



HENDERSON
LIBRARIES



Unlocked Voices



2020 Teen Writing Contest



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Middle School
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Carter Williams



Bella Ariana
Middle School Essay

Will You See?

I am writing this after taking a shower so I could cry about a book I cannot have. I am letting my wet, unbrushed hair drip onto the pages of this notebook, blurring the words.

“Why were you crying about a book?” One might ask. And here is my answer.

The world is full of lies. Lies woven carefully together like the colored the colored thread used to make the fabric we craft into clothes. Everywhere you look you see lies, hear them. Whether it is a neon sign advertising for a restaurant claiming to have award winning pancakes, or your friend lying to you about what they did last weekend. I am sick of lies.

Stories are the only things that do not lie. Here one may argue and tell me books are lies. Fiction stories or mythology for instance, they are not real. The story never happened. While it did not physically take place, every scene was not acted out; it is real and not a lie.

It took place in the writer’s heart and mind. Yes, I know what you are thinking. How sappy and predictable, but it is true.

The story itself did not happen; the story and words written down do not matter. It is not the sole purpose of a book. You must look deeper.

The story is a cover, an explanation to express certain emotions. It is not what happens within the book that matters; it is how the writer felt whilst writing it. The story is the lie, but the words are not. Confusing, I know. It is hard to explain, because it cannot be explained. It can only be felt.

The story lives inside the writer, the emotions slowly blossoming like a rose, petals reaching outward until the inside of the flower is visible, becoming something touching and beautiful. It is not about the plot, the characters, or the genre. It is about the emotions. At one point the author felt these emotions, it does not matter what the emotion was. Anger, jealousy, sadness, happiness.

They felt the story, if it was written with a pencil and paper or on a computer; they felt it had a purpose.

The story does not have to be true, but you cannot hide the emotions. If you are writing a lie you want someone to believe, it had a purpose, it originated from some feeling. Every word has a meaning, hidden or in plain sight. Every letter, line, circle, and curve have a meaning. You just have to look deeper to decipher it.

They say actions speak louder than words. True and false. You could take this very literally and say actions do not have mouths therefore they cannot speak. But the truth is the action must be paired with the words. So, when it comes down to it, actions can lie just as easily as words. The emotions are the truth.

There are many arguments for what I have just written, that this is one of the lies I hate so much. But what makes a lie is believing and not believing. So, you may ask why I'm writing this. And I have one answer for you.

I am writing this because there is only thing I believe with all my heart and soul. I am a writer.



Nicole Blachowska
Middle School Essay

Societal Perfections

As many as 10% of all teenagers suffer from eating disorders. Many teens, both male and female, suffer from body dysmorphia because of social media and their peers. The societal perfect image can cause adolescents to become self-conscious and develop eating disorders.

People starting from the age of 10 have a severe fear of being fat. They are influenced by the people they see every day on television/different media platforms. These platforms 'inspire' people to be thin, sometimes to the point of causing body image problems/eating disorders.

"According to The Journal of Adolescent Health, 81 percent of American 10-year-olds are afraid of being fat. Of course, very few 10-year-olds attend runway fashion shows. Instead, they—and Americans of all ages—get their "thinspiration" from a variety of media, among them ads for all manner of consumer goods that invariably feature tall, stick-thin models". (Rodenbough, L. The Fashion Industry Promotes Eating Disorders 24) Many studies have been conducted to prove that the media influences young women to develop anorexia or bulimia nervosa. Many of these studies have been conducted in countries where the media is not a very big part of life, in which case, they introduce the media and see the outcomes on adolescents.

"For example, there is Anne Becker's work showing that the introduction of television into a population of Fijian teenage girls caused a surge of eating disorders in just three years. And numerous studies show that sexual abuse, trauma, and even bullying can catalyze eating disorders". (Gura, T. Genes Cannot Explain Anorexia 16) Not very many women are/will ever be the same size as most models. Looking up to models/influencers creates a strive for an almost impossible perfection. "Only about 2 percent of women are as thin as most models, says the National Eating

Disorders Association.... Thus, the standard media images of beauty often aren't true to life” (Kowalski K. Poor Body Image Leads to Anorexia 7).

Although many people state that only the least intellectual people strive to look like the models of perfection, many influencers (that many look up to) have struggled with eating disorders to be ‘perfect’.

“Otherwise, the most obvious thing to say, surely, is that only the dimmest among us will mistake the realm of fashion and catwalks for the real world”. (Casey J. The Media Do Not Contribute to the Incidence of Eating Disorders 6)

Society can cause adolescents to strive for a non-achievable perfection and develop eating disorders. The media is a very important factor in affecting body image for young adults. Their peers also have a very big impact on how they perceive themselves. Young women and men are dying because of these extremely overlooked disorders.

Untitled

As a youth, I am familiar that many children have experienced the following; physical attacks, bullying, rape, school shooting, etc. This all falls into the same category, youth violence. I believe that there can be a stop to youth violence if everyone contributes. In this essay, I will be opening up this topic and showing the side of the world, no one wants to show.

To begin with, a simple way to define youth violence is violence occurring between youths. Some key facts to know are that 200,000 homicides occur from ages 10-29 years old, 3-24% of women's first sexual experience was without consent (forced). Youth violence is one of society's most public health problems, from acts like bullying and assaults.

The main causes of youth violence are; media influence, peer pressure, child abuse, domestic violence, traumatic events, mental illness, drug, and alcohol abuse. An example of this, in this case of social media influence, is when a person a blackmails person b to rob person c's phone, which could later end in a fight between person b and c. Another example is in the case of the person of a traumatic event a has been a victim of physical abuse at home, so he takes out the anger through person b also known as bullying.

Recognizing risk factors is very important in topics like these. Within the individual, low commitment to school, unemployment or violence in the family opens up risks leading to youth violence. Within family/close friends or intimate partners, the misuse of alcohol, low family income, and association with gangs as well opens up risks. Lastly, for the community access to firearms, alcohol, and poverty contribute too.

My life was never affected by any type of violence, but our school has received many shooting threats making us live in fear. I have been robbed a few times, making me more aware of my surroundings. Also, being a witness of fights between young

people, I noticed many times it is for the attention or peer pressure, so the smart thing to do was to focus on myself and treat others well.

How can we prevent this from happening? Violence has affected many children mentally and physically. To easily prevent, be aware of your surroundings. Many people have problems with alcohol and drug abuse, causing them to lose control, possibly causing damage to anything in their way, being aware of what is around you might save you one day. When a child's home is safe, this would be considered a violence-free zone. When a child's house is "violence-free" the child is less likely to cause violence against other people. Finally, have healthy, stable and safe relationships with children is essential to prevent any type of youth violence.

Untitled

How has violence has affected me? Well, it hasn't. I have never got in a fight with anybody besides my brother.

I run into things and trip and fall and hurt myself a lot but never hurt by people. I think the causes of violence are a kid might bully kids because he gets bullied at home by a family member. Or somebody might be angry with the world because something happened. Or they could be trying to impress their friends. But none of those should be an excuse for violence.

I think that I could inform the world about teen violence and that it is really bad, and we need to do something about it.



Samantha Olea

Middle School Essay

Untitled

Youth violence has once affected everyone's life. It can affect anyone and everyone. It will either affect you in the future or it probably already affected you in the past. It may even be affecting you now in the present. Either way, you will be affected by violence in your life. Something I do know though is that violence has affected my life. Some things have scarred me from the violence I saw that happened in the past. Trust me, it's not that pretty.

When I was younger, my parents were happily married. Everything was going great in my life. Then my brother was born and everything got even better. After that, my sister was born and that meant I would be the eldest out of my siblings. Soon after, when we were all toddlers, things got pretty ugly. Originally, they were sober, but then they started using drugs and alcohol. Everything was really bad. They would constantly fight. It seemed like it would happen 24/7. My siblings and I were scared because we would never know what would happen next. They then started fighting physically. My parents never hurt my siblings and me, but they would constantly hit each other. It was bad. I remember one time; my dad kicked my mom's chin and she wasn't able to talk for a day. One thing that my parents would do is yell at my siblings and me constantly. Since I was the older sibling, I would make sure my siblings wouldn't get yelled at and that I would get yelled at. After a year of fighting with each other, they both finally decided to get a divorce. All the yelling was finally over. My siblings and I then started to go half the week with my dad and half the week with my mom. As I got older though, I decided to go live with my mom for good. I do visit my dad once in a while but I would rather live with my mom. Both of my siblings still go half the week with my dad and half the week with my mom.

Youth violence could also be caused by yourself. One because

that would cause you to use violence among yourself is social media. You may see something on social media that may lead you to use violence among yourself.

Another cause would be drug and alcohol abuse. Drugs and alcohol can blur you and make you think things that you never think of. For example, it would probably make you think about what other people think about you and would cause you to use violence among yourself which is bad.

Something that I would be able to do that would provoke youth violence is by sending the person to a therapist. They would be able to talk to the therapist about their problems and why they are causing violence among themselves. Another way that I could help someone with youth violence is by talking to them myself and see what I could do to help them. I could also try and tell their family about the situation and have their family talk to the person about why youth violence is bad. The family could also tell the person how much they love them and that would help them as well.

Youth violence occurs all over the world and we must try and provoke it. We must understand why the person is using violence among themselves and then try to help with the situation and fix the problem.

Violence a Gruesome Fate

Violence is a rut of evil it is a deadly thing. Violence has affected hundreds of people throughout the world. It has affected everyone from unborn children to 100-year-old grandparents. It scares people on whole levels and has unimaginable effects on families.

I think that violence is something wrong in one's brain that causes them to become aggressive towards others and can have deadly outcomes. It scares almost everyone. It can change one's fate and moral decisions in life. It can change you from the inside out and can also be caused a lot of different things. I think that no teen or anybody should ever go through violence. I think that violence can hurt people emotionally and physically. I think violence should be ended. So, no kid ever has to go through it again. I think that the causes of violence are not what that kid does but who he or she is around and if the village around them is morally good people. Like old tails say it takes a village to raise a child.

Now, what can you do to stop violence. Provide mental help to kids in need. You can do things that may be hard but if we all rally together we can stop the violence.

Fashion?

Let's be honest, most people these days are mostly obsessed with fashion. In the 21st century, when people have cars that drive themselves, there are people wearing mops on the bottom of their boots, shirts that are made out of holes, and shoes on top of their heads, for fashion. Why has the world turned to this?

People knowing that fashion is harming the Earth, with water pollution, the use of toxic chemicals and increasing levels of textile waste. Vibrant colors, new patterns, and designs are 'trendy' but are achieved by toxic chemicals that ruin the environment, and for some garments, the toxic chemicals can even leak out of the clothes and damage your skin and hair, not to mention other garments that you are wearing. All that for unwearable clothes?!

Some of the latest design fails include the Accordion pants for men, Platform Crocs, Cowboy flip-flops, Camel Toe shoes, YEEZY Ribbed Distressed Sweater, Heel Heels, and lots more. Not only is it crazy that people thought that these would make good fashion designs, but they are also very bad for the environment and you. For example, some of these materials contain very harmful chemicals, or they are made out of animal materials. Too much of the animal materials could cause an extinction, which in turn could cause harm in the balance of the ecosystem. Another downside, for example, some of the shoes don't support your feet, keep your feet healthy, and/or feel comfortable, which is all the right health benefits that a good shoe should offer.

Let's get deeper into what horrible chemicals are ruining our Earth for these horrid fashion trends, like the MC Hammer Pants of the 1980s and the Velour Tracksuit trends of the 2000s. No offense for those who liked that trend. A few of the chemicals and their effects are:

Chlorine Bleach: This doesn't cause many environmental problems, but it does cause harm if it has too much direct contact

with your skin or if it is swallowed.

Formaldehyde: When in the atmosphere, formaldehyde breaks down quickly to create formic acid and carbon monoxide, which can also be very harmful. When animals are exposed to formaldehyde it can make them sick, reduce their lifespan, and affect their ability to breed.

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs): VOCs play a significant role in the formation of ozone and fine particles in the atmosphere. Under sunlight, the VOCs react with nitrogen oxides that are released mainly from vehicles, power plants (Where clothes are made!) and industrial activities to form ozone, which then helps the formation of fine particles. Too many fine particles can be dangerous.

There are many more dangerous chemicals that are caused by the production of clothes, but it would take far too long to read all of them.

Now back to the fact that our environment is being ruined because of horrible fashion trends, why? Some people believe that these horrible fashion trends are a result of the demand for original clothes is going up, which in result rushes the designer and the final product isn't all that great. Others believe that it could do with more people trying to become well known because of their 'creative' and 'new' fashion designs, even if those new fashion designers are the greatest. Maybe the downhill in style and trends that are trendy and stylish is a mix of those two, people making 'creative' and 'new' designs, designers being rushed, and being slightly influenced by those 'new' and 'creative' designs.

Is there a way that we could both save the style and safety of fashion? Whatever happened to the stylish and safe t-shirt and jeans combo that lasted for ages? Not only were styles like the t-shirt, jeans, and simple patterned dresses stylish, but they also contained less of those harmful chemicals. Some people and designers would do well with going back in time to behold the simple beauty that some designs hold. For example, one simple yet trendy style of 2019 is the loose or cropped shirt, complemented with plain jeans, maybe a rip or two on the knees. Not only is that outfit stylish and simple, but the only harmful chemicals included are synthetic indigo dye for the jeans, that are normally made out

of 100% cotton, and silicone waxes, petroleum scours, softeners, heavy metals, flame retardants, and ammonia. Sure, there are still harmful chemicals, but in comparison to the super complicated ones and ‘unstylish’ clothes (Keep in mind that I didn’t list all chemicals.), the simple and stylish clothing choices have next to no harmful chemicals!

Also, something that not many people know, some individuals even end up losing their families due to... impulse buying. For example, let us imagine that John went on Instagram and saw an ad for the YEEZY Ribbed Distressed Sweater. He ignored it with a small voice in his head saying, “C’mon! It’s a YEEZY product, it has to be amazing!” Later on, he sees more ads and posts about that sweater, and all the while that voice is getting louder. Then, he finally gives in. He doesn’t talk with his family about it, and he buys that sweater for at least \$659. His family could have already been in financial distress, and once his wife found out that he bought that without consulting her, there would most likely be a huge fight. That fight could lead to a divorce, child custody, and lots of other bad things that just get him deeper into losing his family. And all because he splurged on a sweater, that is a huge fashion fail, that he probably will never wear.

In conclusion, this paper may have had a difficult storyline to follow, but the one thing that I’m trying to say is that you have a choice whether or not you want to go out, buy really expensive clothes that are fashion fails and cause environmental harm, you have a choice whether or not you want to start the change of fashion for the better. Or, you have the choice to go along with fashion fails that are bad for you and the environment, and watch as someone else takes the stand that you could have taken all along. Let's work together to change the face of fashion, save the environment, fashion trends, John, and many other problems that are caused by fashion. That would all lead to taking one small step to a better world!

Violence

Violence. It has affected everyone's life in some way or another, and there are many ways it can happen. Violence has affected me in several ways, and I will cover this and some other topics. I have been affected by violence before, in physical and emotional violence. Physically I have been pushed around a lot by many people, and emotional people make fun of me and call me things that aren't very great (using horrible language).

Another topic is about the causes of youth violence, what are they? Causes of youth violence, as the media claims, is games. That may be slightly true, depending on how long they play the game and how violent it is. Mainly youth violence is caused by temper, mood, and other actions the people surrounding them do.

If you decided you wanted to help out about youth violence, these might be some options. Try limiting the screen time of the children having problems, as studies show that the amount of screen time one uses is linked to signs of depression and violence. You can also do interactive things with the child that doesn't involve violence because if you do that for long enough they will in a way forget about the violence and not want to do it.



Mischa Abad
Casey Cain
Alyssa Chan
Brooklyn Chan
Katelyn Chan
Leslie Denton
Ella Gaughan
Michael Grubich
Emily Hebing
Lily Mayo
Alexandra Milano
Emma Rich
Isabel Sasaki
Annabelle Swift
Penelopi Varga
Catherine Vernaci

Untitled

Birds are flying,
the sun is shining,
and all I feel is despair.

I can see it in your eyes
that you can feel it too.

Even though the world is buzzing and happy,
I am not.

I hold your hand.
Rivers of saltwater flow from my eyes.
You take me by your side.
And we share our thoughts of
bitter loneliness and depression.

You tell me that loneliness can be sweet.
You tell me that loneliness can be good.
My silent sobs stop.
I look at you.
And I decide to trust you.

Untitled

The thin splashes of rain outside the sliding door—
The thin chills that run through the room—
The thin shadows that lacquer the room,
like infinite ballerinas dancing upon your fear.

The thin mahogany tiles; cold on your bare feet.
A thin creak pierces the seemingly perpetual silence, and the
musty smell of your unventilated cellar wafts into your nose.

It tingles as you momentarily forget what's happening,
as you identify the sting of stale plastic,
the sting of the dusty mist,
the sting of the broken appliances,
remainders of oil and cold metal—
You hang on to the thin but intricate wooden frame of your
mahogany door, crafted to match your tiles.

You've always had protection—
It's always been so easy—
You've grown immune to hardship—
You've never had to face fear—

Never—

Ever—

The pull—

The need to prove yourself—

It engulfs you—

And you rush into the cellar, darkness flooding your eyes, nose,
ears, pores, as you dash deeper into the endless void, the limited
sight of your seemingly normal cellar disappearing before your
very eyes as you fade from existence—

Into thin air.



Alyssa Chan
Middle School

Ball

Bouncing and pouncing
Through meadows and forest flowers
I play with my ball
Even in rain showers.

Thunderstorms and Snowstorms
I don't care
The only thing I want is
Seeing my ball fly through the air.

Winter or Summer
Spring or Fall
Nothing is important
As playing with my ball.

Cold or Hot
Snow or sand
Won't stop me
From playing with my ball on air or land.

No matter what direction
No matter what height
Nothing will stop me
From playing with my ball all day and night.



Brooklyn Chan
Middle School

Why is School so Hard?

Why oh why, is school so tough?
Sometimes, I feel like I just had enough.
Tests and homework are a lot to do.
Most of the time, I don't have a clue!

Sometimes I study for several hours,
when it comes to the test, I have no power.
Thinking really hard, strains my brain,
it feels like I am going to pop a vein.

Studying for hours from day to night,
but I still can't get the answers right!
Reading the questions verse to verse,
sometimes school feels like a curse.

When the day comes to take the test,
I just need to remember to do my best.
Take deep breaths is what I'll do
and when it's done I can say, yahoo!



Katelyn Chan
Middle School Poetry

Never Give Up

Why do you push on,
In this land of sorrow?
When sadness and evil,
Lie on every tomorrow.
Why don't you give up?

How do you withstand,
Your grief and your pain?
When your endless doubts,
Forever reign.
Why don't you give up?

What's the point,
Of doing your best till the end?
When your suffering,
Never seems to mend.
Why don't you give up?

Oh, my dear friend,
That sounds like a horrible place!
Well, here's the reason why
I have a smile on my face.
Why would I ever give up?

I will withstand,
Because I believe,
My difficult goals
I will one day achieve.
Why would I ever give up?

I continue to push on,
Through my sadness and sorrow.

Because I believe,
I can make a better tomorrow.
Why would I ever give up?

The point of never quitting,
Through my greatest frustrations.
Is to build a better world,
For the next generations.
Why would I ever give up?

So please, my friend
Don't give up every day.
There is good on every corner,
And happiness on the way!
So, why would you ever give up?

Don't give up
When the sun goes out.
Or when everything seems
To make you shout.
So, why would you ever give up?

Please know,
It isn't the end.
When everything seems
Like it isn't your friend.
So, why would you ever give up?

And those feelings inside,
Aren't just your battle.
There are many others,
Who feel the same rattle.
So, why would you ever give up?

Please, I beg you
Don't go down the path of evil and dishonesty.
There's delight and amusement in your life.
They've always been there, waiting for you to truly see!
So now, my dear friend, do you still want to give up?



Leslie Denton
Middle School

Untitled

A period is used,
when the author chooses
to end her sentence
without any question.

When a comma is used,
this means the author had
to pause the sentence,
yet it continues on.

Semicolons are used,
whenever the author has a choice. . .
whether to continue or stop
is up to her alone.

Without any knowledge,
a period seems the best way
to end her line.

But then she realizes,
there is so much more
so she shows it with a semicolon.

The sentence didn't stop right then,
even though she thought
it was the only option.

She continues her sentence
at least until the period is needed.

Inner Strength

You see her as small and frail
But inside she is strong and mighty.
Never to show
For it is a wrongdoing.
Never to be seen,
For the real person, she shall be.
Waiting forever
To show her true colors of the day to be.
Long the days go by,
Longer each day.
Waiting and waiting
While watching her people die.
The time is now
She shall not wait any longer
For long it has been
Since she has heard her own battle cry.
The wait is over.
The long days are gone.
For her majesty has come as an equal.
To save what has been lost in the mists of her land.
Here, here they say!
For her majesty has come to save the day!
She only replied with grace and beauty
I am here as one of you
To pay my duty to our fair country.



Michael Grubich
Middle School

Untitled

To ye who is of the saddest woe,
For thou have been defeateth by thy foe.
Just remember these two words,
"Thou art the greatest in all these worlds."



Emily Hebing
Middle School Poetry

A Circle of Years

The Rat

The one who is industrious
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who will spend
And the ones who will save.

The one who is careful
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who stumble
And the ones who step-lightly.

The one who is positive
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who glower
And those who hold their heads high.

The one who is all these things.
Is not unique or drab
They add a piece into this world
As the one who is the rat.

The Ox

The one who is honest
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who show a falsehood
And the ones who are candid.

The one who is diligent
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are idle
And the ones who are assiduous.

The one who has endurance
Can look upon a crowd.

They see the ones who are feeble
And they ones who have continuity.

The one who is all these things.
Is not unique or drab.
They add a piece into this world
As the one who is the ox.

The Tiger

The one who is competitive
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are half-hearted
And the ones who are determined.

The one who is brave
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are timid
And the ones who are dauntless.

The one who is confident
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are overly modest
And the ones who are unperturbed.

The one who is all these things
Is not unique or drab.
They add a piece into this world
As the one who is the tiger.

The Rabbit

The one who is tender
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are flinty
And the ones who are sensitive.

The one who is graceful
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are flamboyant
And the ones who are stately.

The one who is modest

Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are brash
And the ones who are humble.
The one who is all these things.
Is not unique or drab.
They add a piece into this world.
As the one who is the rabbit.

The Dragon

The one who is dominant
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are negligible
And the ones who are grand.

The one who is ambitious
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are uneager
And the ones who are dynamic.

The one who is dignified
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are coarse
And the ones who are distinguished.

The one who is all these things
Is not unique or drab.
They add a piece into this world
As the one who is the dragon.

The Snake

The one who is calm.
Can look upon a crowd
They see the ones who are distressed
And the ones who are peaceful.

The one who is composed
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are uneasy

And the ones who are serene.

The one who is expressive
Can look upon a crowd.

They see the ones who are vacant
And the ones who are animated.

The one who is all these things
Is not unique or drab.

They add a piece into this world
As the one who is the snake.

The Horse

The one who is energetic
Can look upon a crowd.

They see the ones who are faint
And the ones who are vivacious.

The one who is passionate
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are dry
And the ones who are ardent.

The one who is upright
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are unseemly
And the ones who are virtuous.

The one who is all these things
Is not unique or drab.
They add a piece into this world
As the one who is the horse.

The Goat

The one who is sympathetic
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are inconsiderate
And the ones who are understanding.

The one who is mild-mannered

Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are hot-tempered
And the ones who are poised.

The one who is gentle
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are intense
And the ones who are soothing.

The one who is all these things
Is not unique or drab.
They add a piece into this world
As the one who is the goat.

The Monkey

The one who is witty
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are uncomic
And the ones who are facetious.

The one who is creative
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are unoriginal
And the ones who are innovative.

The one who is intelligent
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are moronic
And the ones who are sharp.

The one who is all these things
Is not unique or drab.
They add a piece into this world
As the one who is the monkey.

The Rooster

The one who is independent
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are dependent
And the ones who are self-reliant.

The one who is earnest
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are light-headed
And the ones who are serious.

The one who is responsive
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are unreceptive
And the ones who are receptive.

The one who is all these things
Is not unique or drab.
They add a piece into this world
As the one who is the rooster.

The Dog

The one who is active
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are inactive
And the ones who are thriving.

The one who is faithful
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are fickle
And the ones who are dedicated.

The one who is warm-hearted
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are iron-hearted
And the ones who are beneficent.

The one who is all these things
Is not unique or drab.
They add a piece into this world
As the one who is the dog.

The Pig

The one who is loyal
Can look upon a crowd.

They see the ones who are dubious
And the ones who are devout.

The one who is honest
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are false
And the ones who are veracious.

The one who is helpful
Can look upon a crowd.
They see the ones who are unhelpful
And the ones who are conducive.

The one who is all these things
Is not unique or drab.
They add a piece into this world
As the one who is the pig.

All these qualities
All these thoughts
They all unite in one.
They create a puzzle of personalities.
And they unite in a circle of years
Called Chinese New Year.

The Only Light

To dream of the day when I will see light
Yet it will be forever night
The sun seems to be forever away
As the darkness take over every day
I dream to see a real lotus
But everything is dead, with no one's notice
Although the sun is forever away
With darkness present every day
There is still light in this land
When I get hold my mother's hand
And as life goes on and as it tries
I see light in her glistening eyes.



Alexandra Milano
Middle School

Bandanas

I am strong and confident.
Yet I am kind and sweet.

I am bold and brave.
But I am shy and neat.

I am a warrior of my own.
Even if I'm scared and helpless.

I stand tall as a statute.
Yet I am rather short and stubby.

I am with a whole army.
But alone with no one.

I am intelligent, not cocky.
Even though I'm coy and timid.

By mom.
Oh, but don't forget your lunch pail.



Emma Rich
Middle School

Wishes

Putting trust into a pond
Hoping for a bond
Then remembering our chances
leaving it at the fences.

Only to leave the same
a sad shame
To leave me dreaming
With his smile beaming.

No shining star
Or fresh new car
Could repay
The place you lay.

