady should be brought up the way she was. Dresses, lessons, etiquette, and things like that.

I got up from my seat and followed Cosmia out of the room and towards mine. Cosmia started with a bath. She put the water in the tub and had me wash my body and hair. I didn’t see the point because I was probably going to get dirty again anyway. When I got out, she immediately moved me to a chair that was facing away from the mirror so she could do my hair. She kept poking and prodding with all sorts of sharp things. I’m pretty sure it’s in some sort of braid, but I can never tell until she shows me. The next thing she did was makeup. It’s her specialty, but it hurts when she does it; she presses too hard on my eyelids. It was finally time to put on the dress. It was a deep blue that faded to black when it hit the ground. I had to admit it was gorgeous. Four long hours later, she finally let me look in the mirror. She had put half of my hair up in a twist while the other half cascaded down my back in tight curls. My makeup matched the color scheme of my dress

and she had given me light pink cheeks. I wasn't used to seeing myself like this, but I liked the way it looked. My dress was slightly scratchy but silky smooth at the same time. Cosmia shooed me out of the room and took me to my mom.

The ball was to celebrate 100 years of living peacefully with the dragons or something like that. When I got to the ballroom, I was introduced as the princess and there were already some people there. They all watched me walk down the stairs and all I could think of was not falling with these heels on. When I made it down the stairs, my dad took me around the ballroom and started introducing me to princes from different valleys. I didn't like any of them; they were too cocky. About an hour after the ball started, a guard ran through the door and straight to my father. He talked quietly with my dad and there was an enormous tremor that went through the ballroom. The king looked fearful when the soldier was talking to him and the fear on his face only increased when the tremor hit. My mom found me in the midst of all the chaos and tried pushing me out the door, but it was too late. I had seen him.

The dragon the legend talks about. I don't know his name, but I know that everyone here that has heard about him is deathly scared of him. I could see my father trembling and I could feel my mom trying not to shake with me in her arms. Others in the room were frozen with fear and the rest were either trying to slowly make it out the doors or trying to blend in with the surroundings.

"I thought it was time for a little visit. It's been what? One-hundred years since I was last seen? Did you think I was dead? Just letting you know I'm still here and I clearly still have power. Even over the king," he spoke with a deep booming voice with bright yellow eyes that burned through you like fire. He only had deep blood red scales, just like his anger. He flew off toward the mountain that he lives in and left everyone fearful. The king was the first one to break away from shock.

"Get me all of the knights and young men of the kingdom," he snapped. At the sound of his voice, everyone in the room sprang into action. I was ushered into my room so I could 'recover' from the surprise of seeing him. I could tell that my mother was very shocked that he had come. Her voice was shaking as she talked to me.

"Please get some rest. If you need me I will be in my room," she turned and left, leaving me to Cosmia. Cosmia let me change into my nightdress and she brushed my hair and braided it for bed. When she finally left the room, it was almost time for me to go meet my cousins on the training field, so I slowly crawled out of bed, careful to not make too much noise. I got dressed in leggings and a shirt and slipped out of my room.

When I left my room I decided to skip training that night and go to my father's study to see what he would do about the dragon. As I neared the study, I could hear voices and saw that there was light coming out of the slightly ajar door. From what I heard I could tell that my dad was trying to come up with reasons to get the men of the

kingdom to go up the mountain and fight the dragon.

“I could always let them and their families come and live in the palace or...” my dad trailed off.

“No. You can’t do that. I won’t let you,” I recognized the voice of the captain of the guard.

“I must. It is the only way to get men to go. I have to save my family. I have to give up the crown.” My heart stopped at those words. This can’t happen. He can’t do it. He’s worked too hard to do what’s best for the people. Before I knew what I was doing, I had barged into the room and started yelling at him.

“NO! I won’t let you do this. You can’t. You have to find another way. If me going up there to fight it is the only way to get you to see sense then I will do it. You have to stay king of this kingdom. You’ve done too much for them to just throw it away to the next greedy man that wants to be king.”

I could tell that they were in shock. It was only then that I noticed it was not just them in the study. My mother and half the guard were in there as well. I could feel myself getting red and I turned to leave. I sped out of there despite the yells. I ran all the way to the gardens, my favorite place. I had to process what I heard.

Ok. So obviously, my dad wants the dragon he thought was dead gone for real. He is clearly willing to do anything to make that happen. He just doesn't want our family to get hurt. He wants us to be safe, but he doesn't have to go that extreme. If he releases the idea that he will give up the crown then I have to go up the mountain alone. I can't let him do that. I have to find another way. I will do whatever it takes.

Sanai Smith

Middle School Short Story

The Fire on Christmas Night!

It was Christmas Eve, 11:30 pm. My parents and I lived in an old creaky house on Author Street, the house was severely ramshackle. Stairs breaking, floors cracking, and everything that was part of the house that we touched fell apart.

My parents always had a thing for Christmas, it was actually quite cool. This year was the first year I had the biggest present under the tree from my parents. It was unusually odd; my parents were broke, even though they were only taking care of one child. They didn't have very good jobs. As we sit near the fireplace drinking hot cocoa, I think about what's inside my present. Would it be a box inside of a smaller box inside of an even smaller box, well only parents knew such things.

My mom comes back from the dark cold with heavy wood. My dad comes to go help her seeing that she's struggling. My father cares dearly about my mother, and I loved watching them helping each other or snuggling. It was 11:45 pm, right as my mom drops the wood in the fireplace the horror began.

As my mom put the wood in the fireplace, I heard some unusual cracking noises coming from the fireplace. Then all of a sudden, the fireplace breaks and everything catches on fire. My parents are screaming and I'm sitting there being traumatized by what had just happened. My dad comes and picks up his 10-year-old daughter and carries her far from our house. Just far enough where I can see everything that is happening.

But, instead of my parents staying where I was they went back inside to get my huge present. I guess they didn't want me to have a terrible Christmas. They're coming back, there about to step outside, until the whole entire house crashes down on them. I watch the firefighters rinse the house down with heavy water. I'm still traumatized. Then one of the firefighters comes to me and says, "Is there anybody who lives around here that your parents know." I say yes, and walk all the way to my mom's friend Diana's house. I tell her everything that happened. Then I think to myself my Christmas has been ruined. And so it was.

Now every Christmas day I lay in my room crying, still remembering how they cared dearly about me that they risked their own lives so I can open at least one present on Christmas day. But the only present I opened was the gift of terror and my family that has just fallen apart. This is my story about the fire on Christmas night.

Mason Sosa

Middle School Short Story

Rafting

I was scared to death as I put on my rafting gear. After I got on the bus, our river guide started to tell us all the instructions about how to raft, while we drove down to the river. I looked around: it was alluring to see all the trees growing: they're so soundless, motionless, and seemed to move in rhythm synced to our buses motor, which sounded like a vacuum cleaner. We continued to drive down to the American River, or as liked to think of it, "The End of My Life River." While the guide continued giving out more instructions, my heart dropped when he said, "If you fall out of the boat on a hard rapid, you might stay underwater for up to a minute, but don't worry we will eventually get to you." After we arrived, it took us about 15 minutes to get set up for rafting. Finally, I found my boat and guide and we took the raft down to the water.

When I first stepped into the river, the water was so cold that it felt like it was biting into my legs. As I got into the boat, we drifted off. The first rapid was called, "A Cold Cup of Coffee," which we hit almost instantly. It was a quick challenge to get us, who were first time rafters, familiar to the rapids that laid ahead. Indeed, the water was like a cold cup of coffee; as I got splashed with the water, my body was frigid and although my feet feel like falling off, it was a lot of fun. As the first rapid passed I was surprised because, little did I know that I was about to be cut off from civilization for the next 6 hours; my heart palpitated for the next few rapids. When we approached the biggest rapid, we got out of the boat so our guide could walk us on the land that was above it, to show it to us; when I saw it I wanted to die. O boy that rapid was the craziest rapid ever! When we got back to our boats, we pushed off into the river and started to approach it: I was not ready for it. When we finally approached it, it was so big, I got drenched in water and felt like I would fall out of the boat. We later learned that someone did fall out of the boat that followed us; I was soaking wet and I was very cold. In comparison, as we went through the other rapids, they weren't that bad. Afterwards, we had smooth sailing and then we stopped for lunch.

When we landed on the shore and while others got out to stretch to get ready for lunch, I went to the bathroom. Then I took a little splash in the water and I finally had lunch. The group decided to let the girls get their lunch first. The girls were slower than molasses and were very picky about their food. After they went, us boys went and we were like hungry dogs; we got our food and ate it down. After that, while the others hung

around by the shoreline, my dad, sister, and I looked for skipping rocks to throw across the surface of the water. When we skipped those rocks, it felt like I was skipping my troubles away down the river. I felt very tranquil and life seemed to be on my side, but as is always the case, moments like this don't last. When I woke up out of my daydream, it was time for us to go and we got back on the river.

This time on the river the wind beat against our little boat, like someone trying to push us back to where we started. We paddled non-stop and my arms were super sore after that. It felt like a century going against the wind. It felt like the wind was trying to assault my goal and lead me astray. Then when the wind ceased, we got a break and drifted freely, as the boat drifted, I got out of the boat and floated next to it. When I was laying there in the river, it was like the river was trying to tell me something about life that I never knew. I was very carefree about my life there in time. Then when I got back in the boat, Cameron (our guide) told us the end was near. I wasn't very agreeable with that because I liked the rapids and I had just gotten used to Mother Nature.

I thought about the rapids, having traveled far downstream, and when I looked back at them near the end, I was astonished that I just experienced riding through each of those difficult rapids. The next rapid we approached was a thirty-foot rapid, which we couldn't go on. So we crossed over it on land and let our boats go over the falls on their own. From up high, when I looked down on those rapids, they looked absurd because the big rocks to their front looked like they were controlling the water flow that made the rapids. When our boats came down, we got back in and went on our way. When I looked back I wanted to help the rapids, but then I realized that the rapids didn't have feelings or emotions after all, so I looked forward the end of the trip.

Riding on the last few rapids, was the most fun I had in a while with my family. When we drifted to the end, the guide told us to get out and get back in the bus, but my sister and I floated there instead as our trip ended. I floated in the water a little longer. I floated because I still had a question that I pondered for a while, but which I couldn't answer. I floated but couldn't figure out if the river had feelings or was it my mere imagination stretching my mind?

Robert Stephens

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

It was just an average day in Okay, Oklahoma, gloomy, nonetheless boring. I was walking home from the nearest USPS. It was when I was about to turn the corner to E 74th, N.

Someone I didn't recognize jumped out of the forest right in front of me.

"Hey! What are you do-"

Then it went dark.

It was a few minutes later until I was awake. I didn't know where I was, but I was being moved elsewhere. Somewhere that I didn't know. Where was I going? Then, I tried to make an escape.

There was something over my head but it wasn't too hard to get it off. Then I realized that I was on a train... I didn't know where I was going until the man reappeared. The same man, he looked like me. "Alright kid, you've made a big mistake for doing the murders" he said.

"What murders? Who are you?" I replied, "Why do you look like me?"

"You are going to regret taking that bag off."

Then he disappeared, like a ghost deprived of energy.

It was only a few hours later when it got hot, humid hot, then I thought, "Oh god, this can't be..." The train stopped, I got off as soon as possible; I was in Miami. I withdrew an innumerable amount of money to try to buy a ticket back to Okay. Then I saw the news.

"NUCLEAR BOMB DROPPED IN OKLAHOMA, MORE THAN 600 DEAD..."

There were only 661 people living in Okay at the time. I was a lucky one, but who put me on the train?

I purchased myself a new apartment near downtown. It was arduous, but I was homeless. From the blast of course, I lost my family last week.

I wasn't much of a talker after this...

For living in Okay before the blast, I was requested to receive a grant from the United States government; I incompetently turned it down though, my doppelganger was taking me over, then I started repeating "blame US: blame the US." (Blame US? Who is us? Blame the US? Who is "the US"? Is "the US" America?) I didn't want to turn down the grant but I did... who am I?

"Wait... Did I just question myself even after knowing myself?" I thought.

This was only the beginning of what was soon to come.

Bethany's Big Secret

Hello there, my name is Bethany. I am thirteen years old and turning fourteen in eight weeks. I live at a farm with my mom, dad, brother, and sister. We are a really happy family but we have some problems, well actually I have some problems. I don't really want to tell any of my friends about this secret that I have. So far, I have only told one person about my deepest secret. Her name is Sydney. I only told her because it's been me and her from day one. I didn't want to tell anyone else because I'm too nervous of what their reaction will be. I've decided that I'll just put it out there. So are you dying to hear my secret? Okay here it comes...I have stage three non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC). I don't know how exactly I got it but I just have it. I found out that I had it about sixth months ago. Ever since I've found out that I have cancer, I've been trying to live everyday like it's my last. I'm going through chemo-radiation and it sucks. It makes me so exhausted to where I can't even get up to use the bathroom. Luckily, I have my family to help me out in this very heartbreaking time in my life. Cancer has really put an impact on my life because I never thought that I would be the one to have cancer. I've cried myself to sleep every night asking myself "why me?" or "what did I do to deserve this?" My cancer has lead me to another illness called "depression". I'm taking even more medication so that I won't want to hurt myself, but I know that I will never do that. I love myself too much and I have too much to lose.

I will be going into surgery in about thirty minutes. The doctors will try to remove as much of the cancer as possible so that I can live a happy long life. My doctor said that I have a 20% chance of surviving this surgery. I'm really scared because I don't know if I'll make it. Whatever happens in that room, the doctor will let my family know. I trust them but I'm just not sure if I even want to go through with the surgery only because of the survival rates. Dr. Andrews just said that it's time to start preparing for the surgery. Well, I'll talk to you guys when I get out of surgery.

I just woke up from surgery and I'm in a lot of pain. When I woke up, there was a tube going down my throat so that I am able to breathe but it really hurt. Dr. Andrews said that the cancer might come back but I'm not worried about that.

I feel like running a marathon because I can finally breathe! As soon as I am healed, I'm going use my new lungs for absolute everything. I can't wait until I'm healed so that I can live a normal life again. Well I need my rest so that I can get better so, goodbye guys.

The House on Maple Street

It was 2020 on a foggy morning in Central City. Harrison, Jenn, and Barry were all headed off to The Green Dale High School. Later that morning Ian and Gertrude headed off to work. When they arrive at school, they had to go to science class to work on an experiment. They think they use all the right chemicals so they double check to make sure it is okay and got ready to test. They went to the hall to test their rocket and when they were launching the rocket, Principal Brent walked by, minding his own business making sure everyone was in their classes, and BOOM! The rocket exploded in his face and he fell on the floor. When Principal Brent got up Harrison yelled, "Run!" They all started running as fast as they can away from Brent. Barry started to fall behind as Brent started catching up to Barry.

"Run Barry Run!" yelled Harrison.

Soon Barry was back with the team. They thought they could take a couple of sharp turns and lose him in the janitor's closet but he popped right up and cornered them. He caught them and brought them to his office.

"DON'T EVER RUN FROM ME AGAIN! I will never tolerate that again! You are all banned from science for two months," yelled Brent.

"Okay, we didn't mean for that to explode on you or even for it to explode at all. We ran because we didn't know what to do and we were really scared." replied Barry. "Come on, let's call your parents to come get you and you're suspended for two weeks of school." said Brent.

Meanwhile at Catco, the phone started ringing.

"Hello?" said Ian.

"Hello, I'm Brent, your children's school principal. Can you please come to the school? Your children are in trouble," replied Brent.

"I'll come right away; just let me call my wife."

"Hello Ian," said Gertrude.

"Hey Gertrude, the kids got in trouble at school can you meet me at the school?"

"Why did they get in trouble?"

"I really don't know. We will have to find out," replied Ian.

They both arrived at the same time.

"Okay what did our kids do?" Ian asked.

"Your kids made a rocket and shot it at my FACE!" yelled Brent.

"Oh" Gertrude tried to say before being cut off.

“THEY ARE SUSPENDED!” yelled Brent.

“They cannot be suspended for testing an experiment”, exclaimed Ian.

“Maybe I was too harsh so your kids are only suspended for one week.” said Brent.

Later that day Harrison started working on the rocket for the house. Later in the week, Harrison got interrupted and cut the wrong wire and it messed with launch control. Harrison did not notice. Harrison finally finished the rocket in the house. Harrison rounded up the family and told them.

“Guys you might not be too happy but I made a rocket that can bring us to another planet.”

“What?” they all replied.

“What does this button do?” said Ian as he presses the button.

“That launches us,” said Harrison. BOOM! The rocket roars off into space.

“It was a perfect lift-off. Wow I’m proud Harrison” said Jenn.

“Thank you. It was hard “replied Harrison. “We've been up here for years it feels like,” said Jenn. “We’ve only been up here for 2 days,” says Barry. “Mars is 33.9 million miles from Earth so we have a while to go. It’ll take us about two months at this speed but we have to go much further than that,” said Harrison.

47 days later

BOOM! “Looks like we landed... wait this is Mars! We weren’t supposed to land on mars. Hang on guys and let me go have a look outside.” said Harrison. “Looks like there is a broken engine. If we all go out to look for this space rock that is blue it should be enough power to get us home with the one engine.”

“We need space suits to go out there.” said Barry

“Oh I forgot. They are up in your rooms.” replied Harrison.

They all go out on the mission.

One-two hours later

Jenn found the space rock and returned back to the rocket, she called them on the walkie talkies to tell them. Harrison fixed the rocket. As they were leaving Mars, Barry noticed a red arrow and asked “Ummm Harrison what does this red arrow mean?” said Barry. “Looks like we are making an emergency landing,” says Harrison. “Where are we landing?”

“Where ever the next planet or moon is we are going to have to repair the engines which it'll take some time.”

“How long will that take?”

“I'm not too sure but time will tell.”

30 minutes later

“Well looks like we are on a moon,” said Berry.

“I've always wanted to go to the moon,” said Jenn.

“Okay I'm going to start on fixing the rocket.”

“What was the problem Harry,” asked Jenn.

“All that was wrong with it was there was almost no fuel and the fuel that was in there was the wrong type so I had to empty the fuel tank and refill it.”

“So that could explain what is wrong with the rocket the whole time, right?”

“Yes you are correct Jenn”

As they were taking off Jenn, Barry, and Harrison where looking though everything they found on the trip. They noticed that they will be the first teens to go to space. They'll have a lot of money if they show off their finds and there technology to the NASA space station. There may be more space adventures in the future after they improve their technology for more fun space expeditions.

The end

Grace Willis

Middle School Short Story

Untitled

I was a normal girl when I was born. I had a mom and a dad. They were the best.

I was just like every other child in the world celebrating my birthday, celebrating holiday. My parent would also take me place that other kids would go to, like Disneyland, Disney World, and LEGOLAND. Disney World was my personal favorite, but then my mom got pregnant with my sister. I did not have favorite places to go anymore.

My sister drove me crazy, nonstop crazy. At first, it drove me to the point to want to run away, that is when it started. My parents abused me nonstop, yelling, pushing, and threatening to kill me. I really thought that having someone to play with would make my life easy, but no, my life is even harder. After a while I thought to run away to a foster home, and that is what I did.

When I was running, I stopped, and asked myself,
“Do They Really Love Me?”



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the storytellers

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Edgar Dion Alvarez

High School Short Story

Untitled

His room was cold and barren. Not like how it used to be. His walls were missing his artwork, his shelves were empty, and his presence ceased to exist. Just dust and no reminders. This all feels so disassociating, everything's backwards.

"So, Daniel... this is where you'll be staying." Robin gestures her arm towards his bed. To the side of it was the window that is now blocked by curtains. I remember he liked to leave it open because the view fascinated him and he's always wanting a change of air. I don't think I'll be opening them.

I thank Robin as I carry my bag to the closet. She nervously picks her nails, smiles, and leaves me be. The door was left slightly open but I didn't mind. I sit on the bed and I let myself sink. It's uncomfortable, a little disturbing, and scarily unfamiliar. I suppose that's a good thing. For my sake.

I hurts to think too much. In the situation I'm in right now, my mind goes on overdrive and it doesn't stop until it implodes. Blame could be passed around like a baton but it wouldn't go anywhere, would it? If only Mom had gotten a more stable job to sustain both her and I. If only Dad were still around to help us out and not abandon us to survive on our own. If only Chester had taken over Dad's role instead of copying him and moving all the way to the west coast with Lauryn. God, I want to mentally vomit.

I lay on his bed like a stiff log. I don't get a change of clothes because I'm not up for it. It's chilly, but I'd rather not go under these covers. I want to close the door shut, but it's my only source of light and god knows how afraid I am of the dark. Instead, I let my eyes fall shut automatically. In my head, I let the thoughts run wild and free. Every single one stampedes over me.

I climb up the doorsteps and I hesitate a little. Remember; always take time to take a breather. I knock two, three times. A woman yells from inside that she'll be right there. The door opens and in front of me stands a middle-aged brunette. A woman who probably believes that ninety-six percent of the things in the world causes cancer, but I'm pretty sure her intentions are pure (as long as she doesn't force feed me organic produce).

"Daniel! It's so good to finally meet you!" She exclaims and reaches in for a full-on bear hug. The scent that's lingering on her slightly dizzies

me. The lady apologizes and I tell her it's fine. "Thank you so much for dropping by for our Jacqueline." I never met a parent who spoke so sweetly at the mention of their child. "It's been such a train wreck lately, for all of us, especially when working out schedules, getting our daughter to school, and... dealing with her- our loss."

Apparently, I don't exist in their little circle of grief.

"Elijah was such a wonderful young man. Handsome, too. Such a waste. He walked her to school every single day." My insides wrench at the sound of his name. I don't even want to hear the syllables. Again, I compose myself before I have the chance to break down in front of Jackie's mother in an embarrassing fit.

Speaking of, Jackie peeks her head out and stands beside her while holding onto the doorframe. Her mother introduces me.

"We've met. Hey, Daniel." Jackie waves hesitantly.

"Hi, Jackie." I almost wave back, but I immediately put my hand down. Bad move. "Um, should we get going then?" I try to act chill as I step backwards toward ground level.

"Oh, of course! Let me just..." Before Jackie could take two steps down, her mother practically attacks her, holding onto her shoulder and arm with an iron grip as she fails to help her down the stairs. She writhes vigorously and swats her away. Offended and saddened, she shies away.

"Mom, I've gone down these steps for sixteen years, don't you think I know how to go down them?" She nods and disappears back into her home, closing the door timidly.

As she smoothly goes down the steps, she snakes an arm under mine and we lock elbows.

"You can start walking now." She says.

"Y'know you don't have to hide behind those sunglasses." I tell Jackie "Your eyes look fine." We're currently walking down the East Hall which isn't as crowded as the rest of the school.

"You don't get it, it's different now." She tenses up and tightens her grip. "Elijah's gone and he took my confidence with him. The people here are pretty vile anyways. Better safe than sorry."

"Not everyone is like that." I say.

She scoffs. "Obviously, I didn't think you'd understand. If you were there for us, maybe you'd at least have the slightest clue. It takes one to know one, Daniel."

The guilt I feel is perpetual. It was my fault and only my fault. Everyday, I prayed to any god out there that was willing to revert what I've done. This is the big blame. The only blame that clings to me like a disease.

We don't speak for a while.

"Here we are." His locker is cluttered with all sorts of color, pointless gifts, and other miscellaneous objects honoring him and his life. It's chaotic but beautiful.

"What does it look like?" She asks.

I stare at it, longingly. Frustrated, I try my best to describe it to her.

“There’s flowers littered all around it. It’s very colorful. There’s letters and sticky notes from his friends taped on there too. And there’s his face. In the middle.” My heart stops when I see that portrait. I took that picture of him when we visited the lakes up north. The sun was positioned in a way that perfectly made his face glow and exposed his greatest features. This picture is only a preview of what he was truly like.

Jackie lets me go, saunters to the memorial, and crouches down near the flowers, getting a feel of the petals and its textures. She sniffles and coughs to hide the fact that she’s about to cry. She’s resilient and that’s what I like about her. I stood behind her, petrified, trying my best to disguise the pain I’m feeling. Before my stomach twists and squeezes out the innards through my mouth, I tell Jackie to stay put.

I run to the nearest restroom to dump last night’s leftovers and this morning’s breakfast down the toilet. Jackie patiently sits next to Elijah’s locker, alone.

The bedroom door creaks open and we walk into the dark room. Robin hasn’t found a lamp I can use so to compensate, she gives me a nightlight that doesn’t light up much.

“Thanks for letting me come over. My mother’s been a little overbearing lately, so it’s nice to escape once in a while.” I lead her over to the bed and she takes a seat. I sit down on the carpet in front of her.

“Yeah. No problem.” And then I say nothing else. I can’t think up of any conversation starters and the silence is creeping up on me a bit.

“Did they move his stuff somewhere else?” Jackie asks.

“Yeah. Robin and her husband did, I think. How’d you know?”

“It’s little echo-y than I remember it.” She twiddles her fingers and starts picking at the stitches of the comforter. “Sorry, it’s just something I noticed.” She coughs. Silence again. It’s always been difficult for me to fill the air with something to talk about. In retrospect, Jackie was the most talkative out of the three of us. She was never redundant about it though. Nonetheless, Elijah and I enjoyed hearing her tangents about the weirdest things. It made our days. I go ahead and take a shot in the dark. “I know this is a stupid question, but how’ve you been? Well, since... y’know.” I’m suddenly digging under my nails regardless of them being clean. She sighs and furrows her eyebrows in thought. “Well first, it’s not a stupid question. And second... I don’t know. Ever since he vanished, my life has been filled with ‘I don’t know’s’ and it’s making me go mad. It may not make sense to you, and I’m sorry, but it’s been hard trying to explain myself lately.”

“No, I understand. It’s pretty much the same situation for me. I can’t figure out what to do with myself. Mom and almost every person I know has been MIA and it’s screwing up my head. I’ve been disconnected from everything, it’s like speaking to mannequins. I kind of was afraid to pick you up too because I was so scared interacting.”

“I’m really sorry about your family and friends, but I’m glad you came though. My mother and I aren’t gonna survive another car ride together.” She laughs to herself. “And I apologize if I came off as

hostile. It's not my nature to be that hateful towards anyone, even a friend."

"I guess we both need someone to save us from car-crashing mothers." Not only am I smiling and laughing, but I have someone with me doing the same. She and I needed to feel something genuine and this is a great place to start.

"Also, y'know you can take off those glasses right?" I say, still laughing. Jackie touches the lens of her glasses.

"Oh, yeah." She takes them off, placing them beside her. She looks up, but I see her eyes trail off to the side and she focuses her gaze to the right of the door.

I look back and I see nothing there. If she heard something in that corner, I probably would've heard it too. I start to get concerned when her mouth starts to hang open.

"Um, earth to Jackie? What's up?" I scooch closer and snap which makes her jump. Her lips twitch, not knowing what to say. "Daniel, I... I see something." She steps out of the bed and stands still. I get up so I don't get in her way.

"What do mean? I thought you were blind." Half of me thinks she's just bluffing but, she wouldn't act this serious, would she?

"I am! But, that shouldn't be there." She unnervingly points ahead.

"What do you see?" I ask.

She squints at the blank wall. "Light. It's not that bright, but the longer I stare at it; it starts to take shape of something."

I go unplug the nightlight just to make sure. Jackie still sees it.

"...Elijah?" Promptly, she gasps then rubs her eyes violently. "It's gone."

That was the last thing I expected to happen. This shouldn't even be possible, yet it is.

"Do you know how to make it reappear?" I ask. She shakes her head.

I stand there for a moment, processing, until I suddenly start to feel woozy. In a daze, I make my way to the curtained window. Pushing them apart, I'm greeted by the horizon. A part of me is melancholic and I don't know why. Continuing, I turn the window handle and I try forcing the window open. Not budging at all, I push outwards with my weight and it propels forward as I'm attacked by a roar of wind. How did I have the strength to open that? The cold air bites on my skin and I feel goosebumps on my arms. My face bathes in the warm glow of the setting sun and I feel like I belong.

I wander back to Jackie and I place a hand on her shoulder. Tears stream down her cheeks and the carpet soaks them up as they drop. She cups the empty space with her hands caressing it with her thumbs. She laughs with a bittersweet undertone. "We've missed you."

Gabriel Avila

High School Short Story

Untitled

My husband

Isn't only a cheater.

Why did I say yes to the big sapphire ring, Why did I marry the guy?
Do I have courage to leave?

The reason I had to say yes to the him is because his mother
wouldn't stop threatening me with phone calls,

“Say no I’ll, myself will go to your house and kill you”

“That’s a promise not a threat”

According to his mother on the phone...

Why did I have to marry him, my name could of been Betty
Daniels, But there's always a solution to everything, according to the
State Law, you must provide evidence to get divorce, he's most likely
cheating on me, he's cheating I know it....

The other day I went into my car, my husband has been borrowing it
lately because he doesn't work, he doesn't clean, and he only knows how
to beg for something he wants. When I opened the car door, a huge sense
of Victoria Perfume blew into my face, it wasn't mine.

New York, Manhattan. The city where you see homeless people on every
corner, where you see people stealing One Dollar hotdogs, and where
your unfaithful husband is cheating on you.

But to catch a cheater, you got to get prepared for the worst, I went
into Best Buy for a night vision camera, then I went to go rent a car he
uses mine, finally I wait until night to make my move.

When I parked the car into the driveway I followed him I saw him
walk out of my car into this little townhouse, I waited about 6 minutes to
make move. I went to the bushes to hide, I saw him and a woman, just
was about to take a picture till I saw him pull out a knife, stabbing
her...Nonstop , it was scary, it was displeasing, and that's when I realized
that not only is my husband is cheater, he's a murder.

I quickly took a picture, the flash was on! HE SAW ME, I made a break
for my car I ran so fast, once I got in, I drove on, I saw him in the left
mirror, just standing there, like he knew who I was, and like he was going
to kill me.

I went back to our house, where I knew I was probably going to get
killed but still took my chances anyways, he walked into the door and
exhaled “Ugh, looking for jobs is hard” and went up to our bedroom, I
couldn't unsee what I saw, him stabbing, and letting her bleed out there.

The next day I went to the police station, told them everything that my husband killed a girl, and showed her the picture I took, she believed me. He was arrested.

1 week later, we were in court , I walked into the courtroom, everyone looked at me like I was the killer in the room, I told judge “My husband is the worst, he doesn't clean, he doesn't have manners, and he's a unfaithful person” He was guilty, gets to apply for parole in 20 years.

Hey, my name is Betty Daniels and I married a murderer.