Dug in my heart
a piece of art
I will stay awake
Feeling my heart quake.

Until I turn
And no longer feel the burn
The burn of the wait
Since I was eight.

I will still wish in the pond
Waiting for the bond
Knowing it's been you
All along.

Flutters

Brown eyes
Black hair
Looking at them
Then avoiding their stare.

Chest puffed
Hair adjusted
Looking pretty
Heart flutters.

Walking over
Asking to chat
Responding nicely
Their pretty eyes
Blinking back.

Feeling so light
Everything in color
Feeling happiness
In one another.

Wondering
What is this feeling?
Enjoying our time together
My heart, though pounding
Just flutters.



Anabelle Swift
Middle School

What You Mean to Me

You are the sun on the darkest of days,
When the rain is done, and the clouds go away.

And not late after then,
When the sun will set,
Will you be the star in the dark night sky?

The wind, when it whistles,
Is you calling my name.

When I think "Love",
I imagine your face.

The warm sand on the beach,
When it tickles my toes,
I think of the butterflies
Being with you would compose.

The swell of the music,
The chilly night breeze,
And many more things.
As I think of you,
Do you think of me?



Penelopi Varga
Middle School Poetry

Exact Zodiac

Adventurous Aries, not everything gotta be about a battle.
It seems like every day you're just looking for someone else to
rattle.

All of the anger, the hate and the rage,
Share the spotlight, get off the stage!
You always want to shout, and feel the need to scream,
Take a break from your solo act, try working as a team.
You think you're really funny, there isn't a doubt,
When you don't get your way, there's no reason to pout.

Tranquil Taurus, please get off your phone.
You've got quite the attitude, try to watch your tone.
So stern and so stubborn, I'm not trying to intrude,
When I ask you a simple question, no need to be so rude.
No social spirit, yet some say you're adored,
I don't think I can count every text you've so blatantly ignored.
You avoid confrontation every chance that you get,
The way you choose to act is leaving me upset.

Grandiose Gemini, you wear two different faces,
Each of them moves at very different paces.
You're not trying to be liars, I must certainly admit,
You cover it up with personality, lots of charm and wit.
It's yes and then no with you,
High and then low with you,
Tell and then show with you,
You just never know with you.
You change so quickly, that we all must take offense,
Don't start the drama, just start making sense!

Caregiver Cancer, stop crying, stop acting like you're dying!
Stop trying to tell the truth, 'cause we all know that you're lying.

Every word that you say,
you keep on denying,
Every scandal that you tell us,
you know that we're not buying.
Here's the inside scoop,
No one really cares.
No one's bad mouthing you,
No one ever stares.

We're joking around but you're taking it so seriously.
We're laughing at the situation but you're crying, so deliriously.

Loyal Leo, you're not so golden.
Always thinking you're the best,
"Phew", got that one off my chest.
So erratic, dramatic, an annoying "Insta" addict.
On top of that you're clingy, and blingy,
just another form of static.
You think you aced that role but I'm challenged to believe it,
Because when you're faced with competition,
you're the always first one to leave it.

Virtuous Virgo, your tempo's like zoom-zoom.
Stop thinking you're facing your doom.
And by the way, stop cleaning my room!
Always worrying about things that don't matter.
Stop feeding me food, 'cause you're making me fatter!
Self-diagnosis is causing you hypnosis.
The control freak zodiac,
Always picking on people for the things that they lack.
Constantly looking behind your back,
For fear that you might be under attack.
But don't worry Virgo,
I'll cut you some slack.
Innately paranoid, don't worry so much.
Leave a trail of Lysol on everything that you touch.

Loving Libra, craving that attention and instinctively jealous,
If you're truly upset, then you might as well tell us.
Obsessive and zealous, take an aspirin or two,

Overexaggerating stories
when you know they're simply not true.
Yes, every day is getting deeper,
Take what you want,
you're just like the "Grim Reaper".
Every conversation,
You have to be in it.
Come join the game for fun,
You don't always need to win it.

Solo Sagittarius, did your mother drop you on your head?
Why with all this spontaneity, you just might end up dead.
"Oops", was it something I've said?
Because you're sitting up wondering about aliens in your bed.
You're always smiling,
So sincere, as someone said.
You know what, I'm done with you,
I'll catch Capricorn instead.

Confident Capricorn, your say you're not torn,
Would you still try to save me if I wasn't your first-born?
You're undeniably stable,
Yet you're watching TV without any cable.
Who says you're lazy?
Now that must be a fable.
When your mother calls you for dinner,
You bring homework to the table.
Every day you're working, never any fun,
But if I asked you to come over,
I'm sure you'd drop your phone and run.

Analytical Aquarius, full of intellect and skill,
How is it that someone saw you write you fish into your will?
None of the Zodiac signs would protect you if you were caught
late-night in the frig,
Knowing you, you'll figure out a way to mend that very bridge.
Your jam is a slow song that shows just how you get along,
With just about everyone who ever did you wrong.
Some may describe you as a bit nervous or intense,

But sadly, I'm ending the description
of this sign to keep the readers in suspense.

Poor old passive Pieces, the cynical sign,
Don't say your super happy
and then turn around and wine.

Always so conflicted, can't make up your mind.
Always looking for flaws that you think you need to find.
Get your head out of the clouds.

Come back down to earth.

No need to be so critical right from your sacred birth.
We know you're charismatic, but you need to take a breather,
Just remember passionate Pieces, you're not perfect either.

How the Cuckoo Bird Got its Name

A little bird looked out it's window
When birds were first made, you know
The birds had no names
And played silly games.

Now this one bird
Wanted to name other birds
And be the king
Of anything that has a wing.

He saw a bird by a white daisy
Moving so fast it was crazy
“This bird should be called cuckoo
It moves so fast in the morning blue
Cuckoo, cuckoo
I am better than you”
“I am called a hummingbird
Haven't you heard?”
The little bird shook his head
“I shall find another one to name instead.”

He came to one wearing all black
“I've come to give him some feedback
On what I think his name should be
As he sits upon a cherry tree
This bird should be called cuckoo
He has a big crew.”
“I am a crow
Don't you know?”
“Oh” says the nameless bird
To find another one that won't call him absurd.

He saw one with a long neck
Swimming by a bridge deck
“This bird puts me in a daze
Looking at it in so many ways
Its long white neck
Its orange beak

“I am a swan
From morning to dawn
You should name yourself
And not others like myself”
“So I will, so I will!”
He exclaims as he flies downhill
“I shall be king bird
I will say not another word
so humans will name me that
Like a cat.

But he did say another word
To a bird
Cuckoo, cuckoo
I’m better than you
Said the humans oh boy
This is a real toy
We shall name it cuckoo
Because that is what it says to you.

So, the cuckoo bird
And its herd
Always call cuckoo
I’m better than you.



Middle School
**SHORT
STORIES**

Kenzy Alshinhab
Haylee Batsuuri
Julie Beuparlant
Bayley Blitz
Alahna Carstens
Briana Costello
Lucy Creer
Nikolas Davison
Kinley DeLanis
Tatiana Eubanks
Kendra Ewy
Izabella Giaccani
Savannah Green
Adelle Jensen
Sophia Kutz
Ginny Miner
Zachary Orgeron
Abbey Parkes
Davis Paul
Kaydee Phommaline
Julia Pistalu
Sachin Reddy
Sabrina Skoboloff
Alexandria Sundstrom
Alden Winchell

Untitled

There's one thing that I'm never doing again. Going camping. It all started when my school was hosting a field trip for third-graders to go camping for 2 days and 1 night. When I told my mom about the trip, she was pretty worried. You see, my mom is very kind and loving and she's always worried about me when it comes to adventurous things like camp. I remember her saying, "I have a feeling this won't end up too well."

Let me tell you that I was a 3rd grader who was as tall as a restaurant counter and very daring. It took several weeks to finally persuade my mom to let me go camping with my friends. The night before camp, I went out to get some snacks and then packed my bag. We weren't even allowed to bring our phones with us. On the bus, my friend and I were extremely excited and we thought it was going to be a blast. We kept eating the snacks continuously on our way there since they had said that all the leftover snacks would be taken away as soon as we reached the camp. The day passed, and before I even knew it, it was nighttime. One of my friends from another cabin invited us to a candy party. Although we weren't supposed to have candy, she was able to sneak some into camp using her humongous Halloween bag.

At roughly 10 pm, in our cabin, my friends and I were getting ready for bed and reading some books when Hana, my kind, curly-haired, soccer-playing friend, asked me if she could borrow my flashlight.

"Hey Kenzy, can I borrow your flashlight?" she asked. I agreed, responding with "Sure, just give it back to me before we sleep,"

I handed her the flashlight and after a while, she gave it back to me. It was a perfect day until midnight. I needed to go to the bathroom. It was pitch black outside, so silent you could hear a pin drop. I opened my bag and started searching for my flashlight, but it was nowhere to be found!

After a long, time searching for it, I gave up and decided to walk to the bathroom without a flashlight. I had been wearing a purple shirt with camouflage pants. When I arrived, I entered one of the bathroom stalls and locked the door. When I finished, I tried unlocking the door as anyone would do, but there was a dilemma, I couldn't open it. I tried not to freak out but I just could not keep calm. I closed the toilet bowl lid and sat down on it in disbelief. I sat there for a while, thinking about what to do. Soon enough, I saw nothing but blurriness everywhere. Tears started streaming down my cheeks like a river. I started slamming on the doors hoping someone would wake up and try to find out what that noise was, but no luck. I was absolutely petrified because earlier in the night, we had a campfire and told scary stories. One of the stories told was about killer clowns and I was terrified of clowns and had started to imagine things.

I glanced around to see if anything could help me get out, but there was nothing but toilet paper, a closed trash can, the toilet bowl, and a small window that was closed. Suddenly, I felt hopeless, so I just sat there and decided to wait for my friends to wake up in the morning and come to the bathroom to brush their teeth and just tell them to go get help. However, 2 minutes later, I realized that they would wake up no earlier than 6 am and it was only midnight, so that meant that I had to stay 6 whole hours in a bathroom stall. Crazy right? So that idea didn't last long. I then tried opening the tiny window while silently wishing that a clown's face wouldn't appear out of nowhere. After I had successfully done that, I attempted to slide my body out of the window, my head fit through smoothly, but my body didn't. I decided to start yelling, trying to get anyone to hear me, but that didn't work. After a while, I looked under the bottom of the bathroom stall door to try and figure out if my body could fit through that gap. It was too small and so I sat there trying to figure out a way to get out of there. I looked at the top of the stall door and I saw that there was a huge gap. So, me being a third-grader that's trying to get out of a locked bathroom stall at midnight, I climbed on top of the toilet bowl lid and jumped as high as I could. I tried to grab the locked door so I could jump outside the bathroom stall but I just landed on the floor on my feet.

After that, I thought of the craziest idea ever. What if I were to

push the ceiling tiles to try to get up and crawl to the end of the bathroom building and then climb down and go to my cabin? That didn't work out at all because I found a ton of wires inside the ceiling which instantly made me change my mind and just continue weeping.

While I was locked in that bathroom stall, I thought of a ton of crazy ideas to get me out of there, none of which worked. One of the ideas was to get the toilet paper roll and throw it above the wall of the stall so that it would unroll and I could somehow climb the toilet paper over the stall. I know, I was thinking of insane things, but that was only because I was desperate to leave that bathroom stall as quickly as I could. So I tried my latest idea, but unfortunately, the toilet paper tore as soon as I tried to climb it. 10 long minutes later, I understood why my mom was so worried. I felt like two sides of my brain were talking to me. It's like one of them was calmly whispering, "Don't worry, you'll figure out a way to get out," but the other side was yelling loudly "ARE YOU KIDDING ME? DON'T WORRY?" It was as if they started fighting or arguing. I decided to just follow my instincts.

Suddenly, a great idea popped into my head. I stood up happier than ever but also concerned that it wasn't going to work. I picked up the closed trash can and placed it on top of the toilet bowl. I climbed on top of it, trying to grasp onto the border separating my bathroom stall from the next bathroom stall. This strategy took roughly more than 10 attempts to accomplish, but in the end, I succeeded in holding the border and jumping over into the next bathroom stall. I sighed heavily, and I was very relieved to finally exit the locked bathroom stall. I opened the unlocked bathroom stall door and dashed out, heading for my cabin. As I was rushing to my cabin, I got a feeling that my mom was some type of secret fortune teller. As soon as I got there, I jumped into my bed and covered myself as fast as I could with my sleeping bag.

When I woke up the next morning, I told the story to my friends. As I was telling the story to my friend Hana, I mentioned that I somehow didn't find my flashlight. Suddenly, the guilt on her face started to show up, so I asked her why she was looking at me like that.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" I asked.

“Well, I took your flashlight in the middle of the night and didn’t return it before I fell asleep” she muttered quietly. I was utterly shocked by what she had just said.

“So you’re telling me that you opened my bag, took my flashlight out, and didn’t return it? Seriously Hana?” I angrily shouted.

I was really mad about what she had just told me, but she assured me that she wouldn’t do that again.

I was yelling from out of the window and nobody responded. From that day on, I trust myself more since I was the one who figured out how to escape out of the bathroom stall and I am more responsible for taking matters into my own hands.

When I returned home from that camp and told my mom what happened, I could see her jaw drop.

There was plain silence for 10 seconds until she finally said: “You should’ve waited until morning so that you could call for help.”

However, I don’t agree with her because I was frightened to even look out of the window so I certainly could not have waited for 6 full hours for somebody to come and help me. What do you think? Should I have waited until somebody came or should I have escaped as I did?



Haylee Batsuuri

Middle School Short Stories

The Castle

It was a frigid afternoon; normally I get home from school by four o'clock, but today was different. I had missed the bus and there weren't any late buses scheduled today. Although the weather was murky, it wasn't too bad until some clouds began to hover over me. It was getting darker by the minute. I picked up the pace, sprinting more than I was walking. I thought I would make it home without getting hurt until I heard a startling noise.

I flinched in surprise and got my pocket knife out. I started towards the bushes that created the noise. As I was walking towards them, my foot got tangled in a weed and I fell into the bushes. I fell easily into them like I was thrown into a foam pit. I struggled as an attempt to escape, gasping for air, but I began to sink as if I were submerged in quicksand. My eyes were beginning to flutter, and I fought the urge to close them. I heard my sister call my name, "Bella... Bella..."

I gave up struggling, thinking it was the end for me, and I allowed my body to relax and my eyes to close, eventually falling asleep.

I woke up to a metal pole striking my head and I opened my eyes. I was startled to see that I was entangled in a fiasco of rose vines. I looked where I hit my head, and I spotted a metal gate. My pocket knife was still in my hand and I used it to cut myself to freedom. I thrust open the gates and threw myself through them.

I landed with a THUMP on the ground. I got up and dusted myself off, and I noticed I was standing on a walkway of obsidian. My eyes slowly rose until they were set upon a grand castle. Its decorations consisted of skulls, weapons, and dark crystals. By the looks of it, I doubted there would be a handsome young prince inside, awaiting my arrival. Suddenly my pocket knife was yanked out of my hands, and my arms had been pulled behind me as if I were being arrested.

My head spun around, only to be greeted by two husky,

muscular, sasquatch-like men. They both wore wreaths of rodent skulls and black diamonds. They grinned at me, their rotting, crusty teeth making me wish I were blind. They reeked of dead rats and expired milk, making me gag with every breath. They put me in handcuffs and took one arm each. Together they hauled me to my feet and dragged me into the castle.

The men threw me inside a colossal dining room furnished with beautiful crystals and a vast dinner table filled with nothing but silver platters. A handful of grotesque people sat there, murmuring to one another. Then one by one, they all gawked at me. They looked starved, with their gaunt, pale arms and the bags underneath their eyes. They were gazing at me hungrily. Suddenly they all looked towards the back of the room, and an attractive young man rose from underneath the table. He was wearing a long robe made of snow leopards hide. He sported a crown that possessed various precious gems in it but was twice the size of his head. He wore a sneer, and his twinkling gray eyes bore into mine, sending shivers down my spine. I gazed at him, enchanted by his dark locks that curl around his oddly familiar face. He radiated a godly yet menacing power that unlocked memories. I suddenly had a quick flashback of a boy with gray eyes peeking at me through the door. We locked eyes until a woman yanked him away.

I snapped myself back to reality and began to edge towards the exit as subtly as I could. I kept creeping away, little by little until my back was against the door. I pushed the door open the tiniest bit and looked through the crack. There were hallways lined with portraits of former rulers, all bearing robes made of snow leopards. But there was one thing that stuck out to me, and it was the crown they all wore. The same crown the boy was wearing. I saw three giant shadows creep up behind me, and I whipped my head around just in time to see that the sasquatch-men were back. The blonde one grabbed me by my hair and carried me to the table.

“Hey!” I barked, “Get your hands off of me!”

The man merely glanced at me and tightened his grip on my hair. I scowled and crossed my arms, irritated.

As we approached the dining table, the young man grinned at me and waved. In return, I gave him one of my own hand

gestures. He frowned at me and ordered the men to release me. His voice was surprisingly deep, and he shared the same Italian accent as my brother had.

The guards let go of my hair and I fell on my knees.

“Up,” the man ordered, “Don’t want your dirty germs all over my pristine carpet. That’ll take years to clean.”

I obeyed, leaping to my feet. I didn’t know what to do so I decided bowing would be most appropriate.

“Yes your, um, H-Highness,” I muttered.

He rolled his eyes at me and smirked. “Please, call me Beau. Actually, make that Lord Heath. We’re not currently on a first-name basis given that you are an intruder and therefore should be punished. Introduce yourself.”

Lord Heath? Who did this guy think he is? I opened my mouth to call him out but I saw him looking at me sinisterly as if daring me to talk back. I glanced at the guards who were sharpening their swords. I gulped and thought better of it deciding I wanted to keep all my fingers. “Bella. Bella Hawk. I’m 16 years old, I live in an old creepy mansion on 25th Street Capistrano Terrace with my neglective dad and toxic step-mom. I’m good at archery and I’m on the school’s lacrosse team. What else do you wanna know about me?” I shot back, testing this Henry VIII wannabe.

“Hmm. Elaborate.”

I nearly screeched in frustration but I didn’t want to get on his nerves so I obeyed. “My sister who was my best friend died in a fire 10 years ago. I never knew my mom because she ran away only returning once to take the only other person who kept me sane with her. As you can see, my life absolutely sucks. Have I elaborated enough for you, Lord Heath?” I said sarcastically.

He gazed down at me, and I noticed a gleam of pity in his eyes. A tear ran down his cheek. I looked around the room and I noticed everyone had surrendered their hostile sneers for a look of sympathy.

“Why is everyone looking at me like that?” I asked.

“I too have endured the pains you have suffered. I was neglected by everyone in my family, I was never enough. The only one who kept me going were my sisters. Once my eldest sister died, I couldn’t bear to hear my other sister’s cries every night. So, I left. I came here to fulfill my mother’s wish of being the next

king. She told me that my sister would be back one day. That day would be a gloomy, dark day,” he barely whispered, I had to strain to hear him.

“Just like today,” we said simultaneously. I finally figured it out. His mop of curly hair matched mine. We shared the same cold gray eyes and olive skin tone. He wore the same crooked grin as my sister, and I realized that I’m here with my brother again.

I smiled for the first time in a long time, and I ran to Beau. I embraced him in my arms and held on to him as if he were a harbor. Once we released each other Beau stared at me as a broad smile broke across his face.

“My sister,” he managed to stutter, “Would you like to stay here with me? It’s a lot less depressing on the other side of the castle, I swear.”

I giggled and nodded. I would finally be able to breathe again. Laugh again. Smile again.

Untitled

Beep, beep! Beep, beep! An alarm clock was screaming for Eclipsa Sanderson to wake up. Eclipsa rolled over and plugged her ears. The clock seemed determined to wake her up. Eclipsa and her alarm clock had this war every morning, and in the end, the alarm clock always won. Today was no different, and Eclipsa was forced to get out of bed.

She smacked her hand against the off button and checked the time. The clock read 8:36 a.m. in bright silver characters. Her mother had bought this alarm clock for her; it had a light teal blue frame and violet streaks evenly spaced across it. Eclipsa still hated her alarm clock.

Eclipsa wore basically the same thing every day, but with a different top. Today she decided to wear a short-sleeved red top with blue jeans, a soft light- gray jacket, and some black slip-on shoes.

She then strolled over to the bathroom and brushed her long, shiny black hair into a straight part. Then, she began to brush her evenly sized and spaced teeth. She not only brushed her pearly whites, but flossed them, used a special bacteria- removing mouthwash, and used a tongue cleaner, which explains her perfect teeth.

Afterward, even though she has a perfect olive complexion with no imperfections, she scrubbed her skin with acne wash and skin cream. She looked in the mirror and found two dark- brown eyes with long black lashes at the ends staring back at her. Satisfied with her appearance, Eclipsa walked downstairs to breakfast.

Her mother, Luna Sanderson, was waiting for her. On the kitchen table was a buffet of breakfast foods, just calling for Eclipsa. There were perfectly cooked scrambled eggs, crispy bacon strips, pancakes doused in maple syrup, golden buttered toast, bananas, apple juice, and to finish it off, one golden, flakey, buttery perfection of a croissant. Eclipsa was all too happy to

devour the whole meal. What a way to start the day!

Eclipsa thanked her mother for the wonderful breakfast and hurried to her backpack. Inside was her purple and gold lunch box, filled to the brim with food, her neat binder with her completed homework in it, and a school textbook. Eclipsa grabbed her backpack and shouted goodbye to her mother.

Eclipsa hopped on her light-purple bike and peddled to William White Middle School. On the way, she spotted a man walking a dog. The dog was an ugly pug. The pug was so fat, Eclipsa started to question its diet. She gave the chubby creature a look of disgust, then carried on pedaling.

When she finally reached school, she locked up her bike and hurried to class. The bell rang just as she walked into the classroom. She took a seat and began her long day of learning. After English, Eclipsa had lunch. She met up with her best friend, Sunny, to talk about her birthday, which was tomorrow.

“I am so excited for my birthday! I can’t wait until you come over tomorrow. There’s going to be cake, swimming, and, of course, pizza!” Eclipsa said.

“I’m excited too! It’s going to be so much fun- oh! I have an early birthday present for you,” Sunny replied. She reached into her pocket, but to her surprise, her gift was gone. Inside her pocket was not the gift, but a pug puppy.

“Ew, ew, ew! I hate dogs, and you know that!” Eclipsa hissed, in a harsher tone than she intended.

“This isn’t the gift I got you! How did this puppy even get in my pocket?” Sunny questioned. As she said this, Eclipsa checked her pockets. Out came another pup, much to Eclipsa’s dismay.

“Ack! I have one too! Ew! Sunny, you take it!” Eclipsa shrieked. She shoved the dog into Sunny’s hands.

“Hmm. If we both had dogs in our pockets, maybe other people have them too,” Sunny wondered aloud, ignoring the two squirming pugs in her hands.

“You’re right! We should ask everyone to check their pockets,” Eclipsa agreed.

The pair started to walk around the cafeteria, asking everyone to check their pockets. When they finished, everyone was standing with a pug puppy in their hands.

The students received an early dismissal so they could deal

with their pups. Eclipsa raced home without hesitation. The sooner she could get rid of the dog, the better.

When Eclipsa got home, she dropped the little pug on the floor and burst into her mother's room. She immediately began ranting about the dog and how she came about it.

"So, in conclusion, we have to get rid of it," Eclipsa finished.

"Sorry, but no. I'm sure that if everyone in school drops the dogs off at the pound, most of them won't get adopted. It will have to stay here. We should provide a good and loving home for it," Eclipsa's mom decided.

"Mom! You know I hate dogs! I'm sure some crazy person would adopt that thing." Eclipsa remarked, getting more frustrated by the second.

"We are going to provide it all the care it needs because I'm not going to let it rot in the pound for the rest of its' life. Am I clear?" Eclipsa's mother stated firmly.

"Yes, Mom," Eclipsa replied with a sigh. How could her own mother do that to her? And on her early birthday as well! Hmph. That mutt is not sleeping on her bed, and that's for sure.

Bark! Bark! Bark! Eclipsa really hates her alarm clock. Wait a minute, that's not an alarm clock! She sat up and looked to the source of the sound. That mutt had been sleeping on her bed!

"Ack!" Eclipsa yelled in surprise. She quickly covered her mouth, hoping she did not wake up her mother.

"Why are you here?" Eclipsa hissed quietly. "This is a no-dog zone, so get lost, ugly!" The pup simply just looked up at Eclipsa with big brown puppy dog eyes, full of hope and trust.

"Ugh. Alright, if you are going to be stubborn, then I will just have to get you off myself," Eclipsa whispered threateningly. Still, the dog remained on the mattress. Eclipsa finally decided to pick the mutt up and shove her out the door (It's a girl.) The pup waddled back to Eclipsa's bed and laid back down. Eclipsa stared at the dog in pure hatred.

"Fine. Be that way. I guess if you are going to be here, you need a name, right? How about Ugly? Fat? Stupid? I Hate You? Mom wouldn't approve. Hmmm. Let's look up random dog names," Eclipsa muttered to herself. Eclipsa pulled out her phone and searched up random dog names. In bright, bold letters the

phone showed the name 'Daisy'.

"I guess that works. It's not as great as my previous suggestions, but it's better than nothing. Okay, Daisy, you need to understand. This is my room. You are not allowed here. Stay out, and this arrangement might work. Otherwise, despite my mother telling me not to, I will personally give you to the pound. Am I clear?" Eclipsa ordered. As if she had not heard a word Eclipsa said, Daisy, waddled forward and sat on Eclipsa's lap. Eclipsa immediately pushed Daisy off of her and jumped off the bed.

"NO! GET OFF MY BED!" Eclipsa shouted at the top of her voice.

"I was just trying to be friendly! No need to get all shouty," Daisy muttered.

Eclipsa sat in silence for at least a minute until she said, "Did you just- talk?!"



Bayley Blitz
Middle School

The Escape

Prologue...

“Today will be a fine day at The Lab,” the scientists and employees would say if you asked them. “Nothing could possibly go wrong.” But they were wrong. Nothing was about to go according to plan, except for that one boy. Nothing would ever be right again for The Lab. Only if they knew. But only 4 people did. The Waywillow Creek Laboratory was simply known as The Lab to the people of Waywillow Creek. It was the only government building for miles around. The town was not big, but not small either. About of the town worked at The Lab. Nobody knew -except for the workers- what went on in there. But for the weeks to come after The Escape, everybody knew.

Our story starts on a sunny Tuesday in August. 12-year-old Rowan was drawing another picture. This was the third day in a row that she had been doing this. Paper littered the tiled floor of her, for lack of a better word, cell. Her long black hair was tied up into a loose (and quite messy) bun. The Lab may have been technologically advanced, but it wasn't too comfortable.

Rowan had already made drawings to cover her gray walls up, but she was 7 then. Now that she was 12, her room needed to be more mature. No more stick figures out in a forest, frolicking with stick-birds. Now, her drawings were of detailed animals and patterns. No more silly hopes of being free. Rowan was a trapped soul.

Now, you are probably asking why Rowan was trapped in The Lab. The answer seems ridiculous, but she could read minds. Yes, Rowan was a mind-reader. And she had been locked up in the notorious Lab for 5 dreary years. Ever since she had read minds at the school talent show, and caught the attention of a Lab scientist. Rowan was forced to do several tests each week to expand The Lab's knowledge of her power.

But that was not how she thought of it. No, to Rowan, reading minds was a curse. It was what had landed her here in the first place. Away from her mother, away from her friends. So, she sat drawing at her desk. Today's drawings were happy, bright colors because last week was her 12th birthday. Rowan reviewed the birthday card her mother had sent her. This was quite precious because The Lab didn't allow letters except on birthdays.

Rap datta tap tap. Someone knocked on the door. Rowan jumped up. The secret knock! Seconds later, a grinning teenage boy was standing in the doorway. He quickly closed the door and double-checked that it was closed.

"Hey Rowan!" Parker Brownings said. This brown-haired, green-eyed, freckle-faced boy was Rowan's only friend now. Parker was 4 months older than Rowan, and was tall enough to prove it. Parker and 3 others were teenagers who worked at The Lab as volunteers. The Lab was particular in their selection, picking only the smartest, most trusting students.

Parker's face quickly somber ed, and his eyes twinkled with mischief and fear.

"Rowan, I need you to listen to me. My family is moving to Michigan," Parker shifted awkwardly. "and we're taking you with us. Today, Rowan, you will be free." Rowan just stared at him for a good 40 seconds before rushing over to Parker and giving him a huge hug.

"But how? Won't the Lab track us down, send you to prison, and never let me talk to another person for the rest of my life? I mean, if we're being real here." Rowan speculated.

"Yes, but my plan is really good." Parker then proceeded to tell Rowan the plan that was about to unfold. Just as he finished, there was a click of a key as the door opened. It was Cici Bellwinner, a scientist.

"Brownings, what are you doing?" She asked. Parker calmly said,

"Just checking on her."

"Very well." Dr. Bellwinner walked down the hall. As soon as she was out of eye-shot, they set their plan into action. Parker raced into the supply closet and came out with a spare lab coat and a surgical mask. Rowan put the coat and mask on, and no one could tell it was her. Then the pair slinked around The Lab's sleek

white hallways.

“I hear someone! It’s Dr. LaColla...ok now he’s out of reach, now’s our chance!” Rowan whispered.

“That’ll come in handy.” Parker whispered back. You are probably thinking, why couldn’t Parker just think about the plan and have Rowan read his mind? Well, Parker was the one Lab employee that was nice to her, so she stayed out of his mind. It’s all just common courtesy.

Speaking of Lab employees, Rowan and Parker’s next challenge was to get past the security guards. Big, ugly, and brutal, these men were the cream of the crop guards. But luckily for our duo, they were extremely dumb. Parker’s ID covered both of them. Almost no one knew of Rowan’s existence so they let them through easily. Rowan was starting to feel uncomfortable.

“Parker, this is too easy. I feel like we’re walking into a trap.” She said.

“Oh, don’t worry, I dismantled the security cameras around your room. And everywhere else. There’s a really cool trick where you can set the camera on a loop so that it looks the same as a live feed.” He laughed.

The pair set off at a fast pace so if someone discovered that Rowan was gone, they wouldn’t be able to catch up. Parker and Rowan darted to the nearest public bathroom. Rowan changed into some clothes that Parker told her used to be his sister’s. They caught a bus after that. On the bus ride, they met up with Parker’s mom, Mrs. Brownings, who ushered them off the bus and into her car.

Then began the heartfelt reuniting of Rowan and her mother. Many hugs were given, tears shed, and thanks shouted. Since, Rowan didn’t have a passport, they all crammed into Mrs. Browning's old minivan.

“We’ll be moving across the country, a long drive, yes, but it’s very far away which is safest.” Rowan’s mother told Rowan. Rowan read her mother’s mind, and saw that her mother was wondering if she had done the right thing. Rowan gave her mom a smile, and they all drove into their new future, a free future.

Now, that sounds like the end, doesn’t it? Well, I know what came next. See, I used to work at The Lab. I was getting ready to leave work when I saw The Escape in action. Eagerly, I followed. At the first hotel stop, I confronted them and they told me

everything. Furious, I drove alongside them into Michigan.

Rowan was renamed Emily for legal reasons. Mrs. Brownings got a new minivan. Parker grew up to be six feet (what else did you expect?! And all was peaceful.

Fear Takes Flight

Kate, an eleven-year-old girl was sitting at the airport gate due to the fact that her flight was delayed for another hour. Her brother and father had gone to go buy some snacks and her mom had taken her five-year-old sister to the bathroom. That left Kate alone with her thoughts. Deep down Kate was terrified of flying on an airplane. She had heard countless times about planes disappearing, crashing, or being sabotaged. She had not told anyone of her uneasiness because she didn't want to upset her little sister. Keirsten was a worry-wart. As soon as she came into a new situation she would evaluate all the possible things that could go wrong. Kate rarely worried. She was normally cool and collected, which made her even more worried that something would go wrong.

Around ten minutes later Kate's mom and Keirsten came back from the bathroom. You could spot Keirsten from a mile away with her sparkly pink tutu, bright yellow leggings with a sunshine print, a short sleeve Beauty and the Beast t-shirt, and her princess tiara with pigtails.

"Kate! Kate!" Keirsten yelled as she came running towards her.

"What! What!" Kate shouted back humorously.

"Guess what we saw!" Keirsten said excitedly.

"Ummm. . . A panda!" Kate said in a playful tone.

"No silly! A service dog! It was so cute and fluffy and . . ."

Keirsten trailed on and on talking about the service dog. Kate only heard certain things like "blind," and, "guide." Kate was focused on a plan to convince her family to not board the plane. Her plan never came into action though, because before she knew it her Dad and brother were back and people were being called up to have their boarding passes scanned.

Kate, filled with dread, walked into the boarding bridge to get onto the plane. Kate examined the plane. She hated that her

family was split up. Her brother, Koby had to sit alone in the back. Koby was seventeen, so he was old enough, but Kate didn't like that she had to be away from him. Her dad and Keirsten were seated in the middle of the plane. Lastly, she was seated with her mom towards the front of the plane. This did little to comfort her because her mom was likely to fall asleep shortly after takeoff.

After everyone had boarded, the flight attendants gave them the spiel about what to do in case of an emergency. Kate paid close attention. She learned that the life vest is found under your seat, the oxygen masks will pop out from above if needed, and most importantly where the emergency exits were located, which Kate memorized. Kate remembered a fact from a book she had read about plane crashes. It had said that planes mostly crash during take-off and landing.

When the plane took off Kate squeezed her mom's hand as hard as she could.

"You ok Sweetie? You seem nervous," her mom said with concern.

"I'm fine," Kate said through gritted teeth.

"Whatever you say," she responded.

After the plane had leveled out, Kate was fine. She read, watched some TV on her phone, and did a lot of staring out the window. As she had expected, her mom was out cold. After about an hour, Kate got extremely bored. She decided to text Koby.

Hey bro! What ya doing?

Just sitting here. My seat neighbor is soooooo annoying!

How come?

She won't stop talking! I now know she has a chihuahua named Fred!

Lol! I'll see ya soon.

K. Bye.

That relieved Kate. Koby was ok, her mom was sleeping as happy as ever, and Keirsten was probably having the time of her life hanging out with her dad. Everything was going to be ok. Suddenly Kate heard a scream.

"Help! Someone is trying to get into the cockpit," a woman screamed. This caused total chaos. Everyone was standing up,

children were crying, and Kate was violently trying to wake her mother up.

Then, an announcement from the pilot came over the radio saying, “This is your captain speaking. Everything is ok please sit down.” Then everyone heard the pilot draw an ear-piercing scream over the radio.

A new voice, a deep voice came over the radio saying, “Hello everyone. I am your new pilot. I am Alset.” Every passenger freaked out. All anyone could hear was sobs and screaming. In the midst of the panic, Kate noticed a lady around her mid-twenties. The strange lady had beautiful hair. It was long and curly with the top of her head dyed a silvery blonde and her tips dyed a teal blue. Kate was fascinated by the lady. The lady seemed disappointed, like whatever she was looking for, she couldn’t find it.

The lady came to the front of the plane where all the passengers could see her and then said, “Hello everyone. My name is Heather Rosebud-Oswald. I am a pilot and have a solution to the dilemma we are in if you will listen to me.”

Everyone started talking at once and then the lady with the chihuahua that sat by Koby said, “Stop with the yapping and tell us your solution!”

“Okay! I better hurry! When someone hijacks a plane, they try to kill all of the passengers by either crashing them into something or giving them hypoxia.” Heather said quickly.

Kate suddenly asked, “What’s hypoxia?”

Heather laughed then replied by saying, “It is when you run out of oxygen. I have a feeling that this Alset dude is going to try the hypoxia method.”

“But don’t we have the air masks or whatever those things are called that we put on our faces?” A man with a long gray beard asked.

“Many people don’t know that they only last for around ten minutes. That is why I have a solution. I have counted how many kids are here and how many adults. There are twenty-nine kids and seventy-four adults, but there are only six lifeboats. That is enough for all of our kids to get away safely, as well as one adult to keep them safe.” Everyone started talking, hugging their kids, and trying not to cry.

“How would this plan work?” Someone finally asked.

Heather hesitated then said, “When we reach the eighth minute of using the air masks, we will get all of the kids and one adult into parachutes. Then we will toss the lifeboats, fully inflated, out the window. Everyone else on board will most likely die minutes after. I understand if you don’t want to leave your children, but if you want them to survive, then this is for the best.”

Everyone jumped into action. Kate saw people quickly blowing up lifeboats while other people got children into parachutes. Kate was so scared she couldn't even talk as her mom helped her into a parachute.

“Sweetie. I know this is scary, but you have to promise me you will take care of Keirsten.”

“What about Koby?” Kate asked.

Her mom responded by saying, “Your brother will always be there to keep you two in check, but Keirsten is the most cheerful little girl I know and I don’t want that to ever change. You have to promise me you will help her as she grows up.”

“I promise you,” Kate said through tears.

“I love you so much. I will always be here,” she said while pointing to Kate’s heart. Kate started sobbing and her mom hugged her tightly.

“Hello everyone! This is your captain speaking. We are about to reach high altitude.” Alset gave the weirdest villain laugh ever, almost like he was trying too hard.

“Everyone get an air mask! I will start the timer! We need to decide who is going with the children.”

Kate’s mom answered by saying, “You, Heather. I do not know you, in fact, we just met, but you have taken charge and lead us. That will be important when saving the children.”

“Are you sure? I’ve never had children.” Heather said worriedly.

“Yeah but you are an amazing leader and you seem very compassionate. You were ready to die just to save our children,” another dad said.

“I promise to keep your children safe. Oh no! Everyone put your air masks on!” Heather ordered. Kate slid her air mask over her face. It was uncomfortable. At least it would keep her alive though. A gruesome eight minutes went by. All you could hear throughout the plane was the heavy breathing through air masks.

Suddenly everyone on the airplane could hear a robot voice saying, “Hey everyone it is Heather. I am using my phone to talk to you so that I don’t waste oxygen. It has been eight minutes. How this will work is I will send five kids at a time to the emergency exits. They will push their lifeboat out and then jump out afterward. Older kids please hold babies. I will go last. See you soon.”

Kate’s group was the first to go. It was her, a baby girl, a seven-year-old boy, a toddler girl, and a boy who looked to be about Kate’s age. Kate quickly grabbed the baby from its parent’s arms then walked towards the emergency exit. Before Kate knew what was happening, Heather appeared behind her and pushed all five kids out the door.

All Kate could see was the ocean quickly rushing towards her. When the impact occurred, Kate was shocked by how cold the water was against her skin. She then remembered the baby. Kate cradled the tiny child in her arms gently.

Kate swam over to the boy who looked about her age. He was holding the toddler and trying to help the seven-year-old boy. Shivering Kate asked, “W-w-why would He-e-eather do th-that?”

“I h-have a bad feeling s-she was in an alliance with Al-Alset. I just don’t kno-know her intent-tensions of pushing j-j-just us out. Oh, I’m Aaron ” The boy who was her age responded.

“I d-do.” The seven-year-old said looking like he was about to pass out. “I-I’m H-H-Heathers lit-little brother-er.”



Costello, Briana
Middle School

Untitled

Crunch! The leaves under Mika's feet sound as he steps on them with power but having a slow pace surveying his surroundings. The fourteen-year-old was walking through the thick calming forest, coming from a hospital, to visit his older sister but only because his "friends" convinced him to do it. It's not like Mika hated his sister, he still loved her tremendously but was filled with large amounts of fear and anger when it came to her. Mika could never forget about the incident that happened between him and his sister.

"I'm home!" Mika shouted with excitement as he walked through the front door. He was only eight wearing his sister's white, oversized hoodie and some tight navy-blue jeans of his. His blonde, fluffy hair wet from the rain. Mika was excited to be home because his sister promised him a present for having fantastic grades and he couldn't wait. He slammed the door and ran to look for his older sister, knowing she would be hiding in the dark basement.

Mika quickly ran down the old creaking wooden steps of the basement to find his sister, leaving the basement door open behind him. Since he was running so fast, he tripped and fell face first on the cold concrete floor with a thud that reverberated throughout the room causing Mika to see black for a second.

Mika slowly stood up holding his head. There wasn't any blood but his head was pulsating rhythmically.

He ignored the pain in his head and tried to figure out where he was. Mika wasn't in the basement but instead in a deep dark forest. The dark oak trees that surrounded Mika looked as if they had small faces of crying children carved in them.

Before he even had time to figure out where he was, Mika felt warm breezes tickle his neck and small cold hands wrap around his stomach from behind him. He quickly turned around but no one was there. He still felt the cold hands wrapped around his

body but now he heard a disturbing high-pitched voice, that sounded awfully familiar, whispering in his ear, "They're here now, watching you. Waiting to overtake you and devour you." With that, Mika screamed and started running.

He didn't get too far when he saw "them". Six repugnant looking children, with sinister smiles and ghastly scars covering their bodies with some missing body parts wrapped up in bandages coming towards him. Mika started backing up, holding his ears as the pounding in his head had become worse.

"Do you want to be our friend?" that same voice he heard earlier say. The feeling of the cold hands was missing from his stomach, but now he felt the cold palms lightly holding his throat. "We want to be your friends Mika. Can you accept us as your friends? We won't hurt you like those fake friends of yours did. Instead of saying vile phrases about you, we will talk and have fun with you," the familiar, disturbing high-pitched voice addressed.

"Yes. I want to be friends," Mika had said in a scared, shaky voice. Mika being the lonely eight-year-old he's been his entire life had said yes but only because his sister had friends so he wanted one too.

After saying that, Mika slowly looked up to see his new "friends". Not only did he see the six ghoulish children but he also saw the piercing blue eyes of his older sister holding Mika's pillowcase. Even though Mika felt as if someone was watching him, he felt safe with his sister here. Mika's older sister then exclaimed in a disturbing high-pitched voice, "We can't wait to have fun with you!"

Mika didn't feel safe anymore when he saw black again from his sister smothering him with his pillowcase.

Mika had jerked out of a hospital bed, head pounding and laughing wickedly while holding his sister's throat saying, "They're here now, watching over me. Patiently waiting to overtake me for their revenge."

Mika was administered into a mental hospital the next day and wasn't allowed to see his sister again.

A Christmas Miracle

It was December 4, 2017, and everyone in the small town of Wrensville was getting ready for the holidays. The town would all agree when they say one house was the merriest, the Wood household. Although a couple of years ago, things were very different.

Jack Wood was sitting on the porch sulking. Every year since he was 6 he asked for a puppy for Christmas. Every year though, he would tear open every present, not even a little trace of a puppy. Jack had given up. He had finally realized there would never be an adorable bundle of fur under the tree. Jack had a crumpled-up paper in his hand. On the paper, was a list of dog names, 103 to be exact. Alex, Andy, Addy, Asher, the list went on forever. A tear rolled down his cheek, as he thought about how many years he had waited. “6 years!” he wailed. Jack curled up on the bench and began sobbing.

Mary Wood stared out at her son curled up on the swing. She knew exactly why he was upset. She hated telling Jack they couldn’t afford a dog every year. This year though, Mary was getting close to her goal. She had secretly been putting 10% of her weekly pay into a fund to adopt a dog. She was so excited for the day her son would run downstairs to find a puppy waiting for him. A couple of weeks later, Mary began scrolling through animal shelters for a puppy. There were only a few puppies in the shelter, but there was one who seemed to spark with spirit.

The puppy was a golden retriever mix with gorgeous golden fur. Her eyes twinkled with energy and there was one thing that made her even more special, one of her paws was missing. Mary thought she was perfect and contacted the owners quickly.

On Christmas Eve, Jack’s mom asked Jack if he would go over to a friend’s house while she left to go get groceries. Jack was a little suspicious, but he didn’t mention it. He just went over to Flynn’s house as his mother had asked of him. Jack told Flynn that he had given up on his hopes of getting a puppy, but Ryder just

sat up and looked at him weird. Flynn said to Jack, “What do you mean you gave up, you can’t give up, otherwise, your mom will forget about getting you a puppy.”

Jack protested, “My mom has told me a hundred times that it’s not happening!”

Flynn began to think, and then he asked, “Jack, why did you have to come here again?”

“My mom went to get groceries, she told me to come here. Why do you care?”, Jack retorted, still upset about the puppy situation.

“Do you think she just wanted you out of the house so she can fetch the puppy? Pardon my pun by the way,” Flynn excitedly responded.

“No! My mom has been using her money for needs, not wants.” Jack retaliated. He stood up with anger twisting in his stomach, though he began to think. Was Ryder right? Had his mom just left to get him a puppy? Jack shook his head. He said goodbye to his friend and headed home. Surely his mom would be home soon.

Jack rubbed away the grogginess in his eyes. The sun’s rays were creeping through the blinds as though to say it’s time to get up. Jack shot up straight when he realized the day had come. It was Christmas! Jack jumped out of bed, flung the door open, and bolted down the stairs. Curled up under the tree, tied up with a pretty blue ribbon was the puppy, three paws and all. Jack felt a feeling of excitement, happiness, confusion, and fear all in one. He fell to his knees and let the small puppy attack his face with kisses. It was then when he noticed the puppy’s small flaw. He bent over and stared at the small, confident puppy’s little stump of a foreleg. The little dog took the chance of the young boy’s awestruck stance to push her nose under his chin and give a couple more licks. Her warm, wet tongue shook Jack out of his daze. The puppy wasn’t perfect, but she was his all the same. Jack saw his mom in the corner, her face dazzled with emotion. He stood up and hugged his mother. Jack whispered quietly, “Thank you,” under his breath.

A couple of days had passed since Jack had found the puppy under the Christmas tree, and it was time to give her a name. Jack

had put her more than a yard away from him and started calling out to her with different names. Abby! Asher! He would call, the puppy just rolled on her back and began playing with an old shoelace. Bailey! Celeste! The dog stared at him with confused eyes. Dawn! Ellie! Flower! Grace! Hannah! Hope! The puppy actually reacted this time. She sat up and yipped as if to show she liked the name.

“Hope huh?” Jack chuckled. “That suits you,” he continued. “Come on then Hope, it’s time for you to meet my friend Flynn,” Jack said as he stood up. Jack called Flynn and told him about Hope. Ryder obviously responded with the common “I told you so”. Jack ignored the comment and invited him over. Flynn came in and made a weird look at Hope when he saw her. Hope cringed at the hot stare of disgust and scrambled behind Jack’s foot.

“What?” Jack asked with confusion.

“It’s just, well, w-where’s her paw?” Flynn stuttered.

“I don’t know, but it doesn’t matter, at least not to me!” Jack retorted protectively.

“Whoa, calm down Jack. It just surprised me and doesn’t it bother you that she looks different?”

“How dare you say that! She may look different, but her heart is as amazing as gold. Don’t you see that! Hope is the best dog I could ask for, she has more determination at being herself than any other. If you think otherwise, then you can leave!” Jack retaliated with more anger than ever. Tears swelled in his eyes as his friend turned toward the door. How could he say that, Hope is wonderful, and he judged her by her looks and not her heart. He knew his friendship with Flynn might be over, but how could he have a friend that judged things by their looks.

3 years past and Jack was 15. Hope had come to be one of his only and best friends. The once determined puppy was a sleek and beautiful she-dog now. Flynn and Jack’s friendship had ended, but Jack had made new friends, ones he could trust to support him. Christmas was close once again and Jack was excited. However, Jack believed Hope was the most festive of all. Jack’s mom had clipped a small piece of holly into the fur of her ear a couple of weeks earlier. She looked absolutely gorgeous. That afternoon, Flynn came by to spread some Christmas cheer, but Jack rejected the kind gesture. Flynn got mad and stormed away. Around

midnight though, Flynn returned with a box of matches. He threw a lit match in the mail flap and ran to hide. The Wood family had been fast asleep, but their protective dog, Hope had seen Flynn. She remembered the sinister look of disgust he had given her as a young pup. She ran through her flap in the front door and leaped onto Flynn's back. Flynn let out a screech of fear and pain as she clamped her jaws around Flynn's ankle. Once she was sure he wouldn't run away, she bolted inside to wake Jack and his mom. The fire was spreading fast and Hope moved quite quickly through the debris. She ran up the stairs to Jack's mother's room. Mary was already coughing and struggling through the debris. Hope weaved under and over support beams to Mary. Once she felt Mary's hand grasping her collar, she leads her out of the house. Mary pulled out her phone and called the fire department immediately. Meanwhile, Hope had returned to the house. She was shoving away debris that was blocking Jack's door. She slammed all her weight into the door and it crashed down. Jack was in the corner struggling to breathe. Hope crouched and slowly crawled toward him. Jack wheezed with gratitude when he saw her. He grabbed her collar and she retraced her steps. As they were getting close to the entrance. Hope heard a high creak that Jack had obviously not heard. She quickly shoved him forward before a large support beam fell where Hope and Jack were standing. Hope had saved Jack's life and could barely be seen. Jack could see the exit and decided to try and push the beam off of his beloved friend. Hope whined in pain as the weight of the beam was released. Before anything else happened, Hope had fallen unconscious.

Jack picked up the unconscious body of Hope and limped toward the entrance. When he reached safety, Jack set Hope down and embraced his mom. The firefighters were moving fast to drown the fire out while a vet looked at Hope.

"She has suffered some severe wounds. Some of her bones are shattered.", the vet spoke.

Jack began to cry, he dug into his mother's side with fear and sadness.

The vet continued, "Jack, I know you love Hope, and all we have to hold on to now is hope itself."

Jack noticed Flynn being treated in the corner. Why was he

injured? He wasn't in the house. He then realized why the fire had happened and why Flynn was injured. Hope had witnessed him set the fire and attacked him before heading inside to rescue them. Jack stood up and walked toward the police standing near Flynn. "Officers, I know this was intentional and I also know who did it." The officers stared in shock but listened. "My ex-friend Flynn over there set the fire and my dog attacked him. His injuries are dog bites, they are not from debris," Jack accused. Flynn sat up with fear and tried to move away, but because of that broken ankle of his, he wasn't going anywhere. The cops were on him in a second and he was arrested.

It's 2017 again, and the hero of Wrensville is alive, well, and as gorgeous as ever. Hope has never been discriminated against for her looks, instead, she is praised for her heroism. Jack and his wife Carol Wood are the most festive family in town. Their loyal dog, Hope was expecting her first litter of puppies and was very happy. Every year, Jack takes Hope on walks daily and he knows that he owes everything to a determined and loyal little three-legged puppy named Hope.



Nikolas Davison
Middle School

The Curse of the Fever: A Story of Yellow Fever

It is the year 1793, during the summer in a growing city known as Philadelphia in the heart of Pennsylvania.

Markian whose parents; Jake and Vanessa Hallow owned a grocery store named Hallow Market.

“Markian sweetie, they forgot the newspaper again!” The mother called from downstairs. Two months ago, a new paperboy was hired and he was not a friend of the Hallow family. Dylan Mcloud was Susan Mcloud’s son. Vanessa and Susan were bitter enemies. So, each day Dylan would “forget” to give the Hallow family their newspaper. Mark would have to run down and get a copy from the newsstand. “I’ll get it, ma’am!” Mark hollered back. As he was walking down the street, he saw a few houses, but something was off about them. They had a yellow cloth tied to the porch railing. He wondered what that meant, but when he went to go investigate he heard his mother’s voice in his head say “no dilly-dallying”. As he arrived at the newspaper office he saw Mr. Black sitting at the desk.

“Hello, Mr. Black! Dylan skipped us again,” he called.

Mr. Black’s bushy black eyebrows were arched and his chubby face pulled back like he was thinking very hard about something. Markian asked Mr. Black, “Do you know what the yellow cloths outside of houses mean? I saw a few on my way over here.”

“YOU WHAT?” Mr. Black said nearly falling out of his chair. He started jotting down notes.

“Mr. Black do you know what it means or not?” Mark asked worriedly.

“Here take this to your parents!” Mr. Black shoved a folded piece of paper at him with a newspaper. “Now go home. Cover your nose and mouth with your shirt!”

“But why sir?” Mark asked as he was about to run out of the

shop.