Danielle Barker

High School Short Story

Untitled

Soft worded conversations flowed from the bright television screen as Henry slept peacefully on the long couch. The sound of laughter faded away when the station changed itself. The blue hue replaced the white screen. The light from it had lit up the center of the living room while the entire house fell silent as the antique clock that was sitting on the fireplace stopped directly on the ten. The white behind his eyes were blocked out by something dark and all of the little hairs on the back of his neck stood when he felt a heavy presence lean over him. When his peaceful slumber was interrupted, he had been lost in a drowsy daze. He couldn't recall whether his roommate had returned or not from her party. The urge of wanting to know who was there was not strong enough to bury the fear that was festering in his chest. He kept completely still as his heartbeat quickened. The fear that oozed from his pores burned the surface of his cold skin like a terrible odor. He had hoped that whoever was there couldn't smell the terror on his flesh and would just leave him be. A dark shadow past by the couch, and it blocked out the light from behind his eyes for only a second or two. The atmosphere grew lighter as his fear faded.

Henry, cautiously, opened his eyes as he lifted his heavy head up off his tingling arm. He tried to make sense of what had happened but he wasn't entirely awake. The nightmarish residue that lingered in the air had left him confused. He sat up against the couch cushions as he rubbed the corner of his eyes. Henry wetted his parched lips with his tongue as he inspected the room with his glossy eyes. He shuttered as a chilly draft of air kissed his bare arms. While he tuned in on the silence, Henry wrapped his arms around his body. There was not a sound he could hear and if a needle were to be dropped, his ears would have bled from how loud it would have been.

The silence was then interrupted by a very faint sound of a door closing. He had been under the impression that he was still home alone, but in that very moment, he had felt that someone was in the house. On the corner of the end table, which was on the other side of the armrest, was a wired phone. He reached over the armrest and picked the phone right off the receiver before punching in a number. The phone dialed the digits that he had put in before connecting him to his roommate's phone. It rung about four times but she never answered, so he hung up the phone. He figured if she were home then he would of heard her phone

ring, but he didn't. The cushion sunk as he scooted towards the edge of the couch to get a good look at the antique clock. As bright as the television screen was, it was still too dark for him to even see that the little hand hadn't moved – he figured it out once he realized the sound of the soft-ticking had stopped. So he swallowed his fear and got up onto his feet with ease. The room swayed just a little bit as it went black behind his eyes before it went white. He softly touched his forehead as the pressure worsened behind both of his eyes. As the pain faded, Henry decided to head into the kitchen for something to snack on. He reached across the kitchen wall and felt for a light switch. His fingers brushed against the flat switch before he recognized it. The ceiling light in the middle of the kitchen came on in an instant.

His legs stiffened as the fear in his stomach returned. Broken leaves tumbled in past the backdoor as the gold latch swung from side to side. The house was plagued with an unwanted chill from the stale air that drifted inside. Henry felt the muscles in his jaw tense as he snuck up to the door on the tips of his toes. There was a whiskey glow of light set on the back porch as he gazed out at the boathouse from the doorway. Henry pushed the backdoor shut before he lifted the chain and attached it to the bolt. He fretted that someone had snuck inside the house while he had been asleep on the couch. A small part of him begged to contact the police, but he wrote it off on account of his lack of sleep. Something like the backdoor being found open seemed normal in that house. Of all the times they had found the door wide open in the morning, never did they find anyone hiding in the house. The pressure behind his eyes returned, and interrupted his frantic thoughts. He shuffled across the kitchen to one of the cabinets and gently opened it. Sitting on the middle shelf in front of a few small saucers was a white bottle. He had taken the bottle down from the dust bed of a shelf and examined it. Inside were tiny, circular pills with a line carved across their center. Before he bothered to open the bottle, he first read the label.

“Clozapine.” He scoffed at himself. “The only thing that can keep me sane.” He rolled his eyes at the statement before he popped open the lid and tilted the bottle towards his hand. He decided to take only one since he had been low on his medication. Only one pill trickled out from the plastic edge of the bottle just to fall into his damp palm. He quickly put the bottle down on the counter beside the breadbox and hurried over to the fridge to retrieve the glass of water that he had stored away. He pulled open the door and found that the glass had been absent from its usual spot. Henry sighed as he grabbed a bottle of water. The fridge door was left to close on its own as he walked back. He twisted off the lid of his water bottle after placing the pill on the counter. The very sound of wood splitting erupted from living room. Every muscle in his back hardened like a dry piece of leather as the bottle of water slipped out of his hand and hit the floor. He rushed to see what had fallen over only to find a mess of what had once been the antique clock. As Henry searched for an indication of there being an intruder, he turned to face the kitchen and saw the white pills scattered across the island. Henry

staggered back into the living room while his trembling fingers raked through his hair. He stumbled to a stop in front of the areaway and spotted a solid figure drift across the foyer only to vanish somewhere in the dining room.

Henry was about to run but the phone began to ring. Before the phone could make it to its third ring, he had already answered it.

“Hello?” He answered while pressing the phone against his ear. “Yes, yes. I can hear you.” His voice broke as he listened to his roommate. It was filled with not enough warmth to make him feel safe. Henry sunk back against the couch with his hand pressed against his mouth. His eyes were trained on the kitchen areaway as he expected someone to appear there. Her voice faded as he lost himself to his thoughts that filled his mind. His attention was reeled back in when he recognized the sound of his name being called.

“I’m still here...” He moved his hand away from his mouth so his words weren’t so muffled. Her sweet voice engulfed his eardrums with a question of concern; one that meant that he would only answer with honesty.

“Someone’s in the house.” Her tone was full doubt when she asked him the one question that he resented the most.

“Yes, I mean no. No, I didn’t take any of them yet.” His throat tensed when he heard the disappointment in his roommate’s voice. “I swear to you that this is real this time. I’m not alone!”

The sound of heavy footsteps crossed the floorboards over his head. It was enough to drown out his roommate’s words. He lowered the phone from his ear as he peered up at the ceiling and waited to hear them barrel down the staircase.

Henry raised the phone back up to his ear and exclaimed, “Someone’s coming. I need to go.” He didn’t bother to hang up the phone; he just left it hanging off the table as he ran back into the kitchen.

The latch remained tight across the backdoor when he rushed to unlatch it. He twisted the doorknob while he had given it a good pull. A cold gust of air hit him once he stepped out onto the back porch. A heavy hand wrapped itself up in the back of his sweater, and with one strong tug, Henry had been thrown onto the floor. A man stood between Henry and the door as he held it shut with his gloved hand. Henry scrambled to get back onto his feet but as he did, the man started towards him. In panic, he had lost his balance but had caught himself on the corner of the island. When he lifted his eyes at the man, he found that he was no longer there. He took a moment to collect his bearings. Henry left everything downstairs as he climbed up each step to retire to his room. Minutes turned to hours as he lied in bed until his roommate returned home. He heard her heels snap at the wooden steps as she ascended them. The light at the bottom of the bedroom door had gone out as she slowly opened it. The first thing that she saw had been the bags under his eyes as he lifted his head from the pillow. He lowered his head back against it and said, “You’re not really there.”

Korynna Barnes

High School Short Story

Untitled

It was 1941. Everything was dull and grey except for a few shrubs and patches of grass left in recklessly cared-for lawns. The sky was usually stricken with immense fog that, in the later day, would disappear. Even without the fog, the neighborhood was still an eerie place. The few homes that weren't abandoned or destroyed were even more nerve-wracking than the ones broken down across the way.

In one of the houses, there were two; a man and a woman. Shouting. They would shout so loud, you could probably hear them 10 miles away. It usually ended in one kicking another out, but even then, there would be some yelling and sounds of glass breaking. Then, in the morning, they would come together again as such nothing happened. Then, the house beside me was a cheerful family. Always putting on a smile, and yet, there was some sadness in their face. Like, if you said the wrong thing, they would break. The girl, on the other hand, was genuinely happy, beaming with happiness, I might add. She would roam the streets or play with her dolls on their porch, the light she gives off almost blinding. So happy.

Then, alas, another women. All alone with terrible despair. Over what, you might ask? I couldn't tell you. She is a very enclosed woman, as she hardly ever came out of the house. Maybe every two weeks or so she would leave her home for essentials. I'm sure you'd like to know who I am? Well, I couldn't tell you that either. One day, I emerged from in between two hard slates of terribly hard dirt, which, I would come to find is cement. Many of the days since my emergence, the girl had took care of me, which more or less means she provided me with water...Such a caring girl.

Sometimes when things got a little tough, she would talk to me. I have little clue what she is saying, but I can feel her voice shake the ground ever so slightly to realize her presence. She could talk from sun up until sun down, in which, she did today till her father, I'm assuming, had called her in. When she was around, she could light up the whole neighborhood. But now, it was dark, and I, was alone. In this particular night, the enclosed women came outside. Irregular for her. She sat on her porch, watching. Waiting. Though, nothing appeared. Just infinite darkness that arose in the shadows of the houses in the moonlight.

Sudden yelling and, shortly followed, the sound of a broken glass bottle. I could faintly see through their window blockers, red.

Overwhelmingly red. Anger. As soon as the women inside the house opened the door, all that anger shot out of the house like a cannon, and with it, the fight now took place outside. The ground shook each time they opened their mouth. It was frightening and loud. I wanted to see the little girl, she would make it okay again. Yet, she did not come. By the time the fight was over, the false sun would be halfway up the dull grey sky. The enclosed women still sat on her porch, watching down the street. I knew no one was coming, as no one ever came through here.

Now, it was morning and the sun was barely over the trees. The fog was there, barely present. The enclosed women is gone, probably back in her home. The eerie feeling was still there though...why? It's such like the feeling of being watched, but there are hundreds... thousands of eyes watching. Out of nowhere, the little girl erupted from the door, her bright light shining ever so brighter. As well as her father following behind as they approached the loud, rumbly car. The little girl reached for the handle, but hesitated, then she ran inside and a few minutes later came out with a pot full of water. She rushed over, poured the water, and, with her tiny voice, announced, "Have a nice day, little flower!" A nice day indeed, it was starting to be.

They went into the ground-shaking car as it veered away. Then, all was silent. The trees rustling and the wood on the abandoned houses creaking were the only sounds heard. Peaceful, yet hostile. A few hours passed by of this nothingness, though, the girl's father came back, without the girl. She must have left for the thing she called "school" she would talk about. Besides that, no one else was up and about. Everyone's cars were here... and yet, there was a rumbling in the distance. Could be loud, but it was too far away to hear clearly.

The rumbling came closer and closer until it was louder than the little girl's car. It was big, and was something dangerous. The heavy machinery stopped a few paces away. The door to the car opened, and with it, dark smoke came seeping out from the car, like fog. Out of the fog came a man, consumed by the darkness. The enclosed women stepped out of her home upon hearing the roaring sound of the heavy machine carrying the dark creature. She looked, but said nothing. It was like this for a few seconds until the man said something under his breath and while looking down at me, he smiled.

He had evil intentions to destroy everything and anything that is bright and beautiful. He was too far gone in the darkness, there is no going back. He stomped over, step by step, not consciously coming for me, but he was. He didn't stop. He came closer and closer. All I could think of was I have to get back to the little girl. She said it was going to be a good day. She said. I have to see her again, and it would all be okay. I have to see her again. I have t-

Gabriel Bassin

High School Short Story

Chapter 18

The skin peels more with milk-mouth. I feel the festering in my throat like a horde of crickets corroding inside a bag of chocolate pudding. I peel my lips apart and choke out garbled words to the condiments around me, the floor splattered with relish and Dijon. I am a friend I told them. You'll remember that, I'm sure. The dead armadillos spread eagled and motionless looking like desert rocks on the floor of the supermarket. I brought the outback to this place. I can remember. Waltzing into town, they called me The Wombat. I kicked their doors down and slapped fresh bloody meat on their tables. Kangaroo spleen and koala stew for supper. Oh, sure, they cried. After all, these were the creatures they went and stared on with golden glossed eyes at the local zoo. But I plucked these creatures straight out of the wild. Brought them to the people's doorsteps and said, "Eat up, Jack!" You see, people don't understand the psychology of these animals. But that doesn't matter now. I can't go back. It may have been wrong what I did, surely. But what else can I say except "I love the hunt"? Its noggin tucked away in my knapsack, the beheaded wallaby is skewered with the rotisserie chickens to my left. Even after all this, I can faintly feel my stomach growl in great hunger. I'd crawl over for just a taste but I've lost all control of my center as my head grows lighter like a lazy balloon. It's like a good coke buzz but the party is over. My hands go numb, and my fingers turn to claws as I slowly lose touch with the trigger of my trusty wingman. The Remington falls from my grip and hits the floor, blasting a shell into the deli station, lodging itself deep into the meat that's now gone stinking and sour. The spoiling foods are my only clock for time, as I helplessly feel my body transform under the everlasting fluorescence of the skylights above. I can barely turn my head now. Underneath the tides of pain that come with such a transfiguration, I feel my senses intensify. I look down, smelling something dreadful. The expiration date on the cracked jar of mayonnaise reads BEST BUY 28 AUG. 1984. A shame I didn't collapse among the non-perishables. In the freezers at the end of the aisle, I make out my warped figure, and I see that the ears have sprouted completely. The funny thing about turning into an animal is that rather than focusing on the excruciating pain that ravages every inch of your body inside and out like acid eating away at your innards, you're more focused on the elegy you're writing inside your mind as you say goodbye forever to your human form. It's really quite enlightening.

Malia Bencina

High School Short Story

My Hope That's Hidden in the Stars

“Only in the darkness can you see the stars” – Martin Luther King Jr.
Beep... Beep...

The distant cries of my alarm clock calling me into the new day. Reaching out to silence the annoying machine, I slowly open my eyes. The bright sun, always so happy to greet me. It's sunny smile that whelpe's the darkness. I envied the sun. For its charming light and positive feeling, give one hope. I stretch my aching limbs that crack like a snapping twig on a child's knee.

The clinomania hits me like a train. Oh, how I wish to dive back under my blankets to be reembrace under their safekeeping. Let it hold me in its warm embrace, and let the psithurism lull me into a quiet sleep. But, I remembered I have an unfinished book that I must tend to. Looking over to the russet desk that is littered with pages and pages of unfinished stories, and my forgotten tea and coffee cups clutter the space. I decide to get myself ready for my “inspiration hunt.”

I head to the bathroom within my ‘home’. “Home,” is an apartment that traps and protects my thoughts and feelings from the outside world. Just as a prisoner locked away from the rest of the world, and out of the public eye. I relocated out here to escape city life. I can't handle crowds of people. When I moved out here, I thought that I invent a story, one that I'd be proud of. But its ending has yet to come.

I open the door to my bathroom and go straight to the mirror. I see a woman, well a girl in most eyes. This girl who stares back at me with chestnut hair and strands of gold. Eyes that are hazel which hold all my secrets. And freckles! Oh, how I hate them! They make me appear to be so childish. I look like an innocent girl, if only they knew. My height doesn't help me either. I splash cold water on my face to refresh myself and drain the sleep from my eyes. I wish it were that easy. To wash away the pain of yesterday for a fresh tomorrow. But life isn't made to be easy. It's meant to be a challenge so that you can be strong and be proud of yourself.

I leave the bathroom. If I stare too long at myself the word narcissus comes to mind. I get changed into a sweater and skirt to keep me warm and chic. I grab a notebook and pen. Throw on my coat and slip on some flats. A notebook and pen hidden inside just for days like to today, a quest I have on my mind. I reach for my keys and head out the door. Stepping beyond the safety, which is my home. I head to a small park

down the street. As I walk, clouds seem to appear to make this a gloomy day. Worry I shall not, for the park holds a perfect place for inspiration.

Looking around I see not that many faces. An occasional car or two, but I guess people decided to stay inside. I make my way through the park and take a seat on a wooden bench. I open my notebook to a fresh page and cast my eyes around for that punch of ideas.

The wind blows, chilling my face and hands. My eyes scan the layout, I spot several solivagent people. Their expression is the same as mine. Looking for a purpose. A reason for being here, but I know mine. To be at this park and writing a symphony of words that forms a masterpiece that book of mine. But no ideas are coming just yet. I have the beginning and middle. It's just the ending that keeps eluding this mind.

The wind blows again, reminding me who is in charge. I am bought back into the moment as something hits my foot. I look down to see a bright chartreuse sphere. A ball. I stand and pick it up. It's fuzzy and slightly damp. Suddenly barking nearby. I look up to see a dog running at me. This dog was small and brown with lots of wrinkles. It was rather a mere puppy than a dog. Covered in dirt this pup was attempting to regain its ball. I rolled it back to it and it leaves to return where it came.

I can't help but smile. Such an innocent creature playing without a care in the world. A smile forms across my freckled face for that mere puppy became my muse for the end of my book is upon me. I quickly scribble down my thoughts. They pour out of me like that full rain cloud. But just as quickly as they came, those pesky thoughts went away. I was back to empty thoughts. Stuck, trapped backed questioning what next? That question, time after time, what next line to fill, what next subject to speak of, what next will come into to my lonely life? And as always, the answer being I am lost.

I feel little wet drops sliding down my face. No, they are not tears from my soul, just raindrops warning me for what is to come. Drop after drop of water hitting my cheeks and sliding down my neck. I quickly close my notebook and start to jog. To where? I don't know where to go? I pull up the hood over my wet hair and pick up the pace down the trail. Those clouds blocking the ray of sun robbing the park of its color. Searching is what I must do. Searching just for the answer. A new place to clear the rain from my head and push back what is the whirlpool of my life.

I stop to seek shelter between two doorways to write down some thoughts before the rain robs me too. I reclose the book and clutch it to my chest like it's the only thing I have left. The rain increases and falls on my back soaking my jacket. Seeking my words within my book. Trying to take what is mine. What I have left. My thoughts. The water runs down my legs chilling me so. I know if I stay out here, I'll catch something. Not my ending though. I decide to turn around and make my way home. The rain is falling faster with each step I take.

My feet heavy now than when I first step out, carry me slowly to my front door. I unlatch it and rush inside slamming to keep that rain

outside. My door, my savior allowing me to rest, so that I may catch my breath and my thoughts. Finally, I straighten up, to relock the door.

Making my way back to my room, I notice it appears gray as the clouds outside. No sun light enters. The shadow of the raindrops shining through the transparent curtains.

I remove my wet clothes and my thoughts from the park and make my way to my desk. I reopen my now drenched notebook and lay it upon the desk next to my closed laptop. I start to piece together the thoughts from earlier in the day with the glowing light of the sun to the puppy who enter my head with happy thoughts, to the storm who tried to steal my thoughts away. The words spill out of my mind and onto the page like a light turning on in complete darkness. Like the Sun early this day.

I finished. It's done. I go back to where it all started, my bed. The place where dreams are created and forgotten. A place to share and a place to be secure. A place where laughter and tears hide. I pull back the blankets and lay my head on the pillow. The blanket's arms keep me warm and safe. The pillow cradles my head as my mother once had, while my eyelids droop casting out any light left from the outside world. The rain quiets itself to lull me to sleep. As I began to fall into its sweet embrace, moving pictures appear before my hazel eyes of the past and present; I see my wishes that I wish were realities. Memories now form a world that is just part of my imagination. A place where one can truly see the stars.

Artem Burtsev

High School Short Story

Attrition

Black fumes were raging up into the air, heavy, steam powered machinery working day and night, as the day came to an end many factory workers were pouring out of the building. All of these men were hard workers. A dark, stormy sky towered over their heads, all the smoke made it hard to breathe. The factory was on a hill, just a few Kilometers south of the city, the factory workers were tired after a long day of work, and a train took them to the center of the city. There they would all get off, all but one. A Man by the name of Will Snow. Will was an average man, an average 5'10 height, an average 160 lbs. Weight, Short Dark brown hair, stormy blue eyes. Not much can be said about this man, he is a worker like the others. He wears a factory uniform with baggy pants with a color of bone white and a shirt to go with it, a belt with a few tools, and a wrench in hand. Stepping down the stairs towards him, I'd wave, Will ignored her as usual. His future seemed very average, so did his love life, this man had not a single drop of remorse in his heart, not a single drop of emotion. Will had thought that he'd left the door to his apartment, but then the thought floated away, as he was already turning to his street. His door squealed as he pulled it slowly open, everything in there was a mess, it appeared that he had been robbed, Will did not think much of it. He cleaned the dusty shelves, and in a few hours everything was back to normal, except for the money he had been saving up to go on a vacation. Will decided it was enough work for today so he ate his bread and fell asleep in the table. The next morning, a grey, unfriendly sun had been rising in his window; Will instantly awoke as a cold streak of light grazed his face. He was late for work! He instantly put his workers on clothes, and as he was locking the door behind him...he realized, this is his day off. Will went back in, throwing the uniform and tools in his old clawed up Couch. He put on his weekend clothes, and went outside with the same stale look on his face as ever before. Now all suited up, he decided to walk around the city, a black pickup almost hit him, it drove by and splashed dark grey mud on his dress shirt and pants, the driver yelled and drove off into the distance soon after. He kept walking, he entered a park, dark green blobs would be in place of bushes, and the trees grew faces and evil grins would be seen all throughout. People were walking around with their dogs and kids, all with smiles on their faces, Will could not comprehend this feeling of "Happiness." As he finally walked out and started waiting at a crosswalk. Grey buildings

rose above him as he did so.

“Red.....red.....red.....yellow...green” He murmured as the glare of the stoplight beamed into his slightly closed eyes. He walked across the road reaching the other side. He kept on walking. Rain started to pour down, light drops of sadness would start dripping down his head. As Will was turning to his street he saw that same woman again, she was drenched in fresh afternoon rain...holding some flowers, he slowly walked up to me while I was waving my little hand at him hoping he would take notice. He thought to himself, why would this woman come back, after he had ignored every day since they met. Will.....Smirked, he actually smirked, you wouldn't believe how happy I was, ever since I had met him I have tried to make him happy, I really did feel empathy, but as I started doing it more and more I realized I had fallen in love. On the next day, he woke up, the sky took a bright shining look, the sun wasn't grey anymore and his apartment was full of color, Will got up and cooked breakfast, the only difference today, was that he was cooking for two.

Your Life to Flight

I'm John, and I am 30-years-old and. I am intelligent, also very active. I love sports, protective and a hardworking guy.

I was born and live in Arizona but, I went to Alaska to get a job there with my friends, I go back to Arizona every four months and I have one month to spend time with my family. In Alaska, it is very cold and also very peaceful. People there are so nice. In Arizona it's the opposite of Alaska and it is really hot.

I work starting morning until night, for 12 hours, my job is catching crabs, it is a very risky life, but I have to do it for my family and for the payments.

After another month of working in Alaska, the next is the day that John is going home and see his family in Phoenix, Arizona. John packs up his clothing and gets an Uber, then rushes to the airport. When John gets to the airport he gets a feeling of excitement, so he waits in line for check-in and passes through, John is still waiting for the plane. The unknown terrorist came in and check in, but nobody had a clue that they were a terrorist.

Two hour later, it was time to go inside the plane. Everyone went inside the plane and the terrorist went in first all, to see how many people are in the plane. John was sitting down all the way in the front while the terrorist was sitting down all the way in the back close to the bathroom. John was just on his cellphone while the terrorist was making plans of what they will do. John called his family, says that I'll be home soon, and is very excited to see all of his family. One hour later when the terrorist is about to make the most dangerous move in history. The terrorist stands up, guns in his hand and says nobody move.

When the terrorist stands up and says nobody move, everyone is shocked, especially John because it turns from so much excitement to being in shock, but John said in his mind that, It doesn't mean there's a terrorist in this plane, we will all die. So John talks to some of the people in the plane.

Thirty minutes later, a girl stands up and gets shot and dies bleeding. Everyone is crying, so then John and his friend make a plan while the terrorist is in the back. They make a weapon with the spoon and fork to at least try to stab them, once they make it, they went and attacked the terrorist, who saw them coming and started shooting. Two people got shot, three people got shot, John gets to the terrorist and starts stabbing

and punching them. Pow pow, John and his friends manage to take them down, but the bomb is still on in the bathroom and they have one hour to defuse the bomb or the plane will explode and everyone die. John and his friend need to be careful because if they cut the wrong wire then it is all over 10 second left 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2... John cuts the red wire and finally defuses it. Everyone is so happy, but still six people were shot and died which is really sad. After landing the plane all safe, John got down in the plane and sees his family in the window crying and waiting for him to get up. So when John went up the stairs he hugged his family and says I am really sorry. John said "I am never going back again and I'll just find and apply for job here because I nearly lost my family and peoples' life."

Elmer Campos

High School Short Story

Spirit

I laid their thinking I was dead. I yelled. I was confused and scared on what just happened, I wasn't dead. It was dark but suddenly two wires started flickering together. Then it got cold and colder. A dark figured appeared.

Then suddenly I popped up at my house. I was taunted. It was darker than usual, so I tried turning on the lights but all you hear is the switch going on and off. Nothing happened. I found my way to my kitchen and picked up a flashlight, i turned it on. I was terrorized on what I spotted. A trail of blood in front of me leading outside. My fear said no but I followed the trail anyway.

Each step I took I hesitated but I kept on going. The further I went the more blood and gore I saw. The trail lead to the graveyard. What I have seen will always be with me. She was sobbing begging for mercy. The black figure cut her fingers off! A piece of it was still hanging! Her face was mostly cut open. I couldn't bare her suffering.

I couldn't bare this feeling I was getting, I just couldn't! I wanted it to be over. I pinched myself thinking it was a nightmare. But nothing happened. I told the black figure to do whatever it wants to do to me, I was desperate for this to end. It swooshed towards. It was just looking at me, them out of nowhere it started to transform into something I couldn't understand.

I was paranoid, I. . . Just . . . it was awful. It had blue colored eyes, it had the scars I had, it was Brandon, it was me! I couldn't wrap my head around on what just happened. Everything I just did was me. The black figure was my spirit! My spirit wanted me to sacrifice myself so it could rest peaceful. So I went on and ended this madness. But who do you think is telling you this story?

The Outlaw and the Ranger

Thomas saw the sun setting and he hurried through an arch and past the bank to the city hotel. He ducked into a side entrance and hurried to the top story. He flew into a room and quickly settled in the room. He had heard that the sheriff had rangers after him and he was livid. He refused to allow himself to be captured.

He sat in his room for a long while thinking about one of the men who the sheriff hired. He was tall dark and handsome familiar to the outlaw. The two shared a similar appearance, with the same dark complexion, warm brown eyes, and dark hair that sat in coils. But our outlaw always wore his mess of hair down and was extremely toned. His skin was weathered from the hot sun.

The ranger was an immigrant from France who wore his hair up into a ponytail, his skin was soft and while still toned he seemed weak in a way.

The duo had met many times before and became absolutely smitten with one another. They were always involved with one another, rather it be a shootout or a robbery. Thomas chuckled at the thoughts and pushed them away he looked around his hotel room.

Thomas sighed and chose to strip down and bathe. He sighed as he sat into the tub of warm water allowing the grime and dirt to loosen itself from his skin and hair. The water turned murky as he began to scrub the grit off of himself. He released the water and filled the tub halfway to scrub his clothes.

After a long while of scrubbing and cleaning the outlaw changed into a gentleman's suit and slipped on his gold glasses. He made sure he looked presentable. He knew he looked like himself but he wanted whiskey and he wanted it now.

He strolled into the bar and ordered what he wanted and waited. He drummed his fingers on the counter as he looked around. He noticed a few of the rangers Sheriff Washington hired walk into the bar

"Dang nambit" Thomas muttered as he turned more to the wall of liquor to hide his face. The rangers began asking around if anyone saw the man in the poorly drawn wanted poster, he was unrecognizable compared to the poster.

The poster had an old picture of him as the mugshot, he hadn't had his hair slicked back and tied in that fashion in six years you would think that it would have been updated. The only thing that was true was the

name and place of birth.

"Haven't seen such an ugly bloke in my life." The southern spoke as he eyed the poster. He chuckled to himself as the rangers huffed in frustration. "Sorry boys. Aah there's my whiskey."

Then the sheriff walked in causing the southern outlaw to run out of the bar.

As the years progressed, the lover's attraction grew more and more until finally they chose that they had to run from their lives. They were after all two men in love but weren't truly free. So they happily ran off to an old town where others similar to them lived.

Thus was the tale of Thomas and Gilbert or the outlaw and the ranger.

Prologue

My name represents the sun. It was intended to bring hope for misfortunes. Raymond Thomas. Who gave me that wretched name was my bastard father or rather my nonexistent one. I'm a father-less son, how ironic. I can barely remember his stupid face, and I'm quite glad. However when I look in the mirror and see my deep sea eyes I am reminded again of everything about him. My bold shoulders, my straight dark hair, my long bony fingers, and light skin. Hell even my clothes are hand me downs of him. It burns just wearing the same plaid shirt. But most of all why must I have these pupils? As I stare at my reflection, I stare at him, with my blue eyes...darker than any ocean. My mirror mocks me as memories start flowing; they're a river pouring into my chest and stomach. These thoughts and imagery are not pleasant. If anything, they fuel me with fury and my fists ball up. I leave with bloody knuckles that drip to the floor and a shattered mirror that still continues to crumple piece by piece. He left us. He left me. Because of that, I cannot forgive him. Every day I go to my front door and gaze at it. I don't expect anything to happen but I stay put, as a statue. I can hear the screaming again. The screaming my little 5-year-old ears heard as I peered from the staircase to the events unfolding. The sight of my mother desperately clinging onto his shirt, begging him to stay. It will forever stay engraved to my mind. As a child, I didn't understand but I just knew he hurt my beloved mother. They continue to scream at each other. Hatred and anger was constantly being thrown from left to right. Almost as if, I were observing a ping-pong competition.

"I need you to stay!" Hit.

"I'm not staying here!" Hit.

"I love you!" Hit.

"I hate you!" Hit.

"Don't go." Hit.

"Goodbye." Hit.

I was completely fixated on their match. I couldn't move from so much anticipation, but for the last straw my mother was not able to defeat him. There she sat on the ground, shocked, and broken. She only continued to stare at his sapphire like eyes, accepting her fate. Accepting her loss.

As he was turning his back against her, he took a pause. Seeming as though he was contemplating whether to turn his head or not, he did. At

that moment, our eyes locked.

Our eyes had finally met each other. He knew that I was there watching them.

I could not tell the expression on his face. Only from his pupils could I see how he was feeling, though I couldn't comprehend them. What seemed to be hurt and grief had risen to the surface but another emotion had been lying beneath his very core that I would soon decipher as fear. Excruciating fear that was so evident but hidden.

There it was again, the hesitation within his movement. Looking as though he didn't want to leave but before he could hold our gaze any longer he snapped his head forward and proceeded to walk out that door. Walk out my life. The thoughts that swarmed my head at that time. Too much to count, too much to recall... but the main question that occurred the most was "Why?"

Afterwards I made my way down the staircase onto the cold hard ground where my mother was. I held her face within my tiny palms and asked her "Where is dad going?" I had never seen my mother's face contort so much from pure anguish. She replied to my question with a sob and embraced me with such force. I was suffocating within her grasp. I was suffocating within her love. Was she holding on to her only hope? Or was she trying to kill it to never be reminded again?

I had not been able to answer many of those inquiries I've acquired throughout my years of living. This door holds all my buried treasure but it doesn't give me my reward.

Anger enthralls my body once more. The confusion just creates more anger and more heat. Why can't I understand? Why can't I find the answers?

I break the silence. An unconscious scream surges through my stomach to my lungs to my throat and out my mouth. This door is my worst enemy. I curse it out, threaten it, and thrash it. This was the source of my misery and I wanted it to disappear. I wanted it gone! I wanted it dead! Violence soon enters to greet me. It allures me to kill. To attack what essentially was my father. Looking at violence made me realize that his complexion resembled mine. He smiles at me to give me encouragement. He urges me though I don't want to. Violence again tries to push me, and quite forcibly too. The silence was driving me insane and I couldn't take it anymore. He finally decides to take my fist and curl it until it turns ghostly white, and with a blinded power, he drives it into the hard surface. He takes the other hand and repeats the cycle. Soon enough both arms are alternating attacks to this inanimate object. It wouldn't stop, it couldn't stop. Violence looks at me with the biggest grin on his face and soon after vanishes for me to breathe his essence. I could feel the blood surging through my veins with every hit. All the aggression had spilled out and I had no control...everything was blank. I didn't realize it before but my mother had been shouting at me to stop. Knowing I was creating desperation from her had almost convinced me. Almost. She didn't move any closer to me. Not even an

inch, just completely paralyzed in disbelief. She just continued watching in horror as I demolished the remaining remnants of my father. I wanted him gone, I wanted him dead. Piece by piece the door broke apart. Everything is gone. The bright light from the sun had finally shown itself and the rays were showering me. I felt true peace at last. My desires are finally surfacing.

It had struck me. I finally understood why my father was afraid. And yes, he truly did have something to fear now.

Leagelia Clemena

High School Short Story

Untitled

He sees her standing there: a girl whose image is infinitely more captivating than the wall of flowers behind her. The marigolds, violets, and daisies that enrapture her simply serve as a frame, capturing her figure and making her all the more alluring. She's changed over the years, and unlike the flowers surrounding the two of them, those were years she will not get back. Petals bloom every year. The spring revitalizes them from the winter they had to survive, but humans have to depend on themselves. People consciously endure the winter winds; they have no choice but to leave the blossoms behind permanently.

Alaine's winters are arduous. The seasons are irregular, coming and going whenever they please simply because she is different. The loneliness she bears everyday digs deeper into a void and forces her to relive the struggles of her past, to reach out for what makes her weep because there is nothing else for her to feel. The numbing sensation the constant nightmares bring are brought on from grief, and with it, guilt. It doesn't matter what the memories are. What matters is that she still clings onto him and shakes as she breathes, the darkness of the night her only shield from whatever ghost haunts her.

The trust she has for him is heavy on his shoulders. She insists on routine, a daily cycle that does everything but pull her out of the sinkhole of her own mind. All he can do is drag his feet along while knowing that she will always be behind him. The pressure threatens to crush her, but she continues to walk because he is the one she sees in front of her. Guilt is what chains her feet. It's what makes her steps small, timid, and so opposite of his determined strides. Catching up to him is something that she cannot do, it is unavoidable, and the additional snow winter brings cannot be escaped either.

But Ethan is patient. The tracks he leaves allow Alaine to follow, and to see better on her own. But the burden of trust still oppresses him, and when he's exhausted, he's too proud to admit it. He still forces himself to fit the mold of "protector," "guide," "leader." He slows down when he feels the tension, and he spites himself for not being strong enough.

Then he hears it. A voice crying out apologies and regret, the insistence that he leave. He's free to do so, anyway, so why not just travel to where spring is, to where it's warm and where it's forgiving. He waits for her, in times like these, because the only forgiveness he needs is from her.

The hardship he's brought himself into is a symptom of retribution. The former frigidness of his own heart being challenged by the girl's own storm could be easily recognized as karma. It wasn't until she came along to show him the beauty in other people, to show him the warmth they had to offer. He owes this to her, too. She's the one who has his heart, after all, and he's dedicated himself to the show of gratitude. So when she asks him if he wants to stay, he nods, and takes her hand to stand up again.

She's changed over the years. They hold hands as they trudge through the ice, facing forward and never stopping. They walk together into spring.

The flowers behind Alaine sway with the breeze and petals become loose enough to be freed. The rainbow of petals sweep through the air, passing both Ethan and the girl, as they stand content in the garden.

Love's arbor. As sappy as it sounds, he has never felt happier in any other place. They are the only two here and Ethan takes the chance to approach her.

"Alaine," he calls, his voice as gentle as the wind.

She breaks her focus from the bluebell she's viewing to turn to him. Her eyes are doe-like, with sunlight reflecting glitter off her irises. Ethan takes a moment to compose himself as if he were meeting her for the first time again. He laughs, and so does she.

He steps closer, "Do you...? Do you like it here?"

The smile she gives him is small, but enough, "I love it here."

He is always careful when he decides to bring her out, because he knows more than anyone that she prefers to stay within the safety of their home's walls. Ethan is more the adventurer, so he takes care to choose destinations that ensure the joy of the both of them. He just never expected this place to be so beautiful.

Alaine chuckles, "You're good at this, finding places. And this garden seems to hold much more significance than we thought."

Ethan doesn't understand at first, but he sees the flowers framing her again. The bright colors of the petals caught in her black hair looks like paint on a dark canvas. It's stunning, and the beating of his heart help him comprehend her meaning. The garden is a reward for their resolve. The two have made it out of the blizzard and their only goal now is to make their spring eternal.

"I'll try harder," she says, looking away from Ethan towards the sunflowers.

Surprised, he questions, "What do you mean?"

Her gaze hardens and she grips the hem of her blouse, "All I've ever done is receive from you."

His voice wavers, his fear dismantling his confidence, "Alaine..."

Instead of hearing her spout nonsense about her being undeserving of him, like she would have years ago, she looks him in the eye with determination clear in her expression. She takes his hands.

"I'll show you just how grateful I am to have you," she says, "So expect more from me from now on."

Ethan pulls her into an embrace. He doesn't question her vow. Instead, he pulls her in, tears threatening to spill over from his eyes. He has helped her, he realizes, His efforts actually helped her. The conviction she expresses is clearly a reflection of his own, and his pride turns to exuberance.

The cycle continues, the seasons change, but Ethan thinks it will be easier this time.

Hunter Davis

High School Short Story

Me Too

It all happened so quickly. It seemed like it was yesterday that Rocco first let his eyes rest upon the bright neon green orbs hiding away in the depths of the shadows that surrounded his hallway. The orbs containing horrifying reptile like pupils. Even though he didn't care that he was attracted to males he still had some belief in God, it always provided a certain sense of comfort throughout his life. He wasn't super religious like his grandparents but more of an average human being that just believed in a particular God. The Christian God to be specific. If it wasn't this, he would've almost called himself atheist. God how frightening it was for him when the corner of the average sized hallway of his average sized house was filled with a massive outline.

The orbs that moment were now more than six feet in the air, accompanied by the outline of a huge body. Of course, Rocco's mind went to the worst naturally. Remembering what he learned about inhuman entities from his time in church, he closed his eyes and started to do the only hopeful thing he had left in his frantic train of thought. Praying. He almost thought he could feel the devilish aura engulfing him evaporate into thin air, but boy was he wrong. After finishing the last amen of his lifetime, he flipped the switch on next to him and opened his eyes proudly with a smile on his face. A smile that flat out disappeared within two point five seconds. The figure was now down on one knee and staring into his soul, quite literally. The significantly humanized creature was also illuminated to the fullest revealing every detail that by now Rocco has come to know like the back of his hand.

Rocco was surprised that the thing didn't want to possess him or take his soul for eternal damnation. It turned out the creature was in fact the unholy definition known as a demon, specifically an incubus. His name is Succubi. A very high ranked and respected figure in his circle of the dreadful inferno. After almost a year the two had gotten to know each other, and what was worse, Rocco developed strong feelings for him. How? Why? Is the question he always thought to himself? It couldn't just be the way Succubi looked. Sure, the red-skinned being was gorgeous. Luscious black hair that formed into what Rocco could only describe as something similar to a Mohawk while the rest of the hair on his head was spiked. Including the mainly facial hair that surrounded the rest of his face. His eyes again were a very neon lime-green color. They almost looked like little Peridots gemstones instead of actual eyes. His

body was perfectly muscular, middleweight, and toned. His arms always provided Rocco a warm and comforting embrace when scared or sad about anything. It struck Rocco odd at first when he could tell this demon was capable of feeling any type of emotion. It struck as fascinating when Succubi had confided in Rocco that he was one of the first fallen angels to fall with Lucifer. That's how he was still able to feel emotions and also explains how he was able to retain his great looks to a degree.

Now Rocco was stuck standing in front of the bloody mirror outlined by a chilling group of bones. Rocco could only imagine who's they were and how they got here. Matter of fact Rocco could now see the past of these poor people. Well some of them did horrible acts when they were alive, so it is very hard to feel any sympathy for them. Others though, it was hard to feel anything but sympathy. Now how could Rocco see the past lives of the damned you ask? You might as well could say he obtained the ability when Rocco and Succubi first, willingly let their lips collide. The kiss was almost breathtaking, but the magical aura of it restored his breath in an instant. It was gentle, warm, heart-warming, and everything under the sun. Who knew the first time he would elope with someone wouldn't even be human. Of course, he was scared of being deceived. Shockingly he wasn't. No instead, if he was going to make love to a demon, there would be a price on his human body. That being that he would have to give him his human life away and lead the rest of his life as a demon with Succubi.

Looking over to the large throne in the middle of the room he was standing in, until this day made him shudder. It was for sure nothing like the comfy bedroom he was literally sleeping not even 7 months ago. He almost couldn't stand the current appearance. The miniature horns atop his head, the scaly pair of wings, his own pair of neon colored eyes. Yellow instead of Green in his case. Half his skin was still peach but a lot was now mixed with his own bright shades of scarlet. His eyes were now officially stinging and the sides of his cheeks were lightly hot with fresh tears. The eternal pain knowing that he won't be able to see any of his friends or family again caused Rocco to almost break down. Since it's a shame to for a demon to cry over such "trivial matters", he was lucky that no one was with him. Or at least he thought. The soul that was no longer in his body nearly jumped out of his skin when he felt two strong arms embraced themselves around his waist from behind. Rocco immediately turned around and saw he was now in the, quite possibly, only loving arms in the inferno he has to now call home. A little bit of control returned to his emotions as he relaxed into the gentle, yet strong hug. He felt a hand stroking through his hair, which is Succubi's way of silently telling Rocco to tell him what's on his mind. When looking up, Rocco freely let the tears in his eyes as he spoke. "I'm sorry Succubi, I'm just a little homesick. In fact I miss my life more than ever." With that, the grip tightened. A little too tight. So tight that Rocco felt like he was going to have a hard time breathing. Then again, his soul was taken away and was now technically dead, so breathing

wouldn't exactly be a problem. Still, that doesn't mean the hug wasn't painful in any way. With all the warmth and tightness of the hug, Rocco could still make out the hot wet drop on his right shoulder. For the final time that day he hesitantly looked towards his eternal lover only to be shocked beyond belief. Succubi was as well crying and now instead of stroking Rocco's hair he was stroking his right cheek. Even saying something that made the situation bittersweet in a sense. "I know and I'm sorry. I would have to say I do too. But there's no room in any paradise for a traitorous rebel like me. Please don't hate me." Rocco could never hate him and felt obliged to make sure he knew that. "I could never hate you darling. I love you with all my trusting heart." "I love you more than eternal life my precious angel." And with that, the two were left standing in each other's embrace. Left to remark on all their mistakes in life and what is ahead for them in this new kind of life.

Solipsism

April's steps were light and fast on the wet pavement. The world was unraveling, and she didn't want to get caught in the splitting seams.

She'd first noticed the difference that morning as she approached her tall office building. It was a skyscraper situated in the city center, a monolith that had stood tall for almost a century. Yet, that morning, its edges were chopped and blurry, as if it were a fraying ribbon extending into the sky.

She'd brought up the difference casually to a coworker who had been caught in the elevator with her ("Our building is getting quite old. May need to replace those decaying beams near the top, huh?") The woman looked at her in a most peculiar way and kindly suggested that she use the company benefits package to get her eyes checked.

Later in the day, during April's lunch break, she'd noticed the fountain in the foyer malfunction. However, when she mentioned it to the nearby custodian, he'd given her a peeved look and said that the fountain worked just fine. She assumed that he couldn't see the tiles cracking to pieces, sending water everywhere.

Now, as she made her way swiftly to the train station, the squares of the sidewalk shuddered lightly beneath her feet, pulling themselves apart. She leapt onto the platform, grateful to get away from the wobbly sidewalk, but in her haste she bumped into a thin, elderly man.

To April's absolute horror, the man teetered for a moment then fell forward. He let out a startled noise, but the sound was cut off as his body hit the pavement and he shattered into a million tiny pieces. April screamed and dropped to her knees, fingering the glass-like fragments. She looked up, worried that the other waiting commuters would share her same panic, but rather than staring at her with fear and bewilderment, only a few gazed at her with mild contempt.

A nearby woman clicked her tongue in annoyance. "Get off the ground, screaming psycho," she muttered.

None of them appeared to have noticed the disconcerting scene. The train rumbled toward the station, and everyone filed on as if nothing strange had happened.

April picked herself up carefully and brushed the rocks from her knees. She stared at the shards on the ground for a moment, then swiftly left the scene of her atrocious crime, boarding the train with more haste and force than she usually exerted.

The doors slid closed behind her, and she stared silently out the window as the train jolted forward. It picked up speed slowly, and soon the trees, houses, and buildings passed by in a blur. April tried to lose herself in the passing scenery, glad to be traveling away from the fraying city center.

A man bumped her elbow, and she shifted her grip on the pole she was holding to give him more room. However, he bumped her again, and she turned to him in annoyance. The last thing she wanted to deal with was some sleazy businessman hoping to find a train-companion for the weekend. She had just murdered an old man and wasn't in the mood to put up with this stranger's antics.

She turned to give him a piece of her mind, but he spoke first. "I never was fond of George, but what you did was utterly uncalled for. You should not be taking advantage of situations like this," his whisper-yelled.

His eyebrows were drawn into a fierce scowl, and his storming eyes burned down on her. His words and his look were supposed to instill fear and guilt, but for the first time all day, April let out a long sigh of relief.

"You see it, too," she whisper-yelled back. "Thank God! I've been worried sick all day. What are we going to--"

The train had been slowing, and as it screeched to a halt, the man cut her off with an irritated look. He turned away swiftly and disappeared into the flow of people exiting the train.

April jumped forward frantically, throwing her purse over her shoulder. She called into the crowd, begging him to wait. She pushed past people, through the train doors, trying desperately to find the man, but he was gone.

The train pulled out of the station slowly, and the exiting-commuters dispersed. April watched as the crowd thinned until it was just her standing on the near-empty platform. It was only five thirty, but the cloud cover had ushered in darkness earlier than usual. Streetlights were already flicking on. John would be expecting her home any minute.

April climbed down from the platform and sighed as the sidewalk began to tremble beneath her feet. Cracks erupted beneath her toes. Her condo was only a block away, but the entire walk felt like an elaborate and deadly game of hopscotch.

She finally reached her doorstep, and, ignoring the fraying flowerbeds and the splintering windows, she unlocked her door briskly and pushed through the entrance.

"I'm home!" She shouted.

"Me, too!" John yelled back from the kitchen.

April grinned despite herself. She dropped her shoes and bag at the door and rounded the corner to find John at the microwave, popping popcorn.

He smiled warmly and met her at the kitchen's middle to give her a peck on the lips. "Guess what," he murmured, taking her hands in his.

“You found a million dollars on your way home and we’re going to move to the countryside,” April whispered back, fighting the smirk that wanted to travel across her lips. Part of her wished that that really was the answer to this guessing-game.

“Not quite,” John said. “I rented a movie and ordered a pizza. Sorry to disappoint.”

April kissed him lightly. “That sounds pretty good, too,” she said.

John let her go gently and turned back to the almost-done popcorn in the microwave. April bit her lip anxiously. She hated to put a damper on a stay-home date-night, but she really needed to tell him that either she was going insane or the end of the world was approaching.

“John,” she started, her voice shaking. He turned back to her, and she took a step forward. However, as her foot came down on the ground, the floor shattered and she found herself falling.

In an out-of-body moment, April watched as she fell down, down toward the tile. John pushed forward to catch her, but he wasn’t going to be fast enough. Her body twisted and her head connected with the granite counter top. The world spiraled, frayed, unraveled, shattered, and then disappeared.

Bright, white light pulsed against her eyelids. April didn’t want to greet whatever world awaited beyond the darkness of her mind. She didn’t want to see the unraveling structures, and she really didn’t want to be told that she needed psychological help.

A hand touched her shoulder, and a muffled voice said something. She tried to shrug off whoever was touching her, but the hand gripped her more firmly and started shaking her.

As she peeled back her eyelids, April came face-to-face with the man from the train. Her eyes widened and she grabbed his arm.

“It’s you!” She yelled. Her voice echoed strangely, and she looked around at the strange setting. The world really had unraveled.

The ground was a plain tile expanse that went on forever in every direction, and the sky looked like pure fluorescent light. April felt like she was afloat on a sea of white. The only things obstructing her view were long black tendrils that looked like torn particles and fabric from the fraying world. They extended in long, upward spirals, wavering like the strings of rising balloons.

In an absurd way, the scene was comforting. April finally felt like she had received some resolution to the worst day of her life.

The man was speaking, but April scarcely heard him. She was already off on her own train of thought, dazzled by the possibilities of the world around her.

She cut him off. “This is beautiful.”

He frowned at her interruption. “Yes, yes,” he said. “But-”

“So, where’s John?”

The man frowned again, but this time in confusion. He made a gesture with his hand that pointed to nothing in particular. April looked around, not seeing whatever he wanted her to. She quirked her eyebrows at him.

“Ms. Green, only you know where John is,” he said.

April was starting to feel uncomfortable lying on the tile. She pushed the man's hands away and rose to her feet.

"No, I've only been awake for a minute," she said. "You seem to know what happened, so where is my husband, and where are the others that could see the unraveling. It can't only be us."

Now the man looked as confused as her. "You didn't make any others," he said, a worried look spreading across his face. "Were there supposed to be others? I didn't know, I'm so sorry."

April started to panic. "Of course there are others. There have to be," she said. As the words left her lips, the oddness of the man's statement hit her fully. "Wait, make others? What are you talking about?"

The man looked more and more confused. "I don't know, I just...There weren't others. You never said there were any others," he said anxiously.

April glowered at him. Her panic was quickly replaced with a deep disliking. This man knew something, maybe many things, but he wasn't sharing. "Obviously you know what's happening here, so spill, or..." April didn't really have any way to threaten the man, but her words seemed to work anyway.

He scowled back. "No. Actually, I know nothing more than you. We're stuck in the same boat here."

April sighed in exasperation. "Well, what do you propose we do?" She asked.

The man shrugged. "I woke you up so that you could decide that," he said, sounding sorely defeated.

April looked around once more. As they were talking, the pieces of the world had ascended even farther into the distant white expanse. The tendrils were nearly all gone.

"We should walk," April said, thinking aloud. "Either we'll find something soon, or it will be obvious that it's only us."

The man nodded at her, and the two began walking.

April had no way to measure time, but as she followed the swirls of the tile ground, she decided that time was an elusive concept in this setting. The only thing she had to mark its passing was her tapping footsteps and her scattered thoughts.

"What is your name," she asked the man.

He shrugged, not meeting her eyes. "You don't know?" he asked.

April stopped, and the man followed suit. "There's nothing, is there," she said. It wasn't a question.

"You didn't build anything," the man answered. "You only unraveled and shattered."

April turned a full circle to take in the world. It wasn't actually a world yet. It was just her and an empty figure, a man who didn't even have a name.

No, it wasn't a world. It was a blank canvas. "Then I guess we need to build," she said.

Wendy Figueroa

High School Short Story

Paralyzed

Every day, I wondered what my life would have been like if I had a normal childhood? Would I still be at home? I wish I could have worried about my school, instead of wondering where we're going to sleep. You don't know what it's like to be in such a horrible, abusive family, that you have to leave. You don't know what it feels like to have to mature up to take care of your sibling and how painful it is to see your 5-year-old brother ask you why we move around so much and not have our own home.

This was so traumatizing, it's left me with PTSD, sleep paralysis, and newly a therapist. In fact, today is going to be my first day. But before anything, I have to drop my brother at school. Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot to tell you about Jacob. When I ran away at age 17, I mostly did it for my brother. You see after he was born he became the victim of abuse. So I would put myself forward so my parent wouldn't. But we are okay now.

"Hi, "My name is Janice! Very nice to meet you, I'm super excited to start sessions with you."

"Yeah, me too." I was so glad to finally be able to talk and not bottle all these feelings inside anymore. She's such a great therapist. She has shown me how to calm down when I have sleep paralysis, which I didn't think it was a thing to. Every time I have a problem, I always tell her. If I would've known a therapist could do this, I would have gotten one earlier. To me, she's the best in Vegas! Janice and I meet every week and let me tell you that all these weeks past so quickly.

"This is the end of your 21st session. See you next week, Emma! Say hi to Jacob for me.", she said with a genuine smile.

"Will do! See you next week!" I said as I was dashing to pick up Jacob.

As I was driving to pick Jacob, I see this black beaten up car follows me to Jacob's school. I didn't think much about it; I just thought they came to pick their child up. So I go and pick my brother from school and in the corner I see a tall figure dressed in black. I didn't know what or who it was, but I got in the car with Jacob quickly just in case. And the figure got into the black beaten up car. So while it started the car I took off as fast as I could. My anxiety is going through the roof. My brother looks at me with worry in his eyes. I hold his hand, to ensure him that everything is ok. This is where it all began.

For the next couple of days, I forgot about the figure. I hadn't had

any problems with sleeping yesterday and I didn't wake up with sleep paralysis. I went to work at the Goodwill and when I got out, I decided to get some snacks at 7-Eleven. I grab some chips and the go to the back to get a Slurpee. I start to look at the flavors and then I see it. I look around to if there's anyone one around, but it's just us. My heart sinks. I turn my face a little bit so I can try to see its face. But It is dressed in black and is wearing a mask. All I can see is its eyes filled with hatred. My whole body is in a state of shock. I can't breathe, or blink, or scream, I'm just here. It starts to slowly come closer me. There's nothing I want to do more than to run away, but I can't. It keeps walking towards me. With every bit of energy, I run away from him. I drop the bag of chips, bolt to the car, and get out of there. The gasp of air I took at the red light was the first time I've breathed in 2 minutes, even though it felt like hours. A black car pulls up next to me also waiting for the red light. I look at them. IT! I floored it and ran the red light. My foot is glued to the accelerator. I can't stop. I CAN'T STOP! BREATHE. I try to calm myself. I took rights and lefts to make sure no one's following me. I got home, and made something to eat for Jacob and me. I got ready for bed and went to sleep.

Dark. Screaming. Drowning. Help? My eyes open wide as tears fall from my face. I can't move. I remember my therapist's ways of calming down. I start with my fingertips, then my hands, my arms, my head legs, until I can get out of bed.

"Hey Emma, How have you been? How's Jacob?" she asked.

"Something bad is happening Janice, my sleep paralysis I getting worse." I blurted out. My hands are shaking. I whisper to her, "Someone following me. I'm so paranoid. It pops out of nowhere." Tear fall down my face as I say, "Help me please."

"Well the way you are describing it, it sounds like you're hallucinating. This happens to people with what you have. I'll prescribe some medication that....."

"I'M NOT CRAZY! I'M NOT!" Tears of frustration came down my face. I stormed off and slammed the door. I get in my car and drive off. I wipe my tears, pretend everything is ok, and pick my brother from school. Today his best friend is having a birthday sleepover, so Jacob is staying over at his house. I drop him off and go home.

I take a cold shower, have a quick snack, and go to bed. I've been so stressed out today that when I laid in my bed, I fell into a deep sleep. Everything was good.... until, I hear glass break. My heart drops and I open my eyes. I'm paralyzed, and I see a figure coming towards me. Jacob, I think. It! It is in my house and is coming me with a... Knife! And Body bag! I squinted my eyes so it thinks I am asleep. I can't breathe. It gets closer. My heart is now running like crazy. Closer. "Remember, calm down. Little by little, Emma." I start to wiggle my fingers. CLOSER. Hands. CLOSER, CLOSER. Arms. CLOSER, CLOSER, CLOSER! I slowly move my hand my pillow. It raises the hand with the knife and points it straight over my heart. But with every bit of force I found in my body, and I grab the knife under my pillow,

and I lunge at it. "What have I done?" I let go of the knife. And stay here. Frozen time. I don't know how. I need to know who this person is. I kneel next to the body. I grab the mask. I close my eyes and pull it off. My eyes are still closed. There's a part of me that doesn't want to look, but a part of me that does. I open my eyes. JANICE! The one person I trusted the most, was trying to kill me.

"Emma?"

"Who's there?" it got louder and louder. I try to close my eyes to see if it goes away. It didn't, it got louder.

"Emma?"

The room turns white. I open my eyes and not in my bedroom. I ask myself, "Where am I?"

"Emma? Hi, my name is Janice! Very nice to meet you, I'm super excited to start sessions with you!"

Christina Guistolise

High School Short Story

Untitled

A few decades ago, in about 1985, there were four teenagers who loved to explore. When they were younger, Hannah, Will, Destiny, and Mark were told stories of these man-beasts called skin walkers that live in the caves of the mountains on the other side of town. “No one ever comes back out of those caves alive”, they were always told. They were fascinated by these people that could turn into savage animals and kill people. Now that they were old enough, they decided to investigate the caves where skin walkers supposedly lived... or live.

“She’s dead! Go now... run! RUN!” screamed Will. <<<<< Only 12 hours earlier... “C’mon guys! Hannah and I have been waiting in the car for a half hour for you two! And this heat does not do well with my hair! You guys know this old van doesn’t have air conditioning!” Destiny yelled through the front door of Will and Mark’s house. Suddenly, the twins came running out the door, carrying heavy-looking camping sacks on their backs. “Really? You know we’re only exploring for one night, right?” said Hannah, clearly annoyed because of the heat. “Well, then, Miss Smarty Pants, would you care to explain what we would do in the event of a fire, tornado, thunderstorm, or if we ended up in a really dark place? No, you don’t because neither of you girls thought to prepare for any emergencies!” said Mark, acting high and mighty. Mark was always scared of everything and anything bad happening, but wasn’t too humble. With that, Will and Mark loaded their packs in the van, got in, buckled up, and the four of them were off to the caves.

It was a long car ride to get to the caves. They were located on the other side of town where the road became steep as it headed up a mountain and towards a cliff. They finally arrived after the awkward, annoying, hot car ride there. “Alright, everyone, we need to pull out our mountain climbing gear”, whispered Mark. Destiny, Hannah, and Will looked at each other in confusion. “Why are you whispering, Mark?” Destiny asked. “Um... because if there really are skin walkers nearby, I’m not going to be stupidly loud and end up being a savage animal’s snack!” exclaimed Mark, still in a whisper and sounding terrified. They all made sure they had everything they needed from the car and began climbing. It didn’t take as long as they thought it would to reach the top of the mountain. Then, they all stepped up to the cliffside. “Whoa! I thought there were supposed to be multiple caves! There’s only one?” Hannah said. Will aimed his shining flashlight into the dark cave. “Nope.

There are four separate tunnels inside. Which means that the four of us will have to split up.”, said Will, explaining everything, as his usual brainy, wise self.

“What! We have to split up? I can’t do that by myself!” rambled Mark, finally breaking his whisper. “Just do it, Mark!” exclaimed Destiny, Hannah, and Will in unison. They had dealt with Mark’s act before, so they knew that he would get scared eventually. Mark looked at the cave, then back at the others. “Fine, but everyone has to take these mini emergency packs with them, just in case!” Mark said. The others each took a pack from Mark, and began walking down their own tunnels.

Hannah found the first clue: a hidden door. She turned the knob and opened the door to reveal a newly furnished room with a staircase to the right, a hallway with four more doors to the left, and a burning fireplace in the center. “Is someone living here? Okay, don’t be scared now! Just go down the hall, peek in each room, scan for clues, and then get out of here!” she whispered aloud to herself. First door - a bedroom with a small bed, dresser, nightstand, and closet. Second door - a bathroom with a toilet, sink, cabinet, and shower. Third door - a kitchen with a small table, one chair, stove, refrigerator, and icebox. Fourth door- a cellar with wooden steps leading down into the pitch-black, cold room. Hannah decided that there must be something down there that explains skin walkers. She quietly unzipped her backpack, pulled out her flashlight, and turned it on.

Hannah cautiously walked down the steps, creaking under her weight, until she reached the bottom. She aimed the beam into the dark, but it could barely penetrate the thickness of the black room, now surrounding her. She took a step, then another, until it felt as if she had taken about twenty steps but hadn’t reached a wall yet. “Aaaaah!” she screamed in the loudest way she ever had. The pain... the horrible pain she felt as the knife settled in her back. “Hannah? Is that you?” Will’s voice echoed from the other side of the wall. A raspy voice from within the dark said, “You’ll make a delicious snack after I deal with the others!” Hannah fell to the floor, her flashlight went out, and she took her last breath before her world went dark.

Will rounded a corner and somehow ran into both Mark and Destiny at the same time. “Guys! Thank goodness, it’s you! Did you guys hear Hannah? She screamed like she might have been in trouble!” Will exclaimed. “Our tunnels met up further back, so we were walking together. Then, we heard her scream and you calling out to her, so we started running”, explained Destiny. The three jogged around another corner and found themselves in a dark room. It smelled moldy and dirty. Suddenly, Destiny tripped over something- a leg. “Someone, pull out your flashlight!” she called. Mark turned on the beam and shone it to where Destiny had tripped. “Oh, my gosh! Hannah! She’s been stabbed!” cried Destiny. “She’s dead! Go now... run! RUN!” screamed Will. Click! The light went out. A harsh cackle filled the room. One by one, the three of them realized their mistake. It’s true what they said - no one does come out alive.