“Off with you now boy!” Mr. Black cried shooing him. Mark took off. If Mr. Black was worried then he knew that he should be too. He ran into the market and slammed the doors behind him. As he flipped the sign to closed his mom came out of the back.

“What in heaven's name are you doing?” Mother asked

“Mr. Black said to give this to you and father and he looked worried.” Markian panted. Mother grabbed the note and gasped, his father was looking over her shoulder. Even he looked worried. They ran upstairs and started grabbing bags, stuffing Tyra's and Mark's clothes in them. “What in heaven's name are you doing mother?” Mark said mockingly.

“Kids get your school bags, dump them out, and put a few things that you would like to take.”

When they went to the room Mother was in, to meet Father he was not there. They saw a note on the table that said he went to go get a coach.

“Marky, I am scared,” Tyra said with tears coming down her face.

“It'll be ok. Mother and Father have never let us down before.” An hour later father came back on a coach. “Father, why did you leave us?” Tyra cried as she ran to hug him. But father pushed her to the side and grabbed the bags of clothes and tossed them on the back of the coach. Next, he picked up Tyra and put her in the coach. The children had never seen their father like this before.

“Goodbye my darlings, but before you go I guess I owe you an explanation. A few weeks ago, your mother and I read about a disease that they call “Yellow Fever”. It has been killing people in uptown near the docks. I don't want you to catch it so I am sending you off to your uncle's farm. You can't come back until I send word that it is safe. I love you dearly.” Father kissed them and then the driver flicked the rains and they were off.

Finally, after four hours, the wagon pulled over and they could see their uncle standing at the entrance of the gate. They put their bags on and jumped out to greet him. “Uncle!” they both shouted together. Their Uncle owned a farm with his wife. They did not have kids so they loved it when Mark and Tyra came to visit.

“Uncle there has been an epidimimic an epidimimic a - whatever

in Philadelphia. They call it Yellow Fever and our mother has it!”

“Well let's not stay out here how about we go in?” Uncle Mike said as he led the way up to the house.

Markian and Tyra spent many days and many nights playing with the animals. They rode the horses to Uncle Mike and Aunt Susan's favorite picnic spot to have a picnic dinner and watch the sunset. “Auntie? What will happen to mommy and daddy?” Tyra pleaded. Susan looked at her husband and gave him a look that said: what do I say? “I am sure that your mother and father are alright sweetheart.” She said with concern in her eyes.

The next morning Markian jumped out of bed to find that his sister had dried blood all over her face and sheets. “Uncle Mike, Aunt Susan come quick!” Mark shouted at the top of his lungs.

“What is all the... oh dear god!” Uncle Mike froze. “Ok Mark fetch new sheets and a pail of water, Susan can you get an empty bucket and rag.”

“Mmmark...” Tyra stammered weakly. “I'll be back sissy, be strong.” Markian took off to get what he needed and so did Aunt Susan. Uncle Mike stayed behind to watch her.

“What are you doing?” Markian asked Uncle Mike when he saw him hooking the coach to his horse.

“Your sister needs to be taken care of, so we are taking her to Bush Hill. There she will be treated by doctors who have food and water.”

“Alright let me get my things and...”

“Whoa whoa, you can't come with us, there are going to be fever victims there, and I don't want you to catch it.”

“This isn't up for debate, she is my sister, the only thing I have left now, I am coming sir!” Markian said with more confidence than he has ever had.

“Fine,” Uncle said with worry in his voice.

They loaded up and off to Bush Hill they went. During the ride there Markian started feeling very weak and collapsed.

“Markian no!” cried Aunt Susan. “We are here let's take em both in!”

“Where am I?” He called weakly. “You're at bush hill sweetheart. We take care of the fever victims here.” said a Nurse in white. “How long have I been sleeping?”

“Where am I?” He called weakly. “You're at bush hill sweetheart. We take care of the fever victims here.” said a Nurse in white. “How long have I been sleeping?”

“Oh, sweetheart you have been out for a week.”

“Tyra where is my sister?”

“I am here,” Tyra called from the next bed.

“I knew you too were related, after all, you were brought in at the same time by a couple. Were those your parents?” the nurse asked the kids.

“No, my parents are in the city, they are my aunt and uncle but, where are they?” Mark replied.

The nurse didn't answer.

“Hey on the bright side you two have beaten the grim reaper himself!” said the nurse with a shy hint of a smile on her face.

“Wait do you mean to tell me that we had yellow fever?” Mark asked.

“Yes, dear but you beat it!”

“Now who is hungry?” said another beautiful nurse who came in. Her lips were as red as blood, her cheeks white with a hint of rosy red. Her hair was as black as coal. She was one of the most beautiful women Markian had ever seen in his life. She set down a plate with rice, beef, and beets on it. “Nice and hot.” She said. Then Markian and Tyra gobbled it up. They were so hungry that they forgot all about their manners. “Thank you, ma'am!” they both said gazing at her in disbelief that she was real. “Oh, please darlings, call me Ms. Fawn,” she said fanning herself with a silk white fan she pulled out of her apron.

“And what may we call you ma'am?” asked Mark talking to the first nurse.

“Why you can call me Heather!” she said. She had a fat round face that looked like the moon when it is full. Her lips were a dull shade of red and her hands were dry and cracked. She had bags under her eyes that made her look like she had not slept in years.

“How about I get you two some water,” Heather said before taking off to go get it. Ms. Fawn sat down on the edge of Markian's bed. She then said with hum to her voice, “Tomorrow we will get you set up to go to the orphanage.” “THE WHAT!” The Hallow children shouted.

“Orphanage, we don't know where your parents are so you will go there till we find them.”

“They are at Hallow Market in town, please don’t send us to the orphanage.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes!”

“Ok, ok, but they will make you go I don’t think there is anything I can do.”

“Can you get us a coach at dawn?”

“Yeah my brother has one and he planned to leave for town tomorrow.”

“Tell you, brother, to be ready at dawn,” Markian said with a grin on his face. That night Markian and Tyra stayed awake and pretended to sleep when a nurse came over. Finally, they saw the sun start to rise. They snuck down the stairs and out the front door.

“We gotta go now!” Markian whispered. They took off carefully not to make any noise, but their bodies were still very weak since getting over yellow fever.

“Come on kids get in here!” Ms. Fawn’s brother hollered. Markian helped Tyra into the coach then climbed up himself.

“Ya!” The bearded coach driver said as he flicked the reins. After they got a few miles down the road the horse slowed down and everything grew calm. “The name’s Dale, Dale Fawn. And let me guess you two are Tyra and Markian? All mark thought was.

“Was this uneducated, burly man really related to that smart beautiful nurse? And why did she not have an extremely thick southern accent? As they rode through the city they heard people wailing and saw many people lying on the sidewalk. Markian looked out to his left to see two male adults throwing a mattress with a dead little girl into the street. A man came walking out.

“Sorry, we are closed. We have no food.”

“Sir, I am here to make a delivery,” Dale called.

“Have you food my good man?”

“No, but I have something better!” He opened the door and the children sprang out and hugged their father nearly knocking him to the ground. “Markian, Tyra, my darlings, you ok!” The trio ran inside to sit down and tell each other about the past two months.

“Father, we made it to Uncle’s farm but a month later Tyra and I fell sick with the fever so they took us to Bush Hill, the nurses wanted to send us to the orphanage, but then another nurse

Ms. Fawn helped us escape in her brother's coach and he took us here to you." Markian blurted out without stopping to take a breath.

Father started to cry, "I can't believe he just left you. Now it is my turn; about a month ago your mother, well, passed away. I am so very sorry I would have sent a letter but the post office was closed." Tyra let out a waterfall of tears and father pulled her close. Markian joined in on the hug with tears coming down his cheeks.

Early the next morning Markian awoke to a sudden chill. He got up to close his window when he saw snow had powdered the ground.

When We Fell

The Frost King came early this year as twas Death's wish. He brought with him Pestilence and Famine as they were his favorites of the four. As they ran through the town, Famine had stopped the crops, and Pestilence had touched my father. For he'd been the 5th in the town. The doctor was unsure of what had befallen him. He was white as the snow, with lumps on him, and his skin had black spots along it. Mother would not let me, nor my kin near our Father; she was fearful of him. It had been a week since my father had first befallen Pestilence's touch, and he twas one of many of those that Pestilence had chosen to succumb to Death's call.

Though now our town twas not the only, that had been visited by the Frost King and his Knights of Death. Mother had put salt under the door, by the windows, and the door to our room, she also put out some dry roses. Whilst she did everything to keep the knights away from us, God did not shine his light on us. For two of my kin had joined my father in Death's army; they were out in the fields. By the time we found them, the animals had already gotten to them. We had not seen them for two nights. My mother had gotten fearful for her life as well as ours, so she had made it strictly clear that no one twas to leave the farm nor go into the fields unless twas necessary. Though she should have known by now that if she tells me and my kin not to do something, we shall do it, though maybe this time we should have listened to her...

It had been a week and my kin were getting quite anxious, for there was nothing to do but sit and wait for Mother to come back. you'd think we'd been in there for years. No one else in the house had been greeted by Pestilence since my Father, brother and sister. We knew it had to have been due to Mother's words, and seals, but we could no longer stay in the house with the dirt. It had turned night, as Mother had said goodnight we had planned our escape for the morn, as we lay our heads on the pillow drifting off to sleep will we reside under the bright smile of The Man in the

Moon. I had awoken at the break of dawn, though to my dismay I twas the only one up at the hour for I could no longer bear with the sound of my brothers snoring. I lay awake on the bare floor in our house waiting for another living soul to wake, from what seemed like an eternal slumber. Though at one point in my wait, I myself fell back into the same slumber as my kin and was only awoken by one of the youngest of many siblings jumping on me. He only seemed to stop when Mother grabbed her and put her back on the solid ground. Mother said her goodbyes as she left for work at the Market. We were all so thrilled to go out once again and feel the warmth of the sun on our skin, and run in the frost. Oh, how I missed the forest. But no time to think of that when I can go and see it once more. We all waited a bit to make sure that Mother would not come back. Once we knew for sure that it was safe for us to go out, we did just that; we all flooded out the door making sure not to mess up the salt binding. It was so exhilarating; I was finally out in the world again I loved it there was more than just dirt to be seen for miles however it was a short-lived excursion, for one of my siblings had been bitten by an animal. I had only known due to the cry she let out. We got her quickly and brought her inside. We brought her to the bedroom for Mother could not see her or she would know we had gone out, though I bet everyone heard the scream for miles. My brother and I had treated my sister's wound as to stop from bringing Pestinles back to our house. However, twas not the case as another had shortly fallen into Death's grasp.

Though after the befalling of my sister, this plague came back stronger, and more rats appeared. I worried that my kin and I had invited the vileness of Pestilence back into our town, for the first to get these black splotches were our neighbors. I questioned if I had doomed my kin to be hung. I was so very frightened. Everywhere we looked, people we knew were joining Death. My kin started to go insane from guilt of the treason we had committed. They were saying how they had killed these people; they had killed their friends. I could no longer recognize my clan. They no longer were filled with joy and wonder, but an endless dismay and guilt of the deaths of others. We all slowly went mad, until some of us could no longer take it, so they all killed themselves one by one by one. Our family of twenty-six had dropped down to four: I, Mother,

and one of my brothers and sisters were all that were left. We had not yet come to the madness that had befallen the rest of my kin. Nonetheless were we haunted with the same thoughts as our deceased, for it would not take long for the madness to creep up to my mother and slaughter her. I had gone outside to fetch some water when I saw her, she twas on the roof yelling “Death thou has won this battle take my mortal soul as I parish.” and then she jumped, I watched her jump and hit the ground. It horrified me to see all the blood. I was shocked she would do this, to leave me and my only two kin to fend for ourselves. However, she would not be the last as my other two kin would join her sooner than had I thought leaving me on my own. All alone to fight my thoughts, and the people who would come oh, all alone no hope until I met Him...

Meet Thirteen

I walk to my next class, pulling my sleeve down as much as possible. Shoot, late. I start running and when I open the classroom door, everyone is staring, "Ms. Wheeler, you're late... again..." I stare at my feet and apologize, "S-Sorry Mrs. Byers, I-it won't happen again..." I walk to my seat and she replies, "Sigh... You're just like your father, what's the excuse this time?" I whisper, trying to make sure no one else hears, "Th-The Demogorgan Ms-", she looks angry, "I TOLD YOU MS. WHEELER THERE IS NO SUCH THING." I look her in the eye, accessing her thoughts, you saw it yourself, you know you did, it almost killed you, and your son. It killed Mr. Newby... She flinches when she hears Bob being mentioned, "Just... sit down and let us continue."

A while later, the bell rings and everyone gets up and starts walking to the Cafeteria, "Ms. Wheeler... may I speak to you?" I walk over to her desk, put down my bag, and she says, "About the Demogorgan," I nod, waiting for her to continue, "I want you to forget all about it, it never came to Hawken's, it does not exist, maybe you heard of it from your father or his friends while they were playing that game?" I close my eyes for a minute, "Ma'am I know what I saw, it's back, and so is the mind flayer, they've come for what they didn't get last time." I open my eyes and she looks scared, I pick up my bag and walk to the Cafeteria.

I sit down with my... sloppy joe, I think, but someone taps my shoulder, "Hey Wheeler, just wanted to let ya' know, your kinda strange, stranger than your parents." I turn around, "Why do you care, Walsh? You know, Walsh is a strange last name, no offense or anything, but it sounds like Wash a bit, you should wash up you know, it would do you good." he looks shocked at my response, then he runs away, but why? "Tsk tsk, bullying a girl..." then I see why, "Josh Wheeler ya jerk, I was doing fine until you butt in." my older brother rolls his eyes, "You gonna eat that? You look disgusted by it." I shove my tray forward and he takes the sloppy

joe, "Hey, give the lady her sandwich kind sir." I turn around and standing behind me are, Lexi Sinclair, Lillie Byers, and Delilah Henderson, "Do I have to repeat myself?" Lexi looks like she gonna attack, "LeX, cHiLl It'S oBvIoUs ThIr WaS gIvInG iT tO hIm!" Lillie holds Lexi back, "Okay okay, chilling chilling!" the Lexi and Lillie sit on either side of me, but Delilah sits next to Josh, I close my eyes again, why is it my brother is the one-person Delilah is crushing on? We talk for like, thirty minutes, and the bell rings for the last time and Lexi yells, "SCHOOL IS OUT AND IT IS OFFICIALLY SUMMER! GOODBYE ADVENTURES OF THE LIBRARY, HELLO ADVENTURES OF DESTROYING DEMOGORGANS!" and we run to my house, wondering what dangers lurk ahead, and you know what? It sounds like this summer, will be the best one ever.

The Brooklyn Murder

Bethany walked into work that day thinking it would be a normal day, but little did she know today would be anything but normal. Bethany was a police officer in New York; she was always underestimated. Around noon she got called to respond to a murder in Brooklyn. She stepped foot on the crime scene with her normal stoic expression, but when she lifted the white sheet, her life changed forever.

As soon as she caught a glimpse, she tumbled back in shock. It was her twin brother Blake underneath that sheet. Bethany didn't even know he was in town, let alone murdered fifteen minutes away from her. Her chief soon realized that it was her brother and decided to suspend her from the case and her job until she was back in a healthy state of mind. Bethany just wasn't having it, so she decided to do a little bit of her own investigating.

After asking some of her friends at the NYPD if they had any leads, what one of them said absolutely startled her. Bethany was one of the main suspects in her own brother's murder investigation. Despite this news, she had to tell her family about it, but to her surprise, her family also suspected that she murdered Blake. As Bethany was wondering why she would be a suspect, she realized she talked to Blake on the phone about two hours before he died.

After calling her parents she decided to go back to where Blake was murdered, but as soon as she entered the house she got chills. She swept the whole house for prints making sure to get the doors and door knobs real good. She got her friend Kayla down at the station to test the prints, and the set of prints that was not from Blake was from their childhood friend Braxton.

Bethany was in shock. Braxton was like her and Blake's brother. They were called many different names growing up but her three favorites were the three B's, the three musketeers, and the three peas in a pod. She couldn't believe that one of the few people

that she trusted with her life could have killed her brother. She didn't want to investigate Braxton as the killer, but it was the only way to clear her name.

She was positive it was Braxton when she finished looking at his records for the past three months. Everything that was on his credit card records, apartment rentals, and utility bills all were within the tri state area.

Bethany knew if she was going to make a case to her chief and not lose her job, or worse, end up in jail, she needed to have even better evidence. On a normal case the evidence that she has would have been enough to put him in jail for 10 years, but this would only get him a trial and she would most likely lose her job. So, Bethany continued to dig deeper looking at the crime scene when she knew there wouldn't be any police. Using the lab at the office after hours, even when she knew she could be fired if she was caught. This didn't stop her she would risk losing her job a million times if it meant getting peace for her family, herself, and putting the man that did this behind bars.

It had been about two weeks since Blakes murder and currently Bethany was checking out a warehouse Braxton has been renting for three weeks before Blake's murder. Bethany just entered the warehouse doors when suddenly everything went black.

The next thing Bethany knows she wakes up tied to a chair with duct tape over her mouth and her arms and legs tied up. As soon as she finished assessing the situation the person who she least expected entered the dark damp room.

Her step-mom Karen entered the room; actually, this didn't surprise her. Ever since Bethany met her step-mom she could tell Karen hated her, her little sister Hailey, and Blake. The only other thing she could think about was how she was about to die. As Karen got closer and raised the knife to her neck and she braced herself for what was about to come; the doors burst open and at least 25 NYPD officers flooded the room guns pointed at Karen. The officers made the arrest on Karen, and Bethany and her family finally had peace. After being checked out by a doctor Bethany got scolded by the chief for disobeying orders. Even though she disobeyed orders the chief still allowed her to keep her job, and she even got a medal for her courageous actions.

About a year later Bethany finally settled down and had a

family. She chooses not to celebrate her birthday in honor of Blake since he liked to keep things low key. Bethany still works at the NYPD but as an investigator. She realized her passion was to help families that went through the same thing her family did and to help families of murder victims get peace for their loved ones.

Untitled

It all started out on a nice calm winter day, December 26, 2019 to be exact. I was on winter break until January 6th, so I was going to enjoy this time. But I was missing something; there was a part of me that felt gone. At the time I didn't know what it was, so in an instant I got on my phone to text Mason. Then it hit me: my best friend was what was missing. But maybe I wanted to be more than his best friend, more than a friend, I guess. I'd never really thought of him as a boyfriend until now, and at this moment, I liked that idea. It was weird though. I've known him for a few years and he's always been like a brother. "I wanted to be more than what we were," appeared to be the only thoughts racing through my mind. I didn't know at the time, so I just texted him and said I missed him. He replied with, "lmao dork, so do I." His classic name calling dork always makes me smile. I wanted to enjoy the break but I spent most of it thinking about Mason, which was weird because I had a girlfriend at the time; her name was Laren. I liked talking to her and that's actually how I met Mason, through her. I mean, I guess I didn't enjoy talking or hanging out with Laren as much as I did Mason, but I planned to break up with her in a few days.

Later on, when we were back in school, I broke up with Laren and she wasn't happy about it at all, but things weren't working out, so I knew what I had to do. The good thing was I was still good friends with Mason, but my feelings were developing even more and I felt as if I knew I would never be good enough for him. That man scared me and I'm afraid to love I kept thinking. What would a great, caring, gentle guy like him have anything to do with me? Nothing. I'm never going to find my happy place. "Hey Sara, I love the way the hoodie looks on you," Mason waked by saying with a smile. Every time he talked to me, I would drift off and just stare at his ice breaking, glass eyes. There the type of eyes that if you look at them long enough you could feel them in

your soul, almost haunting you with every blink he takes. I didn't mind that his eyes had such power, I minded that there were broken something was wrong and I could tell. After a while I actually really wanted to tell him so I decided to woman up and tell him that I liked him, but not now. "Ima wait like a month" I told my best friend Joshua, he knew everything, who I liked, why I liked them, and almost everything about that person I would say. "What can you do? What if he's your happy place" he questioned.

When I did tell him it worked out great, he said that he just didn't have the time right now and if we did date he wanted to make sure he had time for me. I promised him I would wait, and I planned on keeping that promise. The best part was we started talking more, we texted each other every morning and talked all throughout the day, every day for 3 months straight. Mason still didn't make his decision. I wasn't sure if I wanted him to anymore. Things were even better when we saw each other at school. I don't really know why but I got so excited to see him, his smile, dark brown eyes, kind of longish black hair. I loved everything about him, most people thought we were dating because of the way we talked to each other. "You're so hot, what are you talking about " Mason would say if I ever mentioned how I looked bad that day. I normally responded with a "haha stop your making me smile " or "so are you goofball" Just flirty type stuff. We got really close and he was ready to date me, but something was holding me back, I knew I had to tell him why so I did in a flower shop when it was raining. " look so I know you like me but sometimes I feel like it's just some joke and it's not your fault and this isn't about you needed time, look when I was younger I when out with my friends, and a shooter came into the restaurant that we were at, my friends and I went under the table, he shot my 2 best friends of 8 years, I watched them get murdered, when he saw me I had short hair, and looked kind of like a boy he told me "you're a stupid little girl, you don't deserve to be loved, and you will die lonely I will make sure of that " When we could hear the cops coming he freaked out and shot my in the foot." I was almost in tears by the time I finished talking. They never found him, I've been so scared for almost 4 years and now the thought of dating you scares me, you mean everything to me and I don't want to lose you. "You're

not going to lose me, I care a lot about you so I'm going to be ok” Mason said with a trembling voice.

At the moment I knew I wanted to be with him for the rest of my life. It was the look he gave me when he said how much he cares about me, it was his eyes at that period in time everything was frozen, just him and I. He didn't have that broken look anymore, they were finally soft, colorful, and light. I could feel the happiness so in an instant I went for it and kissed him, lights were flashing and I could smell the rain and the flowers glistening. “You’re my happy place” Mason smiled and said while we were in the pouring rain. He was my happy place, or so it seemed at the moment.

Valentine's Day

Chapter 1 *Me*

Hi, my name is Sophia Bren, and last year Valentine's Day was weird, and here's my story.

"Honey Wake Up!"

"It's time for you to go to school!"

"Ok, Mom!"

I walked to school and I saw my best friend Tara.

"Hey Girl!"

"Hi Tara."

Tara was my best friend ever since my little brother Jace, died.

"So what class do you have first?"

"Oh, I have English"

"Darn!"

"Calm down Tara"

"Hey, Sophie?"

"Yeah, Tara?"

"You know what tomorrow is, don't you?"

I completely forgot. Valentine's Day. The day my little brother was born, And the day he died. "Y-Y- yeah" I was trying to not cry, which was really hard.

"Don't worry S, I'll make you feel better, just like old times."

Chapter 2 *Home*

Once I got home, I ate a snack and did my homework. I was getting bored, so I invited Tara over.

"Soooooo, what do you wanna do?"

"Maybe we could go to the movies"

"Ok!"

"I'll text my mom." (phone beeps) "She said yes!"

We had a lot of fun. We watched a movie called *Star Wars* and

the ad they were showing, a puppy monkey baby, and me and Tara busted out laughing. After the movies, Tara went home and I went into my room. My mom came in and comforted me and told me I didn't have to go to school tomorrow if I didn't want to but I told her I would be strong.

Chapter 3 *Valentine's Day*

I woke up in the morning instantly knowing what day it was so, I ate my breakfast said goodbye to my mom and hurried off toward school. Once I got to school, me and Tara were talking and I needed to go to the bathroom so, I went to the bathroom and I thought I saw a shadow that looked weird, but familiar. I stepped closer and my mouth dropped as my eyes were in tears... My little brother Jace, was standing in front of me. I thought I was going crazy as he said to calm down.

"Calm down Sophie, I know it's weird to see me. But, I need your help." Help? I didn't know what he was talking about. I thought he was dead!

"What do you need help with?"

"Well, yes I am dead but, if you can keep the doctors from mom, I will bring you back here and I would be alive."

"REALLY!"

"Yes"

"Wait, I have a question"

"What is it?"

"Can Tara Help? Pleaseeee"

"Ohhh fine."

Magically Tara appeared as Jace explained he sent us to February 14, 2009.

Chapter 4 *In the Past*

Me and Tara were blasted back in the past and were dizzy as we saw my mom go in the hospital and so we followed her. After we sneaked into the room before the doctors got there. I went up to my mom as she got startled.

"Woah!"

"Who are you?"

“Ok, listen I’m your... never mind.” I rubbed her belly as she gave birth to my little brother I was so proud and so my Jace blasted us back and we went home. My mom was so happy she took us on vacation for a week. And so, we continued on with our life. But, later I asked my mom where dad was and she busted out in tears. She told me something that changed my mood again. My dad.... had died after she told me, Jace took me in the bathroom and explained that there were consequences of time travel. As in family or friend loss. So, I know I had to go to school in the morning and it was getting late.

Chapter 5 *School Repeat*

Once I got to school I met this new girl, Melanie who seemed really nice. Tara joined us at lunch and we talked about making a book club at school so at first, we had a couple of ideas but then the 5th-period bell rang and we said goodbye. At home, I ate dinner and headed to bed. In the morning I saw a shadow that looked like my dad I could sense it. Or that’s what I thought. It headed towards me and stood there it said that I should go back in time and let the doctors kill my brother, and I wasn’t gonna let that happen. So, the shadow went off into the distance and I never saw it again.

I woke up, it was all a dream. But in the end, I learned that you can’t bring someone back that is already gone. You have to be strong and keep on going with your life. I learned in a way that I will never forget.



Adelle Jensen
Middle School

Penni's Snail Adventure

Once upon a time, there was a girl named Penelope Hartford.

“Um, excuse me, sorry to interrupt, but could you guys just call me Penni?”

Ok, let me restart. Once upon a time, there was a girl named Penni. She was walking home from school when she passed a beautiful garden that she had never seen before. She walked in and saw that it was the most beautiful garden she had ever seen!

“Skip to the important parts!” Ok, ok. Anyways. So, she was like, super stressed with school, and marching band, and, you know, a SOCIAL LIFE. But anyway, she saw a super cute snail.