Love Hates the Life of Death

“Let it go, Love! I told you, Life didn’t do anything wrong!” Death was protesting. “No! I’m sick of Life hurting you over and over again! And you just let him! Look at your face, Death. Look at your clothes. Look at yourself! Can’t you open your eyes and see that he’s gone too far this time?” Love was saying. Love was usually the most stubborn and easily annoyed. Although this was so, there was nothing Death could do to stop Life. He didn’t play fair, as he and his friends typically didn’t. Life, Heart, Pain. None of them played fair. But, Death didn’t know what it was about Life. She knew he was arrogant. But she didn’t care. She loved that he was arrogant and a jerk sometimes. But he could be kind. He could be enduring and give her a break. But, she knew what she did last night was wrong and that she deserved what’d he’d done to her face. Her beautiful--now blemished--skin seemed so ugly now. But, as Death chased after Love who was headed to the locker room to pick a fight with Life, she couldn’t think about the pain in her busted lip or in her right eye. Her eyes were beautiful, though a tad sad. Death was always the sweetest out of all them. Death knew that he meant well. Last night he had gotten drunk with the other girls and boys that he hung out with in his cool group. Blossom, Lunar, The Twins, Vixen--Death never did much like Vixen. She wasn’t very...PG-13. Death finally managed to just jump on Love’s back, in an attempt to make him stop. “Love, please don’t do this.” But they were already in the locker room, tons of half nude males looking in the direction of a pretty soul. Death gasped, shielding her eyes from their toned and chiseled bodies. “Love, stop it.” But Hate, his twin brother had already heard the commotion and came out to see his brother who was stone-faced compared to himself who was content until seeing his brother so upset. “Whoa, what’s wrong, Love?” “Where’s Life?” “Who’s asking?” said Life, coming around the corner with a towel around his neck, hair still dripping with warm water. “Oh. Hey, princess.” Death waved shyly at her boyfriend after revealing her beautiful green eyes, stark against her tanned skin. “What’re you doing in her beautiful?” She blushed looking down, sliding off Love’s back. “Will you please leave it alone, Love?” “No,” he scoffed, sounding more harsh than he meant it. “What’re you talking about, sweetie?” Life asked. Love shoved him hard into the lockers behind him. “Whoa, what was that for?” “You’re a real piece of work, you know that right?” Love addressed. “You treat Death like one

of your toys. You toss her around like she doesn't matter. This is high school, man. The place where you're supposed to grow up and act mature, not go and smash all your problems." Life stood up straighter, looking bolder than Love in comparison. "You've got no right trying to tell me how to live," Life shouted. A crowd of boys appeared as the two boys glared at each other, Death standing in the middle.

"Come on you guys, you're supposed to be my friends. And you're supposed to be my boyfriend. You aren't supposed to fight." Death said. "Your boyfriend is supposed to know that abuse isn't always the road to take, unless destruction is his style. He's supposed to respect you. He's supposed to give you one hundred percent no matter what, like any good man would do to anyone he desires above all the rest," Love said. Life laughed softly. "Oh you're joking right?" He dragged a hand across his handsome face, locked in a joyous and comical grin. "Death, honey, the only reason he even tries over you is because he has feelings for you. I can't believe you've been so blind to it, as have I. But, come on, Love, do you really think she'd ever prefer you over me? I'm life!" Love went stiff. He didn't think this would happen. He didn't think any of the words he thought in his mind would be said out loud. He knew what he felt but he knew nobody would ever say anything because he made sure to mask his emotions in anger and happiness. He quickly went back to his normal facade and deadened his mood. "Come on, Life. You really think I would want your girlfriend? I'm not a jerk and I'm not going to steal another man's girl. Because you're just that type of person, aren't you? You think everyone is like you in that way. You think that everyone has to be like you. You're disgusting, Life." "I know what I see when you look me in the eyes. I've seen it since the party back in freshman year; the way you look at her like she's not everybody else. What do you do every day, huh? Go home and kiss your hand, pretending it's her? Lay awake at night thinking off her?" Love looked bored, although inside he was fighting his own feelings, shoving them down deeper and deeper. He couldn't show her how he felt. He couldn't let her know that he was maddeningly, head over heels, over the moon, in love with her. Anger festered inside of Love. His face twisted into a frown. He jerked his hand back and powered it forward, directly into Life's nose. Life stumbled back into his friends, scarlet seeping through his fingers as he clutched his nose. Love took a step forward, slamming Life into the locker. He hit him over and over and over again until something caught his hand. He turned back to see Hate pulling him back, by his torso. "Let me go!" Love protested. "Let me go!" Hate dragged his brother outside the locker room to where Death waited quietly. Hate threw him against the wall, frowning. Death stayed where she was, facing the opposite direction, clearly lost in some deep thought. Hate had him pinned. "Look, just because you dislike Life doesn't mean you get to make him your punching bag. Don't pull anything else like that as long as she's in the room. She doesn't need that from you. You're supposed to be the bigger person out of the two of you." Hate shook his head. He lowered his voice to barely a whisper. No one other than his

brother would've understood. The voice was soft enough that for most it would appear as only his lips moving. "You better talk to her. Because you and I both know what Life said in there was true." Hate stepped back, turning back to the locker room to clean up his brother's mess. Love walked over to Death. "Death, I'm--" "Shut up." Death said, cutting him off, slicing through his words as though they were a simple sheet of paper. She turned and whipped her hand across his face, hard. "Why are you like this?" She shouted at him, her words echoing in the empty hallway. "I told you to leave it alone and you just couldn't let it be! I know he isn't the best when we're alone, but it's fine when we're together because he cares about me, Love."

"This, Death," he said, gesturing at her face, "this is not him caring about you. No one who cares about someone will ever treat anyone like this behind closed doors. No one should ever treat you like this. You're the sweetest, most kind person anyone is ever going to meet. You don't deserve these things he does to you. Can't you see that?" Death said sincerely. He brought his hand up to her face and cupped her cheek. She leaned into her face into his hand. "Oh, Love. I know you don't agree with the way he treats me. I don't agree with it either sometimes. But, I think you're wrong. He does care about me. He tells me how he feels about me all the time." A tear slipped down her cheek when she looked at Love. He wiped her tear away and tucked a piece of stray hair behind her ear. She hugged him around the torso, so then she didn't have to stand on her tiptoes. She sniffed, though she made sure not to get tears on his shirt as she cried. "Thank you for always being there for me, Lovey." Love was a little surprised, although he wrapped his arms around her small body too, planting his chin on her head. "You're welcome, flower. You matter too much in this world for me not to care about you." He told her as he stepped back. "I know you're his, but I wish you were mine. I really do." He looked down at her, her green eyes staring back at his boring brown ones. She got on her tiptoes, her lips seemingly about to meet his. Their lips connected, seeming to melt together. Death, the sweetest and most innocent felt as though she was finally free in Love's arms. It was Love. It had always been Love.

Chapter 2: Two months later

Death stayed with Life. Why? She wouldn't know. She thought she loved him... but now she knows she doesn't. She tried to break up with him. She tried really hard to leave him. But he wouldn't let her. When she tried to, he said he needed her. He said that he was nothing without her; he was dust that she'd blown away. Now, here they sat, Life's house. Where nobody seemed to be there except for them

Kimberly Hernandez

High School Short Story

The Haunted Tunnel

It's a cold night. Abby and Jack decided to go to a haunted tunnel to explore. They found out about this place because of their cousin. They were scared, but Jack has been in that tunnel a lot of times. Abby didn't really want to go, but she was being dragged into it. They were prepared they had Jackets, flashlights, batteries, and a weapon. They were going to try to go all the way through the tunnel. But they didn't really know because they might get scared. But Abby knew that she would be secure with her boyfriend Jack.

So at like 10 pm they decided to go. They were nervous but they were prepared. They did not know what was coming. When they got there they had to walk down to the tunnel a little bit. When they finally reached the tunnel Abby got scared she didn't expect that it would be that scary. But she was still going to go because she had no choice. They were standing by the tunnel and already got bad vibes. They were getting Chili's. Abby was trying to convince Jack to go back but he didn't want to.

They started going in with their flashlights. Luckily, their flashlights went far. They were slowly walking when all of a sudden they heard someone saying something. They stopped for a second. They saw another flashlight in the distance. They turned their flash off. But they were not scared a lot of people go there often. Jack started saying "Hello" then he got a reply by someone saying "Hey". Then they finally could see the person. He says "Hi I'm Parker". They all introduced themselves. They asked how old he was he said "17" Jack said, "I'm 18 and she is too".

Then they all left and just kept talking to Parker. Parker said, "Why don't I come with you guys?" Abby thought it was a great idea. "Sure" said Jack. They just kept on walking but then out of a sudden they started getting goosebumps. With feeling not wanted in the tunnel. They started hearing bangs again but this time it was getting louder and louder. They were all scared and wanted to leave but they already made it too far. They didn't really know where the noise was coming from. The banging just stopped out of nowhere. Abby was so scared she couldn't move. Jack just said "Damn that was loud" Parker said, "That's only the begging".

They were all just standing there thinking on what to do. Abby was so scared because they have stopped at a corner and she was scared if

something would of popped up. But then they were all quiet they started hearing people. Abby was saying that she swears she hears a baby crying. Abby said “omg call 911” Jack replied, “There is no service”. Parker said, “of course there is no service. They all walked together to the corner of the tunnel they were flashing flashlight at both sides of the tunnel. Parker started saying do you guys see that and he was pointing at the end of the tunnel. Abby looked her heart dropped she couldn’t move. Abby wanted to scream and cry but Jack was covering her mouth and saying “shh”. At the end of the tunnel there was a man just standing there in a costume with something in his hand. They were trying to not act scared. They started going back to the way they came though. There was another person but screaming and dancing in circles. They knew that they were being trapped. They started turning around Abby was crying and saying “what are we going to do” Then all of a sudden the two people were gone they had disappeared they didn't see where they went. They were so close at the end of the tunnel that they could see it. They just kept walking. There was a hole in the tunnel wall but they didn't think nothing of it. Then a group of people just popped out of the tunnel and scream. Abby and Jack start running they were so scared but they realized that Parker didn't run with them. They look back and they are just laughing.

Jack and Abby started walking back and he sees some people familiar. Jack started laughing because he knew everyone. His friends thought it was a good idea that they should scare them in the haunted tunnel. Even to get a friend that Jack does not know like Parker so he can take them to the end and make them not back out. Abby was happy it was all fake and not real. Then they were all just laughing at their reaction they recorded then just left the tunnel. Where they will never go back.

Natalie Hernandez

High School Short Story

The Tragedy in Silver Lock

“Happy Birthday!” Anthony, Elizabeth, Jen, Kayla, and Daniel yelled.

“Ahhh!” Analilia screamed, “How did you get into my apartment.” Elizabeth answered, “Your roommate Jewels let us in.”

“So, Analilia how do you feel to finally be 21 years old?” Kayla asked.

“Fine I guess” Analila sadly said.

“What’s wrong?” Daniel asked, “You seem a bit down today”

“Well I just can’t stop thinking about Jake lately,” Analilia stated.

Kayla says, “Don’t think about him he is gone and will never bother you again

Analila and her friends go to a little coffee shop in the corner of Mulberry Rd. It smelt like freshly brewed coffee. There were lots of beautiful flowers decorating the interior. Blues, yellows, pinks, and white colored the place. Analilia’s friends all said at the exact same time,

“I want a large mocha with extra fluffy whipped cream please!”

They all started laughing, and Analilia nearly fell over. Jen asked Analila, “What coffee would you like on your special day?”

“I want a French vanilla Frappuccino” Analilia replied.

“I know” Jen excitedly said, “We should go to the woods to celebrate your birthday.”

Everyone nodded in agreement. All of Analilia’s friends got into the same car except for Kayla.

Analilia and Kayla went to into a different car than the rest.

“Come on I know there is something wrong,” Kayla said.

Analilia replied, “Well I sort of feel scared after hearing that someone broke out of prison”

“You don’t need to be scared,” Kayla said.

“I keep thinking if it was Jake who broke out of and is looking for me,” Analilia explained, “he told me three years ago on my birthday that the day I turned 21 he would propose to me.”

Then Kayla asked, “Wasn’t that a few days before you broke up with him?”

“Yes, and that is what scares me.” Analilia worriedly said.

After a few hours of driving, they finally made it to Silver Lock Woods. They set up tents and start looking for firewood. Once they found enough firewood, Analilia started the fire. Elizabeth got out

marshmallows, chocolate, and graham crackers. The second that Anthony saw what she took out the car, he shouted, “Woohoo s’mores!”

They all started laughing at him. Then they decided it was time to tell scary stories. Daniel’s story was about the ghost that lived in the woods. Jen told the story of the creature that steals the light. When the fire started to die down Analilia went to go get more firewood. She went alone because her friends wanted to get her birthday surprise ready. Analilia found a small beautiful waterfall that sparkled in the moonlight. As she was going to pick up a log, she heard a scream.

When she got close to the camp she yelled, “You are not going to scare me.” She walked past a few trees then screamed when she found her friends laying their around the fire dead. She broke down in tears when she a telescope with a little bow on it. Analilia heard rustling in the bushes and sprinted as quickly as she could into the woods. Tired of running she stopped to catch her breath. She looked down and something caught her eye so she picked it up. It was a picture of her and Jake.

Analilia heard a footstep behind her. Jake lifted his knife and swung it towards Analilia.

She dodged it and fell to the ground. Jake yelled, “Why, why don’t you love me everything I did was for you.” While Jake was yelling at her, she slowly lifted herself. He looked at her and chased her when she started to run. Jake got close enough to her to knock her to the ground. He put the knife to her throat, but when he was just about to kill her, she hit him with a log and got him off of her.

Analilia started running and running. She went as fast as she could and passed what felt like hundreds of trees. After a while, she felt exhausted, but she did not want to make the same mistake of stopping again. Finally she reached the road, she felt relieved.

Then she pulled out her phone and called the cops. She was surprised on how quick it was for them to find her. She told the cops that Jake was still in the woods.

“It is okay” they assured, “we will Gone him.”

Three Days Later

Even though Analilia had no friends left. She still went back to school. At a nearby deli, right when she picked up her sand which to take a bite the news turned on. She felt terrified when it said that after three days of hunting they have not successfully found the location of Jake Calisco.

Angel Herrera

High School Short Story

Stuck in London

On their way to London, Bryan and Angel were bored out of their mind on the plane but they were looking forward to what they had planned! Once they heard the school field trip was to London, they both immediately had the same idea. They didn't however think about the long ten hour plane ride getting there. They spent their time having a rap battle, just for fun. After a little while Angel fell asleep first then Bryan tried to get on his snapchat, but for some weird reason he didn't have service, so he fell asleep. Everyone woke up with the rumbling noise from the landing of the plane.

Bryan and Angel were the first ones to get off the plane; Bryan looked up at the sky and said "Finally some fresh air!" They were both hungry so they decided to head to "Pied a Terre" the cozy, fancy, restaurant in London where they made reservations months in advance. While the rest of the group went to Nandos. The only people to eat luxurious cuisine was Bryan and Angel, and they ordered the delicious steak fillet, while the others just ate fried chicken. Everyone got full pretty fast; once everyone was finished eating, Angel said "That was delicious, but it's getting kinda cold, let's go to the hotel." So they all went to the hotel. It was about a thirty-minute drive but when they finally got there, Bryan and Angel talked and agreed to do what they had planned in the morning, so they were off to sleep.

8:00am came along; you could hear the rumbling of the trains, the loud honks of the cars, and feel the cold breeze of the wind. Everyone got ready to hit the town where all of the shops were located. We were supposedly going "just to look", but Bryan and Angel were thinking otherwise. After thirty minutes, they arrived at the outlets and now it was time to lose the rest of their group. During the bathroom break everyone got out except Bryan and Angel, somehow no one seemed to notice they were too distracted by all the buildings and unique culture. Suddenly, a taxi pulled up and the driver said, "Good morning, are you Bryan and Angel?" they responded saying "Yeah, good morning!" everything was going as planned.

They got off at the shopping district where there were exclusive stores such as Streetwear United and Dark n Cold Urban Streetwear Clothing London, & Supreme. This was their plan, they waited the entire time to sneak away from the group and cash out with the luxurious clothes and accessories found in London. They played rock paper

scissors to decide which they would go into first. They both shot on “Shoot” Angel won by a viciously drawn scissors while Bryan shot a paper. Angel decided to go to Streetwear United; it was like heaven, since they were both into fashion and clothes. Walking into the store they immediately looked at the Adidas x RAF sneakers, Angel looked at the employee and shouted, “Can I get a nine and a half”. By fifteen minutes they were done shopping at that store, they didn’t even look at the tag, they just swiped.

It was time to go to Bryan’s preferred store Dark n Cold, and again they balled out, they bought bags and clothing, & shoes. Then they went on to Supreme they waited one hour because there was a long line, once they got inside they grabbed sweaters and went to the cashier. Angel went up and the cashier said “ please swipe your card” Angel did and out of nowhere it said “ DECLINED” in big bold letters. So Angel was confused he asked, “Are you sure?” the cashier said one hundred percent sure. He got out of line and asked Bryan to go, and the same thing happened, and they both felt embarrassed, they had realized they blew all their money.

Now they’re lost, they have no place to stay, and have no money or phone service. Since they had nothing to do they just dressed up in there flashy, pricey items they bought. Angel was just joking around saying, “Let’s rap over a speaker and put a hat down so we can make money”, but Bryan actually thought the idea was smart. So they were dressed up all in their streetwear and went to the Fremont of London. They were both embarrassed and couldn’t decide who goes first so they went at the same time. They had crowds come tip them and go but this one person stayed the whole time. Once they were both done the guy came up and said “you guys were actually pretty good, and I like your guys style, I don’t know if you know who I am but call me Symere.” He asked why we were rapping because no one else was, he thought it was unique, and then Bryan and Angel explained to him our situation.

Symere said, “I like the hustle” and invited both of them to quad biking. At first, they didn’t know but they learned pretty fast, and spent good one hour and thirty minutes. Symere surprised them by saying, “I’m a rapper too and I got an upcoming show tomorrow would you guys like to come along? I’ll let you guys stay at my place.” They hesitated and answered yes because they needed a place to stay at for the night and the money they made was all spent, so they went to his house and fell asleep right away because they had a big day coming up. The next day came along and right away as soon as all three of them woke up, they started getting ready. Symere had on all this jewelry such as chains, rings, grills, Bryan and Angel didn’t even realize his face tattoos the last day. They left in a limo and arrived at the place they were both in the backstage really nervous while Symere was ready, they were up it happened so fast everyone was feeling the music, they all were wondering who Bryan and Angel were. The night happened so fast they were both relieved it was over. Symere gave them a cut of thirty percent, Bryan and Angel thanked Symere and they were going to pay

for a plane ticket but Symere just let them use his own personal jet. They were flying first class they couldn't believe it they were on their way home.

An Author's Goodbye

This isn't a normal story. I'm not the heroine. I'm not a disembodied narrator. I'm just a background character. You will get to know me as I work in the background to help others reach their happy ending.

The air was cool and stuffy at the same time. There was no breeze to brush away the stale air. Even so, the air sparked with anticipation. Two figures conversed on top of the next building, their words becoming more heated and tense. They had no idea I was there, silently observing.

I watched as they conversed, the Dream Eater slowly dying on the ground. It didn't take long for the dying form to begin the process of disintegration. As the first grains of sand fell on to the ground, the second figure disappeared into the dark of the night.

I made sure that no one was in the area before I leapt across the gap between buildings. I slowly made my way over to the ever-growing pile of black sand. It seemed to glow purple in the moonlight.

Tears stung at the corners of my eyes. The Dream Eater had once been a dear friend of mine. It hurt to know that he had starved to death. But I also knew it had to happen. The Society of Dreams was changing. There was no place for him in their new society.

Kneeling down, I took a small, glass container out of my satchel. I reverently took a handful of sand and let it fall into the container. I continued to collect sand until it was about half full.

I carefully slipped the lid on and screwed it shut. I wrapped it in a dark cloth and placed it back into my bag. Something made a loud noise off to my right down in the alley.

Time to go.

I leapt off the roof. "First one down," I whispered to the wind.

Less than an hour later, I was slipping behind the booths that lined the street, peeking between the tents. Making my way down the street, I spotted a young man enthusiastically selling his wares to passerby's. Unbeknownst to him, I knew his true purpose for being here. I moved into place behind him. Reaching around, I grabbed his collar and yanked him out.

"What the -" He thrashed in my hold and threw his hands out to steady himself.

"Calm yourself. I mean no harm." I let him go and glanced back into his tent to make sure no one had noticed.

"What is the meaning of this?" He glared at me, clearly annoyed

that I had interrupted his work.

“I bring information that would prove useful to your operation.” I looked him over, watching as curiosity spread across his face.

“What kind of information?”

“I know what you’re looking for.” I glanced behind us again. “She’s here. Making her way down the street. She has short blonde hair and dark brown eyes. She’s wearing a short, summer dress.”

The man looked at her with uncertainty.

“It’s on you whether you believe me or not.” I glanced out once more. “She’s almost here.” I turned and ran back up the street, ducking behind another tent.

The man slowly turned and entered his tent. I watched as he called her over, trying to catch her attention with his wares.

They exchanged a few sentences before the girl became scared and wandered off. I didn’t miss the small device that was now shining from the hem of her dress.

They would find her using the tracker and then she would be reunited with her brother. My work here was done.

“Good luck, Emerald.” Turning on my heel, I ran.

I arrived around midday. I could see movement inside. So, I sat and waited. I waited until the parents locked the door behind them and disappeared into the surrounding forest.

Grabbing my phone out of my pocket, I made a quick call.

“Hello?”

“Hi, I wish to speak with Violet.”

“This is she.”

“I’ve found an old acquaintance of yours. She appears to be a certain species you have a fascination with.”

There was silence on the other line.

“If you’re interested, she lives in an old cabin in the middle of Hollow Forest. Hard to miss,” I continued.

“Thank you for the information.” The other end quickly hung up.

So, I sat and waited once more. It didn’t take long for three of them to appear: Violet and two of her goons. I watched silently as the men made quick work of the door and Violet shouted at them to begin their search.

It was then that I decided it was time to get away from there.

Leaping over bushes and weaving around trees, that’s how I spent quite a lot of time as I worked to get out of the forest. It had been almost half an hour since I had left the cabin.

A gunshot rang out overhead. Then another. And another. I couldn’t be sure how many exactly, but I knew that I had done my job.

“Sorry Lizzie, it had to happen.” A heavy sigh. “Another one down; one more to go.”

Later that evening...

I ran up to the quaint house. Light pink flowers bloomed in the window sill, a small doormat lay on the porch, its pastel colors welcoming.

I knocked on the door and waited. It wasn't long until the door was opened and a familiar face stared back.

I beamed up at him. He beamed down at me.

"It's been a while, Green," I giggled.

"Too long." His smile shifted into a teasing smirk. "If I didn't know any better, I'd think you were avoiding me."

I gave a nervous giggle and looked away, rubbing the back on my neck. "Yeah about that... I was wondering if you wanted to go for a walk."

I could see the curiosity in his face and knew this would be hard for the both of us.

"I don't see why not." He turned and shut the door behind him before following me down the street.

"By the way," I said as I reached into my satchel. "I have a favor to ask." I looked up at him, hope lingering there. "I need you to look after something for me. It's very important that nothing happens to it." I placed the small hourglass in his hand. "It's all I have left of a dear friend."

"I swear on my life to take care of it." Green gave a small nod and took it gingerly into his hands, cradling it as he observed the sand moving inside.

We fell into silence, neither of us sure what to say- if there was anything that needed to be said in that moment. It wasn't until we had entered the surrounding forest at the end of the town that I even dared to look at him. He looked calm, but a jumble of emotions flashed through his eyes.

I stopped suddenly when the path began to widen. I stared at the ground as he stopped in front of me.

"What's wrong?" I dared a glance up at him and saw pure concern etched into his deep emerald eyes.

I took a shaky breath, "I have to leave." Tears stung at the corners of my eyes, blurring my vision and I turned away, refusing to look at him.

"Hey..."

"There used to be six of us... Now I'm going to be alone," I whimpered, the first tears slipping down my cheeks.

His strong arms wrapped around me and I cried harder. He turned me so that I was facing him.

"It's okay." A pause. "You never know when you might be seeing someone for the last time." He pet my hair in long, soothing strokes.

I turned my head, my ear right over his heart. "We were always going to say goodbye, weren't we?" I sniffled and fisted my hands in his shirt.

"Yeah. I think so." He nuzzled the top of my head.

"I loved you though," I cried, "I loved you so much."

There was a pause.

"I know." His hold tightened. "I know. I loved you too."

My heart constricted, hearing him say those cursed words.

We stayed like that for a while. Just pulling comfort from the other's presence.

I finally looked up at him. He was hesitant to let me go.

"I have to go," I whispered.

He leaned down and placed a soft kiss on my forehead. "Don't forget to remember me."

My tears began anew. I turned from him and made my way toward the road I arrived on- the road that led away from my friends. I refused to look back, knowing if I did, I wouldn't be able to leave.

I didn't have a reason to remain here anymore. I had made sure they would all get their happy endings. But I knew that their happily ever after didn't include me. Fate dictated otherwise. So, it was time for me to go. It was for the best.

That's what I had to keep telling myself. It was for the best...

I shut my eyes tightly and when I opened them again, I was back in my room. Looking down, I mourned the world I had to leave behind.

"Goodbye," The author whispered with a broken heart and a trembling voice, hesitantly closing the book and placing it carefully back on the shelf.

Miranda Johnson

High School Short Story

The Staircase

Cold air filled my lungs as I trudged up the steep, never-ending staircase. It was about 11 at night, and I was returning to my dorm with books weighing down my back from the library across the street. And I think someone was following me.

The click of the library door following the closing of mine, the silent but sensed footsteps behind mine as I crossed the street. I dismissed it as nothing, but the growing pit in my stomach said otherwise. I stopped on the staircase. Silence.

I continued to walk up, at a steady pace, and then I halted again. A slight slip of someone's heavy boot echoed up the dark winding stairwell. Silence again, and I realized how closed and narrow in the staircase was.

Oppressive dark stone on both sides spiraling up, cold stone steps, and small, barred off windows every once in a while, illuminating a couple steps in front of it. I loosened a breath as quietly as I could, and forced myself to keep walking, steadily, attempting to mask my fear, but quicker.

The footsteps behind me were louder now, and I could hear the scrape against the stone steps they made. My pace quickened, and so did theirs. They were probably a few loops of the stairwell underneath me, but gaining. I knew I was near the top, I recognized in my frantic hurry, the broken second to last barred window. Just one more. Whoever, or whatever, was following me wasn't far behind now. I broke into a run as soon as I saw the end of the staircase lit up by the moonlight emanating from the last window. My breathing was ragged now, and my footsteps thundered. The pair behind me thundered right back, gaining speed. I zoomed down the winding hallways, racing to my room.

Everyone else's door was closed and dark, probably out or asleep. I didn't dare look towards the staircase as I turned a corner at the end of the hallway. But in the corner of my eye, I saw a flicker disturb the ray of moonlight shining from the last window on the stairwell. I raced to my room, turning right in the maze of hallways.

The footsteps behind me were roughly 20 feet behind me now. I kept pushing, not having time to think or look back. Now left, down that hallway, then left again. 10 feet. I could see them if I turned around. I saw my door, my safe haven. I hurriedly reached into my pocket for my keys.

The echo of the steps behind me no longer had an echo; we were in the same hallway. My eyes only saw my brass doorknob just a few more

feet away. I broke into a sob as I grasped it, shoved the key in the lock with my shaking hands, and hurtled into my room. I fell, and slammed the door closed with my foot.

I got up so fast to lock the door, by the time my hands flicked the lock, my head was still catching up with the situation. I heard my heart pound like cannons, felt my hands shaking, and my shirt stick to me with sweat. I finally relaxed my posture and turned around, finally able to catch my breath. Then I heard the doorknob jangle furiously and the pounding on the door crack the wood

Daniel James Kessin

High School Short Story

Untitled

Once there was a man who liked carving wood. He wanted to carve something perfect. So perfect, that everyone will love it. So he said to himself "hmm, I want to go out to the forest and carve something amazing that everyone will love" so he did. He was walking to the forest when he bumped into his old friend from High school. He said "hey, do you want to come to the forest with me?" to his friend. His friend said, "Sure why not". So he and his friend walked along to the forest, as they bumped into a flea. The flea said, "Buzz can I come with you guys buzz" the woodcarver said, "Sure that would be interesting". So the woodcarver, his friend, and the flea were all walking to the forest when they bumped into a cockroach. The cockroach said, "Can I come to the forest too". So the woodcarver said, "yea, we can never have enough people". So the wood carver, the friend, the flea and the cockroach are all going to the forest.

They finally got to the forest, after all, that time. The woodcarver said, "We need to find a perfect tree to chop down so I can make something perfect with it". Why can't we just chop any old tree we find? Said the friend. The woodcarver said, "The tree has to be perfect, trust me. The friend said that's fine. They all went their own ways searching for that one tree. The friend went east, the flea went south and the cockroach went north. The woodcarver didn't go north, he went to the middle of the forest and found the perfect tree he ever laid eyes on. It wasn't tall nor small, big nor small but just right. He found the perfect tree so he can perform his works on. He called his buddies over to help him with cutting it down. He really couldn't ask much of the cockroach and the flight to help other than to encourage them but his friend helped him with cutting it down.

They got it down after chop after chop after chop. When it hit the ground and made a really loud sound they all cheered. The woodcarver ran to his truck and drove it quickly over to the spot where the tree was. He backed up to the tree and lifted it into his truck. He then drove everyone back to his workshop to wait and see what he would do. He already had an idea in mind of what he was going to do. He started to carve on the log as soon as he got to his workshop but everyone asking to come in but the carver said, "No, I need privacy". They all said, "Its fine we will just stay out here". The carver went inside and started carving the log into what he wanted.

It took him a couple months to complete but he finally got it done. They all were gone by then but he called everyone to meet him at his workshop. They all got there as soon as possible as they all were so excited to what he did with the perfect piece of log. The woodcarver did a big unveiling. He made a small stage just for this one specific "thing" he made; he says it is his best work yet. The carver pulls the small curtains from the stage revealing the wooden piece in front of them. They all dropped their jaws. They all started rambling on how this is so amazing and perfect. The woodcarver said thanks but none of this wouldn't be possible if Jesus hadn't died on the cross for our sins. So, everyone loved the wooden carving of Jesus Christ carrying the cross.

Michael Tran

Michael Tran missed his deadline for the first time in six years.

Michael Tran never missed his deadline. Michael Tran was a human clock, methodically ticking until he calmly reached the hour—, the next hour—, and the hour after that—

As Michael Tran's editor, I was furious. I searched my email in frantic pursuit of any email from him—maybe he had sent it early and it had fallen into my spam folder, or maybe he had emailed me asking to meet physically and I had accidentally deleted it—and found nothing but coupons and advertisements for penis enlargement pills. I couldn't handle another person being late this week.

A tight pain crept into my chest.

As Michael Tran's friend, I was worried beyond belief. I knew these past few months had been strange; Michael never went this long without contact. I knew little about his personal life. But I trusted him. I knew he tended to lock himself in the house when he wrote.

It wasn't the fact that he was late. It was the fact that he was simultaneously late and Michael Tran. He was indubitably prompt with everything he did. Even when he was bedridden with a bad case of the flu, he had gotten his always-stellar work to me a week early. He grazed the surface of perfection; daresay, he almost epitomized it.

My concern overtook me. Clearly, something colossal had thrown his constant clock out of whack. I called him and, receiving nothing but the cheery tone of the automated voicemail, left a message asking him to come to my office. I would be here all night anyhow.

To my surprise, I heard a three familiar knocks on my door fifteen minutes later. It always took him exactly thirteen to get to my office.

Michael slowly pushed open the door. His narrow black eyes were puffy from too much sleep, his usually tan skin shades paler. When he sat in the plush chair across my wooden desk, he sighed as if the weight of the world were on his shoulders. I noticed the messiness of his once pristine black hair. "I'm sorry, Tova. I should have contacted you earlier," he said.

'Should have' was two words I never expected to hear out of his mouth.

"It's alright," I responded coolly. "I was just... surprised. You've never been late before. What's the matter?"

His hands were politely folded over each other as they always were,

but they trembled almost imperceptibly. He sucked in a deep breath through his crooked teeth.

“Angelique died last week,” he mumbled. The worn expression on his long, stony face didn’t shift an inch.

I felt as if the wind had been knocked out of me. Angelique had been his wife of four years. I had been at their wedding. Angelique had showed up with her mother and father, having had no one else in her family. Michael, who lost his parents at a small age, only invited me and a couple of his other peers. It had been a small but joyous affair. I didn’t talk to Angelique often, but she had seemed a kind soul.

I vaguely knew she had been suffering from a kind of brain tumor cancer for the past half-year. So she hadn’t been recovering at all, then.

“Michael—I’m so sorry,” I managed.

“It’s alright,” he responded. “It’s alright. I’ll have the manuscript to you—“

“Damn the manuscript, man. Don’t worry about it,” I interrupted. “If there’s anything I can do for you, just let me know.” I opened the mini-fridge under my desk and slid him a small bottle of water.

Michael took a small sip. I watched a drop of water dribble down his lip and splash onto his rumpled white shirt. “Thank you.”

He paused for a moment, staring at the mishmash of posters behind me on the wall. He was stuck in deep thought before he opened his mouth. “Well, it’s funny, right? Tova, did you know Angelique?”

I shook my head. “I didn’t know her too well.”

He leaned back in the chair. “Yeah? I thought you did. She was the best woman I ever laid eyes on. Do you know how I met her?” His voice was rough at the ends and high for a man his age, but it had a strange sort of cadence to it.

“No.”

I thought against letting him ramble, but ultimately decided to let him go on since it seemed to be oddly therapeutic. Michael Tran always kept his words perfectly controlled—efficient to a fault—but also I figured the Michael of a few weeks ago hadn’t been under intense emotional distress. And so he began his grand story.

“It was around when I first finished *Flying Boy*. You remember it?”

“Of course I do.”

“It was kind of a stupid plot, wasn’t it? At least, I thought so. A boy who wanted to fly so badly he jumped out of the same tree every day for ten years? That’s bullshit. But when you’ve dedicated so much time to a single idea, all you can do is—continue on with it. See it to its end. Angelique didn’t think it was stupid, though.

“I was signing copies of *Flying Boy* at the Barnes & Noble. She came up to me, clutching a copy in manicured hands. God—Tova—I loved her a lot. A lot. She came up to me—all starry-eyed. Dith—

“—the boy in the book.”

“—yeah, the boy in the book—desperately wanted to fly. Angelique

wanted to fly too.” His face had filled with a sort of sweet melancholy from reliving the past. “I thought she was the most beautiful woman I ever saw. I know people think love at first sight doesn’t exist—but she converted me. I never knew my mom or dad, right? So in that instant, she became everything I had.” He looked at me. “Along with you, of course.”

“Thanks.”

“When I was signing her book, I wrote a ‘dearly,’ before her name. I’d never done that before. She said she wanted to talk to me more—she held onto every word of what I wrote and reluctantly let each go, back into the abyss—that’s how she described it. So we met that night and our coffeehouse paper cups turned into glasses of wine at my apartment and that was when I thought—this is a life I could live.

“You remember our marriage, right? Tova?”

“Of course I do. It was wonderful.”

“Sure was. It was everything we had dreamed of. Had a priest and everything.

“Angelique loved God and prayed to Him in earnest belief. I didn’t really understand, and I still kind of don’t. She never forced me into it. I am more a modern American than a Vietnamese. I use God’s name in vain. Her religious life was a mystery to me. She went to church on Sundays like clockwork. Sometimes, she went during ‘times of struggle,’ as she called them. I didn’t know what went on in there. I had never seen the inside of a church.

“It was a great for a while. She was a child therapist—fitting, considering how caring she was—and came home at five every day. I loved life. I loved to write. We were thinking of having a child.

“But I guess it couldn’t all stay good, right? I had just finished—“

“Forget Me Not—“His ode to life and love and all the joy in between.

“Right. My spiritual child. So I was riding the high of that book. It was selling well—to think that all those people in the world were taking in what I thought! What I wrote! It was a kind of megalomaniac euphoria.

“But Angelique wasn’t quite as alright as I was. She began to forget things, like—like what time she would have to leave to avoid the morning traffic, or she’d forget to grab the car keys on her way out. It was such minor stuff that I thought she was just overworking or stressed—“ Michael’s voice dropped several decibels. His eyes darkened as he took a drink.

“Maybe if I had done something earlier.”

“You didn’t know,” I reassured him.

“I had to call 911 when she had a seizure. It was March 14.

“I’m no doctor, Tova. They told me she had a type of brain tumor cancer—anaplastic astrocytoma. Grade III. It was bad. It had progressed fast.

“I couldn’t—do it. Tova, she was hurting. And that hurt me twofold. Whenever I saw her in that stupid hospital gown, with that

tag around her wrist and the IV plugged in her, I felt the sharp pain of knives on my flesh. Always.

“She went through surgery. Radiation. Chemo. None of it worked. She lost her beautiful curled black hair. No more braids. No more of that tickling sensation on my forearms when I hugged her from behind. She was a husk of what she used to be, Tova. She still loved me and I still loved her, but it was like watching a flame you had kindled in the middle of a cold forest—die.

“I couldn’t sleep. The hospital didn’t let me stay in her room—so I’d be laying in our cold bed alone and she’d be resting some foreign place, surrounded by beeping monitors. When I slept, I saw her staring face, close up against mine, her eyes unrecognizable. It was her, of course—she reached out long nails and grazed my cheeks.

“I woke up screaming every night.

“This went on for a few weeks. So, finally, dark circles under my eyes, I got fed it up with all—of seeing her dead face in my sleep and her dead body in the bed—and thought that maybe God, in His almighty glory, would give me a listen. You know, make some miracles happen.

“I went to the same church she used to go to. I prayed three times a day. Once in the morning, once in the hospital by her still body, and once kneeling alone in front of my bed meant for two. It grew into a strange addiction: I couldn’t stop. Something in me was convinced that this was the only thing that could fix her. If God had helped her find me four years ago, maybe He knew what was going on now. Sometimes—I swore she would open her eyes with the lucidity of the past and it would all be alright for five minutes. Maybe God really was looking out for us.

“But guess what? It didn’t work. The stupid prayers didn’t work. She was in a coma for three months. Her breath was labored. Her eyes were bleeding. She was suffering, and the doctors finally told me that I had a choice to make.

“It’s funny. The day before I took her off life support, I got angry at the crucified Jesus in the church. I yelled at it—no, I screamed my lungs out at it. I tossed the Bible onto the ground. Because what the hell was he doing for me anyway, right? Maybe God got pissed at me because of that. Maybe that’s why Angelique...”

I said nothing.

He seemed done: utterly resigned to the world’s whims. He thoughtfully finished the bottle of water and tossed it in the trash.

“Her gravestone had a tiny cross on the top of it, right? Well, a cherub embracing a cross. She picked it before she went into the coma, on her deathbed.

“I broke it off. I brought a hammer to the graveyard and chiseled that stupid angel right off.

“I don’t see her when I sleep anymore.”

He looked down, lips drawn in a painful grimace. I offered to buy him drinks.

“It’s alright,” Michael Tran responded, recognizing that time went on. “I’ll have the manuscript to you by tomorrow.”

Kira Leal

High School Short Story

The Idea of a Home Has Always Been Peculiar to Me

Animals around us do not make homes that last forever. In fact, they expect them to fall apart or be destroyed, and do not grieve for them, they make new ones. They do not grieve when mankind takes shovels and brooms to destroy their nests and dens. We destroy their shelter because it inconveniences us--their homes are hidden in the nooks of trees, the empty corners where the roofing connects or burrowed in the soil of our backyards. We remove their homes with malice, and annoyance, and are prepared if they try to return. Animals are persistent, but they learn that if they are unwelcome, they do not come back.

However, human beings are the only species that foster and nurture the need to have permanent shelter in one spot or in multiple spots. If there is an area that is most to their liking, they will persist to live in this spot through extreme weather conditions, such as flooding, or hurricanes. We will make somewhere our home until we are no longer content with it: maybe it is the others around us that dissatisfy us, maybe it is the distaste in how big or small the house is, or maybe it is just us getting in our own way. At the end of the day, if we are no longer happy with where we are, we pack up our belongings, and we leave the house. It becomes a shell of the people that were once in it, and it is empty again.

The anatomy of a house is not one that we consider often because we do not think of it as a human being. When we pull into the driveway after we are finished with the work day, we do not see the windows as gleaming eyes that are staring at us, watching our every move until we are out of its field of vision. It is watching our every move until we enter, but it is not our own will. It is the house's. We do not feel as though it has emotions because to us it is inanimate, it does not have a heartbeat. We are selfish. We think that we are the ones that give a house life. It is not about us, and it has never been.

Just as the human body and existence is an incredibly complex concept, the house is as well. The kitchen represents the mouth, where the food is preparing to be broken down by the stomach, in the close-by dining room. Our bathrooms serve the purpose of removing wastes from our body, but it does the same for the house. The rooms that take up space are limbs, to where they each hold a unique property, such as a home office that may be a dominant hand used for essential function every day to get things done. The living room has its own explanation, for it is much like the human heart in terms of it being alive. When

people are circulating through it, the heartbeat is accelerating, and it is at resting rate when there is only a few that are dwelling, resting in themselves. The staircase is much like the human spine, where each step is one of the many vertebrae within it, and it leads to the much more important aspects of the human body. There are walkways and halls that lead to each limb, allowing for each part to be functional and reachable, from one to another. Within the walls, there are electrical wires and water pipes that go around the entire house, connecting each room.

Up the stairs is the master bedroom, a place that holds many similarities to the mind. It is where spontaneous ideas are born, it is when we feel connections that we have never been aware of previously, it is where the most emotions are intensely felt. It is where we are lost in our own minds in a beautiful slumber to dream and be, at the most, in a comfortable place. It is where we are imagining, where we are laughing, screaming, crying. It is where we experience emotion.

While the analogy of the mind being in the master bedroom stands, it is clear that this is not all that is lurking in our brain. The master bedroom does not include the dark, isolated parts of thought. If the master bedroom is thought and emotion, then it must be the basement where we are in our subconscious. It is just a space in a house that is meant to bear the weight of extra storage, but instead, it takes on the heaviness of the tales of horrors that human beings have designated for it. It was never meant to bear the ideals of evil, only past memories that we have moved past. It is somber, and there are dead spiders and their webs in different portions of the room, on the floor and on the ceiling above. It is full of memories we wish to not remember, and an uncertainty--the same unsettling feeling that dwells at the pit of our stomach from the top of the stairs, looking downward. We spend our lives creating monsters within our heads, and they burrow deep within the human psyche, lying dormant for years and years.

They wait impatiently, waiting to come out. When the time comes, we feel the knots rise in our throats when we look down that stairwell because we feel as soon as we get to the bottom, we will not return to the surface. We have told ourselves that these monsters are not real. The hairs stand up on the back of your neck as though to tell you that they are real, and they are waiting for you at the bottom. Waiting to eat you whole.

Again, the basement is not the scary part, because it never was meant to be. It is back in the master bedroom where we should be afraid.

It is where our greatest fears can be realized, and it is where we are open to the house and its wrath. We lay there for hours upon hours in the dead of night, entrusting the house with our safety, just until the sun rises again and peers at us through the house's eyes. We spend a third of our lives in an unconscious state of memories replaying and synapses firing at rapid speeds, bursting. Even in a place where we are supposed to feel safe, where we have made it our own, we are still so

uncomfortable when we are only left with the house as company. A master bedroom is no longer a safe place when the sun sets. It becomes a mouth, and it has teeth.

In the night, we are at no one else's mercy but the house, where we lay in quiet. In the deafening peace. It becomes uneasy, like your stomach acid rising up your throat.

We spend each night in an uneasy silence, hoping that the house does not crush us with its teeth. We spend every night hoping that it does not bite down.

That means there are teeth, and I can feel them easing in on me, digging into my flesh every second I spend within the house. I cannot push them away because the more that I struggle against them, the faster that they are going to be inside of me, and become me. There are things inside of the house, people that are talking, and their voices are static now. They are strangers to me. I do not know them, and I am afraid. I am afraid of them coming closer. They can hear my thoughts, and they know what I am thinking about them.

I come down the stairs, and he is standing at the top of the basement, yelling at me. It is increasingly loud white noise in my ears--I cannot hear a word he is saying. The teeth are sinking deeper into me, becoming a part of me. I do not answer him. I slam the door because I am enraged, and I listen. His bones are cracking, breaking, shattering, splitting as he descends down the stairwell until he is at the end. I hear him in pain, but I do not open the door. The house is telling me not to, for I may see something that I do not want to see.

I return upstairs, and I shut my eyes, and I lay in the darkness. There is no more of me, only the pink gums of the house and the teeth that are growing out of me, and it is dark. It is quiet.

You were only meant to listen, but you continue to go where your domain is restricted. You continue to dig and pry into things that are not for you, you continue to be a troublesome nuisance where you prod and insert yourself where you do not belong. This place is not for you.

The house is hungry and breathes, and it becomes a mouth. It waits for no one.

The house takes on the misdoings and sins of others, and it becomes nothing but a rotten memory that people want to lobotomize out of their brains, but the house did nothing to them. Yet, we still find a place to make the house guilty, even when things collapsing in our hands are our own fault, because we are in the house most when things go awry. Human beings curse and howl in furious anger to say that the house is why things ache and that they must leave at once.

They pack up their whole lives, thinking that things may change when they leave.

But what about the house?

What becomes of a hollowed out house when those that created it, abandon it? Does it feel like a monster that is brought to life, only to be left to its own devices, only to be hated in the end?

How does it feel when those that inhabit it, then leave it because

they are no longer happy with what the house makes them feel, or what happened within it? Does it dream, does it have nightmares?

Does it stay awake at night--do the walls shake with anger and bitterness towards them during unholy hours, does it writhe in agony?

The house feels the black shadows in it when it looks inward and feels as though it is no longer alone. It feels great joy, as though to say, "I knew that you loved me!" It has never felt such happiness to see them back again.

What is to happen when it realizes that these shadows are not people, and the cycle of pain begins again?

It creates people instead, ghosts that walk and talk in the empty spaces, their voices echoing, like a lone puppet show that hurts for us to watch, because we know the house is talking to itself in our absence. It makes friends and lives through the invisible people, but it only lasts for so long.

The house is no longer content and feels an animosity like none before it. It begins to inhibit human emotion--it on the acid comes up through the pit of its basement into its throat, holding back furious words, in a loop of asking itself--"What did I do to make them leave?"

It will feel sour, it will feel ravenous. It will be felt so intensely that it will make itself inviting, keeping its doors open, because the house is no longer going to sit and be alone in its feverous anger, it will be open, waiting.

Waiting, waiting with its mouth wide open.

It is hungry.

Malaya Lee

High School Short Story

Dear Diary

Dear diary,

Well my name is Unique Pink, I'm 17 years old, My favorite color is purple and I'm pretty sad about leaving Florida, but hopefully this move is positive... I need something good to happen because these last couple of months have been nothing but bad news...

Dear diary,

I've been trying my hardest to keep a smile on my face but my mom's gone I'm going to have to face that... Fighting depression at this point, hopefully I meet some friends at my new school so I can finally leave this hell hole I call a home!

Dear diary,

School has actually been better than I thought. I met a bunch of new people, but there's this one girl I think we would get along very well. Her name is Shaneeka, she is very chill I like how we vibe together. I can't wait until tomorrow so we can chill again.

Dear diary,

I totally forgot about you. So much new stuff have been happening. There's this guy Damarcus, we been talking for a couple months and he asked me to be his girlfriend today. Shaneeka and her boyfriend, Jamal, are coming with us on our first date to the movies. It's going to be lit! I hope I get my first kiss.

Dear diary,

I'm starting to feel as if Damarcus is up to something. He hasn't been spending as much time with me anymore and I'm starting to suspect It's someone else, but I might just be overthinking. I don't want to lose him... Oh and before I forget Shaneeka has been acting distant too! I feel as if I have nobody in this world. Life was so great when I first started my new school and if I lose Damarcus I'll lose myself.

Dear diary,

So turns out I was right. Damarcus and Shaneeka have been sneaking behind my back spending mostly every weekend with each other. They met up at the same spot for the past couple weeks. I've been watching

them for weeks and they were kissing so much that they didn't even see me! My own best friend! It's okay though revenge is a BITCH!

Dear diary,

So Damarcus and I have been trying for months to have a baby and we finally made it happen. So the day my son was born, Jamal, Shaneeka and of course Damarcus was all in the room. Damarcus was crying tears of joy. I was crying tears of laughter. Shaneeka said to me "Best friend! What's so funny?" I told her "because he looks just like his daddy." Shaneeka said "Mm not so much to me." She then had me laughing even harder when the doctor came into have me sign the birth certificate. I said that I'm going to name him after his daddy... Jamal Jr.

TO BE CONTINUED....

Austynn Martinson

High School Short Story

Untitled

It was winter of 1975. 18-year-old John Witherspoon stood alone on the street corner, waiting for the bus that would take him to the nearest pharmacy. John's life without a low. He was currently homeless, had no family, and when starving every day. He didn't see a point of return for himself, and decided it was time to end it. When the bus rolled up in front of him, he took a seat, sat quietly and counted the change he was going to use to buy the pills that would end his life. The bus route to a stop and John got off to enter the pharmacy. He walked into a random mile; grab the bottle with the longest name, and turn to walk to the counter. Suddenly his whole world turned upside down. Before him stood the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

"Well that we all today, sir?" She asked him to delegate voice preparing to ringtone app. John was at a loss for words... He felt something he never felt before, and began to reconsider his situation. Did he really want to do this when he could have even a small chance at happiness? He looked down at the pills that held so much power, and set them down on the counter. He then looked back up and the woman and said 5 words that made all the difference.

"No, I don't need these." He stuttered for a second, trying to think of a way to express what he was feeling, whatever this was. His mind went blank, and he was at a loss for words. "I'm John... And you are?"

"Stephanie. Have I seen around here before?" she questioned, as imaginary sparks flew between them.

"No, it's my first time here. Are you in school?" John replied, slowly gaining back his train of thought. The empty store set a mood that was perfect for John to impress her.

"No, I graduated last year." Stephanie answered; blood rushing to her cheeks as the man in front of her open his mouth to speak again.

"Hey you're holding up the line!" "It seems as though the store was empty after all. Embarrassed, John turned and mumbled an apology to the man behind him.

"Stephanie, I would love to continue this conversation. Could we possibly meet somewhere?" John was desperate to see this woman again, and he made a vow to himself not to take no for an answer.

"My shift ends at 8. Could we meet at the café down the street then?" It was a plan. John nodded, and stepped out of the line. He turned to look at Stephanie once more and ran out of the pharmacy. He

used his change to buy a new pair of shoes, and clean himself up in the bathroom of restaurant. He walks to the café, ready to see the nice woman again. Stephanie and John had a wonderful conversation, and John knew she was the one.

Could we meet at the café down the street then? “It was a plan. John nodded, and stepped out of the line. He turned to look at Stephanie once more and ran out of the pharmacy. He used his change to buy a new pair of shoes, and clean himself up in the bathroom of restaurant. He walks to the café, ready to see the nice woman again. Stephanie and John had a wonderful conversation, and John knew she was the one.

This became routine. Two would meet up at the café at 8 PM sharp, the café that John would then acquire a job up. For three years, John worked at the café and Stephanie work in the pharmacy, they fell in love more, and more each time they saw each other. Stephanie was John’s first... First friend, first kiss, first love. But, she was his second chance.

Fast forward to spring of 1983. John and Stephanie stand at the altar with Stephanie’s family and John’s friends watching. They kiss to seal the deal of the unconditional love. John and Stephanie with her fast-forward to spring of 1983. John and Stephanie stand at the altar with Stephanie’s family and John’s friends watching. They kiss to seal the deal of the unconditional love. John and Stephanie Witherspoon go home, to their two-bedroom house.

It is now fall of ‘85. John stands next to Stephanie’s hospital bed holding her hand as his child is born. A beautiful baby girl, who would come to be the second love of John’s life. For the next 18 years, John becomes the father he never had.

Stephanie and John live their lives together, growing old with one and more in love. Their daughter graduates, leaves home, falls in love and start a family of her own. Now grandparents, the two couldn’t be more happy. They thought nothing could ruin what they had with each other. Until the day at Sunrise hospital when the doctor breaks the news of the tumor growing on Stephanie’s left lung.

Chemotherapy was rough, leaving Stephanie drained and weak.

John stayed with her, never leaving her side as the life is pulled out of her. Two years past, and Stephanie is left weak and lifeless. For the second time, John stands next to her hospital bed holding her hand.

A tear streamed slowly down her face. Stephanie looked at John with such passion you could hardly tell she was on her deathbed.

“John, my love. Please don’t forget about me.”

“Oh Stephanie. How could I? You saved my life those many years ago. I’m just sorry I couldn’t repay the favor.” John whispers, squeezing her hand as a sign of reassurance. John prepares himself, as he can feel his beautiful wife fading. The monitor next to them began to beep slower and slower. Stephanie mumbled something, faint but audible.

“I love you, John.”

“I love you too, Stephanie.” The monitor lets out a single tone, and John feel Stephanie’s hand go limp. Stephanie was gone, and after so

many years, John was alone.

John wipes away his tears, after crying silently for a while. He walks out of the hospital, into the snow of the night. He holds a single flower, one from the dozens that were next to Stephanie's bed. He sits on the bench outside of his wife's death place. He sits, holding a single flower, and looks back on the day the woman behind the counter saved his life.

Wanna Play a Game?

I woke up chained to a heavy iron chair; the room was filled with metal. I was clueless to where I was, the windows were covered as if I was in a doomsday shelter. I hear a man's voice in the distance summoning me.

"Kevin," called a voice.

I searched impatiently for the source of the sound. I come across a small monitor located in the corner of the room. A man appears onto the screen.

"Welcome Kevin." said the man.

"Where am I?" I asked repeatedly

"This is an automated recording, made just for you." the man continued. "My name is Limb and I have a task for you."

I fought my way out of my chains, ignoring the recording. A deed I would soon regret. My wrist was bleeding, but I bolted. I looked for a door, an exit, anything that could take me out of that place. I hear the recording stop talking, I knew I was running out of time.

"You shouldn't have done that, Kevin." I hear the recording say.

I hear a latch open and then footsteps. I had nowhere to hide, nowhere to run to, I was trapped. Two men grab me; I feel a pinch at my neck. My body suddenly becomes limp. They hold me down, chain me back to the chair and lay me onto the ice-cold floor. They take my foot, I can no longer fight back, they slit off my pinky toe. All I see is blood, I have no reaction and I can feel nothing.

Moments later, Limb comes back onto monitor.

"I have taken your toe in return for trying to escape. Congratulations, you've won the first game."

"Game?" I ask in confusion.

"You obviously didn't listen to the recording; you were too busy trying to leave" Limb answers.

"You must win three games in order to leave. Now, we will play would you rather. I'll go first."

At this point, I'm terrified. I know that this will not just be a regular game of would you rather.

Limb continues, "Would you rather cut your wrist or eat a roach?"

I pause, as I know he will make me do whatever I choose.

Suddenly, I hear the sound of roaches maneuvering their way outside of the metal door.

The sound of the rancid creatures give me chills, as I am frozen in disgust.

“Your answer, Kevin?”

“I’ll pass,” I answered hesitantly. “I will not do either.”

“Will not? Hmm, I won’t make you, but I will say you lose this game.”

I sit in silence, staring at the monitor, waiting anxiously to hear the next game.

“Truth or dare is the game we shall play, lose the game and you are bound to stay.” Limb announced proudly.

“I have to find a way out of here,” I thought to myself.

“Can’t go anywhere if I’m starving though.”

We played truth or dare for what felt like hours. Back and forth, we answer questions. I suppose Limb had gotten bored of me, the monitor shut off and things went silent. A latch opened and a black tray filled with mush slides towards me. The monitor clicks back on.

“Eat; you’ve been here for days without food.” Limb tells me.

“Days?” I answer.

“Just eat.”

The monitor clicks off again. I begin to pick through the mush, I discovered that although it looks disgusting, it tastes quite delicious. I quickly devour the “food” and just as I’m taking the last bite, the monitor begins to project a loud screeching sound. Limb appears onto the screen.

“Good wasn’t it? Welp, I hate to tell you, but your food was laced.”

My eyes widen and my chin drops. All I can think about is my death and how this horrible place would go from a torture chamber to a murder scene.

“Calm down, you do have an option. Cut your stomach and get the anti-poison, or basically die here on the floor. Your decision.”

I can no longer think straight, I can feel my heartbeat in my throat. I’m indecisive on whether I should let myself die and leave this place, or live and possibly go back home.

“Bring me a knife.” I said demandingly.

A knife slides through the room and lands at my feet. I pick it up and notice that it’s dull. Hesitantly, I press it to my stomach and press as hard as I can. This time, I feel everything. I yell for I am in excruciating pain. Blood begins to gush from the gash that is now in my abdomen. The monitor clicks back on and I yell.

“Let me out of this hell hole!”

“Calm down,” Limb says “take your anti-poison.”

“I want out of here!”

“Win one more game and I’ll let you leave. You have impressed me greatly.”

I know at this point, I don't have the strength to continue. I must form an escape plan; I grabbed the chain to the shackles and began scratching the floor.

After cutting my stomach, it felt like days before Limb came back. I

would tear my clothes to rewrap my wounds; I would soon run out of fabric. I tear off my left pant leg, as I hear the monitor click back on.

“How are you doing? Never mind, I don’t care. We’re playing the knife game, I’ll be in later”

I wait patiently, until I hear the latch open. I quickly slide my chains across the floor to catch it before it closed.

“You still have your knife, I suppose” Limb said as he motioned towards my abdomen.

He began to start the game.

“I have all my fingers, the knife goes chop, chop, chop.” he sang as he stabbed the spaces between his fingers.

He then stabs one of his fingers and groans in agony. He motions that it’s my turn. I begin.

“I have all my fingers, the knife goes chop, chop, ch-”

I lean towards Limb and stab him in his sternum. I pull on my chains, and break loose. I run out of the latch. I hear an alarm in the distance.

“Kevin, time to wake up. You’re going to be late for school.”

Andy Orozco

High School Short Story

The End

Sometimes I get really bad nightmares but every time I pinch myself I don't wake up. My mom is a very optimistic person. She can seek and find hope even in the worst situations. My father on the other hand thinks the world is going to end, which is also part of the reason I'm freaking out. Being with my mom soothes me. She helps me find the hope she had with her. Usually when I'm anxious I go for a walk, but how can i go for a walk, when anyone can kill me at any moment. Looking out the window will have to do for now. As I look out my window I start to notice nothing seems to move. Everything looks so calm and quiet. There's usually a lot of noise in the city, but now there's not a single sound, or a person walking by. There isn't even a single bird in the sky.

I still can't get through my mind, how is it that just last week everything was normal and now nothing is the same. Why did it have to happen today? Why out of the blue with no warning. I can hear the newsmen saying,

“Everyone is in danger; please proceed with caution because there is no more government to protect you.”

He said it so seriously, it didn't even seem like he felt any concern for what he just said. Everything just seemed to get quieter as time passed.

I'm Carlos and I'm just a regular kid that goes to high school. But the story I'm about to tell is worth more than any treasure in the world. This story is a quite unique story, it's the story on how I survived the end.

For the next week we ate the food in the house. All of it. We were running low on supplies, water was running short too. We knew sooner or later we were going to have to leave the house to go find food. We searched all over the city, we encountered a lot of people. Some were nice people, others tried to steal from us. My dad was armed, so it wasn't going to be easy taking our stuff.

As we roamed through the city, we saw that most houses and stores were all destroyed and stolen. Eventually we found a storage lot. I was full of food and water. We quickly filled the car and we took as much as we could. As we were leaving Jousk, the owner of the lot, spotted us and quickly started to chase us. He chased all the way to our house. Luckily, my dad had a lot of weapons in the house, so we just waited for Jousk to show up. Jousk was with four other men. They seemed to work for him because they did everything he would tell them to do. When he was here,

he started shooting the house and my dad fired back. The shootout lasted for 5 minutes straight. No one was hurt. My dad though Jousk ran out of ammo, so he walked outside with a rifle. As soon as he took a step out of the door I heard a gunshot, but it wasn't my dad's rifle. It was a pistol shot by Jousk. I saw my dad laying on the floor, lifeless. My mind was full of thoughts that I couldn't keep up with. I was so furious but I still felt sad. MY mother told me to start running to the woods to get away from Jousk. We took as much as we could and headed for the woods. On our walk to the woods, I still felt horrible. I knew I had to get revenge and I knew I had to kill Jousk. But my priority at the time was to find shelter.

It was a lot easier to survive in the woods. There wasn't many people here, and the few people that were here let us stay with them. They taught me how to survive in the wild. I learned how to hunt, fish, and how to start a fire with a rock and a pocketknife. I told them how Jousk killed my father and when they heard his name their faces filled with horror as if they just saw a ghost. Turns out my dad wasn't the only one killed by Jousk. I also told them how I was looking forward to getting revenge one day. I asked them for their help but they were scared. With a few motivational speeches, I managed to convince them.

Our search for Jousk lasted 28 days and 27 nights. By the 28th night, we found his new shelter. It was a little cabin and had three guys outside armed. They took turns guarding the cabin and Jousk was inside sleeping. Getting inside to kill him wasn't going to be a walk in the park. We killed the three guards successfully and luckily, no one seemed to notice inside. We waited for the other guard inside to come out for his turn. He was killed quickly too. We rushed in the cabin and killed Jousk without hesitation. He didn't know what hit him. We also took all his supplies and decided to keep the cabin too. When we told everyone else the news, they all cheered and they celebrated with a huge feast. They didn't have to worry about Jousk anymore. We lived in peace for the next year until a new government was made. The world is going to slowly go back to the way it was. We have a story to tell now. The story on how we survived the end.

Loud Voices in Quiet Places

My mother always told me to ignore what the voices said. To just block them out and keep the positive vibes flowing. For years, I did as she said. I ignored the voices to the best of my ability. By “the best of my ability”, I mean, letting them influence my eating habits which caused me to develop anorexia nervosa and also allowing them to influence my relationships with others.

Out of fear, I always broke it off with those I was closest with. Even with Quinn. Although, I really do regret how I did it. I can't believe I did such things to the only person I could trust and even call a friend.