“Did you know snails are my favorite. Animal. EVER!!!!!! Life would be so much easier if I were a snail”. Her mom wanted her home so that's where she went. She went to bed at 8:00. But when she woke up the next morning, something felt different. She opened her eyes and then noticed that they were on the top of her head. She felt something heavy on her back. She realized that it was a snail shell! Penni Hartford was now a snail!

“Which, by the way, is totes amaze!”

Ok. so, she slithered away, (or whatever you call it) to try and find a way out. When she found a hole to get out, she saw that there was another girl in the garden. And this girl looked suspiciously like the human version of her.

“Spoiler alert:”

NOOOOOOOOOOOOOO! ABSOLUTELY NO SPOILERS!

“Umm, this is my story”.

I'm the narrator, NOT YOU.

“Turns out it is not me in the garden!”

HEY! STOP THAT! Ok?

“Alllllllrighty.”

So. Where was I?? Oh, right. The imposter Penni offered her some fruit, which she gratefully took, and then left, most likely to go to school. Snail Penni hurried as fast as she could, which was

not very fast,

“HEY!”

What? You weren't!

“STILL!”

Anyways she “hurried” to her human house. Then, she realized that her mom was afraid of snails and that there was not much she could do.

“And then I had a-”

TERRIBLE

“I was going to say-”

Horrible

“TERRIFIC IDEA!”

She decided to kill the imposter so that she could come back!! So, she made her way over to the school, just in time to catch the imposter. But then, the imposter picked her up and started talking! She said that she was the long-lost twin to a girl named Penni, who disappeared that night. And then, Penni knew that she had to get back.

“Understatement of the year!!”

Be QUIET! So, Penni went back to the hole and wished to be human again. Then, she fell asleep. When she woke up, she was still a snail. So, she sought out the fairy of the garden. After searching for two and a half hours she found the fairy that told her that in order to become human again, she had to complete 5 acts of kindness. So, she started off. While on her way to find some way to help she found a little stuffed animal with a tag that reads

“If found bring to 3305 Tiny Day Rd.”

As she headed off to the house a little girl came running towards the stuffed animal and Penni screaming and crying “Summer there you are don't leave me again!!”

Summer must have been the stuffed dog's name. Next, she killed off an ant army who was attacking a fawn. She was strolling through a park hoping that she can turn back soon when she found three animals that needed help, a rabbit who couldn't reach some berries, a mother squirrel who need to bring food for her babies but kept dropping it, and a baby cat whose paw got stuck under a rock in the water. This was what she needed to do to turn back to a human. She decided to help the kitten get unstuck and try to help her with its paw. Then, she gathered berries for the old, widowed rabbit. Finally, she helped grab the nuts that the mother

squirrel had dropped. After all that, she was TIRED. So, she went to her hole, right before falling asleep, wishing to be human again. The next morning, she woke up as a human in a human bed. She was so happy!

“YAAAAAY ME!”

Shhhhhhhhhhhhh.

“Ok fine.”

So, when she got up and went downstairs, her mother shouted with joy and then said that she had something to show her. She told someone they could come out and told Penni that this was her long-lost twin sister, Jennifer, who went by Jenni. She told her mom that she wanted to go to the park and she just left hoping the kitten was still there. When she got there the kitten was still there so she grabbed it and brought it home saying that the kitten was stuck under a rock and was hurt. Penni's mom let her and Jenni keep the kitten and they named her Minni. Penni, Jenni, and Minni always had fun together and lived happily

“Or is it happy.”

It is, Penni, now where was I? They lived happily ever after.

THE E-

“or is it”

It is THE END.

Untitled

I was alone. There was no one left. I had been alone for quite some time. They got to them all. On my planet, Torrilliaa, we had these terrible storms. Nothing like what you have on Earth. I guess the closest relation would be to call them ‘mutant tornadoes’, but still, that doesn’t do the danger justice. These wonderful ‘mutant tornadoes’ sucked up every living thing except for myself.

Pleasant, isn’t it?

When I realized I was alone, I tried to distract myself from it. I played games, rocked out to loud music while air-guitaring, and indulged in unhealthy amounts of chocolate. Fun, right? I soon realized nothing’s fun unless you have someone to share it with. For a while, I moped around, not really living. I was just too sad to truly experience life.

Solitude was a deep, unforgiving pain that wouldn’t go away nor be pacified. The overwhelming loneliness engulfed me, so I donned my cloak of stars which protected me from the dangers of space, and ventured into the unknown. (Don’t sing that song)

As I soared through the universe, endless amounts of beautiful stars encircled me. It was weird to think there could be someone else in this beautiful, mysterious universe. I came across this amazing, almost it seems, swirling group of stars. It took my breath away. I decided to dive into the strange thing, and soon enough, I saw a solar system.

There was a dark blue planet with faint rings, a ghostly pale blue planet spinning on its side, a pinkish planet with colorful rings and a huge orangish-red planet. A plain red planet, a blue and green planet. An orange planet, a small gray planet, and in the center of it all, a fantastic ball of flame. This stunning, marvelous, small, ball of flame was the center of it all. My sun is enormous and blue. It’s crazy to think something so small could be the origin of life in this small but perfect little universe.

I investigated the closest planet. Its beautiful dark blue hue

took my breath away. The planet was made of gas, so I summoned my meteortran, (which is was swirling cloud of wind for me, but for everyone it's different) then on it, soar into the atmosphere of the gas giant.

I was met with a rush of wind. The fog was so dense, I could barely breathe, but of course, I don't need air. I'm pretty much a swirling cloud of wind held together by my headdress. My headdress is my life force. If it ever gets destroyed, I slowly fade away into nothingness.

I was met with the sight of a huge palace, made of what looked to be stars. Crowds and crowds of creatures all surrounded it. Some floating, like me, others seeming to be made of wind, nothing holding them together. I soared into the palace. I was met with the sight of three boys, sitting upon thrones. They had headdresses like mine, but their's kind of looked like halos, whereas mine resembled a crown made of tornadoes. They're swirling clouds too, I guessed. They all had bluish skin, with brilliant bright white hair. Each of them wore a midnight blue robe as they sat regally on their thrones.

The tallest throne looked to have been woven of the night sky. The second tallest was floating upon a throne that looked to be made of water. The shortest was sitting on a throne seeming to be quilted of rocks.

When they saw me, they looked afraid. Sometimes I appeared scarier than I actually was, what with my sharp teeth, blue skin, blazing orange eyes, and dark black hair. I picked up the pace and soar towards them. You're fierce, like the wind, I told myself. The tallest one sized me up and folded his arms defensively.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" I was taken aback by how harsh his voice was. Ever since that day when everybody was killed, I'd been resigned to the fact I would only ever hear my own voice again.

It took me a second to answer, but when I did, I smartly said, "What?" So much for seeming fierce... He smirks and repeats himself, arms falling on the armrests of his chair.

"M-My name is Torriiltune. I was looking for signs of intelligent life," I stuttered. He looked me over for a second. Then he smiled. He reaches out his hand to shake mine, and I hesitate. All this time alone, and I forgot what it feels like to be with someone else. The moment of hesitation must have been shorter than I

thought it was because it seemed he hadn't noticed. When I shake his hand, he says, "King Novan. These are my younger brothers Prince Aquar and Prince Georiill."

I nodded towards them. "What planet are you from?" Georiill asked. "Torrilliaa," I reply. All three boys' eyes widened in awe. Aquar stage whispers to Novan, "Could she be the one from the prophecy?" Novan looks me over for a long time. "Maybe..." Georiill smiles so wide, I thought his face was about to crack.

This was getting really shady. "What do you mean 'prophecy'?" Novan looks embarrassed as he says, "There's a prophecy about a girl coming to our planet to save us from the Great Red Spot. She's supposed to be the lone Torrilliaan. Are there any more of you?"

I looked down at my meteortran, kind of scared to answer. I looked up after what seems like an eternity, but not nearly enough to gather all my conflicting emotions. "And if there aren't?" I mumbled. Novan smiled warmly, and answers, "Then you'll save us."

I told them all that happened. About my years alone, my exploring, and how I came upon this solar system. They told me what's happened to them, too. The Great Red Spot had been terrorizing them, but there was a prophecy given by the stars; a young female Torriilliaan would save them and vanquish the terrible beast. The attacks got deadly, and the Great Red Spot was plotting to wipe out all life on the planet. They had all but given up hope I would come, but now I was there.

They told me about his weaknesses. They told me about his strengths. The boys taught me how to use powers I didn't even know I had. When it was time to say goodbye, they each bowed to me. "No, guys, really you don't have to bow to me. We're equals." They had that stupid look of awe on their faces again. I rolled my eyes. "You're all hopeless," I said exasperatedly.

Novan straightened up and walked over to me. "Thanks for everything," I said. He looked at me and smiled. "We're the ones who should be thanking you." His two brothers followed. Georiill hugged me, which took me by surprise, but I hugged him back nonetheless. Aquar high-fived me, and Novan shook my hand. Then, I was off.

I soared into the atmosphere of the Great Red Spot's home planet. I couldn't see anything, so I went closer. There were rows and rows of different creatures, all imprisoned in cages made of some sort of rock. In front of the rows, a monstrosity sat upon a throne. This terrible excuse for a living thing was huge. It towered over me, with red skin, one eye, triangular giant sausages for arms, and a headdress which looked like a swirling red cloud circling his enormous head. "Galaxies..." I muttered under my breath.

"Who are you?" He boomed in a voice like tires on gravel. I took a power stance with my arms folded and looked down my nose at this atrocity. "I am Torriiltune, the last Torrilliaan, and I am here to destroy you."

This barbarity laughed, a harsh, cold sound that made my blood curdle. "Really? How is a tiny, little, weakling going to destroy me?" He barked. His overconfidence made me want to gauge out his wicked eye. I gritted my teeth and summoned something that would tell him I wasn't playing; an orb of water. This orb could have the power to completely vaporize this monster.

I could see the fear in his eyes. He quickly pushed it down and composed himself. He stood up and summoned a tornado. Wait a minute... I knew that kind of storm. Not only had he been feeding off the innocent creatures of this solar system, but my own. He had killed my race.

This discovery hardened my resolve. I flung the orb at this barbarity, and it hit him straight on his sausage arm. It made it dissolve slowly. He bared his teeth and screamed, a sound that rattled the universe. The sound almost knocked me down, but I regained my balance right as he chucked the tornado at me. I dodged, but then he threw a ball of lightning right at my headdress.

I went down fast. I plunged all the way down to the hardened metallic core of the gas giant. I lied there for what seemed like an eternity. I could feel little bits of me fall apart. I couldn't believe this was happening. Poor Novan and his kingdom. They would die, the stars were wrong. I was pathetic. I wallowed in my defeat, like the wealing I was. The Great Barbarity's words came back to me, with such a force I shook. How is a tiny, little, weakling going to destroy me?

These terrible, demeaning words made me get up. I sat up with

a force only matched by the strongest tornado ever created. I would not curl up and die like a coward. I would keep



Ginny Miner

Middle School Short Stories

Untitled

Ida and Isidor Straus strode across the creaking wooden planks connecting to the quoted “unsinkable” Titanic. Blue skies and light winds threw Ida’s hair away from her pale face and let it dance through the wind. The Strauss handed in their tickets and boarded the ship. Hope encrusted on their faces for a life in New York; they gazed upon the magnificence of the boat as they felt the superiority of being first class. From all angles, there were signs of wealth and riches.

“We’ve picked a fine ship, we have,” Isidor smiled thoughtfully.

“I have no desire to disagree,” Ida laughed as they rounded the corner of the candle-light hall.

The joyous couple waltzed through the corridors gazing around at the bedazzled chandeliers that reflected the light against the golden frames splendidly. The marble floors complemented the red carpets quite nicely. Stewards guided them towards the first-class cabins and invited them to participate in the opening night, starting with first, second, and third-class dining.

All passengers had entered, and the banquet commenced. Roast of all kinds lay perfectly in a patterned row. Lamb, pork, turkey, pig, and concessions of all sorts were soon being consumed by passengers. The grinding of knives and forks added to the scene as Ida took a seat a few feet away from the podium, and initiated conversation with Mary Conover Lines.

“What brings you on this fine journey, Ida?” Mary inquired.

“My husband and I are traveling to New York, and you?”

“On voyage to America to see my brother’s graduation,” Mary replied, looking interested.

Isidor noticed a strained deepness to Mary’s voice, as if she was attempting to sound more mature for her young age.

“What a fine voice you have my dear,” he complimented her with a mischievous smile. Mary’s almond face turned a light red,

that seemed almost fascinatingly like a beautiful, but scared-looking rose in the yard in front of the Straus's porch. Isidor caught a glimpse of Ida's doubting face and instantaneously felt guilt for his actions.

"You should be ashamed of yourself Isidor. I personally think that she has been trying very hard to add a touch of elegance into her already alluring voice," Ida stated sternly. Mary's mother started speaking but Ida and Isidor were lost in thought, and were reverting their eyes towards the stunningly gorgeous opera singer, sweeping towards center stage. Her laced gown reflected light against her pearls as her bird-like voice echoed throughout the courtroom.

"Voices hum crooning over Moonlight Bay Banjos strum tuning while the moonbeams play All alone, unknown, they find me Memories like these remind me..."

There was a momentary pause after the performance was over, letting the passengers quiet down, even though a slight hush still remained in the background. Captain Smith Introduced himself and few others including the head stewards, the main assistant, and hosts for Titanic activities and events. He introduced the route and began presenting brief safety procedures and a map of the ship before dismissing everyone to roam the ship independently. Isidor lead Ida up to the deck for a night of stargazing, and cocktails. The two perched on a pair of cushioned chairs they were able to lay back on, and they sat staring at the past, the silver stars dotted around the night sky, and the moon as white as snow after a blizzard. The couple soon gazed into each other's hazel eyes, almost past the color and into each other's hearts, ever-beating with love for each other. Soon their eyes slowly dipped, and shut, dreaming the night away...

"Miss, Mister, I have to ask you to please head to your cabins," a stewardess advised them, as Ida was slowly awakening, the night sky still above the boat, her cocktail emptied onto the floor.

"I'm terribly sorry," she glanced down to the stewardess's name tag, "Emily," Ida said with guilt. Ida nudged Isidor with her elbow and stared him down until he agreed.

"I do agree, we'll leave you to your business now, good evening to you, come along Ida," Idisor muttered to the stewardess as she slowly walked away.

Three days of luxury passed, filled with exquisite courses and

boisterous activities. Ida and Isidor met some of the wealthiest passengers, and had a grand time with John Jacob Astor IV. They spotted Mary and Elizabeth Lines in the halls at times.

Isidor hadn't forgotten to remind Ida that they were halfway through their magical cruise, and though she was tired and longed for a day to rest, Isidor was persistent, and insisted that she made the trip worth their while. The two attended various parties, and gladly went to slumber each night. Ida happily dreamed on her cushioned cot, with the smell of sea salt swirling around her lungs. All was quiet and peaceful the night of April 14th, 1912. She slept a few feet away from her husband, but in her dreams, she was miles away. No longer than the dream started, however, it ended in an ear-splitting screech that would seem to have woken all of the Titanic. Isidor and Ida were awake with a start, hearts pounding.

"Isidor, I believe we've hit something!" Ida exclaimed anxiously.

"Do not be afraid my dear one," Isidor told her soothingly.

The shutters of their windows flew open and the rush of cool ocean air swept into their cabin.

"Passengers! Passengers! Please make your way to the nearest lifeboats! Do not panic! Less stress handles the matter quicker. We have hit an iceberg. Thank you, I repeat, please make your way to the nearest lifeboat and do not panic. Women and children first, then men. Thank you," a very nervous Captain Smith announced in a rush.

"Isidor! I'm afraid!" Ida stated, her heart almost beating out of her chest.

"My dear, I will escort you to the lifeboats and wait for my fate up in the deck, but there's no need to fear, now let's leave, we don't have much time," Isidor nervously said.

Isidor and Ida sprinted up the marble steps towards the lifeboats as fast as they could; the halls were crowded with nervous passengers with the need for survival. The loud clatter of shoes, screaming and fainting added to the tenseness in the Titanic as everyone was running to safety. Ida heard the first lifeboat leave and thought, Oh, no! If 65 people have already left, I'll never be able to leave! Little did Ida know that only so many people could fit on the lifeboats, with the catastrophe shocking many.

Isidor helped Ida step onto the wooden steps onto lifeboat 8 with the other people.

“Isidor! Come with me! I can’t live without you! Find your way onto the lifeboat! Please join me!” Ida sobbed. It was too late, Isidor had left.

“No, I’m not leaving,” Ida decided while climbing the dirty steps to her survival.

“Ida please, you are only a foot away from the lifeboat, you and your husband will die. Would he want that to happen, Ida? It’s for the best,” Colonel Gracie tried to persuade Ida. But she had made up her mind, and there was no going back.

“We have lived happily together for many years. Where you go, I go,” she dreamily called to her husband. Ida weaved through the passengers and crew members. Passing the courtrooms, and cabins, halls, recreation centers, and eating chambers, and up the flights of stairs towards the moonlight deck, Ida’s resting robes whipping past her, she spotted her beloved companion resting on a pair of deck chairs, one open, almost as if Isidor had predicted her arrival.

“Isidor!” Ida cried.

“Ida, my dear, you didn’t board!” he told her in a strained voice.

“Leave Isidor, go and live your life to the fullest,” Ida whispered, tears streaming down her face. The murky ocean water was quietly rising up onto the deck, soaking Ida’s flats.

“Ida, you know I would travel heaven and earth to be with you. I’d die many a time, if I could spend my time alive with you by my side,” Isidor spoke poetically. The water was now clear and reaching their lower calves.

“Ida, even if we are to perish on this ship, I would want to do it in peace.” Just as Isidor had been speaking, the water ascended to their waists, and a brief panic approached them.

“Ida, let’s just get this done with.” Ida was hesitant to speak, but alas, she answered.

“I agree, we’ve lived our lives well, I want to die with you in peace.”

“Bless your soul, that we may reunite in the world of light, farewell Ida.”

“Goodbye, Isidor.”

July 28th, 1923

Untitled
Ginny Miner

The luscious and vibrant grass looked gray as others stepped past the graves of Ida and Isidor Strauss. Their beloved romance remained unshared, deep below the ocean amongst the debris and ruins of the glorified ship. Forgotten amongst the hundreds of souls lost that evening, Ida and Isidor remain on that same set of lawn chairs, though their spirits roam free in the heavens. The defiled plaques lay in the dirt of the Woodlawn Cemetery for time's life, side by side, as Isidor and Ida stay on those very chairs, willing to die for each other, and perishing for love.



Zachary Orgeron
Middle School

The Wanted Child

These couple wanted this one child but the adoption center said no and that was that. If they want a child they should be able to have this child. It doesn't matter about gender, race, age. The adoption center said no because with more children more tax money they got.

After hearing this the couple and then filed a lawsuit and they got a lawyer. The trial went on and on and on. On day twelve of the trial the final day the judge made her choice and ruled in favor of the couple.

"We don't want the money." Said the couple.

"We just want the child and no more."

After they got out the couple went to the adoption center and looked for the child but they couldn't find her. The person who was at the desk was gone as well, she took the child with her to her home. The couple saw her at the last second and talked to the lady.

"Ummm that is our child we won ownership over at the court." Said the man.

"Give her to us."

The lady gave them a face of disgust.

"NOOO this is my child I just adopted her." Snickered the lady.

"She's mine and that's that."

The judge says this and went over and talked to the lady

"Ma'am they won the case she is their child not yours".

As she said this she took the child and gave it to the couple.

"Mom, Dad where have you been?" Said the girl.

"Looking for you that's where we been".

They lived happy after that.



Abbey Parkes

Middle School Short Stories

Sovereign

“You’s don’t know anything, do you?”

I felt the warm blood trickle with a shiver down my forehead. My red scales glistened, feeling the hot liquid with a claw, and a wince. I let out a grimace, biting my cut lip as Rhojaan held his blood-soaked mace. “You’s don’t know howda follow directions?” He continued, with another strike of his blunt, spiked weapon. My teeth rattled, and I let out a roar of outrage, of agony as more blood squelched from the massive wound on the back of my head. I paused, feeling blood lap at the back of my tongue.

“G-Go to hell, Rhojaan.” I mustered, spitting a wad of blood. I pulled relentlessly against the shackles around my wrists and throat as he struck me again. He dropped the weapon and drew my chin up with a claw, forcing me to stare into his piercing amber depths. “We’s a pack ‘ere. And our pack don’t like traitors.” He snarled, an amber glow in his throat. “You’s lucky I’m pitying you this time, Lazarus. Get outta ‘ere before I split your head like a melon.” He broke into an uproarious laughter as he shoved me out of my chains, joined in by all the other members I’d considered my family- up until this moment.

I turned my body around, eyeing the black dragonborn coldly. His armor rattled as he padded towards me. “Go on then, git!” He laughed, towering over my normally monstrous stance. I shifted my stance with rage, snarling quietly as smoke escaped my lips. The tall, night-black dragon laughed uproariously. “Look it! He’s gettin’ angry!” He howled hysterically, clutching his gut with laughter.

Just how I want it. I thought with a snarl. I turned to Rhojaan, snaring his great axe he’d left pressed against the wall in my claws. Rhojaan kept wheezing with a petty smirk.

I let out a roar, a cry powered with all the rage and helplessness I’d felt, and brought the axe down on Rhojaan’s head. The chains shattered, and I heard a slice as it sliced cleanly

through his thick skin. There was a long pause, of horror.

I heard an outcry erupt from behind me, of shrieks and wails as I closed my eyes and embraced the pandemonium erupting behind me. His blackened blood pooled at my feet, my tail surveying the stone earth. I fixated the great axe in my grasp.

I can work with this, this is nice. I thought, taking - what was left of - Rhojaan's sheath, and his jewelry. I looted a small sack from his belt, and numerous other trinkets. With a final huff, I pulled the mangled head into a small sack, each half of his face frozen in fear. The blood dripped suspense fully from the bag, shattering the silence with each tick against the ground. I turned to the crowd, standing stone cold with fear, as I put on the golden chains he bore on with an icy sigh.

"Enjoy your wretched leader." I spoke with a hoarse whisper, padding out of the large den as the members swerved to let me exit. I pressed through the tattered cloth door, stepping out into the familiar dip in the woods. I drank a small healing potion I'd kept handy in my belt, wiping my bloody mouth clean with a long sigh towards the moon. It's gentle, aloft eyes cooed at me, glittering as the wound began to heal. I took a few steps into a grotto frolicking with icy, luminescent mushrooms and tiny critters, embracing the sound of the night. The birds, the bugs, the swaying of the peaceful leaves. I stared up into the canopy that parted the moon's soft rays, and my body, stiffened from stress, relaxed, sinking into the grass's damp blades. My eyes felt heavy, and I felt consciousness ebb away from my heavy, somber body.

I began to stir, the warm sunbeams pierce my flesh as they peered through the trees, a reddish-pink painting splayed across the dawn's canvas. My fiery gaze slowly set to the bright lights, stretching my stiffened joints that had been anchored from a deep sleep. I pulled myself up, a surprising weight as I stood, remembering the vivid nightmare the night before had played out. I took a long breath in, Rhojaan's dried blood cracking and flaking off of my yawning face. I picked up the black-stained great axe, fixing it comfortably against my scimitar I'd used the moons before. I stood up and began a trek towards civilization. The dew's tender flakes lapped against my feet as I stepped, the misty, dank bog swallowing me whole. The trees bent tenderly around a crude dirt path. I took a heavy step forward, onto the dusty road. Every

bone in my body ached from the walk and the thoughts that flooded my mind. My stomach lurched with hunger as I pressed on, hoping to hear the distant sound of the clamor of a township. I paused, hearing the loll of a carriage crackling against the tender stones approach from behind.

“You’re a far way off!” I heard a voice cry out.

“Need a ride?”

I bit my tongue as I held a snarky remark down my throat. I turned to the carriage’s owner, a tall half-elf with curly ginger hair and icy blue eyes.

“Yes, th-that would be nice.” I reckoned softly.

“Name’s Rahjel. Yours?” He spoke jubilantly.

“Lazarus.” I murmured quietly, stepping into the large carriage as he opened the door. I saw massive stockpiles of fruit and vegetables, piled into messy sewn leather pouches.

“You’ll have ta ‘scuse me there. I was just bringin’ all this to the town. There ain’t much room, but I’m sure you can make it work.”

I piled myself gingerly into the vehicle, evading as much of the crop as I could as I sat down.

“Help yourself, you look like you need it.” He chuckled softly. It was a long ride full of fruit and lighthearted conversation.

I hadn’t comprehended the length of the ride, until I was unloaded from the carriage. I hadn’t crushed anything major - only a few pears and apples. I paid for my damage, and for the trouble - and helped Rahjel set up his shop. Taking a few prized goods for myself, I padded off towards the ornate castle.

Shuffling through an uncomfortably filled crowd, I felt my demeanor return. That burning hatred I’d tried so hard to kill fill me, envelop me. The thirst for blood to be splayed on my teeth and claws, the weak gags and whimpers of an elf with its throat slit. How badly I’d wanted to taste the flesh of man- but that life was behind me now. My fiery aura- I hadn’t noticed, lost in the vast forest of thought- had split around me, clutching their children and whispering in elvish or orcish or whatever language they thought a filthy dragonborn like I couldn’t understand. I felt the pavement thicken at my feet as I padded down a less trodden road. The stones flicked as I stepped, the crowd’s conversations growing shallower and quieter. I slipped through an alley, feeling the

sewage creep against my feet, the hollow ambience of the brick walls filling my ears, rattling inside of my skull. I tread tenderly into the clearing, at the face of the town hall's sandstone, painted walls. I let out a slight sigh, slicking my hand backwards of my forehead and stepping forward inside, my tail dragging behind me.

I pushed open the heavy, slick elm doors with a creak. My body was heavy. The two Tiedfling guards recognized my heinous features and lead me quickly, and discreetly through more massive doors, leading into a long flight of stairs, laced with red and golden threaded carpets, laced with long, amber tassels. They nodded in unison, slamming the door behind me. I let out a long sigh, the only light coming from a candle light emitting from a room atop the staircase. I let my hand slide up the wooden handrail as I stepped up the stars. The spiral stairs went only about twenty steps before I found myself at his door.

Pushing the door open, a stone of anxiety writhing inside of my stomach, I saw his throne. Sildrid, the king, stared at me with a fiery, loathsome gaze. The fat halfling saw me, erupting into laughter. His round body and amber curls perked up at my arrival, his chubby face and features brightening.

“Ohohohohohoh! Lazzie, you've returned!” He shouted pompously through the echoing corridor.

“It's Lazarus.” I corrected, passive-aggressively.

“Did you bring me a present? Oh, goodie!” He cried out, seeing my blood-stained bag.

“Bring it here!”

I held the small satchel containing what was left of Rhojaan's head to Sildrid. His grubby hands made quick work of the crude twine I'd used to hold the bag tightly together.

“My stars!” He cheered boastfully. He grabbed the left side, slit cleanly down the center of the skull.

“What a marvelous cut!” He praised me.

“Where is the money?” I asked abrasively, with a snarl.

“Oh, oh! Yes, yes. Fle'rygrr, bring my prize.” He spoke to a typhling next to him. The typhling's purple-silver flesh glittered, as he slowly exited the room in silence.

“Now that there are no interruptions...” Sildrid spoke, much quieter and calmer than usual.

“I have another offering.”

“Hmph?”

“There is a party seeking out a safe delivery of a minecart’s jewels. There’s-”

“No.” I interrupted, turning around to leave. The typhling Fle’rygrr held out an outstretched talon, in it a sack filled with jewels and doubloons.

“But whyyy?!” He complained. Sildrid stood up, following me. I turned back around, eyeing the short monarch with a cruel gaze.

“I’m not your pet.” I spat.

“I have my own life, too.” I continued to pad away, opening the large door.

“I’ll pay you!” He called after me.

I paused, gnashing my teeth. My ears pricked. I took a small breath in, turning towards him. He smiled, knowing he’d captured my full attention.

“How much?” I spoke with a slight smile, putting the sack of money into my belt loop, closing the massive elm door.

The Process to Overcome the Wrong Mind

For many years I excelled as a pitcher and hitter in baseball. I always believed in myself and the thought of failure never seemed to cross my mind. I was cheered on by teammates, coaches and other parents as well as my own. I was on the high life, nothing was going to stop me.

After about 7 years of consistently playing at a high level, I couldn't. I felt that I woke up one day and lost all my skills. I couldn't throw, I couldn't hit, and most of all, when I went to fix something it never stuck. It was very frustrating and beginning to take a toll on my "second life". I stopped hanging out with friends, I didn't go outside much, and I was turning into a hermit. I continued to practice, workout, and compete, but it was not how I could best perform. I was supported by others but I wouldn't accept it. In all it was a downhill spiral to failure.

I had to change my mindset. The first step was to open up about the already obvious problems to my parents. They listened to my struggles and it was "heart-breaking" to them. We all agreed that I need to change my mind. I had to eliminate the bad thoughts and embrace the positives. Many of the problems were to do with me, not outside sources. I also started visiting a sports psychologist. He helped me extremely, for he told me ways to think and ways to kill the negative thoughts. I had all the resources.

The next step was to apply these to my performance. Recently, I was in a tournament where I faced intense, pressure-filled moments. Unlike my past few months, I handled these positions with pride and confidence. I thought good thoughts and did not bring myself down with the fear of failure.

While I am making great progress, I expect many more challenges to come my way. When these hurdles in my performance spring up, I know how to overcome them and the rewards on the other side. It may be a long battle, but it's one I know I'll win.

The Peril and His Rose

It's been 5 years since Mr. Coleman killed his wife. After spending his time groveling in prison, he goes for a walk. He tried to clear his mind, but the walk just made his thoughts heavier. During this time, he reminisces about the time where his other part was alive. The part that he cared for but lost.

"Honey!" Mrs. Coleman called from the kitchen. Mr. Coleman came into the kitchen as a response, smiling just as he looked upon her.

"Do you know what day it is?"

"Of course, I know sweetheart." Mr. Coleman wrapped his hands around her waist as he placed his head between her neck and shoulder while smiling.

Today marked their first anniversary. Both parties had many plans in mind but, sadly, Mrs. Coleman had to go out while Mr. Coleman stayed home. Recently, their neighborhood has been experiencing bewildering events of people going missing. The police assume there's a killer on the loose. The information had frightened Mr. Coleman with the thought of his beloved disappearing right before his eyes. If a killer ever came in contact with their home, Mr. Coleman would have his gun ready at hand.

As it turned to dawn, there was no sign of Mrs. Coleman arriving home. She usually doesn't come home late, Mr. Coleman thought to himself. While deep in thought, the backdoor suddenly opened and the lights went off. It was dark as night. With caution, he quickly grabbed the gun from the cabinet.

"Who's there?" he questioned.

"Show yourself!"

No answer.

He suddenly heard running coming towards him. The moment he pulled the trigger a bullet projected itself across the room hitting whatever made the noise. Mr. Coleman was scared for his life. The pitch-black that surrounded the room along with the

silence made Mr. Coleman anxious. Had he shot a person? He vigilantly traveled to the light switch, turning it on. In an instant, Mr. Coleman felt fear and regret as more horror had struck upon him. Mrs. Coleman laid on the floor, lifeless. Beside her were gifts and roses, supposedly for their anniversary. Mr. Coleman felt his knees collapse as he slowly fell to the ground like gravity was dragging him down towards the Earth's core. For a moment his mind had gone blank. Tears starting to fall from his eyes as he stares at the dreadful image.

Forward from that point, nothing mattered. His sentence to jail didn't matter. His health didn't matter. Nothing mattered. What mattered was a rose from that day. A rose from his wife to remind him of her tragic fate and the person who caused it.

Scream

I woke up, golden sunlight filtering through the window. I yawned and slid out of bed. I grabbed my brown t-shirt and green shorts, and as I was changing, I surveyed my room. The walls were logs stacked and tied together neatly. My bed was made out of spruce wood and the sheets were dark green. White pillows laid against the headboard. My bed was set in the corner of my room. A little desk was next it, made out of a stripped spruce log that was carved to function like a normal table. My bow sat on top of it along with my quiver. I finished dressing and grabbed my bow and slung my pouch of arrows over my back. I walked out of my room and into the kitchen. I grabbed an apple sitting in the fruit bowl on the table and walked out of the door and into the woods.

The trees weren't very dense, so I could hunt in the woods easily. I took a bite out of my apple and wiped away the juice that ran down my chin. I took another bite of it and put the rest of the apple in a pocket attached to my quiver for later. I spotted a deer and crouched behind a bush. I grabbed an arrow and fastened it to my bow. The deer bent its head down and grazed on the grass. The white dots on its light brown fur gleamed in the sunlight. I loosed the arrow, and it hit the deer's neck. It bleated and bucked backward, trying to shake off the arrow. The deer stomped on the ground, and then fell over. Its actions became weaker, and the last thing the deer did was kick out. I walked up to the deer and grabbed a leg, then started pulling it towards the campsite in front of my home. I looked at the deer's eyes. They were glazed over. Good. I was almost to my campsite when I heard a whooshing sound behind me. I dropped the deer's leg and turned around. I saw nothing. I suspiciously walked towards a bush and reached inside. I felt nothing. I frowned and turned back to the deer. It was gone. Only a puddle of blood remained. I nervously looked around and started backing towards my campsite. Another whoosh sounded to my right, and I turned my head so fast I hurt

my neck. I saw a black creature duck out of sight. It was huge. I gasped and started running towards my campsite, smacking branches out of my way and stumbling over tree roots. I heard twigs snapping behind me. I dared to look. The creature was not there. Instead there was a little fox. I looked at me and scampered away. A heard a crack and I turned around. There was nothing there again. I felt air on the back of my neck and turned around quickly. Nothing. Is it circling me? Trying to create so much fear that I can't think straight? I thought. I pulled an arrow out of my arrow pouch and got it on the bow as I slowly surveyed the forest in front of me. I heard a growl behind me. I didn't even look, I just ran. I jumped over a rushing stream. I slipped on a wet, mossy rock on the other side My bow clattered to the forest floor and the creature ran over it. I heard the creature chasing after me. I weaved between the trees and jumped over rotting logs, breathing heavily. I noticed that the tree trunks were getting thicker and that they were becoming denser. The more I ran the darker it became. I stopped when I didn't hear the creature chasing after me anymore, and I realized that I ran really deep into the forest. Too deep. I heard a noise behind me and whipped around. And screamed.

Untitled

Anna was walking home from the playground one day. She was playing with her older sister Mary. Although they were both there together, they seemed quite distant. Anna was on the swing with her doll Bessie, while Mary was on Snapchat with her friends. Anna laughed as she was swung up and down, with brown hair flying in the wind. After a painful five minutes of sitting for Mary, she yelled at Anna and ordered her to get into the house.

"It's just too HOT!" she hollered with a screeching voice. As they both entered the house, they found their mother on the floor, crying next to the shrine of their dead father.

"Mommy, what happened?" inquired Anna, "We have termites in our walls, we will have to move in a week. The house is the only possession that we have left of Ryan."

Mother sobbed.

"It will be okay," said a surprisingly understanding Mary.

"But it won't, I have not enough money to buy a new house, barely even enough to pay rent for a measly apartment. We will have to move in with Great Aunt Donna." said a slightly more composed Mother.

By making this decision, none of them even had a clue how this would drastically change their life. And not in the right way.

As they began to pack up their belongings, many feelings arose. All of the clothes their father had bought them were to be thrown in a box or thrown away. All the memories of shopping trips at cheap stores like Target and Kohls were to be disposed of and tossed down the drain. Mother came to the girls' room to comfort and mourn with them.

A few days later, the movers came. They hauled all the boxes into the back of the U-Haul truck. Anna took amusement to see all the plates go into the car. After the boxes were loaded, the vehicle pulled out of the driveway and headed for Hovertown, where their Great Aunt Donna lived. After Mother packed up a

few sandwiches, they stepped in their grey car named Elvis and started singing a country song. They sang and sang until they arrived at Hovertown.

They pulled onto a dirt road next to a small stream. The crackling of the rocks under the tires was making Anna feel uncomfortable. After an unpleasant minute or two, they made a left turn into the driveway of the house.

"Great Aunt Donna's house is a little different," said Mother, "She has an ... acquired taste in furniture and housing."

As they came closer to the house, they saw it was made of blackened, falling boards and rusty old metal. The boards were hanging off of the house, and some had bullet holes in them. The lawn was brown and yellow, and dead shrubs were lying on the bare soil. Even before Mary stepped out of the car, she was already fussing.

"This place looks like a piece of trash," she snapped.

"Language Mary, do not say such things in front of Great Aunt Donna, you know she has Alzheimer's." Said mother in a snappy, whisper-like voice.

Anna was looking around the open landscape. She was the only one out of the three who was excited to live here. But there was one thing that made Anna very curious. In the open meadow of dead grass, there was a small house-like a shed. It had small shingles that were cracked and displaced. It was completely dark inside except for a dim light bulb that swung back and forth on a cord. Anna pondered about her discovery. But little did she know that what she had found was what she wished she had never noticed.

"Anna, come to say Hi to your Great Aunt Donna."

"Hi, Auntie D," said Anna excitedly.

"Hello, Darling," Said Auntie D.

She had prepared a platter of cookies and cakes for the guests to snack on. Although the house looked unpleasant from the outside, it was quite comfortable on the inside.

"How are you doing?" inquired mother.

"Oh, hello! When did you all get here?"

"Auntie D, we've been here for 15 minutes."

"Oh yes, sorry, I must have dozed, Carry on."

"Well, I asked how you were doing."

"Oh, I'm doing fine, thanks for asking."

"Maybe I should escort you to your new room."

They walked down a hall filled with old replicas of famous paintings like the Mona Lisa and the Last Supper. Great Aunt Donna was always a collector of art. After a long walk through many halls filled with different antique objects, they were finally escorted into their rooms. They all had the same bedsheets and comforters and the same colored walls. Both the girls were excited to have their rooms.

"I can put all my teddy's in that corner!" said Anna with an excited tone in her voice.

"I can put all my expensive makeup brush and lipstick on this dresser," said Mary, talking to her friend Sam on her phone.

But something was bothering Anna. She felt like she saw something otherworldly when she was walking down the halls. Something scary, magical, but terrible

As the day passed, everyone began to unpack their belongings. They all began to feel more comfortable with their new living space. "It's time for dinner," called mother, trying to get the attention of her children. "Coming mother," the girls said in unison. They both walked somewhat quickly through the hallway. As they arrived closer to the dinner table, Anna felt that terrible sensation again. She stopped in the hall. Huffing and puffing with every passing second. As she was trying to focus on catching her breath, her mind shifted to a different topic. She remembered when she saw the field of dead grass and the shed. She kept thinking of the pendulum light bulb in the shed. Back and forth with every breath. Although she didn't know it, she would find out soon.

Her mother offered her a glass of water at the table. They were being served fried chicken and tater tots on plastic plates from the nearby pub.

"What happened, dear, I was so scared!" said Mother sympathetically and worriedly.

"I, I saw the outside shed in the dead grass field, but it was scary this time. I felt like when I was looking at the shed; someone was looking at me."

Donna, in shock, stood up and whispered, "She came back."

Bringing chills to all of them. None of them, not even Great Aunt Donna, knew what was in store for them.

That night, everyone went to sleep, thinking of the worst.

They all felt that they were in grave danger even though they hadn't also been informed about the situation. The fact is, they certainly didn't think wrong. As Anna and Mary went to brush their teeth in their bathroom, they both sympathetically looked at each other. They started to clean. As Anna was looking in the mirror, she didn't know if her subconscious was imagining this or not, but an old distorted woman wearing blackened rags held a blood-covered knife to her head in the mirror.

"AHHH," she shrieked.

"What is it, Ann?" said Mary with a worried tone in her voice.

"Nothing," Anna lied.

She tucked herself into bed, pulling the covers over her cold feet and legs. She was shivering in the bed. The window next to her bed shone moonlight into the room, reflecting on the white covers as she dozed into sleep. A shadow began to approach the window. She had an evil smile on her face. Blood dripping down from her teeth, onto her doll, who was already colored on her face. She watched Anna sleep for a few hours. She was putting her long fingernails on the glass window, smiling with her long yellow teeth, peering into the window. She stood there with the same smile.

Anna woke up, curled into a small ball. She realized she had made it through the night. She woke up to find her grandmother praying with her rosary. A small platter of pancakes was on the table. She and her grandmother both sat to eat.

"Why are you praying?" asked Anna.

"Because an evil person has come to hurt us all." She said in the most kid-friendly way.

"I made a poor choice when I was a little girl, which made this bad person want to get revenge."

Right before Anna could ask the next question, she was interrupted by a scream coming from down the hallway. It was her mother. She was continuously screaming. They both ran as fast as they could, though Auntie D was lagging. They cracked open the white door to Mary's room and saw something terrible. Mary was lying on the bed with her pretty brown eyes wide open, paralyzed in fear. She had knives sticking out of her back, dripping blood onto the innocent white covers. The blood dripped down from the sheets to the floor, showing a reflection of the nightstand. Her face

had been positioned sideways. She was looking in the direction of her nightstand too.

"MARY," Anna sobbed.

"NOOOOOO.," but the one thing that Great Aunt Donna found peculiar was the doll sitting on her nightstand, looking right at the situation. It was a baby doll who was bald and had coloration on her face. Donna walked around the room, trying to wrap her head around the situation. She came to the other side of the bed. She stepped around the puddles of blood and dead flies. She looked at the room once more, from a different perspective. And then she saw it. The doll was sitting on the edge of the nightstand with her half-faced smile, looking intently at the corpse. Droplets of dried blood covered her bare scalp. Donna was paralyzed in fear. She couldn't stop looking at the doll. It was like the doll, and Donna had become one for a moment. Their hands, covered in the blood of their family member, were used to wipe away their tears. All of them sat around the dead body, crying, praying, hoping that this isn't a pattern. But they would soon be disappointed with their prayers. Little did they know that the orchestrator was closer than anyone ever thought.

The day went by quickly, and before they even knew it, it was time to sleep. The adults went to bed already, but Anna was still awake. She went and brushed her teeth and changed her clothes. Anna soon came to her bed. She looked out the window to see the shed in the middle of the field. She turned, closing her eyes. Thinking about her recently passed sister, Mary. Who had the doll? She opened her eyes. But instead of seeing the room, she saw right in front of her face, the watcher. The watcher's cold hands were holding her brown locks of hair. Her breath breathed down on Anna's blue eyes and soft nose. The watcher's intent smiling eyes looked at Anna. "Every scar on my face, for every death with no trace." She noticed as she said her last few words that she clutched a small doll, identical to the one in Mary's room. She screamed in terror. She kept screaming, but she wasn't heard. She cried and cried and even tried praying, but the next morning when Anna's mother came to wake her up, she was gone. She was nowhere to be found. "Oh, where could she have gone!" Mother said worriedly. Crying on the phone, she called every person she knew, but when she came back to Anna's room to investigate, she

saw something on her nightstand. A small doll with a colored face, with small blood-drops on her head. The doll sat there, looking at the bed, intently, curiously, evilly. She looked at the bed like Anna was still in fact, lying in bed, dreaming of her dreams.

Toxic

They say I have gone crazy. That I'm not myself. At least, since I met him. He lights up my world. Makes me smile brighter than a shooting star. Though, he also makes me furious, and filled with hatred for myself. So, what keeps me longing to be with him? The answer is simple. Love. Love is what keeps me longing to be with him. Each and every day I spend with him, I find myself falling for him more and more. Within the single second that I first met him, I knew it was love.

The first time we met, we had gotten the same history class. We didn't talk to each other, didn't make eye contact with each other, didn't even try to learn each other's names. We just sat there, side by side, waiting for the day to be over. Until, my best friend introduced me to him. Shawn Bridge, was his name. He was tall, dark glowing blue eyes, like the color of the ocean, and a smile that lit up the whole room within a minute. We started talking to each other, and at first, we were shy. It felt as if we were 5 years old again, sitting in a kindergarten room. As we started to talk more and more, I started to fall in love with his personality, his opinions, everything he had to say. I was captivated by his charm.

Then, it was the day I had been waiting for since the first time we met. The day when he would ask me to be the one. I know you may be thinking, Marriage! Already! but no, not marriage, girlfriend. He invited me to the place we first met, a park. This was not just any park though, this park had millions of memory's waiting to be opened and looked at by the millions of people in the world. Most people think nothing of this little park. I mean, there is no playground for kids to run and jump around on, no actual parking, no basketball court or any other sports court. Just a little park, filled with the most beautiful green trees, that change their colors in the fall, slowly making the place just a bit more enjoyable than the second before. This place, this park was special, but most failed to notice.

As I started to walk towards him, I notice a path of rose petals, and a candle lit alley, with the most astonishing picnic displayed. Yes, it was very cheesy, and yes this is the thing that normally happens in the movies. Especially the Hallmark movies. Though, it seemed so romantic and thoughtful at the moment. It truly felt like I was at the movies. It was a fairy tale come to life. Then he popped the big question, asking me to be his girlfriend, and obviously I said yes.

We began going places, spending more time together. It was truly a blast! At least, for a little while. Until I saw more of his true colors, more of his personality that I did not notice. He started telling me that I needed to lose weight because I was too fat, or that I was stupid and had to repeat a grade. He made me feel ugly when I was wearing a certain outfit, or if I wasn't wearing makeup. Or he would make me feel worse if he thought I was wearing too much makeup. He started comparing me to other girls, telling me that they were way prettier than I would ever be. Saying that I would never be good enough for him.

I just thought this stuff happens in relationships. No, it doesn't, I was oblivious to see it. We started arguing, fighting. At first, it didn't happen that often, but then it started growing and growing like a tree. It started getting out of hand and we were fighting almost 5 times a week. By this point, I had no idea what to do. Should I break up with him, like everyone wanted me to? Or should I stay with him, and wait to see what happens. Until I saw him doing something I thought he would never do.

What is he doing?! I thought to myself. There I saw him, cheating on me with Cassandra. Cassandra and I have never gotten along. We were almost like enemies. She bullied me starting from the first grade all the way up till now, because I accidentally spilled my chocolate milk on her. Apparently, that makes someone your arch nemesis. I rushed out of the house, in a panic as he chases me down saying "I can explain". Cassandra bolted out the front door, worried that I saw it was her. There it was again. I could feel it. Another fight bursting, trying to break through. At this point I barely even cared anymore. I fell to the floor next to my car, with my face in my hands, crying, because I couldn't hold back the tears any longer.

There he was, just looking at me with a face of regret. He

came and sat next to me, as I pushed him away.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know what I was thinking,” he says, looking at me hoping for forgiveness. I didn’t know how to react, I was still shocked by what had happened. So, I just sat there and kept crying. Until, I stood up. He tried to kiss me, but I did something I thought I would never do. I pushed him away. His facial expression looked as if he were astonished, but in a bad kind of way. It felt so good to push him, that I did it again. It was like all the anger and hatred was being released from inside me, and I loved it. I loved it more than anyone could ever know.

The next day arrived, as I woke up from the horrible night I had before. There was Shawn. Texting, calling, emailing, sending me cute animal pictures. I ignored all of it. The last thing I wanted to do was speak to him. I just had to figure out my life. Figure out who I am again, so that I don’t feel obligated to be with him. So that I don’t feel like I am not me without him. And even though I try to be without him, something just keeps pulling me to be with him. Like he is luring me into his trap, once more.

So, have I gone crazy, like everyone says I am? I really cannot tell. They say I am not myself when I am with him. They are right. I am not myself when I am with him. I am a completely different person. They say it is a toxic relationship. Even though I know they are right, I still cannot help the fact that I have fallen for him so hard. So much so, that I feel that I am completely in love with him. I have poured my heart and soul into this relationship, into him, and what do I get back? I get back no reward, no love, no satisfaction even of the tiniest bit. Don’t hear me wrong. I was not hoping for a reward. I never wanted a reward, no fancy trophy for being the best girlfriend on the planet! No, that is not what I wanted. All I ever wanted was to be loved. And even better, love the person that loves you. I just wanted to be loved by someone. I wanted the fairy tale of Cinderella, riding in a carriage off into the sunset, sitting right next to the tall charming prince that swept you off your feet, and that treats you right, and loves you. I just wanted to be loved. I guess that fairy tale does not always come true.

So, I came to my decision and ended it with him. He really was no prince charming. Everyone was right, it was a toxic relationship and that’s not healthy for either of us. It took some

time for me to drown my sorrows in tubs of ice cream, while having many Netflix and Chill movie nights with my best friend. At first it felt like my whole world had ended. In the end though, my friends and family were right. It wasn't love. I didn't find out what love really felt like until this happened. Don't worry, I won't leave you hanging. I had just ordered a nice warm hot chocolate from the coffee shop. I was in such a hurry, to get to my friend, since I was already late, that I ran into this guy and spilled my hot chocolate all over him. I thought, oh no! Maybe I will create another arch nemesis. So, obviously I apologized and he just laughed it off. Then the most awkward part happened. I tripped over his feet. I know right? How can you just trip over someone's feet like that? So I tripped, I was about to fall head first, until he caught me, and we looked straight into each other's eyes. Right then and there, I could feel the spark. I knew it was meant to be. So, I guess it is only chocolate milk that makes people your arch nemesis. Who knew that this could all start because I spilled a drink on someone? In a way, I guess I could say thank you to my toxic relationship. I got my wish. All I have ever wanted was to be loved, and this seems like a pretty good start.

In the end, it all seemed like Happily ever After. What they use in the true fairy tales!