I remember it like it was yesterday. It started out like this...

Quinn and I would hang out every single day. She'd walk home from school with me, stay at my house for a few hours then ride the city bus home.

Anytime I was with her, the voices would always say horrible things to me.

“She's only here because she pities you.”

“She doesn't like you; she thinks you're annoying and weird.”

“She talks about you behind your back. She says such mean things.”

“You're such an idiot for thinking she'd ever actually be friends with a freak like you!”

“You know she secretly hates you so quit pretending and do something about it already.”

I know it wasn't true but hearing it every time I was around her, I started to think it was true. I gave into their lies.

I spent endless nights thinking of what I would should do to tell her we couldn't be friends anymore. I thought about breaking it off and saying I just don't feel the connection anymore. I also tried coming up with reasons why we couldn't be friends but there were none. My anxiety ended up getting the best of me and I came to the conclusion that the only way to do this was to kill her. Such poor choices, I know, but I'd do anything to get the voices to stop.

I invited Quinn to stay over a Friday night at my house. She slept in my bed. I slept on the floor.

In all honesty, I didn't sleep. I was so overcome with anxiety and fear that I spent the night balled up into fetal position crying and muttering, “I don't want to do this”.

By the time morning came, I had made Quinn a lovely last meal.

One egg, sunny side up. Two slices of turkey bacon. A piece of buttered toast with raspberry jam spread across it.

I had brought the food up to my room and gave her a good time to eat while we sat together and watched morning cartoons on my television.

I still remember the smile on her face when I came in with the tray of food. She had said, “Oh gosh, Zander, you really didn’t have to do this! Thank you so much, you’re the best,” before taking a huge bite out of the toast.

Her eyes were black, not soulless nor lifeless. Instead, they were like two pristine stones of onyx that lit up with a purple flare when touched by candle light. As she stared at me with her lips curved up into a smile, I almost teared up. How could I kill such an angel?

After Quinn had eaten, she dressed herself in a pale gray dress paired with black tights that had obviously been worn way too many times for they had holes all over, and a pair of boots. Her long black hair had been pinned up and matched with a small, black rose pin.

“I have a gift for you.” I had said in such a soft tone that she barely heard me.

“What is it?” Quinn had asked while biting her bottom lip. It was something she’d subconsciously do.

“You’ll see,” I had said with a small smile as I pulled out a small, black box from one of my dresser drawers. I opened it to reveal an opal pendant with a golden chain.

“Oh my god. It’s beautiful! Thank you so much Zander, I love it!” Quinn had exclaimed.

“You’re welcome Quinn,” I mumbled as I chained it around her delicate neck and hugged her from behind. I breathed in slowly, letting her scent fill my nostrils. She smelled like peaches and cream and I loved it.

“Thank you, really Zander. This means a lot to me.” She whispered as I had continued to hug her.

This was going to be harder than I thought it’d be.

I led her to the forest close to my home. We had walked a few miles into the forest to a secluded spot, which was where I did it.

I told her, “Let’s play a game. You close your eyes and I’ll hide.” She happily agreed. She had loved playing such kiddish games.

She counted to 20 very slowly. In the meantime, I searched for a large stone.

“19...20!” She looked around for a moment and as she started to stand up, I struck her with the stone, which had immediately knocked the lightweight girl out.

I had dragged her to a clearing in the area and stabbed her repeatedly in the chest. Blood splattered all over my clothes and my face but I didn’t care, I just wanted the voices to stop. I finished the job by slitting her throat.

It was a clean cut, right through her soft skin just barely exposing the bone, but it left a bloody mess. It oozed out of her as if the blood

were a slow moving river lazily guiding itself down the path that was her neck.

Before I had left, I hid her behind some rocks and covered her up with leaves and twigs, hoping no one would be able to notice it was the former body of my best friend. I had changed and went back home, pretending everything was normal. Although, I knew it wasn't.

It's been weeks since I killed her and I'm so overcome with guilt. The voices won't stop. They continuously tell me how "I shouldn't have done it". That "the police are going to find me and lock me up". That I'm a "murderer". One voice in particular has been whispering to me that I should kill myself. That the police won't find me if I'm dead. I mean, I'm better off dead anyways.

I think, I'm going to do it. I pull out a pen and paper and neatly scratch down what is to be my suicide note.

"Dear loved ones,

I hate to leave on such short notice like this but I've decided I can't handle this pain anymore. My dearest mother, I'm so sorry for how much pain I've caused you. Hopefully this can end your suffering as well as mine. Tell the police that I killed her. Her body is hidden a few miles into the forest near our house under some leaves. I hope you all can forgive me for such a crime I've committed. I just can't handle this anymore. The voices have become too much to handle and I've become so overcome with guilt that I decided to leave. I love you all so dearly and I wish you a good life. Goodbye. ♥"

I take the blade of my knife I used to kill Quinn, climb into my bathtub, and run a warm bath. As the tub fills up, I close the curtain and cut deep slits down my wrists. I watch as the blood flows from my wrists and drip into the water, turning it a deep shade of red. I turn the water off and slowly drag the blade across my neck, taking a deep breath as I slip out of consciousness into a deep sleep, for eternity.

Hailey Rodriguez

High School Short Story

Untitled

“Luke! You're sixteen years old. I'm still legally your mother, young man. So you're still going.” My Mother exclaimed as I let out a long groan. I look out the window since I no longer want to stay on this topic. About thirty minutes after my Mom's small outburst, we come to a slow. Sydney Mental Institute, it read. After my Mom comes to full complete stop, I step out of the car and leave her to her own silence. Outside, the only sound to be heard was the crunch of gravel under my feet. I reach the steps in no time. Of course my mom would park the closest to the entrance, I thought to myself as I turn around to see my mom locking the doors. I speed-walk my way up the stairs and to the main doors. I put my hand on the handle, but it doesn't bulge. I laugh and turn to my Mother, “See! They don't want me here either!” My Mom is about to say something when we here a loud thump followed by a creek behind me. We both look at the same time, my smile going away almost immediately. We see a small nurse beckoning us to come in.

Then, almost as fast as a blink of an eye, my Mom starts to apologize for my behavior. What did I do? The inside is super cold with an eerie smell to it compared to outside. My Mom fills out the paperwork so I go sit down on the chairs. Next to me, there is a young girl probably around the age of ten wearing work clothes. She turns to me and smiles, “Hi, are you new here?” I nod, “If you are, beware of the medicine room.” she whispers then looks forward and stays quiet.

Surprisingly my Mom finishes the paperwork fast. She walks over to me and hugs me tight. “I love you, son. This is to help you, not to break you. Maybe you will learn something out of this place.” Then she turns and walks out with a bang of the door. After a few moments of awkward silence later, the nurse starts to explain to me about the rules, but I tone her voice out and think. What could I have done to make my Mom leave me in this place? I was a perfect child, I had okay grades in school, I cleaned, I was a gentleman she raised me to be. What did I do wrong? I was brought out of my thoughts by the sound of my name. “Mr. Hemmings, are you here with us?” I looked at the lady speaking to me, “Good to have you back Mr. Hemmings.” Mind telling me what you were thinking about? I shake my head no and say, “No. Not really.” there is a pause of tension in the air. “Well then Mr. Hemmings, I'm Dr. Harrison. I will be your personal medicine doctor. I, and only I, will give you your dosage of medicine when I feel the need to give you it, ok?”

She tells me with dominance in her voice. I nod. She then led me to a room, but didn't walk in.

Rather than let me in, she kept me out. She was talking but I was only hearing half of what she said. It felt as she was doing something to my brain. This is why I don't like girls, I think to myself, they get in your head. I came back to Earth when I heard her sigh. "Well Mr. Hemmings, I think it's time for your first dosage. You keep spacing out. I have the perfect medicine for you." she says with a smirk. Then I get dragged into the room. Inside is so bright it takes a moment for my eyes to adjust. I secretly wished they never did. When they do adjust to the lighting, my stomach takes a toll for the worst. Inside there were five stretchers, three of them already being used for three boys. The three boys looked pale and had blue-tinted lips. They were hooked onto so many wires. On their arms, legs.... Everything was covered in needles and a blue liquid going through. I can feel my face lose its color. I go to scream but instead feel a sharp prick to my neck. I struggle to keep my eyes open for at least a little bit more. Then darkness consumes me.

I wake up to a bright light shined in my face. It takes a while for my eyes to adjust, but when they do, I see I'm in another room with the three boys that were on the stretchers. The one with pink hair spoke first, "Hi! I'm Mikey." I see he has hazel-green eyes. I think he is naturally pale. "I'm Calum." a boy says with little enthusiasm. Calum is very tan with brown hair and a blonde streak through it. He has soft brown eyes and a little button nose. "And I'm Ashton." a taller, more fitter boy speaks. Ashton has curls rounding his face with brown eyes speckled with green flecks. "I'm Luke. So... what is this room?" I say getting a better look around. "This is the punishment room. You come here when you resist your meds. But they still give it to you just when you're knocked the f-", "MIKEY! DON'T SWEAR!" Ashton yells at Mikey. His yells echo across the room. "Sorry. I don't condone cussing." Ashton looks at me reassuringly. I smile and nod at him. "So why are you here in the place, mate?" Calum looks at Ashton, "If you don't mind me asking." "It's fine. I'm here because of my depression and self-harm. You guys?" I say with a question in my tone. "I'm here for the same thing as you. Mikey's here because he goes into a thing called headspace. Headspace is when you change your thoughts into a younger self. His headspace age is around 4-5. He hasn't gone into headspace for some time, though. We think his doctor; Dr. Harrison that is, has changed his meds." Ashton rambles as I look to Mikey with a sad look. "Calum here suffers from what our society calls it 'Being Gay'", Ashton finishes. Calum puts a hard look on his face, "Our society is stupid. I'm not mental just because i'm gay. Mikey isn't mental. He can control it, and so can you both with your depression. We aren't mental." Calum completes his speech with a look of disgust. "We can leave", says Mikey in a small voice. "Before our next dosage. We can go out the doors. Yes, they are hard to open, but with us four we can make it open faster than one." he says with more confidence. "When they come in, act like the

label they put on you. That should get us to the medicine room, which is the closest to the doors.” he stop talking when he sees the door open.

“Boys! Glad to see you awake. Guess what time it is?” Dr. Harrison says in a singsong voice. “I think it's time for another dosage! It's been so long. Let's go boys!” she motions for someone outside the door to come in. Those someone's were four male nurses. They come in and grab each one of us. I see that each of them have three syringes filled in each pocket. I get the boys attention and they stop fighting instantly. They look where I was pointing to. They nod and reach for them. Surprisingly, they get their hands on at least two of them. I grab all three. Inside the medicine room, they start to strap us down. That's when Mikey starts to thrash around and scream. Our nurses leave us and go to Mikey. The other two boys look at me. Now, I mouth. They get out of the stretchers and get the nurses in the neck. I hear a gasp and turn around. There is Dr. Harrison with her hand on her mouth. She looks at me, then the boys. That's when she charges. Instinctively I duck out of the way. I fumble with two syringes. When she reaches me, I squeal and poke her with both, immediately putting her down. The boys crowd around me and poke me with their fingers. “C'mon Luke. Let's go while we can.”, I nod not pinpointing the exact person who spoke.

Next thing I can comprehend we are running down the hallways. We all head towards the main doors, with hope that they will open with ease. We turn a corner and see the door. Ashton presses for it, and it opens. We are all shocked it didn't budge and be hard to open. “Come on guys, let's go.” Mikey says, nudging us. We all ran left side of the building. After about twenty minutes of pure running, my legs were killing me. Apparently so were the others as well. “So... whose parents are we going to? We can't wander the streets after just leaving that place.” Ashton remarked, worry tracing his tone. “Let's go to my place. I haven't lived with my parents for quite some time before they put me in there. My place is big enough for all of us and, all my money is there.” Calum said, hope covered his eyes. “We could start all over.” I said slowly, “we could start to be normal, get jobs, be ourselves again. But with this, we could be more.” Everyone agreed. We all started walking to Cal's house and in about fifteen minutes, we were there. Ashton sat on the floor while the rest of us sat on the couch. “Here's to a new life, boys.” Ash said while raising his hands.

Brandon Sanchez

High School Short Story

Dear Daniel

My name is Zack Lucero, I'm 26 and live in New York. I think I'm going insane or he's coming to get me. I don't think I have much time before it... or he gets me. I can hear him breaking and destroying everything in my living room. Trying to contact him or it was a mistake. Now I've got to pay the consequences. You should probably know what I'm talking about now that I've calmed down and stopped panicking. I never believed in the paranormal or anything like that by the way. As a kid, I was always prone to sleep paralysis and I would have an episode at least once a week. As I got older, my episodes started becoming less and less common and eventually it went away. The night I meet it or him I was having an episode, which was unusual. I was laying face up in my bed. My room was almost dark but still had a bit of light shining in from the outside. I couldn't really see anything in my room but I slowly started to make out the figure of a small boy near my black computer chair. I was in utter shock and disbelief at what I was looking at. The boy turned and looked directly at me. The next 4 seconds felt like 4 hours. He stared at me with his soulless black eyes. I couldn't move or say anything. Out of nowhere, he started slowly moving towards me. As he got closer I realized that he had a his left side of his head missing. I wanted out of this episode fast. He finally reached the base of my bed and looked directly at me. He gave out the creepiest child giggle. He was enjoying this, he enjoyed taunting me and seeing me like this. He slowly opened his mouth and revealed sharp jagged teeth. He lunged at me and I woke up. My clock read 3:05 A.M.. I clearly remembered going to sleep at 3:04 A.M. What felt like forever really only happened in the matter of a minute. I scanned my room and there was no trace of him. He was gone. My bed felt wet. I was sweating like crazy and I also wet the bed.

Last night I got no sleep thanks to him. I had to go to work early, so I started my morning routine. I fed my cats, took a shower, and made my bed. While I was making my bed, I felt something ushering me to look over to the black computer chair. I tried not to, in fear of seeing him again, but curiosity got the best of me. I looked over but for whatever reason I started to walk over the chair. Once I was near the chair I felt like someone was there with me. I got up and left to work. I didn't want to think about it. On my way to work i usually pass a parking garage that is always filled to brim with car, but today the garage was empty and closed out. I found this strange but I left it at that. I got off of work and

started walking home. I passed the parking garage again. I felt something ushering me to look inside. I went over the window and took my phone. I took a picture and bolted home. Once I got home, I locked my doors and made sure my house was clear. I opened up my phone and examined the photo. In the photo, there was a black computer chair in the middle of the garage and I could make out the figure of a boy in the corner of the photo. I looked exactly like him. I was speechless and scared. I didn't want to think about this any more so I turned off my phone and went to bed. I was having a very vivid dream that night. I remembered that in the dream, I was in a grocery store and this lady came up to me saying "you've meet Daniel haven't you?" At first, I was confused but then I remembered the boy I was saw in my episode. The lady went on to say "Daniel likes to play a lot. He sadly died in a car accident and now he just wanders around. If you ever see him again you could ask him 2 questions by saying dear Daniel. If you ask him a 3rd he'll kill you". I wanted to say something back but then I woke up. It was broad daylight outside. I was shook up from my dream but I brushed it off. The next month or so went normal until I meet... him again. I was having another episode and there he was again standing near my computer chair. I suddenly remembered what the lady had told me. I asked, "Dear Daniel are you coming after me only. " No" he whispered. "Dear Daniel why me?" I asked. What he said still shocks me. He said, "I'm trapped in a maze with no prize at end, I've been following around sounds and light trying to escape this maze, yet I could never escape. You played right into my hands though. Did you think you found out about me for a reason? For some special meaning? I go after those who don't believe. There's only one way out. So good luck because my game begins now". He slowly got up and started walking at me. I remembered that I had my phone next to me. I had enough strength in my hands to pick up phone. Once I got my phone, I opened the camera and started going nuts on the camera. He noticed what I was doing and he lunged at me. I suddenly woke up. I immediately check my camera roll and see dozens of black photos, but in one of them you could see him clear as day. All this time I wanted to believe that he wasn't real. I heard something coming from my kitchen. I lunged up and ran towards the kitchen. I stood there in utter shock. My kitchen table was somehow cut in half. I was confused and angry. I suddenly heard something come from the window outside of my kitchen. Just for reference, my apartment is on the very top of my complex and it's connected to the roof, so if anyone would be up there they must've been on the roof. Now that I was sure, I heard something I built up enough courage to look outside the window. As I looked around I saw nothing but then in the corner of my eye i saw him. He had pure black eyes with white little pupils. I jumped back and tried to run to my living room. Before I could run, everything got silent and then all hell broke loose. Daniel started destroying everything and throwing everything. I ran into my room and tried to hide. That's where I am currently typing this. I'm going to try and stop him. But I don't think I

have much time. If you find this, please spread the word on Daniel. Goodbye...”

On November 12, 2017, the NYPD found this following report after the noise complaint from neighbor. The NYPD had to forcefully make their way into the apartment. The apartment was found in shambles. Furniture was destroyed, drawers were open, and doors were destroyed. After an hour of onsite investigation, no one or nothing could be found. The only thing found was the following report and another document that will stay confidential for now. Also Zack Lucero, the tenant, has gone missing and has not yet been found. There's been a hand full of reports of him walking around near an abandoned parking garage at around 3:05 A.M. Those who see him claim that he has pitch black eyes with tiny white pupils. They also claim to hear the laughter of a little boy.

Inspired by the tweets of Adam Ellis

And She Bathes in Moonlight

HERE LIES DAVID DUNBAR
THE BLASPHEMER 1827-1869

I ran my fingers over the carvings burned into the board with a branding iron. My fingertips were covered in a thin layer of dust and ash. When I rubbed them together, the soot fell away. I turned to Mrs. Bowman. She was looking around, eyes wide.

We were not in a graveyard, despite the many graves. There were no fences or actual stone monuments, only boards added long after the death of their owner. This was the place where they buried the sinners and heretics. They did not deserve a proper burial.

Some of the graves had been dug up by animals and robbers. Coffins lay exposed, the wood bleached by the desert sun beating down on them. Mrs. Bowman reached down to one of the graves next to us and threw dirt over an uncovered corner of a coffin next to her.

HERE LIES POPPY BENNETT
THE IMP 1832-1840

Mrs. Bowman wiped her eyes on her sleeve, sniffing. I knelt down next to her. "What's wrong, Mrs. Bowman?" I asked. "She was just a child..." Mrs. Bowman said, staring at the wooden monument.

"What happened to her?" I said after a long silence. She put her hand on the dirt above the coffin, closing her eyes. She was quiet for a moment.

"Her mother took her to church, and in front of everybody, Poppy cursed God's name. She was sentenced to drown." Mrs. Bowman sighed, taking her hand back. "They all died in such a way. This place is full of their energies." She looked to me. "They are quite interested in you. I suppose they can smell your maledictum."

"Is she the one we're looking for?" I asked. Mrs. Bowman shook her head.

"No. She is much too young. Too innocent to cause such despondency." She stood, moving to the next grave, while still looking around. "I feel hundreds of spirits here. There are not nearly enough grave markers for all of them."

“Some weren’t written in the town logs. Only the ones who were documented have gotten headstones.” I looked at David Dunbar’s grave, standing slightly tipped to the side. This wasn’t a headstone, this was a joke. “What if she’s one of the one’s without headstones?”

“We shall find her, dear, either way.” Mrs. Bowman ran her hands over the top of another grave.

HERE LIES THOMAS WHENREY
THE HOMOSEXUAL 1824-1854

“Although it might take a while, we must keep looking. For both of your sakes.” She stepped away from the grave. I followed close behind, hands in my pockets. She stooped down to cover another coffin, before flinching back. “This one wishes to speak to you.” She looked up at me. “Do you know anyone by the name of Monroe?”

“No,” I answered. Mrs. Bowman looked between the grave and I, considering.

HERE LIES RHETT MONROE
THE THIEF 1830-1857

“Will you speak with him?” Mrs. Bowman asked. She must have seen the hesitant look on my face, because she continued: “If you wish not to, it is fine. He is a forgiving man, and understands your apprehension.”

“I will.” I sat in the dirt, next to Mrs. Bowman. “What will he have to say?”

“I do not know.” Mrs. Bowman pursed her lips. “It is surprising that one reached out to you. Many apprentices cannot start a proper séance on their first try.”

“Really?” I asked, surprised.

“Is this your first time speaking to the spirits?”

“No, not the first. They were the ones who told me to come to you.” I responded.

“The spirits knew of the curse?” She asked.

“They were under it too. My family.” I swallowed. “They died before they could lift it.”

“I apologize.” Mrs. Bowman said. She looked at the grave again. “Knock on the dirt, in the shape of a triangle. It will bring Mr. Monroe into this realm long enough to speak with you.” I obeyed, before closing my eyes. I felt a cool breeze caress the side of my face, as if someone had walked past me, and opened my eyes once again.

In front of me sat a young man, with wide eyes under a pair of tortoise-shell glasses. He had soft features; smooth skin, opaque green eyes, brown hair in a puft of curls. He smiled sweetly, his head cocked as he looked at me. After a moment, he stuck out a hand. I noticed his unusual pallor. It was clear that he was not alive. “Rhett.” I shook his hand.

“Lace.” I said. He grinned.

“A beautiful name.” Rhett said, sitting back. “Can I ask why a lady such as yourself would spend her youth digging around in grave yards?”

“A woman buried here placed a curse upon my family.” I sighed.

“We all die before we can reach age thirty.”

“That’s rather rude. Why would she do that?”

“I’m related to an executioner. He put hundreds of people to death in the name of the law.” I scoffed. “I’m surprised there’s only one curse on us. He was a dick.”

“You came here to have it removed then?” Rhett asked.

“Yes, I did. Mrs. Bowman, you spoke to her, is a psychic. She knows how to do it.”

“A lovely woman.” Rhett smiled. “Very courteous.

“Why did you wish to speak with me?” I asked. He thought for a moment.

“Death is lonely.” He furrowed his brow. “I hope it isn’t any inconvenience. I thought you looked lost.”

“Of course not.” I said. I looked around the graveyard. Mrs. Bowman was nowhere to be seen. “Can I ask you something?”

“Certainly.”

“Do you know of a young woman buried here?”

Rhett was silent, considering. “There are at least eight, by my count.”

“This one is angry. She would disturb your rest, quite often.” I indicated the corner of the coffin still sticking out from the ground. “I imagine she kicks up dust and screams.”

“That sounds quite familiar, actually.” Rhett nodded. “I’ll tell you, in exchange for a favor.” I nodded, leaning forward anxiously. “Would you be willing to take my bones with you when you leave?”

“Why?” I sat up straight. The soul and the body are so closely linked; taking any single piece of a corpse could prove fatal if the spirit were angry enough. They normally did not ask for you to take their bones.

“I need you to burn them. Not here, though. I cannot stay in this God-forsaken town anymore. Burn my bones, and I’ll be free to roam the earth.” He rolled his eyes and grimaced. “It is a simple request. You will be doing me a great service.”

I deliberated my options, which were not large in number. If I didn’t, I would have to spend days, maybe even weeks looking for the woman. I slowly nodded. Rhett grinned, and pointed to the far North side of the graveyard, where a single plank of wood stood. “That is her; the one you are looking for.”

“Thank you,” I said, and Rhett stood. He helped me to my feet.

“It was nice to meet you.” He chuckled, and looked to his coffin. “I do hope you will keep your word. If not, I’ll have to haunt you, and I am a busy man.” I laughed, and when I blinked, he was gone. I stood back in the regular world, my hands reaching out, touching nothing.

Mrs. Bowman stood behind, staring down at the grave in front of her and whispering under her breath. It was a moment before she noticed that I had returned.

“How was he?” She asked with a smile.

“He told me where she is.” I said, and pointed to the plank to the North. “That’s her.”

“Are you quite certain?”

“He was.” Mrs. Bowman looked at the grave, walking over slowly.

“The energy is much more powerful here.” She whispered. She froze in her tracks with a wild look in her eye. “She’s here.” I looked down at the plank.

HERE LIES ELOUISE RAWLEY THE MARTYR 1820-1845

Slightly underneath was another message, scrawled in a different handwriting that somehow remained on the wood.

HANGED BY MISTAKE

My blood went cold. This was it.

I turned. In front of me stood a woman, not much older than me, with a sunken, sallow face, and grey precipices of bone sticking out all over her body. Her hair was the same stringy, dusty black as her eyes, which stared at me with an apoplectic glow. She said nothing.

“Elouise Rawley, I call on you to lift your curse upon this girl and her family!” Mrs. Bowman shouted, standing next to me. Elouise remained staring, her eyes boring claws into my soul.

“You’ve killed everyone in my family, Elouise. No one is left but me.” I tried to reason with her. “Everyone who hurt you is dead. It was a mistake, a terrible mistake, but you have killed far more many people than necessary.”

She was unmoving, unmoved, and silent.

“This will not work. She’s closed herself off.” Mrs. Bowman said. She turned to me. “You hired me to lift the curse on your family. I will complete that request, but there is one condition.”

“What is it?”

“The curse will not continue, but it will remain upon you.” Mrs. Bowman grimaced. I felt my heart drop in my chest. “I will banish Ms. Rawley, which will prevent any further iteration of the curse, but you will still die.”

“So, if I had kids, they could live?” I asked. Mrs. Bowman nodded. I swallowed, thinking. “Do it.”

With a deep inhale, Mrs. Bowman stuck out her hand. She drew a shape in the air with her finger. “Caelum enim in requiem.” she whispered. Elouise screeched, evaporating into a grey and green mist. She was carried away on the breeze, and I felt something heavy within

me dissipate, as if I had been carrying a stone in my chest all of my life. I turned to Mrs. Bowman. She nodded.

“It is done.” She turned to the graveyard. “Spirits, we thank you for allowing us to pass through your realm unharmed.” She looked back at me. “We have exited the spirit world. They seem more at peace, now that Ms. Rawley is banished.” She looked to me. “I believe you promised Mr. Monroe something. I suggest you keep your word. Spirits do not like to be tricked.” I nodded and walked over to Rhett’s grave. I began digging through the dirt with my hands. He was barely a half-foot deep, buried on uneven dirt. I pried open the coffin and found a set of bones in a splintered, molded wooden box. They were arranged in such a way that suggested that he had been tossed in without care. With shaking hands, I took up his skull. It weighed heavy in my hand, and the cool bone felt foreign to my fingertips.

“What do I do?” I asked, my voice trembling. I had taken in so much information in the past half-hour; my mind was racing to keep up.

“We will take his bones, as promised, and burn them back at my home. He shall be free.” Mrs. Bowman put a hand on my shoulder.

“We?”

“You have a talent with spirits. You have been surrounded by death, and it has left its mark on you. The spirits see you as one of them.” I stood. “It would be a shame for it to go to waste.”

I thought for a moment. Slowly, I nodded. Mrs. Bowman smiled. “Well, then.” She looked up at the sky. “The moon is high. It is near midnight. We should head back to shelter.” She began walking forward. I closed my eyes; my face turned upwards, and took a deep breath. The silver rays cast my dark shadow on the ground, surrounded by dozens of planks of black against the sand. With that, I tightened my grip around Rhett’s skull, and walked away.

The One Night

Based on a true story.

It was a nice and beautiful night and Jessie and his Mom, Dad, and Aunt were going to the airport to drop off Jessie's Mom and Aunt. When Jessie and his Dad got home to his brother and cousin, they ordered some pizza and played their ps4.

Once the time hit eleven o'clock at night, Jessie's Dad said that it was time to go to bed. Jessie asked his Dad if he could watch a movie and his Dad said yes. Just that he needed to make sure that all the lights were off and that all the doors were locked. Jessie said okay and that he would make sure that he will do it. So, then everybody else went upstairs and Jessie stayed downstairs and started to watch his movie.

Once it was over he decided to watch another. Once both movies were over the time was three o'clock and three o'clock is supposedly Devil's hour. When Jessie saw that, he got a little bit nervous because Devil's hour is to be the most haunted time of the day. Jessie then went to make sure that all the doors were locked and that all the lights were off.

Jessie then went to go upstairs and when he hit the top step, the television turned on and all that was on was static. This made Jessie stop in his tracks and turn around. Jessie stood there then finally grew enough courage to ask, "Is anyone down there?"

When there was no answer, Jessie then went downstairs to turn off the television. The second that he was able to see the television he saw standing right in front of it, a shadow figure standing there facing him. Jessie then couldn't move, no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't move. Jessie then asked the figure, "Who are you?"

Suddenly the figure started to raise its arm slowly then stopped and pointed at Jessie. Right after that Jessie then was able to move, he stood there for a second longer, and the figure slowly faded away. Jessie ran towards the remote and turned off the television. The moment the television turned off the doorbell started to go off rapidly until Jessie turned around. When Jessie looked at the door, the doorbell stopped. Jessie bolted for the door to see who was there and when he looked out the peephole on the door and saw another shadow figure standing there but this one looked like a woman. Jessie then panicked, and he went to grab the keys for the door and right when he touched the keys the

television turned on and this time there were two figures standing there both pointing at him. Jessie ran to chase down the figures, but the figures disappeared before he got to them. Jessie then unplugged the television and ran up the stairs.

When Jessie got to the top, he stopped and looked at all the room doors and noticed that all the lights were off, and his room light was the only one that was on and his door was cracked open. Jessie slowly walked towards his room and when he got inside the room, he observed it and noticed that everything was fine. Jessie walked further into his room and the door slammed shut when he got fully into the room. When the door shut, Jessie jumped into his bed and went under the covers. Jessie waited for about ten minutes then he peeked out. Jessie noticed that the room was still fine, so he felt a little bit better. Jessie went to change, and he checked the time on his digital clock that his great-grandma gave him, and it didn't have the time on it, instead it had the word "DEAD" on it. Jessie freaked out, grabbed the clock, ripped it out of the wall-socket, ran to his window, and chucked it at the ground. As Jessie saw the clock get destroyed he felt really upset with himself. Then Jessie turned around and he looked at his nightstand and sitting where it was just moments before was the clock. Jessie was finally able to keep his cool and he changed and went to bed.

When Jessie got up in the morning, his room was trashed. Things were destroyed, and his dirty clothes were everywhere. Jessie went and cleaned up his room then got started with his day. When Jessie got back home that night, he went upstairs and found on his bed a picture of him that he doesn't remember taking. But the crazy part was that his face was all scratched out. Jessie took the picture, threw it away, and went to bed. When he got up in the morning, the room was perfectly fine, and it never happened again.

Reagan Sosa

High School Short Story

Untitled

I looked out of the window of the taxicab, trying hard to find a reason why I should stay and work things out, but there wasn't one. I just needed some time to get away from the reality and drama of life; my parents understood. When they announced their divorce to me, my heart actually broke. My parents: the dream perfect couple, the ones who always worked things out, my idols, getting divorced! I am 16, my name is Taylor Scott, and my whole world was about to change.