Alexandria Sundstrom
Middle School

Untitled

It was a cold December, damp and grey. There was no snow, no fun, and no cheer. We were all dreading the holiday season. My neighbors thought someone made some sort of winter witch angry, like Narnia, and was causing this terrible winter. But I, Joanna Steele, thought it was the new family in town. A couple of weeks before the holiday season, a family moved in. They consisted of a father, a mother, an older daughter, and a younger son. They were the Rhodes'. The father was tall and lean and looked as if he owns a big business, the mother was short compared to the father but was taller than most women and she looked very prideful. The children were similar in looks, all except for the scars. The boy had scars across his cheeks and the girl had them on her arms. The mother also had these scars across her arms, but she hid them well. The one thing that they all had in common was the cold icy looking coats and their cold looking blue eye. They had fur around the sleeve cuffs and bottom of the coats. Everywhere else on those coats were ice blue, such a grey-blue color that looked as if they were made from ice. They had moved in about three weeks before the holidays. Everyone at my school stayed clear of the children, Ozz, and Bec Rhodes. Ozz was in my grade, sixth grade, and Bec, she was in seventh grade. They seemed fine with the fact that no one was coming near them, for they had each other. Ozz ended up being in my second-period class for a few weeks but no one would go near him so he had to move classes. Bec would always find her brother on the bus and during lunch, even though they had different lunchtimes. I, personally, thought it was cool that they always had someone to go to because I didn't have any siblings, though I wish I did. Two days later, the snow stopped coming and the smiles left everyone's faces. All of a sudden, we were all dreading the holidays, even I tore down all my Christmas decorations. No one went outside unless they had to, everything was muggy and damp. Every time I

walked outside, my hair puffed up. Mosquitos came to visit too. Every night I would sit up in my room and shoo away the mosquitos, wondering how this all happened. But before I ever thought of the Rhodes, I was fast asleep. The Rhodes never even crossed my mind until one terrible night, when one of my friends asked me if I wanted to sleepover at her house that night. She was really nice and her name was Georgia Lam, but she goes by GiGi. Once I got to her house, we decided to go for a walk. GiGi didn't live far away, in fact, she lived three houses down from mine. So, we went out for a walk around the street. We both knew that the Rhodes' lived in the biggest house on the street, only rich people rent it. So, being children from middle school, that was our destination. They had no car in the driveway, so I looked in the window, but it was black. I told GiGi that they must have closed the curtain. And she went into the backyard to look in another way. Which was a bad idea. Of course, I followed her. We peeked through the window that was around the back, I thought the screen door would give us a better look, but GiGi talked me out of it. We would have gotten caught if we went with my idea. GiGi had accidentally knocked over a bucket and made a ruckus. We ducked and heard Mr. Rhodes come out of the house, he looked around and saw the bucket and started complaining about raccoons. He went back inside and forgot to close the curtain! GiGi and I peeked in through the screen door and saw something we will never forget. All of the Rhodes were sitting in a circle, holding hands. In the middle of them was a symbol. It was a circle but with little symbols inside of it. I leaned against the screen door to take a closer look but, Mr. Rhodes had also forgotten to lock the door. So, I fell through the opening door. GiGi started grabbing at me so I looked up, and Mrs. Rhodes was standing over me. I tried to look like I was asleep, to seem like I slept walked my way to her home. But GiGi kept screaming and yelling, saying I passed out, and that I just died! So I glared at her, and she screamed, jumped the fence, and ran home. I was stuck. Mrs. Rhodes smiled and said, "We were waiting for a sacrifice." I started screaming and fumbling around in my pocket for my phone. I grabbed it but before I could call 911, she snatched it out of my hands. She shook her head and hauled me upward. I stood there, awaiting my fate when GiGi crashed through the door, with a baseball bat and

two men. The police had come. I looked at them, but they were looking around as if no one was there. GiGi freaked out and started searching around. I screamed at her and the two men that I was right there. Bec walked towards me and told me they can't see us. Then Ozz joined her and they both started chanting in some weird language. I wasn't listening I was trying to grab my best friend. Mr. Rhodes grabbed me by the arms and put me in the circle, I tried to get up but I was stuck! I started screaming louder. Mrs. Rhodes slapped me to shut me up. I went to slap her back, but I couldn't move my arms. Bec and Ozz kept chanting and pretty soon, I couldn't move my mouth. I kept trying to scream but my lips wouldn't open. Bec stopped chanting and said, "This will kill you, bit by bit, organ, by organ..." I continued to struggle against my own body, but I couldn't move anything. After a little while, my vocal cords stopped, I couldn't make any noise. Mr. Rhodes turned toward me and spoke in a deep voice, "We were going to shut your body off, but I think we should make you bleed." Just at that moment, GiGi stepped on the circle and jumped. "Joanna!?" The two men rushed over and stared at me. I kept struggling but I couldn't move at all. Ozz continued chanting as if nothing happened. I could feel my lungs slow down. GiGi screamed at the two men to take me to the hospital, but they just stood there, in some sort of trance. Mrs. Rhodes smiled, "They can't hear you, or see you. They're blind and deaf now. Such a shame too, what pretty boys." GiGi grabbed my arm and started dragging me across the room. My lungs started working again, and I could kind of make noise. GiGi got to the door and turned around to look at the Rhodes. They were just sitting there, watching her drag me. GiGi went to step out the door, but she couldn't. She was punching at the air and kicking at nothingness, but it was like she was hitting a wall. She called out, in the hope that the neighbors would hear her, but they didn't. We were stuck. I could talk again, at least move my lips. My tongue was still dysfunctional. I said, "Dith ith all or alt!" She said it was my idea to lean against the screen door, so it was my fault. The Rhodes just stared at us fight and being angry. We were stuck in the Rhodes house for one week. We were being starved and it was only one week before the holiday season. We kept asking them if they will let us go. But they never did. One night, when all the Rhodes were

asleep, GiGi tried the front door and escaped. When I woke up, she was gone. I thought the Rhodes had used her as a sacrifice. But they kept asking where she went. I had no idea until she came back for me. She opened the front door and called to me. I walked to the door and she pulled me out. I was free, I hugged her. She brought me home so we could call the police and have the Rhodes arrested. But when we got there, everything was gone. The Rhodes had left town. So, the Rhodes move from city to city, and town to town. Just to ruin winter. They have never been caught, never had to pay the consequences. So, watch out, before you're sacrificed.

Switched

Our story begins in a small town in Oregon called Cannon Beach where a boy named Randy lives. His family is not the wealthiest, but they can afford to have food and a roof over their head. Randy's dad works at the local supermarket which doesn't have the best salary. Randy's mom is a stay home mom who cooks their meals and does their laundry. Even though they have a small house and not that much money, they are a happy family. On the other side of town lives another boy named Baxter. Baxter and his family are pretty well off. They live in the nicest neighborhood in town in the largest house. There, Baxter throws weekly parties which Randy not once got invited to. These two families are very different in every way. Now let's get on with the story.

"Randy! Out of bed hon. It's time to go to school."

"Yes mom." Let's see what to wear today. Umm... Ah! My ripped orange shirt with not that many rips and jeans with holes. Nice! Time for breakfast.

"Oatmeal Yum! Ok I'm ready for school mom."

"Sorry son I have to go buy your dad some new work clothes. You will just have to walk."

"Ok."

"Bye! Love You!"

"BAX!"

"Mom, ok I'm up."

"Good you don't want to be late for school, again. Come on 10 days is not a lot. Bax!"

"Ok, ok I'm going." Um polo, leather jacket, and sweats. Breakfast time. Yes! French toast with strawberries. My favorite.

"Dad, I'm ready!"

"Coming, son! Hop in my new Ferrari. Just got it."

"Cool. Let's go."

"Wait forgot my phone."

“Off to school.”

“Baxter, what’s up man.”

“Hey Rob. So, you heard about Randy.”

“ Yeah! How does he live without a phone or air pods?”

“ It's crazy. Well I better get to class.”

“Ok see you at lunch then.”

“Good morning Mrs. Shelly.”

“Ahh Mr. Davron your late to class.”

“Yeah, I had to go to the restroom.”

“I see... Sit Down. Now today in science we will be learning about Chemical reactions. Now everyone, partner up. Baxter, I think it would be good if you partner up with an A student such as Randy.”

“Fine!”

“So, Baxter you ready?”

“Ready for what?”

“To make a chemical reaction.”

“Ha! I’ll show you a little reaction I am going to have after lunch.”

“What?”

“It's called a fart Randy.”

“Ewwww. You know why don't we just sabotage this class so we don't have to do science ever again. Give me that beaker!”

“Hey, what are you doing?”

“If I spill this chemical on the light switch it will mess up the lights causing them to turn off so we can escape.”

“You don't know that!”

“Yeah, I do.”

“No! Hey move away from the switch.”

“Fine I will do it with you standing there. Pshhhhhhhhh.”

“What's happening!!!!”

“Ohh My god 911! 911! 911!”

The ambulance rushed in and took Randy and Baxter straight to the hospital.

“Randy! Randy!”

“Uhhh what happened.”

He's waking up. Kid what is your name.

"Umm... Baxter."

Oh No! It's worse than I Thought.

"Baxter Baxter! What is your name?"

"Ummmm. Randy."

Kids we have to take you home to your parents right away.

"Okay."

"Oh, Baxter we were so worried about you, are you okay?"

"Who are you?"

"Baxter, we are your parents."

"Baxter?"

"Yes, that's your name."

"I'm Baxter? But I thought I was R... I'll be right back..."

"Wait! This is not my house, where's my room, I'm not Baxter, I'm Randy. Quick Where's the nearest mirror?"

"Um the bathroom."

"Yes ok! Please, please, please.... Ahhhhhhhhhhhh OMG why am I wearing Baxter's Face and his clothes. Something happened with that light switch."

"Umm Mom I'm going to my friend's house."

"Okay, be back soon."

"Baxter, Baxter, Baxter!"

"Randy we just switched bodies!"

"I know but how?"

"I think it was the light switch. The chemicals in the beaker must have gone through us."

"Ok Science freak. Hold on. Every chemical reaction wears off right."

"Yeah."

So, this one must wear off too."

"Yeah! But how long does that take?"

"Usually 5 minutes. If we multiply that by our age which is 15, that's 80 hours or About 3 days. So, we just have to wait till the 3rd day to switch back."

"That's not that bad. Here this is my second phone so we can keep in touch."

"Um Question Baxter."

"Hmm What?"

“How do you work this phone?”

“Right forgot you don't have one. Well to unlock it you press the home button. Got it? Then If you want to text me, you click this green box and type.”

“Cool!”

“It's like explaining this to a four-year-old. Anyway, where do you live?”

“Um I live on Madison Rd. You live in one of those dinky homes.”

“They're not dinky, they're just not as big as yours.”

“Ok geez, hopefully those 3 days go by fast.”

Definitely my mom, definitely my dad. “Where are you?”

“Oh, welcome home Randy. So, where's my tablet?”

“ Tablet?”

“You don't have a tablet. What! Randy doesn't have a tablet!”

“Umm... I mean right I don't have a tablet but I really want one. Sooo... can we buy one for me?”

“Sorry hon, we don't have extra money for junk like that.”

“It's not junk!”

“Randy, I don't like this new attitude. Why don't you go think about it in your room?”

“Fine I'll go to Randy's room without electronics! I Mean My Room!”

“Ahh welcome home Baxter.”

“So, who is this new friend of yours?”

“Randy...yes Randy Rendent.”

“Ahh! So, what do you want for dinner?”

“Ummm... Some toast would be delicious!”

“Toast? You want Toast? You don't want a Beef Sandwich?”

“Ok.”

“Then what type of bread Sourdough, Brioche, Bagel, Pita, Ciabatta, White bread, Challah, Pumpernickel, Texas toast, Flatbread, English muffin, Bun, Brisket?”

“Do you have plain Brown bread?”

“Brown bread? Baxter what has gotten into you? SYou want brown bread out of everything else? Ok then do you want anything on top? Cream cheese, peanut butter, jam, Nutella, honey, jelly?”

“Umm just some butter I guess.”

“Ok... Fine.”

“Ummm... Mom! I'm going to Randy's house again!”

“Fine just be back soon.”

“Randy! How do you not have any electronics! Like not even one tablet or T.V.?”

“Well how can you live with choosing every single day a different type of food.”

“Well for breakfast you have wet and soggy oatmeal! Disgusting! Why is your life so boring!”

“Well why is your life so complicated.”

“Listen Randy, I have a baseball game tomorrow. Don't you blow it for me. If you do I will get you grounded for the rest of your childhood. You got that?”

“Sir!”

“Good.”

“Ah Man I don't know anything about sports.” I can do this, I just have to practice for a long, long time which is a max of one day! I'm Screwed!

Randy Hon we have some bad news.

“What? What could possibly be so bad then not have a T.V. to watch Celebrities Being Pranked!?”

“Son our neighbor Mrs. Renoldas has passed.”

“Huh why? She had no food for two weeks in her house and none of the wealthy donated to her. But why didn't you... I mean we.”

“Son we barely have enough food to feed ourselves.”

“Oh.” But Randy Oh no! What have I done? I've only been thinking about myself. I have to apologize.

“Can I go to Baxter's house really fast... ”

“Sorry Hon its bedtime. Maybe tomorrow.”

“Ok.” Man, I can't believe all this pressure I've put on Randy. I've gotta make it right but how? Ill figure it out in the morning.

“Morning Bax wake up time for your game!”

“Oh No.”

“Hop in you got your bat bag.”

“Yup!” I don't even know what all this stuff in here is.

“There's your coach, get on the field.”

“Ah 34 you made it! Ready to win!?”

“Maybe?”

“All right you're up first. Get up to the plate.”

“Sure.”

All ready here's the pitch. Zoom!

“Strike 1!”

“Strike 2!”

“Strike 3! OUT!”

“No! My life is over! Randy, Randy I have to talk with you.”

“I know what you're gonna say. I'm now grounded for the rest of my life.”

“No that's what I'm here to apologize about.”

“Apologize?”

“Yes, I've realized that not everybody is as lucky as me. I've been so ungrateful and such a jerk to you. I'm sorry I made fun of you for what you didn't have. To make up for it I'm giving you that phone to keep and a check for 1000 dollars for your family. I know you really need it.”

“Thanks, Bax. At school tomorrow lets switch back.”

“Cool.”

“You're ready!”

“Yup on the count of three touch the light switch. Ok.
3...2...1”

pshhhhhhhhh!

“I'm Back!”

“Me too!”

“Hey you want to sit at my table for lunch today.”

“Sure.”



Lauren Brown
Edgar Chay-Leos
Rafael Enriquez
Kaleb Hayden
Magdalene McArthy
Alexis Rieck
Gilbert Smith



Lauren Brown High School Essay

Untitled

I have always wondered what the universe has in store for me. I believe like pawns on a chessboard, a higher being or power has created a destination for me and I mindlessly follow their designated path. I theorize that the universe blessed me with taking the difficult paths in life, in order for me to learn from them.

In but a moment's notice, a swift collision amongst 4 cars created an unfortunate incident amid a hectic intersection. Stopped at a light, the floating aroma of cinnamon in the air from the latte in my hand collided with the stench of blood and sweat when my family and I were rear ended; ultimately sandwiched between two cars in a sudden impact. The predestined path for the woman in question was for her to use her phone while operating a vehicle and become distracted enough to make my family and I to suffer. My brother's blood curdling scream filled the car and created a frenzy in the air as I swatted away the thick, gray smoke billowing out from my mother's airbag. The motherly caress of my salty sweat and bitter blood streamed down my face from my busted lip and a cut forehead. Stepping out of the car and viewing my surroundings, nothing felt real. I recounted my steps and pondered on the possibility if this all could have been avoided. What if we had left Starbucks ten minutes later? What if I had forgotten my phone at home and we were forced to turn around and retrieve it? Except that's where I was wrong, it was meant to happen and there was no possible way of avoiding it.

At the scene of the accident, I was tasked with: calling my boss to let him know that I was not able to come in, alerting my father at work about what happened, and speaking to the paramedics about my injury. Now that might not seem like much, but this is coming from a person who is absolutely terrified when it comes to dealing with authority. I dread making phone calls and my anxiety

levels shoot through the roof when I have to take charge; however, in that moment, I had to do what I had to do. With the adrenaline pumping and cortisol racing through my veins, I had to step up and assist with the stressful situation that I was faced with. Tough as it was, I can say with reassurance in my heart that our accident was meant to happen, to allow me to face my fears and work through my anxiety.

Through darkness you are bound to light and that is why I am eternally grateful for the car crash. I often think about that day late at night and proceed to cry in my room. That day, something or someone, was watching from above and protected my family. At the end of the day, we made it out alive. Our 2017 Mustang convertible was a total loss and we all suffered physical and emotional trauma; but, it was not our time to go.

After that moment, I have been an advocate for trusting the process and being able to maneuver the difficult tasks that are thrown my way. I believe through every stormy night, a rainbow filled morning is on the rise. Our physical therapy appointments, doctor visits, and flashbacks to the accident were all temporary. I'm alive, my cuts and scrapes healed, and I've learned to have faith in whatever situation gets thrown my way.

Possibility

“There's a lot of us out here that are birds, man. We all need to just fly.” My word is possibility because anything you want to reach for just go for it and don't let anyone stop you from reaching that goal which is why I chose the quote by the one and only Travis Scott. This year I want to think of myself as a bird who can fly.

Last year I didn't feel like a “Free Bird.” I felt like I was trapped in my own little world and felt like I couldn't escape, I was always isolated, depressed, and lonely. Which is why I picked up drugs I thought doing drugs would help me find my true self, but it wasn't the solution I never seemed to get better I only got worse. I thought my friend that got me into drugs were my friends but once I got into recovery I just found out they were not friends they're just there to ruin someone's life.

The first step I'm going to take is staying in school because without school my life isn't going to go anywhere, and nothing will be possible. Secondly, I'm going to stay clean and sober, and that will lay out a sturdy foundation for my recovery. And lastly, I will focus on myself and grow as a student and improve in school.

My past wasn't so good so I would like to change that this year I made anything possible impossible and I would always forget about the possibilities.

Untitled

Humming from the plane was casted upon the plastic and rough armrest I rested my head on. For every mile that we furthered, the vibrations carried on stronger, rudely bumping into me and causing my head to bounce on the armrest. I readjusted my position to ease the uncomfortable ride. Fussing and turning in my seat had proven to be no help and, in some positions, made it even more discomforting. Hopefully through these last hours, the turbulence would reduce to barely audible noise.

The two hours before boarding were quite unpleasant as well. The airport has the atmosphere of bitterly cold air conditioning, the harsh lighting of the strong beaming white light spilling all over the floor, the busyness and chaos of every existing person rummaging to their flight. It's unforgiving and every single soul would cut ahead should the opportunity arise. Crowds of people pushing each other, going to places where they need to be. Along with that you have the people; ranging from small babies to old men, barely able to stand with a cane. The airport was the definition of unwelcoming.

Upon boarding the plane, it was filled with sighs and groans; people waiting to go home. The area itself had no functioning lights, so it remained to be merely lit with the strobing red and green lights from the outside. I held myself in my seat, pulling my arms back into my hoodie to give myself just a pinch of more warmth. In front of me I saw an old woman, bundled in even more clothing than I was, thick fur coat and a vanilla sweater with a bit of static on the collar. While in her seat she shuffled constantly to keep herself warm in the harsh and bitter cold air conditioning.

I looked out the window, and out among was the fleeting sunlight, covered by the dark and thick clouds. It blinded the sun, casting a shadow of darkness upon my seat. Even just a ray of

lsunlight had provided me some sort of warmth from the bitter air. There I scrambled to find even more warmth, jumbling all of my warmth to the center like a huddle of people. I looked out the window once again and I was received by the grandeur. A little cloud was lost and isolated by the giants of others, unable to see the runt in their path. The tiny cloud's objective is to grow; although quite simple, the objective has numerous obstacles in its path before it could ever stand along with nimbus clouds.

It would take nearly their entire lifetime to grow. Even as they stand large and proud, the slightest change of air or a simple rise of temperature can whittle them down with ease. Despite that, the cloud continues, growing until it can't. Children enter a new era of their lives and imagine great prospects, only to be met with the unmerciful juxtaposition of reality. These growing clouds have much to face and much to learn. Numerous and countless obstacles will perpetually cross their path and expect a battle. These clouds mustn't give out simply due to something new coming about. Rather, they should stand tall and charge head on. You may be whittled down, however another cloudy is inevitable.

Waking to my face spilling out drool on the armrest, I catch a warm orange glow upon the seat. Looking out the window, a grandeur cloud standing alone and tall remained in the center of all the chaotic clouds. Its head stood taller than any other cloud in the sky and across the horizon. Stroked with a golden ray of sunlight, it glowed spectacularly. It remained as majestic and beautiful. For everything that tries, eventually develops into something greater. An infinite progression chain is upon them, that should define their prospects of another sunny cloud, showing its beauty and through all the effort it took to become whole.

Untitled

*Construct your determination with Sustained Effort,
Controlled Attention, and Concentrated Energy.
Opportunities never come to those who wait...
they are captured by those who dare to attack.*

~ Paul J. Meyer

The word I have chosen is determination. This is because it relates to me in a lot of ways, for example, soccer, it takes much determination to be successful.

My word is very much inspired by my past. Last year I had the opportunity of a lifetime to go to Sweden (on a 14-day trip) to play in the biggest youth soccer tournament in the world. It was incredible but the one thing I didn't have leading into that trip was determination. I had ample time to prepare and become the best player I could be. I ended up waiting until the last three weeks to really put in the work, and it showed. I did not play badly, but I did not do as well as I should have.

There are a few steps I could take to follow through with determination in 2020. First of all, try to keep a positive mindset. Second, I will keep the squares out of my circle. I know it sounds corny, but it's true. By keeping those who are bad influences and have negative energy out of my space, so I can stay cool calm and collected. Finally, I will turn negatives into positives. For instance, if I am in a soccer game and you pull my groin, look at the bright side like "as soon as I get wrapped up I'll be fine" or "now whoever my substitute is can play." Small changes in perspective go a long way.

I have a plan to keep myself accountable for staying determined. Making a goal chart for things that I want to be able to or to excel in. If I want to be the best shooter on my team, I will start going to the soccer field every day and constantly shoot the

ball from short and long distances. Changing my dynamics and pushing myself will allow me to be much better than the players that don't practice consistently.

In reflecting on the past year, I realize I need to work on my determination. It relates to my past because I wasn't trying as hard as I should have been. Take steps to become as focused and good-minded as I can. Lastly, hold myself accountable by making a goal chart.



Magdalene McArthy

High School Essay

Positivity

*There is no life I know to compare with pure imagination.
Living there, you'll be free if you truly wish to be.*

This Roald Dahl quote reminds me to stay in a positive state of mind. My word for 2020 is positivity because I noticed that I always used to have a negative mindset, and I'm longing to change that. Also, recovery has allowed me to acknowledge that negative state and strive to overcome it.

In my painful past and suffering throughout my addiction, I always felt lonely, depressed, bipolar, and unmotivated. I thought doing drugs and drinking would help me find happiness, joy, and self-love. It worked for a little while at first, but then I started feeling down all the time and I never felt good about myself. I stopped excelling in academics. And the all-around person I was becoming...I didn't like her. I wanted to change, but I felt trapped. My Higher Power finally answered my prayers and revealed that I was willing to change. He opened a door for me that I never foresaw. The door opened, I seized the opportunity, and my life has forever changed.

There are steps I'm going to take to improve in certain areas: calling my sponsor daily, finish the steps, continue to excel in going to meetings every week, and pick up commitments at meetings to be accountable for responsibilities. Another step I'm going to take is to stay open-minded and willing. If I stay open-minded and willing I will find myself in a positive state of mind, and my outlook on things will be more positive.

I need a plan to hold myself accountable. First, I'm going to take myself out of self and take actions that will help me remain positive. If I don't feel like going to a meeting I will have that commitment and it will motivate me to "suit up and show up." Secondly, if I find myself alone in my head, I will reach out to my

sponsor. This will allow me to express myself in ways, and that burden will lift. Transparency gives me another chance to change my attitude into positivity.

Within the next year, I want to turn over a new leaf and become a better person. In short, I am committed to becoming more positive. I aspire to grow spiritually in my recovery and to grow as a person.



Alexis Rieck
High School Essay

Outdoor Planetarium

The light breeze of summer drifts over me as I lay on the thin patch of turf, hardly bigger than myself. I run my hands through the springy strips of plastic painted to resemble grass. It's dark and cool, or at least as cool as you can get for it being a summer in the desert. My eyes wander over the sky above me. It's a clear night, blocked only by light pollution setting a thin haze over the otherwise spectacular view. Mostly void, but partially stars. Stars; that's what we care about anyway, we look straight past the darkness into what catches our eyes.

A wolf howls in the distance. It's not a fearful howl nor a howl of aggression, but one of pure yearning and passion. The moon is brighter than usual, its shadow forming it into a slender waxing crescent. I can understand the moon's appeal, if I was a wolf I'd probably howl at the moon too.

We're all filled with a sense of discovery of the unknown when we look at the night sky. We look at the moon and stars and know that there are planets, asteroid belts and other amazing phenomena right up there; right in front of us. I reach my hand up from my position on the ground, it's a silly notion in actuality, yet it seems as if I could simply reach up and pluck a star from the sky if I wanted to, but of course that's impossible.

Even the moon, which we can clearly view, is 238,900 miles from earth. We only even got that far in 1969 when Neal Armstrong was the first person to take a step on the moon. Yes, we've been to other planets too; the Luna, Ranger, and Apollo missions all went to different parts of our inner solar system with missions to Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn as well as a few moons of other planets each exotic compared to our own. This solar system is nothing compared to the extreme vastness of our galaxy alone. There are an estimated 100 billion solar systems in the Milky Way, all of which we've merely viewed with a

telescope. We don't even know what could be out there. TrES-4 is the largest planet ever discovered, and technically it shouldn't even exist due to it being almost twice the size of Jupiter. There's even a planet made entirely of diamond the size of Jupiter that was theorized to have once been a star, and this is only a fraction of what is out there in the rest of the macrocosm.

The universe is beautiful and surreal unlike anything else could ever be; we know so little of the place we live in. I continue to stare up into the void above me, mesmerized by its unique and 'meticulous grace. The world up there zooms out of focus pulling me back down to the serene backyard. I'm back. Here, at this moment in time, on my own planet, on Earth. I let out a deep breath. The trees are rustling in the breeze exactly as they were only a moment ago, and the wolf ends its yearning howl exactly as it started; yet I don't feel at all the same.

There is so much right here on our own planet. We have oceans that cover over 70% of our world and life fills those waters with creatures that are simply unimaginable, with most of it completely uncharted. There are volcanoes that start deep below the earth's crust, plunging through the oceans and making up a myriad of islands around the globe. Freezing tundra covers Antarctica in temperatures that get far below zero throughout the year, yet an array of flora and fauna still thrive in the glacial desert. Even in the deserts that can get to a blazing 134 degrees Fahrenheit, life survives. And we thrive.

Human beings in and of themselves may be the most unique thing about our planet. We rose from nothing, low on the food chain, but with one simple thing to our advantage: tools. The fabric of our existence is based on the ability to create and to discover and to use that to reinvent ourselves and the world; and reinvent it we did. We built and we learned and we expanded until we were truly the most intelligent and most influential animals on earth. But consequently, we started to destroy it.

It started in simple yet harmful ways. We built factories in order to make more goods in seemingly better, faster, and cheaper ways. That's what we want anyway, we want cheaper and faster; more efficient. How can we make this cost less? How can we make

this easier? But efficiency costs us. Pollution is what it costs; ice caps melting is what it costs; deforestation is what it costs; extinction of a myriad of species around us is what it costs. In a matter of years we'll need to look into our fate, knowing that it would happen all along and yet doing nothing to stop it. We can look back at the damage that we've caused all we want but that will do nothing. We need to look to the present and say "What can we do now?"

The thought echoes through my skull, penetrating to the sparking synapses underneath, galvanizing me. I sit up, running my hands through the synthetic turf, and then pressing down to the earth beneath it. The trees in front of me rustle their leaves in the summer breeze, making a subtle music. I hoist myself up from my spot, letting the wind rustle my clothes and swish my hair into my face. I hold my arms out as if I can let the breeze lift me off the ground until I was flying far away from this earth. My arms lower once again to my sides as fortitude paints over my face. I need to do something right now, lest it be too late to do anything at all. I stay here standing for a moment more, embracing the gust of wind that comes my way ready for more of them hereafter.

Leader

I've always been a leader but the wrong kind. I always knew and saw that people looked up to me and not just because I'm 6'1, but because I'm strong-minded and I stay consistent with everything I do. Older people gravitate to me, as well as younger, so being a leader is nothing new to me. This time around I plan on being a different kind of leader. I don't just want to lead others wherever life takes us not into a dark abyss where you have no choice but to go in blind but into the light somewhere better more hopeful and with promise where the path and intentions are clear.