Aunt Elise and Uncle Will had understood my predicament and invited me to a weeklong stay in Peru. They were like my second parents. My aunt and uncle were archaeologists and had an excavation to do in Peru, so when they asked me to go, I didn't hesitate. I needed the break and thought it would be a good thing

“Oh I'm so excited about this Will; we have worked so hard for this promotion.” My aunt's sudden explosive statement had interrupted my thoughts. “Can't wait!” my uncle said excitedly in response. In unison, they turned to me and though they expected me to have some input, I just gave them the best smile I could manage. I knew nothing about Peru or anywhere else in the world for that matter. This was the first time I had ever left my safe small, home state of South Dakota

We finally reached the terminal A-26. The airport was so crowded. I had never seen so many people in the same place at the same time. It was exciting. My aunt and uncle sat on a narrow wood bench. There was a leather seat right next to them, and I sat in it with the hopes that it would be more comfortable than the appearance of the jagged wood bench that my aunt and uncle decided to sit on. Everyone in my family was beautiful. My mom and my aunt both had luscious straight blonde hair and emerald green eyes. Her and my mom were twins only minutes apart. They both were tall and skinny and turned heads everywhere they went. Then there was me. I got more of my dad's rough looks. I have ugly wavy brown hair, and dull blue eyes. Everyone always commented on how gorgeous I was, but I'm sure that the only reason they said that was out of pity.

My aunt and uncle were talking in hushed voices; I assumed that whatever they were talking about was not for my ears. I took some money out of my backpack and went to get some ice cream, because why not? As I turned the corner, I ran straight into a person. He was like a brick, I got kind of dizzy when I crashed into him but I recovered

quickly. He said sorry in a hushed and hurried voice and walked away. I turned around, but only saw the back of his head. I was no longer in the mood for ice cream, so I went back to the comfort of my leather chair. The flight attendant's voice came on over the speakers and announced that it was boarding time.

My aunt and uncle were wealthy, so we flew in first-class. As the flight attendant opened the curtain, I saw a familiar blonde head. I ran into the boy. I thought it best to just avoid making any type of contact with him. He seemed really stand offish, and honestly I could relate. The attendant directed us to our seats, which were so big that my aunt and I could have comfortably fit in the seat together. The flight attendant went over the safety guidelines, but I wasn't really paying attention, because I was too busy reading the magazine that was in my front seat pocket. The plane took off.

I spent the first couple of hours watching movies, and then I decided to get some sleep. I woke up to the sound of crying; I looked over and was a girl about the age of five. She had little red curls and green eyes, but not as vibrant or as pretty as my mom's. Her scream was so high-pitched that I couldn't go back to sleep. I stayed, sitting there contemplating my life and my choices. I looked over to my aunt who was engrossed in studying a huge map that she had laid out on her table. My uncle Will was sound asleep and a drop of drool started to form at the curve of his mouth. I just smiled content in that perfect moment. Then the plane started moving violently. I heard the captain over the speakers telling us that everything was fine, an engine blew out and that we were going to make an emergency stop at a small airport. The whole time he was saying that, I was just thinking how there are some things that captains shouldn't tell us. The turbulence got worse and we started to head in a downward motion. I heard people screaming as the yellow oxygen masks fell from the ceiling of the plane. My aunt frantically woke up my uncle. A metal tray flew and knocked me over the head. I blacked out.

I woke up hot and sticky, and found it hard to collect my thoughts. The last thing I remember was the yellow oxygen masks falling from the ceiling. Oh no! I jumped to my feet and searched frantically in the ruins of the plane yelling at the top of my lungs "Aunt Elise! Uncle Will!" "They're gone... They're all gone." I turned around to see the blonde haired boy with red-rimmed eyes. I looked at him and we just held each other's eyes, just standing there sharing the feelings of loss and loneliness. He was handsome. He had bright blue eyes and blonde hair. He stood about 6'2 and could be no older than 18. Then I heard something move. It was the little girl who had been crying on the plane. She took a minute to look around and broke into huge, high-pitched sobs. I ran over to her and held her in my arms as she cried. While I was there with her, I finally got a good look at my surroundings. We were in some kind of rainforest. The trees were so green, lush, and tall. The air was moist but not extremely hot. There were strange animals jumping from the trees. I thought they were lemurs. The little girl stopped crying after

about 15 minutes or so, and fell asleep. I laid her against a chair that surprisingly stayed intact. I walked over to the blonde-headed boy who sat at the tip of the plane and stared quietly into the endless rainforest. I sat next to him.

We were silent for a long time before he said "Alex Morris" I turned to him confused. "My name is Alex Morris." I smiled and responded "Taylor Scott, nice to meet you." I held out my hand and gave him a long firm shake. "Where do you think we are?" he asked. I shook my head "I have no idea" I responded. He pulled out a phone and handed it to me. "This could be our way to survive," I looked at it astonished that it survived the crash. I instantly stood up and tried to get some service but there was none. He looked at me and said, "We have to get somewhere higher." I nodded in understanding and went over to wake up the girl. "No!" he said in a stern voice. I gave him a questioning look. "She will only slow us down, and who knows what danger awaits in those trees?" She will be safer here." I looked at him and nodded. I still went over to the girl and woke her up. "Hey...what's your name?" I asked as softly as I could. "Lila" she responds in a meek voice. "Well, Lila, you see that boy over there?" She looked over my shoulder, and gave Alex a wave. He smiled at her in return and she started to giggle. "We are going to go on a walk, but we will be back, ok"? She nodded. "Stay here right in this chair, you understand?" she nodded. "What are you going to do while Alex and I are going?" she responded "Stay in the seat and no more" I looked at her, smiled, and gave her a big hug. Then I got up to leave.

Alex and I got some scraps from the plane that we hoped could help us on our hike. We started out on a steep trail. He let me lead. "How old are you?" I asked. "I'm 17" he replied. "How old are you?" He asked. "I'm 16" I responded. We hiked for a while in silence. It wasn't the awkward kind of silence but rather the kind of silence that is peaceful. We both have suffered a lot. He lost his parents, and I lost my aunt and uncle. My aunt and uncle, the realization suddenly hit me, and I was overcome with emotion and sat down. "Are you ok? Taylor. What's wrong?" "They're dead" I responded. I broke into tears. "They're Gone" I repeated, still trying to make myself believe it. Alex sat next to me and gave me a hug. Even though I didn't know him that well, it was comforting to have someone there who supported me, who felt and understood what I was going through. I just sat there feeling safe and supported in his strong arms. I finally broke away, wiped my tears off with my sleeve, and said, "We should keep moving before it gets dark". Nodding in agreement, he stood up and we continued on with our hike.

We got to the top of the mountain and I gave him his phone back. He took it and extended his arm out. "YES!" We have signal!" he said breathlessly. He handed me the phone. I dialed the only number I knew: my parents. The phone rang a couple of times before my dad answered. "Hello?" "Dad"... I couldn't understand him, so I got straight to the point. "Dad, I can't make out what you're saying. The plane we were on

crashed. Only a boy, a little girl, and I survived. We are..." I paused. I don't know where we are. I looked around to try to get some bearing. I looked down and saw a Heliconia flower. Heliconia, where do I know that to be from, I thought. It hit me. The lemurs, the trees, the wild Heliconia flower. We're in the Amazon! "We are in the Amazon, dad please help." That's all I got to say before the connection got bad. "We should start heading back," said Alex. "You're right; Lila will probably be worried and scared." We made our way down the giant hill. When we got back to the crash site, Lila was nowhere to be found. I turned to Alex, who is already off looking for her shouting "Lila, Lila, come back!" I saw a flash of red, and called Alex to come over. We ran over and found Lila crouched down by a river. I sighed in relief. "Lila, what are you doing down there?" I yelled. "I found a piece of wood in the river, and I wanted to play with it," she responded. "LILA!" Alex ran towards her. I didn't understand but I ran after him. Lila stood up and turned away from the water. An alligator grabbed her and dragged her into the water. "NO!" I yelled. Alex stopped running and stood still, watching, muttering to himself. I kept running. "No!" He grabbed me and held me. I beated against him trying to break free, to save Lila. It was no use. He was at least 6 inches taller than me and way stronger. The alligator had pulled her under, and more had started to come. I heard an occasional scream and sound of the alligators rolling and splashing in the water. I started crying and Alex took me back to the plane crash site. I just sat there horrified at what had happened, still fresh in my mind. He was busy making a fire and building a fort out of the metal from the plane. It was a very smart idea, but I did nothing to help. This was the longest day that I had ever had. I just wanted it to be over. I fell asleep.

Ashley Valigura

High School Short Story

Untitled

I should have lied or said literally anything else. Her face changed so quickly, she became blank, and then furrowed her eyebrows angrily. I couldn't have lied though, even if I wanted to. I patiently awaited her reply.

"What do you mean," she kept her voice low, "you left that part out?"

"I knew you wouldn't have done it if I told you," I retorted without meeting her eyes.

Her voice broke and so did my heart when she asked, "Do you know what you put me through?"

I wearily dragged my eyes to her and instantly wished that I hadn't because she said, "Alice, do you even care?"

Tears fell off of her cheeks and down her neck, she started to shake. My mouth gaped open, trying to articulate how I was feeling.

"Of course I care," I couldn't finish before she spat some terrible words in my face.

I hung my head as a sob rattled my entire body, and I became very aware of how intense she was getting. Her hands gripped my forearms so tightly that I thought they were bound to burst. The familiarity of the situation took me somewhere that I had been avoiding for so long. Everything rushed back, despite my effort to push it away. Zoey's voice faded out and a deserted memory crashed over me.

I remember a voice drew me over, a grunt, a whine. I was creeping toward the bedroom door; it sounded like he was struggling. I reached for the handle and was about to go in, but I hesitated.

What if something is wrong? Mom isn't home, she's out again. Am I prepared to deal with whatever lies behind this door?

I would have to be.

With a deep breath, I quietly walked in. The television cast a flickering light onto the empty bed. Gunshots and terrified screams emanated from the screen. I heard a cry come from the darkest corner of the room.

"Make it stop!" he groaned. "Please, I'm sorry, sorry, sorry-"

The figure was shaking, I looked closely.

"Dad?" I called.

"Turn it off!" he yelled. Startled, I lunged toward the T.V. in search of a button that would put an end to the symphony of violence.

"Now!"

“Where’s the remote, Dad?” I scrambled to the bed, throwing the sheets and covers about the room.

A shuffling noise made me turn back around. I hardly believed that this animal was my father, he charged at me with a fierce look in his dark eyes. My heartbeat made its way to my throat, I couldn’t scream. He grasped my arms in his big hands, I cried out in pain, but he ignored it. The television put a menacing shadow onto his face.

“Stop,” I whimpered, “Dad!”

“Don’t you know that I’m sorry!” he shook me violently, “Can’t you leave me alone? Don’t you see? I had to! I had to!”

When he released me, I collapsed to the ground, hysterically crying. My father soon followed. He wheezed and let the tears fall, muttering broken apologies. Eventually, he crawled away from me, dragging himself on the carpet. I lay sprawled out on the floor, shocked and confused.

Zoey’s silence brought me back to her holding my arms. I’m sure that if her grasp weren’t so tight that my knees would buckle. I knew she was aware that I hadn’t been listening to her at all. Her voice became low again, but that only made everything that came out of her mouth feel like a dagger to the heart.

“And the worst part? You did this for you! You’re selfish, you manipulated me, and got me into this mess. You wanted this power, but I got it. I didn’t even want it. I told you this was dangerous, but you didn’t listen. You’re a coward, you couldn’t deal with your dad’s troubles,” her eyes widened, letting me see the true extent to her emotion, “No, it’s not that you couldn’t deal, but that you didn’t want to. You hate having responsibilities, even though it’s a part of life! So, you made this big failure of a plan that might kill me, the only real person who’s been looking out for you since your mom left. But I wasn’t enough. Congrats, Alice, you’re crashing to the ground in a mass of flames and you’re taking me with you.”

Zoey waited for my response as she breathed heavily, but my words never came. She was right, I couldn’t retaliate. When she realized that I wasn’t going to defend myself, she threw my arms down and stormed away. My body fell to the floor in a heavy heap.

“I’m sorry,” I choked my words out, “Zoey! Please, come back!”

But she didn’t come back. I was left there on the floor like I was all those years ago. No one would ever come to my rescue.

Emily Willhite

High School Short Story

Untitled

Winchester Croft tried to scream. Her vocal chords were raw from the strain, and her lungs were reaching out for air that wouldn't come. But not out here, not in the vast expanse of black space.

It grew darker and darker and colder and colder and with each passing second and every falling degree, Winnie could feel death clawing at every fiber of her being. She sensed it feeding off her existence, absconding her of every last inch of her life. Death is a living, tangible, breathing thing, Winnie thought, then almost laughed at the absurdity of the thought.

Winnie could feel her limbs slackening. She had no control over her leg, but her arms waved wildly, trying to get her to safety. Safety and air. Winnie missed air. She missed breathing deeply, in and out, in and out, in and... she shook herself. Her memories of air, distant though they may be, had lured her into a hypnosis, until she had almost given herself up to the sweet release of death.

She sprang to action, flailing her arms and leg to try to get somewhere safe. Her gear weighed her down, and it was getting harder and harder to move. Suddenly her limbs gave out, and Winnie was stuck.

She gasped as air flooded into her lungs. It tasted like chocolate and sunshine and warm blankets on cold days and Christmas morning and-

"What on earth were you thinking? Are you insane?" Patton yelled. She looked up, still gasping, at her best friends. Thad and Patton stood next to each other, their expressions as different as their physical appearances. Thad's dimples were on the verge of coming out of hiding on his pale skin, and his blue eyes glinted mischievously. Patton, on the other hand, was a stone carving. His near-black eyes were completely expressionless and almost lost in his dark skin. Typically, he couldn't seem to smile if his life depended on it, but his cheerless expression was no 10 times more severe.

Thad helped Winnie to her feet and put his arm about her waist, pulling her right arm over his shoulder.

"I'm proud of you," he whispered. Both her empty right pant leg and her left leg fell limply to the ground. Her entire body was weak and she felt like she might collapse at any moment. It was all she could do to smile back at him shakily.

"You're insane." Patton claimed. He took Winnie's other arm and slung it over his shoulder, then swept his arm under her leg and pulled

her away from Thad and into his arms, where she lay like a child.

She was thankful for his strong arms and steady gait as he walked her down the long hallway to the deserted control room. He set her down in an empty chair and crossed to the other side of the room. She shrugged out of the simulation suit, which Thad took from her. Her fitted athletic t-shirt and sports leggings were drenched with sweat. Patton returned with her prosthetic leg, which she carefully fitted to the bottom of her thigh.

“So, w-when can I g-go again?” Winnie said haltingly, still trying to catch her breath.

“Are you kidding right now? You almost,” Patton snapped.

“But I didn’t.”

“That is not the point! You made an asinine decision and could’ve gotten yourself killed.”

“But I didn’t. I’ve always wanted to do the simulation. The only reason no one ever let me do it is because of my stupid leg. But I can do it! I can! I was doing great!”

“It’s true, she was,” Thad said, and then stopped as Patton looked at him austerely.

“The point is, you did it without permission, without supervision, and no matter how well you were doing, you could have died!”

“Look, I know I shouldn’t have done it without permission. But nobody was going to let me do it anyway. Everyone thought I couldn’t do it. But I can! And now that I’ve proved it, I can do it with permission.”

“So you’re planning on telling your dad? That’s good to know, because I sure as heck was not looking forward to that conversation.”

“Look, Patton,” Thad hedged, “no one was going to let her try the simulation before. Now that she knows she can, she can do it with permission and actually have a chance to get better. Before she messed up, she was doing a lot better than you or I did on our first simulation. And she didn’t have anyone in the box.”

“I was! I was doing great!” Truthfully, Winnie couldn’t remember anything before waking up in the hallway with Patton and Thad standing over her. But she was sure she had been doing great.

Suddenly, the lights flickered off. Patton and Thad moved to the doorway.

“Guys, what’s going on?”

“I... don’t know.”

Winnie wheeled herself over to a computer and pulled up the locator. There was no one on their side of the ship. On the other side, however, were a swarm of red dots that moved chaotically.

“Guys, everyone is converging on the stern.”

“Is it a power outage?” Patton asked.

“I think so. We have to get over to the stern. Like, soon.” Winnie tried to stand, but her legs collapsed out from under her.

“I can’t move. Guys, I can’t move. Guys, guys, guys.” Winnie started to hyperventilate, her helplessness caving in on her like a ton of

rocks. She tried to grab onto the rolling chair, but it fell on its side and out of reach.

Patton rushed in from the hallway to her side. He turned the chair back upright, scooped her up, and set her back in it. Thad was to her seconds later, pushing her hair out of her eyes.

“It’s my leg, it’s offline. It’s useless.” Winnie choked out. She was crying so hard, she could barely speak. Her leg was part of the ship’s technology and as such, only worked when connected to the net work.

“I hate this,” she sobbed. She felt the sudden hot tears leak down her cheeks and onto her neck. Patton and Thad looked at each other like they always did whenever she lost it. Winnie knew she was scaring them a little bit, but her leg (or lack thereof) was a constant reminder that she wasn’t like everyone else. She hated it. It was a huge roadblock that kept her from doing the simulation, dancing as long as she wanted when she felt that groove, and getting her physician’s approval for her training papers even after she completed her training, which took her out of the running permanently for the draft. It even made her two closest friends treat her differently, and her father, too! He was the captain of and was constantly busy running around solving problems and helping people, yet, however lovingly, he somehow still found time to tell her what she couldn’t do.

And here it was, another reminder that she just wasn’t good enough. Anyone could get themselves back into a chair. A trained monkey could, for crying out loud!

She wiped away her tears fiercely, and glared Patton and Thad in the eyes.

Suddenly a piercing scream brought all three heads towards the door.

“That sounds close,” Thad said. Winnie turned back to the monitor.

“Impossible,” she murmured. “It only registers three heat- oh.” She saw a fourth heat signature, and Thad was right- it was just two corridors over.

“I have to go.” Patton stood and looked down at Winnie. His height made him seem a million miles away. “I’m sorry. I’ll be back as soon as possible. Keep an eye on the other side of the ship.” His gaze redirected at Thad. “Start up the backup generator and try to make contact.” With those words, he ran out of the room.

Winnie watched the other side of the ship from the monitor. The dots seemed to have calmed down now. Her dad was probably freaking out, having lost his daughter and her two knuckle-headed friends, plus whoever that fourth heat signature was.

Winnie’s fists were clenching and unclenching, leaving crescent-shaped indents in her palms. She could hear Thad swear mildly from the corner as he banged on the generator.

All at once, the screaming started up again, and getting closer. Patton burst into the room, carrying a hysterical woman.

“Tula!” It was Winnie’s very pregnant sister-in-law. She was already wearing the infirmary’s paper-thin gown, which led Winnie to believe that she had come straight from there.

Winnie thought.

“Thad!” Patton ordered. “I need towels, hot water, anything you can think of.” Thad, who seemed to have come out of his frozen stupor, began making his way over to them.

“Is she...?”

“She’s in labor. Now go!” Patton set her down gently. Winnie lowered herself to the ground next to Tula quite ungracefully with her bulky leg, grasping her hand.

“Are you- oh gosh. This is really happening. Oh gosh. Oh man.” Tula nodded, whimpering lightly.

“I-I noticed that- y-you and P-patton and Thad w-were g-gone and I w-went to look for you. C-crazy, I know. I’ve b-been in l-labor since this morning.” She let out a little sardonic laugh.

“Where’s Aaron? He must be worried sick.”

“I k-kno- Aaaargh! She screamed, another contraction coming on. She squeezed Winnie’s hand until Winnie thought her eyes would pop. Thad came dashing back then, with pillows, blankets, towels, and a jug of hot water.

Patton and Winnie helped prop Tula up against the closest desk.

“Okay, Tula, you’re going to need to push.” There was a pause as Tula yelled again. “I can see the head; you’re doing great, almost there.” Patton poured water over a towel and wiped Tula’s sweaty forehead.

“Aagghhhhh!” Tula shrieked, and gasped heavily. “Oh my- Aaggh!”

“Tu, it’s okay, it’s almost over. You’re almost done.”

Tula shuddered, gave one last scream, and went limp. Patton pulled away from her, cradling a tiny body in his arms. The baby bawled, convulsing in Patton’s strong grip.

“Hey, look at that. You’ve got a little girl, Tu.” He chuckled a little, and began to clean her off.

Tula sat back in relief, her eyes closed. She was breathing heavily, but her lips turned up in a tired smile.

“Thanks, Patton.” Winnie shared a delighted smile with the tall boy. He wrapped the newly clean baby in a blanket and handed her to Tula. She sat up and laughed breathily.

“Oh, she’s so beautiful; Tu. Aarom’s going to be so happy.” The baby seemed to have tired herself out and lay there in her mother’s arms. Winnie leaned in and stroked her little face, in awe of her miniature features.

“So what’s her name, Tu?” Patton asked softly.

“Well, Aarom and I kind of thought she- or he- would be named after either Aarom’s brother and dad, or sister and mom.” Winnie gasped.

“So, guys, meet the newest citizen of Tatum Winchester Croft.”



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the poets

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Untitled

Sadness.
Sadness is dark.
Sadness is bland.
Sadness will drive anyone
To the worst of places.

Through the darkness.
Through the night.
Through it all,
More lays ahead.

Friends and family.
Both will save you.
With help,
The darkness can be defeated.

Sunshine,
Friendships,
The warmth of the summer.

Cold,
Frosty,
The blow of a cool, winter wind.

Life,
Beginning,
The love of spring.

Orange,
Gold,
The colors of autumn.

Although you
May have nothing,
You have everything
With friends.

Brother

You drive me mad,
Steal my things,
Play stupid pranks,
Call me names,
But I do that too,
We bicker and fight most of the time,
But what would I do without you?

You stick up for me when others are mean
We laugh all the time
And have a good time
With you by my side,
I wonder what would I do without you?

I love you and you love me too,
And I will always wonder
What would I do without you?

Katelyn Cortazar
Middle School Poetry

My Friend, the Violin

The days where I'm sad
Or feel that nothing is right
I always have a friend by my side
It may just be a violin to you
But to me...
It's my world

The violin is as peaceful as the night sky
It always helps when you're feeling low
The strings play this tune
That reverberates in your soul and mind
The bow is gentle and makes the sound
Come alive
It is the greatest friend you could ever find

Memories

Memories
Within a babe
A memory is made
And the seed is laid
Soon a boy
Tears of joy
Waters the little seed
Soon a man
With great plans
So what does he need
Of a little tree
Big and strong, he may be
but he still has need
of the little seed
soon a wee old man
with his plan
all done and do
his little tree
now strong like you

Miriam Dayton
Middle School Poetry



One's Roots

Slowly the lilies' petals died a victim of the breeze,
So frail the lily had become it feared a child's sneeze.
Numbly it wished for its roots that had run so deep,
Hoping they'd forget that grudge they sought to keep.

Nearby a frightened child hoped his mom would hear his plea,
And would see him through the forest and over the blue sea.
For without aid the child would meet a gruesome fate,
To the things that come whenever the hour's late.

Across the field a wolf sat still knowing his end was near-
Foolishly, he had left his pack now gunshots he could hear.
In a last attempt, he gave a loud and piercing howl,
Hoping his pack would come and forgive him of his foul.

All these things so close together, their problem is the same-
They have been forgotten by those who share their name.

Angela DeFilippo
Middle School Poetry

Untitled

Yellow, Cream, Brown, Grey
Only having one word to say
They purr, eat, sleep, and play
While they dream of the perfect place to stay
Fur, whiskers, and a small nose
Four little paws with five round toes
A sweet little round purr, that comes directly from their heart under their fur
They cuddle and snuggle up to the fire
And wish to their hearts desire
Cute and funny, as they seem to be
Cats are the best animal for me!

Aileah Ensley
Middle School Poetry

Untitled

GENTLE KINDNESS, BRUTAL WORDS

Gentle kindness; night wishes.
you are forever waiting for your joy.
you cry,
we hope to bless the dark words of home

LOSS AND LIFE

Loss can explain life.
you are okay,
for I am okay

CRUEL MEMORIES

Grey shadows,
froze in time.
I lost hope for you,
and that a cruel memory of you.

DOZENS OF BRIGHT DIAMONDS

Dozens of silver diamonds.
a hundred bright stars...
despair can't keep you from singing

MY MOTHER

My mother is my best friend,
my caretaker,
the one who loves me unconditionally.
she is my mother
and I love her dearly;
more than she will ever know.

Untitled

Teardrops fall onto the ground
drifting down your pale cheeks
You sit there lost, waiting to be found
They called you a freak
They told you to drink bleach
They called you stupid so many times that you started to believe it
A fake smile covered your frown
Hoping people would notice that truly you hurt deep down

You tried to ignore it
But how could you ignore looking in the mirror day after day after being
called ugly
You got pushed so many times the bruises were permeant
You got made fun of so many times that the layer around your heart began
to tear
You got threatened so many times that you lived in fear

Why? You thought to yourself
Why do people care so much about putting you down rather than lifting you
up
Why? You thought
Because one smile can change lives
But people just stand around
One, "Are you alright?"
Could help people see light
But people don't make a sound
And just one act of kindness
Could save someone's life.

Catherine Grimmer

Middle School Poetry

Untitled

She's always been
Broken,
Different,
Mixed,
Left alone.
8th grade, test and pills.
Hills were suicidal.
A wave of anti-depress.
She called the pills "the cruelty"
Tried to go home to the depression
That can be found in TNT.
Friends call people who can't understand
That sometimes becoming free
Has nothing to do with sanity.
Kids who grew up this way are called names
The classics:
"stupid" and "spaz".
Every school,
Every year,
A kid breaks.

Hannah Herbes
Middle School Poetry

Untitled

He puts on a mask every day
to try and hide his real face
he doesn't know who he is anymore
his heartbeat has lost its pace.

But when his mask wears off again
the world thinks he has gone mad.
He doesn't know what he is anymore
and that was very very bad.

After all, it was the world
who told you to be you.
To be the person you very are
but who are you? Who?

You must choose between good and evil
to know who you are and stand,
you must choose what you want to be
not what you can.

Don't be a piece of bubblegum
chewed up and thrown out,
and then you might know who you really are
and be free to roam about.

Untitled

Your voice vibrates, echoes in my ear.
Your face embroidered in my memory.
Your touch rings in my skin, yet it's been years since last impacted.

I miss your warm touch.
Your mischievous smile.
Your bleach hair.
Our challenged laughter.

Home has lost its touch without you.
Life harder to live.
Breath harder to intake.
With you gone, my world is crashing, breaking at every seam.

I still feel you, though we are miles apart.
The distance may separate us, but you will forever remain in my heart.

My eyes may weep.
My soul may screech.
My heart may burst shattering blood onto skin.

They can protest, and let them lie.
For until we are standing eye to eye; I will stay within every memory of us.
Every scare from our falls.

Will I be?

Even if you break, tear apart, crush, or demolish my heart.
My soul.
My life.
All I am, every piece of me; I have given you my all.

Yet if thou wish destruction upon me.
I would still hold my all in your hands.

Why?

I do not know.
But you're the closest I've felt to home.

So let them lie and threaten.
For unless it comes from you, I will not listen.
For I am just a part of your strings.
I listen to the motions of your hands that obey the commands of the
heart, and mind.
And for that reason they shall not lie.

We may never be together.
Forever apart.
The distance still challenging us, as we depart.
But you always remain within my heart.

Josh Khin

Middle School Poetry

Untitled

The darkness in your life
Dreams crushed
Everyone experiences it
The dark grey cloud
Overcoming you
For whatever the cause
Creating a hurricane
Or maybe a tornado
You can't see anymore
Because you are so overwhelmed
Surrounded
You make the wrong decisions
Causing mayhem
Born by only one thing
Not smarts
Not intelligence
Not maturity
But from sadness
No matter
Where or why
Sadness will overcome one's soul
Ending something
And beginning something new
Sadness does no wrong or rights
It just overcomes you
Like a fog
That will never end

Isabel Letourneau

Middle School Poetry

Fear

Fear,
The rising panic,
A tidal wave of,
Fear,
Omnipresent in life,
For fear of death,
Keeps us alive,
Fear of unknown,
Keeps us untaught,
Hateful fear.
When ebbing,
Fear is only rising,
Always moving,
Orbiting the sun of our brain,
Rotating between this or that,
For fear is always there,
Keeping ankles from touching the ground,
Keeping us sneaking around.
Fear affects everything,
Fear of the bigger predator,
Keeps us hidden in huts,
Fear of the dark,
Keeps us awake at night,
Looking around a shadowed room,
Searching for movement,
Not quite brave enough to turn on a light,
Waiting for what comes next,
Fear.

Untitled

1. They only sought out the defeat of one another
2. Bloodshed was the attraction of the battle
3. A kick and a punch a throw of blades!
4. The swords begin to speak to the dying as they are swung
5. Rage Fury anger was then celebrated with a parade
6. The manipulating of sand and the strength of muscle
7. Opening of gates and awakenings of chakra
8. Conflict and war and death, death I tell you death
9. Dying in the field of battle is a grand way to go
10. No one cares about the children or the people of the village
11. They say they do but they don't
12. If they did they would find peace, they would begin to care
13. Instead they teach them will there young to get strong or die weak
14. Village and bodies of land argue day and night
15. Men act as brave as a lion, but are scared as a mouse
16. This fight was just the beginning of a long lasting war
17. Who dares to step up and save this world...
18. There is one man
19. One holy, one just man
20. This man's name is...
21. Naruto Uzumaki

Tomorrow

Something most want
Something some don't get
Something few don't want
Something some get
Tomorrow
A day of excitement
A day of fret
A day of enjoyment
A day to never forget
Tomorrow
A gift not assured
A gift to deserve
And maybe not deserved
Perhaps it will never occur
Tomorrow
The next page in the book
Another step to the end.

Some journeys are shorter than others
Because of the limited tomorrows,
So try not to hide under the covers
And don't let your troubles eat you up in swallows.
Maybe I'll see tomorrow,
Maybe I'll never see tomorrow again.
Maybe you'll never see tomorrow,
Maybe you will.
All we can do is
Live life to the fullest extent,
Make memories to never forget,
And hope for the best.
In case I never see tomorrow
I love you.

Ms. Nonchalant and the River

As Ms. Nonchalant begins her day
She flies towards the river
Ms. Nonchalant! Why have you flown my way
Well that was rather chipper

I'm not here for you
You awful lazy river
Such horrid words Ms. Nonchalant
You sure you are okay?
Do tell me river, why should you talk to me
I am a busy bird, please leave me be

Ms. Nonchalant, why I'm sorry
Please do have a fish
Of course you know I'm full of them
For I'm the River Styx

Ms. Nonchalant, she had flown down
She was rather hungry
But as you see Ms. Nonchalant,
Well she had not flown up
You see the river, he too was hungry
He ate her whole, and with a full mouth said
I'm not lazy, and you are very dead

Yu Maria Muneyasu
Middle School Poetry

Untitled

Beware of the wolves from the Shadow Pack.
They are bloodthirsty creatures, they have hearts of black.
You must run and flee before they attack.
Alluring they may seem, we all agree.
With angel like eyes and a crooked grin.
You must realize that beyond that sweet tongue lies a bed of sharp teeth.

Lisa Musa
Middle School Poetry

Untitled

I see light wherever I turn
Then how come I'm surrounded by the monsters in the dark
Watching me through the walls
Waiting to haunt me
Scare me
I'm trapped
In a world I can't get out of
I'm trapped
I'm scared
I'm locked with the key just out of reach
Waiting
In my cell
For someone to unlock that door
And set me free

I look to the mirror
I grab a marker
And write what I want to fix
My mirror is full of notes
Of what I want to fix
When I go outside
I leave my head down
Covering my ugly face
Hoping no one sees
And no one asks
I cover my arms
Cover all the scars
I rush to where I'm going
But I leave my head down
Thinking of things to add to my mirror

People say people who take their lives are selfish
They say that they are overreacting
They say their destroying others people's lives
They turn their heads in disgust

They say such mean things
 But the person just wants to escape
 Escape from the cruel harsh world
 And be the hero of their own story
 To fly free
 And smile

Overwhelmed be the idea
 They take their life from the cruel harsh world
 People still talk behind they're back
 Until one of them suffers so greatly
 That they are the victims of they're own words
 And are overwhelmed by the idea to be free
 Away from cold iron chains
 That bind away they're soul
 In a prison cell
 We call a body
 And take they're life
 So they can be happy
 And the cycle goes on
 Human nature
 We talk
 We never understand
 Until we do
 That the reason they take their life
 Is to live

.....

I smile today
 I smiled for a lot of today's
 But I've cried more tears
 There was even a time I wanted it to all end
 So I can finally feel the warmth of happiness
 Flushing my face
 But I got better
 Although there will always be a part of me
 Remembering the war
 The bloody bloody battle
 I am better
 But I will never forget
 Because it is carved in my heart
 What I was
 But I hope that
 There is a new carving
 Next to it
 Of what I am now
 Happy

Isabel Sasaki
Middle School Poetry



What A Star Is

A star represents a life,
glimmering in the sky during the night.
They are used for wishes,
for blessings and chances,
and progress will take flight.

Although it can only take you so far,
it can encourage you, that star.
It represents a life, shining to the fullest.
It shines to those who show it.

A strive for life,
a struggle to fight,
All that make up a star's shine.
There will always be light.

Even when your days are full of gloom,
there will be something to show that it isn't all doom.
Some are hidden like a surprise,
and will try to trick your eyes.

Who knows?
Your dream may come true,
when the next star glows.
The only one who will find your wish is you.

Megan Shaver
Middle School Poetry



The Bond

The bond between a dog and an owner,
Is not something to look over,
It's unconditional love,
It's greater than the Gods above.

There once was a dark gray pup,
Who could melt the eyes of any grown-up
Then one day,
He was given away.

The pup was left in a box of cardboard,
And every day it poured,
Then on one sunny day,
A girl named Lily said, "Hi, little stray!"

Lily held the pup and ran straight home,
When she got home she picked up a comb,
And she saw little stuff in his fur,
She gave him a bath, and he became a black blur.

When her mother walked through the halls,
"Lily I'm home!" she calls
Lily exclaimed,
"Look I found a puppy today!"

"Where did you find that hound?
It's going back to the pound!"
"Wait, mother please,
He was alone, just like me."

"Well, I'll give him a chance,
But don't get too attached."
"Ohh thank you so much,
I will take care of this furry bunch!"

“Now, what will his name be?”
 “How about Charlie?
 Come on boy, what do you think?
 Does it click or does it stink?”

Bark! Bark!
 “Yay that’s great, can we go to the park,
 Before it's too late?”
 “Okay but be back before eight!”

Now, this is how their bond grew,
 They were inseparable, and they hardly said adieu,
 Unless of course there was school,
 And Charlie thought it was just cruel.

When Lily knocked on the door,
 Charlie would bark and roar,
 Then later they would go for a walk,
 And Lily would always talk.

But eventually, the walks became shorter,
 First in halves, then in quarters,
 When they finally got to a vet,
 And this is where they met.

The dragon named Cancer,
 And they were looking for an answer,
 Charlie had a tumor on his leg,
 And it was as big as an egg.

Charlie went through chemo, he lost his hair,
 It landed over here and over there,
 Until it was all gone,
 And he looked like an ugly cat had been drawn.

I prayed and prayed,
 That the dangerous disease would go away.
 And yet, it only worsened, I think that if he was a bit younger,
 We could have saved him from all of this pain and horror.

I believe that he died for a reason,
 And I will always remember him in this autumn season,
 He made such a big impact in my life,
 And I can’t wait to see him again in the afterlife.

The bond between a dog and an owner,
 Is not something to look over,
 It’s unconditional love,
 It’s greater than the Gods above.

Francesca Trujillo
Middle School Poetry

Untitled

Our happiest days had danced by,
Like a Blink of an eye --
Our lives have been changed forever,
This should've happened Never --

As easily as we Feel Guilt,
Our World still sits on a tilt --
We have been forgotten,
While everyone else lives on Fluffy cotton --

In the moment it was Fight,
or Flight --
No One can understand,
Survivors will continue to Hold hand in hand --

We are Family,
This is our reality --
Heaven Now has fifty-eight,
Hoping all these Country Angels will have a Tailgate

As we listen to our Jason Aldean song,
We are Country Strong.



Poetry

the poets

High School

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Little Did She Know

A tiny baby giggles as her mother holds her close to her heart,
caring for her.

Little did she know how distant her relationship
with her mother is now.

A little girl with fringed bangs and a darling smile shines bright
as she runs to her dad with open arms.

Little did she know how he would touch her in places
she would never forget.

A gullible teen, runs to the one who she loves the most.
Little did she know how much destruction he would do to her.

Her pure heart has, afflicted with deadly sins.
Her pure mind, tainted with disturbing images.
Her pure tongue, burnt by alcohol and cigarettes.
Her pure lips, kissed by cold-hearted men.

She hides her face in public and cuts herself in private.
She hides her body because insecurity, anxiety and
depression takes over.

She doesn't care.
No one loves her.

She tries to be perfect so everyone can love her.
She just wants attention and love....

....she's damaged, emotionally, physically.

Now, she cuts her scars deep and takes medication
so her reality becomes real again.

How will she get the love she's wanted?

Will she be okay?

My Mask

My mask...

It hides me from my true self.
It doesn't allow me to show who I am.
It makes me think I'm someone different.

I don't even know who I am now...

What do I like to do?
Play sports? Gossip? Ami

What do I listen to?
Pop? Country?

Who am I?
Shy me? Loud me?

How do I take it off?
Does it come off as time passes?
Is it permanent?

My mask...

Will it ever come off?
I need to see my true self...

Juanairis Ayala-Avila
High School Poetry

Blue

Words are not always what you expect them to mean
just by looking at them.
My favorite color is blue (any shade), and this defines my persona.

My exterior says blue, but my heart screams yellow.
My exterior says blue, lonely but strong like a wolf;
but my bright yellow heart causes me
to have kind and caring actions of a mother deer.

I prefer to be alone,
that way I don't have to worry about anyone in any way, shape or form;
however if I see someone struggling I will go out of my way to help them;
once they're satisfied with their problem I will be on my way.

I may be blue but I am free!

My Paddock shorts are blue just like me.
My bright yellow heart will lead me into becoming the person I want to be...
A director and so much more.

My lone wolf roams in the night
but the mother deer in me helps me stay positive.

My actions are very motherly.
But blue is my happy color,
blue has so much more meaning than just being blue.

My hugs feel warm and safe, but my expression looks unfriendly.

Do you think I am a nice person.
My love and kindness is as pure as a baby deer.

I may look blue but just know that I am happy on the inside.

Maddie Baker
High School Poetry



The Difference Between John Doe and Jane Doe is 23 Cents

Men can never understand me because
they are gifted with the attention I fought for

Men can never understand me because
their bodies are temples while mine is a trophy

Men can never understand me because
birth control is a sin but Viagra is insured

Men can never understand me because
their voices will always be heard no matter how loud I yell

Men can never understand me because
my idols will always be overlooked in our history textbooks

Men can never understand me because
I will never be pretty enough, smart enough,
strong enough to be their equal

Men can never understand me because
I am always a mother, a sister,
a daughter, a wife, or a friend but never a person

Men can never understand me because

I am a woman

Nathan Black
High School Poetry

Desert Witch

You are
A witch
In the desert
The scorched

Pinch, Prick
A possum
Stealthy bastard
Steals sight

That cactus
Moving
So slow
No one
Sees
Unnoticed

Up above
Sails
The black
Night sighs

The moon
In silver trees
The crimson eye
Travel the skies

Emilee Chapson
High School Poetry

Laughter Deferred

What happens to laughter deferred?

Does it evaporate into the sky
Like a broken hearts cry?
Or wilt like a parched, graceful flower
And then be smothered from the watchtower?

Does it feel like happiness has an absence
Like winter neighborhood silence?

Maybe it just melts down your arm a cold, milky gray
Like a sad ice-cream cone on a sad summer day
Or does it fly away, like a misguided firebird?

Julie Charlton
High School Poetry

Conscience

She wants to take people and twist their mind,
she whined,
to an endless tunnel of time,
where people take for granted,
what society has chanted to our faces
and what places are there to go,
where there are no phones and nothing to distract us with,
and time will stand still not tick.

It will never stop until the sun bursts us all into eternity so carelessly,
So flawlessly.

But certainly certainty could potentially give us all clarity,
of the sea
of the land
of the dammed
of the water that we drink.

But she signs a contract to conflict
and every time she opens it
it falls out so rapidly
and foolishly she can't deal with the pain anymore.

She wants to find a home,
where she can have a cat that will roam, through every nook and crevice,
and the breath is easy to come by
and easy to give,
easy to forgive,
not be combative, or abusive.

She wants a family,
that will surly be a liability to every need of her being.

She says she has friends
that will get her through the ends and further,
but they hunt her down
and back stab her although,
still she wants them

whether they bring her up
or shoot her down
Almost until she drowns.

But headphones with surely block it all out
when friends aren't there to play with your hair
Or just agree that life is not fair.

She is a conscience,
a second mind,
and in that mind you cannot control the hands of time,
she can be fragile and light but then she can turn dark as night.

She will replace the roll of your own mind
when you cannot think quick enough
or when you are uneasy,
or to trying to be pleasing.

Then your own personality takes over
and then you lose it all
to a takeover of depression
that sends you into a spiraling pit of self-hatred,
then you feel sacred to Satan.

Then hopefully,
greatness will be awakened
through the arrogance of therapists and realists
And cliché Instagram quotes
And church sermons you can't even relate to
Apparently
Because you are just 'too young'

Then you live life knowing you aren't safe,
but then you work with faith
to prove them wrong,
So wrong.

When she awoke, something had changed,
instead of rage she found an honest sample of tranquility,
and equality.

A river of serenity flowed through a mind of endless entity,
and thoughts poured out onto paper
and danced about in beautiful ways
and stuck with people for days,

when the nights are the hardest
and the people never noticed
the symptoms of depression in the person
Because they always just say
'I'm tired'
Which they are not lying

Sometimes they are tired
Of feeling of not feeling
Of feeling like their world has been left behind
Of not being heard
Of others not being heard
Of even the people they live with.

They retreat to escapism when they feel defeat upon them,
they hum a tune,
or study the moon,
or watch a cartoon.

She feels as if she is shrinking
and she will avoid thinking of sinking,
through smoking,
out love,
out of Love.

Alexia Gaskill
High School Poetry

Inhale

People with broken fingers should not hold cracked pottery
and broken shards should not be walked on
by people with bare feet.

Hate

I hate my personality.

I hate it
the way once I get close to someone it has to come and ruin it.

I hate that I am dragged down with it.
I hate the way it gets me in trouble.

Once I was talking to someone
and it swooped in and said something offensive.
After that I was sent to the principal's office.

I hate the way I can't get away from it,
how it creeps its ugly head out
when I finally think I've gotten rid of it.

I hate the way I can smell its stench
as it comes to wreak havoc.

I hate that I can't have a girlfriend
because of it,
or
maybe it's because of my figure.

I hate that I become a pushover because of it.
I hate the way I make a scene in public because of it,
I hate that people blame me for what it does.

I hate me.

Aria Haley
High School Poetry



Two-Voice Poem

Audience

I love movies
The experience is just great
The actors are just phenomenal
Wow all actors can sing perfectly
I love to meet that actor
they seem like such a nice guy
Their timing is just perfect
Sometimes the effects are too cheesy

I thought that Boss Baby
was a cute movie
I love action movies
everything is so fast
Oh look there is a shot
of the character
The movie was almost 2 hours long
gosh
La la land should have
won best picture
I've watched this movie like 8 times
What a funny scene

Sequel's are not necessary

We want bloopers
at the end of each film
The Oscars are rigged
That was a good scene
**doesn't notice the music*

Okay let's go the movie is over

Director

I love films
The experience is just great
The actors are...a handful
So much auto-tune
That actor was the biggest
problem child
I wish the actors would be on time
That was the most expensive part of
the film
I think that Hollywood is running out
of good ideas
Everyone had a short attention span
these days
THAT IS THE BEST SHOT
WOWIE I LOVE IT
I worked 2 years on this film

MOONLIGHT IS INCREDIBLY
UNDERRATED WHO ARE YOU
I've only seen my finished film once
That no one would stop laughing, so
we had to do it over and over
We make sequels because people ask
for them and we want money
Uhhh no

The Oscars are definitely rigged
That scene cost the most money
DA DA DAAA DA BUM BUM DUM
DUM
**Stays till the very end to watch the credits*

Savannah Hankins

High School Poetry

Untitled

Love, has endless meanings and interpretations
Friendship, family, and "the one" being the most basic tropes
Yet also said to be found in other languages
Spanish, French and Italian to name a few.

Love can be painful and full of sorrow
and make you feel like your heart is bursting
out of your chest all at the same time.

However, while love can mean all these things
it boils down to two different kinds of people
Those who are afraid of it and those who embrace it.

Making it simple and complex,
making just about as much sense as a child just learning to speak.

Maybe that's why we simply long to be in love or feel loved.
In a world of stress and endless cloudy 9 to 5 days.
There's that one thing that makes it all worth it.
Whether it be a simple "text me when you get there"
or a giant teddy bear.
You know what makes your heart go tick tock.

Katherine Hernandez

High School Poetry

The Sailor Princess

There once was a princess gentle and fair,
With soft blue eyes and flowing golden hair,
Every day she would stare at the setting sun,
Wishing to travel and see other lands one by one,
Oh how she wished she could sail,
In the ocean she knew she would prevail,

She pleaded with her father to let her go,
But he wouldn't listen and kept saying no,
The king would see her gazing into the distance,
And admired her persistence,
Oh how she wished she could sail,
In the ocean she knew she would prevail,

The king then realized that this was her dream
So he allowed her to go, in his eyes a sad gleam
For he just wanted to do what was best for her
Because seeing her happy was what he would prefer
Oh how excited she was to sail
In the ocean she knew she would prevail

The next day she was prepared to explore
She couldn't wait to see so much more
The ship she boarded was big and vast
It was designed to sail very fast
Oh how excited she was to sail
In the ocean she knew she would prevail

Crossing the ocean wasn't always easy
All the commotion kept her busy
Soon enough they spotted land
With beautiful sparkling sand
Oh how happy she was to sail
In the ocean she did prevail

As she explored close to sundown
She met a handsome young prince in the center of town
He offered to show her around
Enjoying each moment, a new friendship they found
Oh how happy she was to sail
In the ocean she did prevail

She stayed for weeks enjoying his friendship
This soon turned into love and courtship
He decided to ask for her hand
So they traveled back to her land
Oh how happy they were to sail
In the ocean they would prevail

They soon crossed the deep blue waves
Enjoying all the sunny days
They made it there safe and sound
In the castle her father they found
Oh how happy they were to sail
In the ocean they did prevail

The prince asked the king for his daughter's hand
The king said yes, and their wedding was grand
Their life was filled with love and laughter
And they lived happily ever after
Oh how happy she was that she did sail
Or she never would have had this beautiful tale

Natalia Hernandez
High School Poetry

Perception of Perfection

Perfection is a sweet spot that will truly never exist.
For true art has mistakes and perfection is lack thereof.

Why would you not want to learn from art?
To be perfect is defeating the whole purpose,
To try and try again.
Never turning anything out,
Because the false perception of perfection stops the beating heart.

Art is the forgotten,
The dirty gritty nothings,
The far from perfect,
The chase of perfection will always be known.

For fools believe what is accepted
The unaccepted should provoke thought
Personal perfection will never be the outsider's perfection
Everyone leads a different perception
How could one focus in on what everyone believes is pure
If purity in itself can never be accomplished

Stop trying my dear
Follow your path not someone else's
No one knows what you want but you
For you hold the power of your own life
Forget all you have learned and let go
Let your thoughts free

Create! Thrive!
Only being yourself will create true perfection.

Untitled

A woman stares down at me
Dark brown eyes
White irises glowing against her bronze skin
And her hair, a dark and flowing river,
With more waves than the ocean
And curlier than the wind that blows the palm fronds,
Drifts over her shoulders
The roots growing wildly into her eyes.

Her counterpart beholds me
Her sapphire gaze icy
And her inky hair bleeds into her visage,
The straight strands streaking across her neck,
Her skin is fine porcelain,
Almost as pale as the snow,
Bright, fresh, and certain to be
Covering the grounds of her homeland.

My blemished skin burns under their gazes,
My knotted hair piled upon my head.
My soft caramel eyes begin to drown
In the pool they have created.
My mouth trembles open
And theirs follow suit,
Sharp tongues sparing no victim.

They screech and tug at my hair,
Blunt fingernails pulling at my skin,
Ten are painted the color of blood,
The others left alone.
"Choose," they croak,
"It is one or the other; me or she."
But I cannot,
And they can tear me apart.

I Am More

I am more than what meets the eye,
I don't open up to people,
But I promise I try.

I try to converse and let down my guard,
But if I happen to succeed, what would I say?

Pulling out uncomposed thoughts is way too hard.
And nobody truly wants to hear the raw truth,
Nobody wants to know my burdens or past,
Because if they did, they'd have to carry that pain too.

But I am more than what meets the eye,
I don't know how to be normal,
But I promise I try.

It's just that nobody knows what's living inside,
Do my differences strike your curiosity?
Want to know why my anatomy is different than mine?

I have a brain that thinks faster than I can comprehend,
No matter how much I try, it races relentlessly,
and it refuses to slow down for days on end,
I have a heart that angrily beats,
I feel it attempting to pound it's way out my chest,
And it constantly punishes me for being me.

I have a mouth that will never admit that I care,
My stubbornness is tangible,
It can be felt by anyone as it floats throughout the air,
But of course I care,
How could I not?

My stomach is always twisted up in knots,
And I have hands that bleed from fists that clench too tight,
And endless thoughts that keep me up at night,
I have legs that are constantly shaking,
And a soul that is ever breaking.

So yes, I am more than what meets the eye,
I hate talking about my anxiety,
But I dare you to try
Try living one day in my shoes,
And I promise, you wouldn't want to talk about it too.

Sharon Lee
High School Poetry

Sonnet

I can be shattered but I'm not broken
You tore me apart, ripped me to pieces
I thought I could be patient and potent
But my love for you always increases

I looked into your eyes, I saw nothing
I wonder if you had forgotten me
When we fight, we always end up hugging
But in the end, your lock doesn't match my key

When I first saw your smile, my heart fluttered
I could never forget your sparkling smile

When I try to talk, I always stutter
In my eyes, you made every day worthwhile

There were some days when you made me feel blue
I guess that must mean that I adore you

Kimberly Lueken
High School Poetry

Smoke

You take toxic people between your fingers,
just like you take your cigarette,
you inhale them and watch as they change,
yet before you let them before you,
you watch them slip between your fingers like smoke.

Gabrielle McBrayer
High School Poetry



Time, a Two-Voice Poem

Grandpa

So much time has passed

Slowly

I have seen many things
War, love, death
I've seen it all

My time is ending
I am old and frail

Watch the young boys
Watch them run and play

Joy

Will remember me

Won't make my mistakes

Almost done

Me

My boy

Goodbye.

Young Boy

Not much time has passed

Quickly

Time moves forward

My neighborhood, school, Tommie's pet turtle
I have seen few things
I've seen these

My time has just begun
I am young and spry

Hear the stories from my grandpa
The stories of his long life

Love

Teaches me

Makes me laugh

Forever

Him

Grandpa

How about one more story?

Grandpa?

Time Passes

We have seen wonderful things

We watch each other get older

I love to

He gives me

Because he

And

My time is

Time is up for

I love you

I will miss you

Fritz's Love Songs

When the lights went out,
It was alright.
Besides, they were rather bright.

Again I'll fall in love with my own loneliness,
These feelings are familiar, feelings like this.

Alone, I stood for a while,
And then I saw you,
Down the street. About a mile.

You illuminate the night with a light so clear
It floods the sky and blurs the darkness, like a chandelier.

I'd like to go up to you, to ask you a question.
But there's a weight
Holding me down.

Fear, starting that usual countdown.
I stumble up to you.

I don't want to lose this chance.
I ask if you could spare a dance.

I take off my disguise and show you me.
There's nothing left to hide,
you can see it in my eyes .

I'm no gold gleaming gold prize.
But at least I'm a guy who tries.

You hold my flame and set alight my heart.
It's different this time. Maybe this is a start.

Elizabeth Monreal
High School Poetry

Star-Crossed Lovers

Fate didn't bring us together
destiny pulled us apart
the universe said we were star-crossed
but we didn't take it to heart

The Sound of Music

It seemed like a forgotten echo the first time I heard the angelic plucks of an old faded nylon guitar that my grandfather played on slow mornings.

At first, life was entangled with this false image of TV and cable.
I remained unaware of my inner talents,
almost like a caterpillar not knowing one day it will fly.

If one doubts that music is capable of making someone confident,
then allow me to be your mirror.

It was on a rainy day that I discovered my secret.
It was an old studio piano, nearly invisible in the dusty basement.

My inexperienced fingers pushed down on a key.
The sound that transpired shot goosebumps from my fingertips to my toes.

It wanted me to know its secrets.
I played until my fingers became stone and my ears speakers.

My alarm clock was the mesmerizing sound
of a finger pressing gently upon a piano.

Every passing second without my piano
provoked an uneasiness in my bones that I could not erase.

School wasn't a priority.
Only the bus ride home to that abandoned basement.

This was my life but only the beginning.

It was a church. Big, tall, and bright.
The outside was nothing compared to its inner beauty.
It wasn't the white walls or the majestic pillars.
It was the voices. These angels singing with a peaceful harmony
that humans should not be capable of producing.

They called to me and I answered.

My voice became an instrument.
Every Sunday, I ventured to church
and got lost in the tunes of heaven.

I sang and laughed.
Music! That's what they called it.
It was capable of taking over the human body
and transporting you to another dimension.

A place that words could not be expressed.
This was my path for 6 years.
I learned and adapted. I harnessed my skills.

Music became capable of curing my insecurities.
A medicine.
It tends to have this random effect on anyone.
I believe in this. The future.

Like a racetrack,
I circled this with no intention of slowing down,
rather only speeding up.

Every second with my instruments
pulled me more into a room with white walls and golden fountains.
Some would have called it Heaven. I called it my basement.

Soon my curiosity ventured into the world beyond darkness
and comfort.
I followed the sound. The sound of music.
A remedy.
It seemed so alive to me.

Almost as if, I was following a real person.

Now I can confidently say that music is more than a hand held object
or electronic beat.

Music to me is the sound an old gate makes
when my grandmother pushes it open delicately.

Some days it was the sound a bird makes
when it whistles after a stealthy slumber.

This is my passion. My motivation.

The old piano hidden in the basement
allowed me a small glimpse of the future.
It was dark down there, but life has never been brighter.

Alexis Olsson
High School Poetry

To My Unrequited Love,

I loved your laugh, your humor, your intellect
But now I simply miss them.

I loved the way you made me feel
But now I am empty.

I loved the way a simple glance could set my heart on fire
But now my heart lays in pieces.

I loved the way you smiled, on the rare occasions you did
But now I know I was never the reason.

I loved it when you spoke to me; it was like I was the center of your universe
But I guess you were only the center of mine.

I loved it when it seemed like you never spoke to any other girls
But now I see them all the time.

I loved it when I still believed in love
But now I believe in nothing.

Because every time I see you with her I know
You never really saw me.

I loved you.

Now I just miss you.

Sincerely,
Your Unrequited Lover

Macy Palbaum
High School Poetry

Untitled

The summer weather
Soon leaves our touch

The new cool weather
Becomes in our clutch

As we all get warm
And gather our coats
To prepare for the storm

We gather our summer endnotes
For we will miss our summer warm

For now we say hello to fall

And a goodbye to summer

Gabriel Parker
High School Poetry

Thinking About You

Sometimes I wonder if you wonder if I'm thinking about you,
And I got to say... I don't even have a meaning without you,
If you wonder if you're on my mind, I can only be honest,
Since the day we met you've been the only thing on it

You complete me like the tides complete the ocean,
Or like the way your smile after a kiss completes the motion,
You complete me like your beautiful dress completes my suit and tie,
Or like how the simple word "Love" completes "You and I"

It's kind of funny, you're asleep as I am making this,
Laying on my shoulder... Looking pretty, makeup less,
I'm trying to focus on writing, but I can't because I crave a kiss,
I don't want to wake up this beautiful angel, but I might take the risk

You're the color in my life,
And babe no other girl could try,
To ever take me away from you,
Girl I'll love you till I die,
Man I am such a lucky guy,
I'd say you're one in a million,
But really that'd be such a lie,
Because you are one of a kind

Other people hating cause they look at us in envy,
They jealous because they can't find love and with us there is plenty,
Plenty, plenty already and it's still growing,
My love for you grows everyday there isn't no way it's slowing

I cherish every minute that I spend with you,
Whether it is cuddling or untying your tennis shoes,
We make it a time to remember no matter what's on the schedule,
We don't wait for special moments, we make the moment special

Every minutes special when I'm with you, it feels like a dream,
A sense of completed perfection burning up inside of me,
Sitting by the side of me,
The words most gorgeous sight to see,
My heart is in your hands and that's the only place it likes to be

Kristina Piscos
High School Poetry

The Sonnet of Truth

What if I told you the world can be pure
Stirred and turned by unparalleled beauty

The skyline of Kuala Lumpur
A landscape with only a single tree
The simplicity of water and soil
The obliviousness of its true gems

The night and day filled with laughter and toil
I dream of delight in creative stems

Tell me, with your heart, these sayings are true
Let me believe the universe is fair
This creation is all I've ever knew
Say the darkness is just a mere nightmare
This world, loved and trusted, was just a frame
Such a thing was to never stay the same

Untitled

Depression, you are not my family
Nor my friend
You are just a fantasy
A fantasy that is driving me to my insanity
This is all just a brutality

But how do I tell you to just leave?
To just leave me alone!
If I told you the truth would you believe?
Or will my soul be the one you'll own?

Dear depression, you make me feel such pain
Such hurt
A pain I wouldn't wish on anyone living on this earth
I just wish my entity and soul would start anew - call it Tabula Rasa, rebirth
Maybe then I wouldn't feel less of worth

And just when I thought it couldn't get worse, your cousin suicide came
knocking at my door
She tells me in a better place I'll be free if I give her my life to relinquish
Yet a deal with the devil I'll make if my own life I were to take
But I won't because that would just be a mistake
Suicide, my life I will not let you take

I must admit my life's not perfect
But I have to think of whom I'll effect
Besides, God told me my life is worth preserving
Therefore no suicide
I will not fall for your deception
I am the one who decides

Dear suicide, I have found the strength to live
I was meant to thrive
That is why I stayed alive

Planet Me

We are erupting Perceptions,
in our bodies.

Made of skin and bone and mountains -
You make up, break up, we flourish- a divine daisy.
With one foot dabbling in egotism,
A single page of an infinite other -

And one hand reaching through absence and shaking God's omnipotence.

Normal, numb, and obligated - we astray beings.
We leak wisdom into reflecting pools,
And indulge in pipe dreams.

We burn our honored statues at the wicked memorial.

Inscribed in the headstone:

I am man. Distracted by knives, I conquered the night.
Like a course less bird I drew a word with nothing but a seed on my back.
I bleed pools of metallic starlight.
Chained to a lagoon - I drown, in accused suffering.

Bathroom Tile Revelations

I do not often exist
I wilt
Even my brightest colors
Are desaturated to others
Suffocating in grey
Even in a room of inhaler bodies.

I do not often exist in my bathtub
I steam
Water hot and boiling my skin
The things coming from
Underneath the crack of the door
Will not reach me for some time.

I do not often exist with him
I stay safe
Clovers twirling between fingers
Even on a quiet field
It is better not to speak
Than to speak and regret it.

I do not often exist when I remember
I rot
His touch between my thighs
The memories of him and all he was
Leaving me to decompose
In my own garden that is far from him.

I do not often exist to myself
I dilute
Even in rooms untouched
There is nothing sacred
Each moment is choreographed
Many times over.

I am going to exist
Emotions will drip over my skin
Things never felt will begin
Sprouting up in fertile soil
Creating new playgrounds to explore
New meaning to moments in the past

I am going to exist in my bathtub
Scars will become pale
With the tiles as my guide
Row by row
And step by step
To porcelain palaces not so far away.

I am going to exist with him
He is too beautiful when he paints
For moments seeped with silence
I will not continue in poetry
When I could simply speak
And tell him of the hues that he brings.

I am going to exist when I remember
The color red will not bring me
To an unsafe place in an unsafe car
It will be a representation of where I've been
Not what I have lost.

I am going to exist to myself
Steps without meaning
Weight displaced
No longer will I stop
In a crowd of dancing masses.

Untitled

Zane the mellow fellow

I'm fairly mellow, so I'm told,
I'll stay that way 'til I grow old.

Always up for new, exciting feats,
Or just chilling by myself with my fresh indie beats

Seldom will you find me down
In my neon encrusted town

I'm more chill than your ice
And, for the most part, nice

So call me Zane the mellow fellow
Because my favorite color is...
Salmon

Malika Taylor
High School Poetry

Sonnet Love Poem

The way you stare makes me super red
I just can't believe I have you with me

Good god it just makes me feel fluffy inside
Holding your soft hand is a prized treasure

Hugging you is like holding a jewel
Strong but I'd never want a scratch on you

Rough scruff on your chin brushes against my cheek
Your soft tender lips gently press on mine

As my hand embraces your waist with care
My heart flutters as I feel your hot breath

My heart pounds hard against my weak ribcage
My heart stumbles over our interactions
My heart gushes at the touch of your kiss

I am in love with you my darling dear

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