I promoted violence and negativity and lead others in the wrong direction. Instead of leading them to an uplifting future, I promoted an unpromising present. Whereas I was living the same unpromising lifestyle. I always knew and felt I should try and give them the life I wasn't fighting for myself.

At the dawn of this new age, my mind is clear and my intentions are true; I have a plan and the will to follow through with it. I've chosen my path and I plan to follow it all the way to victory. If any wondering minds may cross me on my journey I'll insist that they join me with no regret in mind this time. I know my intentions are true, I know there's no cliff at the end of my path only progress, success, and endless happiness.

My recovery is a big help in my conquest. It's opened my mind and it has woken me up to the brilliance of the world-- not just the negativity and cruelty of it, but the grace and miracles it can give if you just have faith and the willingness to work with it.



Malia Bencina
Elijah Cabrera
Miriam Dayton
Isabella Delaney
Oriana Delcid
Logan Fawcett
Violet Flanagan
Andrew Greenstein
Destyni Ho
Averys Johns
Ashlynn Keith
Jaylan Mathews
Landynn Meyers
Gimena Ortega
Ashley Ruano
Kamaya Sanchez
Ella Shaw
Aferdita Vinca
Matthew Wagoner

The Little Bird

There once was a little bird,
Whose voice was hardly heard.
The little bird, whose wings were broke,
Spoke out with a croak:

“Please let me fly just once I beg you
To fly over the clouds and through the cage I am bound to.”

There once was a young boy
who stumbled upon the birdcage that held the little bird.
The little bird whose croaked voice he heard.

“Why don’t you young pretty creature?
Why don’t you leap out of your cage and start your adventure?”
Asked the young boy

The bird leap in fear
“How did you come here?!”
The boy replied quickly;
“I heard your pretty voice silly!”

The boy reached for the cage lock,
But the bird squeaked and squawked
“Please oh please no! I cannot leave I cannot go!”

The boy looked quite shocked, but then smiled
“Ah well, then I shall wait here awhile.”

Minutes and then hours passed
as the boy waited next to the small bird.
Not a single sound was heard.

The boy left but would come back
the next day and the next and the next.

Then one day,
The bird would turn to the boy and say,
“I think I would like to take a peek
out of my cage today.”

The boy had a smile that grew wider within the second
He leapt towards the cage’s lock and ripped it open
without another thought.

The bird crept out of her cage ever so slowly with eyes that
showed curiosity and fear

The boy jumped for joy and wept a tear
For his small little friend was finally out and here.

Although this was true,
This was also completely new.

The little bird fled back to the cage with fear-stricken in its eyes.
All courage was gone and replaced by anger that took up its size.

Anger surged through it and stomped its foot.

“It’s no use I shall never fly nor be free!”

It chirped and whimpered,
“No one deserves freedom if they are like me!”

With a gentle scoop, the boy held the bird close
“Then I shall help and nurse you and care for you the most.”

The bird relaxed for the first time in a long time
And the bird sighed.

“It shall be just us two”

The boy continued

“Us two in this world that is new.”

With troubles and pain left behind,
Over the years the bird learned to fly.
The little bird was no longer the same,
Thanks to the boy that came that one fateful day.



Elijah Cabrera
High School

Love is Brokenness...

Being in a state of mind of being hurt and broken leads to a lot...
such as love.

Not always is it true that you get with a person and have true love.
There are such things as puppy love and forced love.

Being broken-hearted or broken-minded
will have you searching for “love”
and comfort in every place you can get it.

What I’ve learned is this:

THIS GENERATION NEEDS TO FIND LOVE IN FAMILY
AND LOVE IN WAKING UP ANOTHER DAY

WE ARE NOT THE GENERATION OF SCREW UPS

WE ARE STRONG

CAPABLE PEOPLE

WITH SELF LOVE.

The Monster

The girl never stopped running, so afraid was she,
She ran and ran and ran, such was the monstrosity.

She was running away from failure,
and disappointment from her peers
That she chose to keep on running, always full of fear.

Then one day she was confronted
as failure came crashing down around her
And she realized then that she wasn't perfect
and that something would always ground her.

She couldn't be enough,
to satisfy all those she loved and respected,
And this forced her to accept a brand-new perspective.

She would fall short sometimes
but somehow that would be alright,
For another day she would be the champion of another fight

But what mattered most is that
she never let failure define who she'd become,
For it is only then that her monster would have really, truly won.

Clean

Reverberations through the hall
her steps are drawing nearer—
Wisdom closing in— Comfort, fading.
She says I've brought the glass to shame,
sharply turns, struts away...
A distorted mirror, she might think
my double does not look the same.

Spots of dirt to her— memories to me.
Dirty, speckled, sparkling reflection,
dynamic... true, like a shifting sea.
I sponge away the grains of grime
there's nothing left of me to find.
Crisp and clean, she will approve.
But my double does not feel the same.

A Mother's Love

In your eyes I found true happiness and love
You let me feel something I had never experienced before,
It began to be difficult in time
but because of the sparkle in your eyes
All I could do was try

Your beauty,
your giggle,
the way you'd recite "momma"

When you'd run and have fun in the sun
Watching you sit up,
walk,
run,
these have been the best moment of my life
And will continue to be the very best moments despite any strife

I love you my beautiful girl
From now till forever you are my world.

Unrhymed

I do not understand all the things in this world
People always do terrible things
People are so greedy all just for money
When the cash grows people change
Likewise, the same person will never be the same
Most people want happiness but
I don't know where to find it
Manners should be taught more
For all the youth
Because they will be next to care for the U.S.

Untitled

Everybody has a thing.
A thing they keep hidden awhile.
I want to be Alice Eve.
I want to play saxophone at the train station.
I want to be a singer at a cabaret night,
leaning over a piano in my pearls.
I have dreams where I'm stuck
at the bottom of a cliff.
Part of me will be stuck there forever.
We pawned grandma's pearls,
because pearls are expensive.
I think I just want to go to sleep.



Andrew Greenstein
High School Poetry

Prometheus

A stroke of genius.
A potter's clay.
A breath of life.

That is how we were all made.

Gifts out of stock.
Knowledge obtained.
Trickery for our benefit.
Our father loves us, doesn't he?

Fire no more.
Fire obtained.
Zeus is angry.

And nothing will ever be the same.

I climbed the mountain where you were once chained.
To ask you something, would you do the same?
Would you sacrifice yourself if you knew what we'd become?

Destroying the earth one by one.
Making so many more, we can't stop ourselves, two by two.
Causing wars and mass destruction, millions by millions.

What was it that made us so endearing to you?
Is it unconditional love? You are our father after all.
Or was it that you wanted to subtly challenge the gods?

I can relate.
I've always been at odds.
Being autistic, the world wasn't built for me.
So, I create life out of my own clay.

Many people.
Much love.
Much suffering.
I guess I got it from you.

I love you dad.



Destyni Ho
High School Poetry

Let's Build a Life

Let's build a life
Made of sticks and stones
Crumbling bricks and scones
Let's climb higher and higher
Step after step
Encouraging to pull ourselves up
Never falling down
Never giving up
Let's build and build
An empire of love
Life
Death
Let's build a life
From the shattered pieces
Of your heart
Let's paint it
To disguise it
To hide it
Let's draw on it
Happy faces
So they don't ask
Let's build a life
Of stepping on shattered glass
And drowning in the river's
Flowing down your cheeks
Let's build a life
Made of wood and metal
Sturdy bricks and stone
Let's paint it
With happy faces

Let's build a life
Full of love
And happiness
Sewn with the words
Of your lover
Tied with the smile
Of the two people
Who built higher and higher
With their blood, their sweat, and their tears
Let's build a life
Of two people
The only two people
Who never gave up
Even when their empire
Was crumbling
When their feet
Were bleeding
When their heart
Was shattering
Let's build a life
Of two people
Who kept smiling
Through the good and the bad
Who held on tighter
When all odds were against them
Let's build a life
Of one shared heart
Sewn
Stitched
Stapled
Glued
Taped
Back together
Still functional
Still happy
Still smiling
A heart full of memories
The good and the bad
The happy and the sad

Let's build a life
Together
As one
Hands intertwined
Eyes locked
Building and building
Climbing and climbing
Higher and higher
Let's build a life
Of two
Inseparable people
Who never gave up
Who kept on
Loving
Climbing
Building
We built our life
So we smile and watch
As others do the same.

Untitled

I shall recline into myself
the clam shell opens up
oh so, shut up, shut up
little cup, I strip the strands from my skull
and stuff them in,
little cup, fever dream
beading plodding from my seams
pearl, my crystal ball
with the supple knowing of selene
little cup, this is all I have seen.

Street lamp, moon mother
drenched in electric kerosene
shield yourself with my curtain
my pearls, your masquerade
strega, strega, thump in time with the tide
this is your rebirth, moon mother
scorch the night with plaster heartstrings
shot down from heaven
strega, strega, riddle yourself down on a beam.

Resting now, with our backs to the cool grass
bellies basking in the light of a keen moon
pools of milky beams circling on our chests,
chasing themselves round & round
ivory wisps dancing
in the form of cat & mouse.

Cicada bellows a somber, humid tune
lulling the world to sleep

a tranquility that dazzles with effervescence
humbling my numbed ears.

Oh, I am keen as knife's edge in the
glory of the knight
as it lay beside
drenched in chainmail, decoration for the sky
the starlight gives view to a strong, plump face
the sun has ripened his cheeks
like strawberries in June
icy tone sends its relief- heaven bound.

The stars gasp above us
inhaling & exhaling in cataclysmic fashion
dewdrops of creation
supple & warring
frothing, white igloos
that surely should melt under the
warmth of the golden night.

As should the knight
slipping back to his vivid dream lands
recoiling once more into the blackness
assuming position nestled right into
Orion's belt
oh, how illusions constrict me.

Untitled

I have a car.
Subdue to the inauguration of this car,
I not only gained a companion,
but a reliable source of entertainment.
Relations grew, and so did my knowledge of the motor vehicle.
I learned quickly,
and adjusted to the presence of the interior and exterior.
It was quite a beautiful structure,
and its fresh minty scent was addictingly soothing.
Initiating a beginning to a whole new prosperous path,
I was excited to hold the keys of my future.
As I hop into the driver's seat and start the ignition,
I begin playing with butons, and other trinkets.

At first, trips and communications were uncomfortable
and foreign, but with further exploration,
I passively relaxed into the leather seats.
My car and I managed to surpass unthinkable obstacles,
and in the process created gratifying memories.
We traveled down winding roads
and treacherous terrains of affection.
This car felt secure, and gave me a sense of satisfaction
when it's calming breath warmed my chilled nerves.
I allowed myself to let the car be in control,
and it took me to new highs
and lows of which passion cannot measure up to.
In the heat of it all, I felt complete loyalty
and assurance that I would be protected.
And then we crashed.

In mere seconds the tranquility and breeze
that swept through the windows subsided
and took the car and I along with it.
We tumbled, and although minor,
the car and I were damaged
but not nearly as detrimental as
the repercussions I was bound to face.

Although I hurt, there,
lingering in the arrogant air was a sense of relief.
Euphoria crowded my vision,
taking place of any beautiful memory of that car,
leaving no further room to conjure any recollection.
My body had been abducted from the slab of metal,
and placed somewhere more secure.
People whispered, "It's okay, he's not someone to fuss over."
I allow myself to fall into these words,
giving them permission to embrace me into
apathetic confinement.
This confinement held hostage regret and desire,
and held them so tight
that a simple smile could mask my true intentions.
My true intentions,
which lie deep enough to mask,
are critical to a persevering task.
And one day I'll get back into that car,
and we'll create and accomplish a whole new feat.

No Strings Attached

There is a marionette that lives in a cage,
it only comes out when it's summoned to the stage.
The puppet is tired of being used to amuse others.
it lost all hope,
its eyes lost all colors.

It doesn't care about how much joy it brings,
it is so tired that it grabs scissors and raised them above its head
and cut the strings.

Untitled

We all overcome.
I use to overcome things, being numb doing drugs,
now I overcome with hugs.
I love to love,
my love is blood it used to be cold,
doesn't make me unfold on the drugs.

I use to rob
and mob
in the streets to get over things.
I use to pop beans
and drink lean
till my eyes bleed and my spleen fall out my body.

Mom crying, I'm dying,
I keep lying.
I'm not me,
I'm just fiend for everything.
I say I can stop,
then I flop
and drop
and pop a pill.

What is fear?
I OD'd,
then I wanted to get clean,
no one believed me because I was that fiend that OD'd.

I'm alive, I didn't die.
I survived and I'm staying clean.
There's something out there for me and my family.



Gimena Ortega
High School

Untitled

An alien said to the universe,
"Are you evil? I need to know."

"Perhaps,"
the universe replied,
"You should ask yourself the same question."

Yo soy quien soy/ I am who I am

Oh, wow your Hispanic!

Yes, I am.

“I love your language it’s so exotic”

These are the things I am asked and told as I walk down to street speaking what they think is my native tongue. It is not my native tongue but it is in my blood. I speak a foreign language to you but to me it’s home. It’s my safety and it’s as close as I’ll get to what it can be like back to what the man calls the Rio Grande.

I am seen with pity when people ask my name.

I tell them who I am,

“oh, wow you must be ashamed”.

I am not ashamed but I am hurt.

I carry the oppression on my shoulders.

“Can you teach me to dance your native dances”.

No, I can’t because I don’t know how to dance it.

You deem me spicy like the food I eat.

You say I’m complicated and loud like the music I listen to.

My culture is not for your amusement.

My culture is not your Halloween costume.

To me, it’s as close as I’ll know to what it’s like being Hispanic in a country where I am being kicked out and ridiculed because of my last name.

Generations like me carry the oppression,
carry the pain and our pasado oscuro
but we also carry the beauty and the passion.

Untitled

As my wings took off into the fiery furnace of the sun
I leave all my worries and troubles behind
I try to fly higher but the chains are getting tighter
As I land on the rumble of the earth
I find that I can still stand at the pace of a snail
I'm limping, crawling to find somewhere to go, I just need a hand
But I'm starting to lose hope but somehow, I'll cope
I want to fly again with my wings spread
But alas that dream is dead
But I will soar again one day
And I hope you don't miss me too much
Because I'll always stay in touch
As I fly through the sky with my broken wings
I'll see you later in spring.

The Wind Told Me

In a melancholy voice,
the Wind whispered to me.

With but a few words,
the rivers that ran south –
past pores and stained ivory keys –
evaporated.

My hands no longer reside along the Ring of Fire.

I took the hands out of my wristwatch,
broke all but one ball and chain.

Instead of focusing on structures and punctuation,
my eyes trailed to him.

Him and his strawberry-sweet laugh and lavender presence.

He spoke as if his voice created waves,
his image was marble, whilst his soul was soft, white sand.

Like pinkies if children,
our paths interlocked.

She – the Wind – read the cards and reassured me that
the little “Yes” on the floating triangle was not a mere
heads-up penny on the sidewalk.

Luck was a foreign word to the Wind,
but his name was not.

Salty Residence

A wave coming in on the shore
Hitting me like a brick when I least expect it
Pulling me under so quick the wind gets knocked out of me
 water fills my lungs
 Slowly, but steadily choking me
 I'm gasping for a breath of air
 But all I can do is drown
No matter how hard I try to lift myself up
 Going down, farther and farther
 Think it's over, thinking it's safe
 Just so it can pull me under again
 A cycle that never ends
Leaving its salty residence on my skin and in my memories
 Reminding me that I'm never free, at its beck and call
 As long as my hair is wet,
 And my skin is salty.



Matthew Wagoner
High School Poetry

Apple Stem Soulmate

Love is holding hands
with my apple stem soulmate
and watching HGTV with them
even though I hate it.

Love is when you're crying and your dog licks
the tears away.

Love is feeling stable when everything around
you is falling apart.

Love is sentimental
That plushie you'd carry around
everywhere as a kid
A silver thick banded ring you can't wear anymore
Even though you should be able to.

Love is the color yellow
And that stunningly beautiful shade of blue in
your eyes.

Love is sunshine and sunflowers
When the sun peeks through the clouds
70° weather.

Love is a rainbow after a storm
But I'd rather be sitting with you in the rain
than in the sun by myself.



Rahaf Alshinhab
Hannah Crowell
Stella Garner
Amanda Hernandez
Kaitlyn Kutz
Elizabeth Monreal
Jake Orlinick
Alycia Sandrin
Kitt Serflaten
Katherine Vivas
Natalya Webster

The Irish Tragedy

Sophia was in a ship crossing the Pacific Ocean and was with her parents (Joseph and Ana) her face was very pale and she hadn't eaten for 11 months, her parents were really wealthy and selfish, they had enough food to feed the whole ship, but instead, they ate them all and didn't care about their starving daughter, "Can I please have just a half potato?" She used to ask nervously, "NO, there's not enough food for you!" they used to harshly shout back, "ok" she used to say sadly.

6 months later, Sophia was dying from starvation when her parents dumped her and left her alone in a cold, dark room... Later on, a very wealthy couple with 2 children picked Sophia up and took her to their cabin to rest, they asked her "What happened?" "How long have you been here?" they asked worriedly. "I've been here for about 7 months" she replied softly "oh my!" "it looks like you haven't eaten for 1 year!" she said sarcastically, "actually, I haven't eaten for 2 years" she muttered. Her awesome new parents gave her 12 potatoes and said she can eat any time she wants. When she felt the potato, it was like she just held a gem, though, it was rough and bumpy.

3 months later, her real parents and family died on November 18, 1850, although she thought she would be happy she was really sad, her new dad became the king for his kindness and she became princess and married a prince. So, everyone was happy. Sophia visited her real parents' graves and hugged their gravestone.

So, at the end, everyone was happy enough to live, but on September 19, 1856 something tragic happened, her new parents died, she was also really sad, even to be queen. But, after a while she got used to living without her parents.



Crowned for the Fall

Leaves bent beneath her feet and branches broke with less than a look, but she never complained about the damage that chased her. It was never her fault anyways--even her courtiers would whisper rumors behind feathered fans: seasons came too fast, the forest grew too old, the peasants played tricks out of fear. They were the ones who turned the wind harsh and stones sharp. How could it have been their delicate princess who angered destruction? She never minded the ruin corrupting her future kingdom. The destruction was but an illusion. A pawn in a plan to save her kingdom.

Yet at these occasions, even power was an illusion. No matter how high she held her head and how long she sat on her glorious white throne, she couldn't wave her wrist to call obedience from the court that surrounded her. She was an observer, a servant--and nearly slave--of the court, placed precariously within a willow tree bedecked with shimmering lace leaves.

She was hardly an heir and barely a queen. The courtiers, scattered over the fields of ash-colored grass, fluttered around in a flurry of pink, green, and yellow silk, ignoring the brilliant decoration of a woman that ruled them. The seasons bore the same cold colors of grey, black, and white over the kingdom. The dullness only accentuated the practiced joy she held above her head. Nobody minded the darkness, but the princess knew of the world's eminent death.

The courtiers never knew the true weight of death. They were heartless, and to them, the princess was a study of cold ignorance who couldn't be bothered to discuss the social politics of their kingdom.

A sharp laugh pierced through their eager gossip. The princess's sister was talking among the throng of people, next to the woman who'd laughed so high and loud. The princess flicked

her gaze to the woman, who stared back at her with a fierce intensity. They held each other's attention at all these meetings, yet the court was oblivious of them. The woman wore a high headdress with dark jewels glinting off of her tresses, challenging the simple beauty of the princess's lace dress.

The courtier smirked at her ruler, an eyebrow raised. She smiled back innocently, recalling her name from one of their nights: *Eliza*.

The princess's smile dropped when she saw the glint of the dagger inside her skirts.

Eliza's eyes told her to get on with the plan already. It was strange how the daughter of destruction could even afford to give the daughter of beauty her trust. Their ancestors would look cruelly down on them today, but this was the only way to true freedom. This was the only way for the world to become alive again.

The princess shyly clinked her fork against a glass, bringing some attention to her as she raised her glass in false joy and cried, "To the Renewal!"

The court echoed her shout in a repetitive mantra. Giggles arose as the women turned back to soft flirtation. They all knew that a member of the court would be a sacrifice so the next generation could live on, yet death was nothing more than a topic to dwell about over tea time. The Renewal was but a joke that flitted momentarily upon their minds.

But the weight of her next task, of the world's future upon her shoulders, made her stomach turn. The only way to truly save her kingdom was through death.

"Princess!" Eliza yelled the name out. "Give us our Renewal! Give us our coronation!" The princess nearly blanched at these words.

With a quick nod to Eliza, she quieted the court. The coronation on Renewal day was the only time when they harbored some form of respect for the royalty of beauty.

"Bring me my sister as the sacrifice."

Everything paused in silent shock. Then the sobs--hot, angered, wretched sobs--filled the court. Her sister was being mauled by the courtiers, her pink gown torn at the bottom into

shreds as they dragged her to the princess's feet. The princess turned emotionless at the sight, trembling in spite of the plan they had.

The court laughed at her unfortunate situation. A wicked man grinned at the princess when he forced her sister to kneel before her in the dirt.

The princess glared back at him. With a swift flick of her hand, her fan fluttered open to hide her guilt and inevitable sorrow. Her closest confidant lay at the edge of death, but her court only hungered for her sister's death. Savagely, their eyes glimmered in spite and bloodlust.

"Let me have my coronation." Her voice was bold yet cold--fragile, cold. Ice at the brink of thawing caught in her voice. "As you wish, my queen," the man replied in lieu of her sister. Even the court denied tradition, but it was not meant to be followed. Beauty and destruction would not have to fight to the end in this time. And yet the plan called for a death that they wouldn't understand. Her sister was nothing compared to her people. Her world. Her life. Her crown. She was a million times more important than all of the false happiness.

Despite the guilt welling in her, the princess tossed a ball of gold string to her sister, customary of their coronations. Her ancestors had a maidservant twist the golden strand around a crown of thorns and feathers to demonstrate the future queen's strength and ability to soar in the most troubling times. She began to unwind it, slowly, as if deliberating in her mind how best to save herself.

Letting her true feelings flicker across her face for an instant, the princess gazed lovingly at her sister. She smiled back in her eyes, braver and surer than the princess felt. The princess's blood pounded in her skull as she stood up. Her hands shook when she called the Eliza over. As she pulled the dagger from her dress, raised high in her fist. The crowd roared tremendously.

Beneath the noise, a sob escaped from her sister. The princess nudged her in response, urging her to work faster. Trembling, her sister twisted the gold strand around the white branches. Bits of feathers stuck out at the edges, creating a false bird out of its wearer. The promise of broken wings tantalized the court.

No queen had ever worn such a crown, and it enticed the court into empty rumors. Each action of the princess--discarded of

moments ago--were hinged upon with intense interest. Every breath she took was a bet of life and death between the courtiers. They never gave up their gambling thrills, for life was but a playing card to them.

Her sister stood to place it on her head. She closed her eyes. Anticipation swelled in the court, the rustle of fabric never absents from their nervous tittering minds. Her sister tightened her fists on the monstrous creation. Raised the broken crown high above her head. Everybody's breath hitched in unison. And she smashed it into the ground.

Chaos rushed through the court, creating a shift in the atmosphere. The white trees shook in the breeze and entwined around each other, creating a thick lattice dome above the courtiers. Grey clouds drifted above, eliciting screams from the courtiers. For all the days that the world was bleak and colorless, they could not tolerate darkness that shrouded them.

Destruction had come too early. Eliza, the daughter of destruction, still held her dark power. The Renewal had not worked. Their plan was working beautifully. Clearing her throat, the princess yelled, "Halt!"

It was the only time she was heard and obeyed. The courtiers clammed up and gazed up at her, eyes glowing amber to adjust to the darkness.

"How can we do a proper Renewal if you don't behave well?" Stilted laughter emanated at the princess's response, but most of the courtiers stood, waiting, like flowers frozen in the dead of winter. Fearful of never seeing another spring. Eliza stepped up to the princess's sister and placed her palm on her forehead.

Ashes spread outwards from the imprint, a swath of darkness spreading its wings and engulfing her. The stench of death slammed into them, nearly making the princess topple over in wretched grief. The courtiers cheered and raised their fists jovially as the princess choked on her sobs. The Renewal truly was complete--or at least it was in the courtier's eyes.

Eliza moved her hands gracefully, fixing the crown into its true glory. The courtier's gaped--Eliza was built to destroy, not create. Placing the crown upon the princess's head, Eliza turned to the crowd. "And here you have her! A majesty crowned for the fall." A dark smirk spread across Eliza's face as she mocked the

princess.

“Oh, we’re not done yet,” Eliza’s voice boomed. Quivering in excited fear, the court yelled even louder. They were hungry for more destruction.

Eliza grabbed the princess’s hand... and her beauty corroded and fell like the court’s fans did--in swift astonishment.

Disbelief rushed over the courtiers like the smoke that followed, smothering their future in darkness. Seething at the edges of the field, the destruction curled around the court in a vicious swell. Ashes turned to ashes, seared by pale white flames. Yet this was different from the kind the princess’s ancestors faced.

The smoke smothered everyone beneath the trees as they tightened their hold over the court. Coughing and wiping the sweat off her brow, the princess shivered despite the heat.

Eliza appeared through the smoke, carrying the ashes of the princess’s sister. Despite the people who swarmed around them, scratching helplessly at the trees that caged them in, they found the gap that Eliza had made for the princess’s sister. Emptying the ashes to the outside world, the world became alive again. The ashes turned to seeds as the world was slowly being purged of the most corrupt thing that had ever been placed upon them--humans.

Eliza and the princess gazed at each other momentarily, wonder filling their eyes as their plan unfolded beautifully around them. They pulled each other into a warm embrace.

The court’s screams echoed about, frantic in the face of death. Yet Eliza and the princess were calm. Eliza’s breath was hot on the princess’s ear when she whispered: “I don’t want to die. Not the way my ancestors did. Not to spread rumors upon the courtiers and lead to the world’s destruction and to spite you just because your ancestors hated mine.” The princess nodded slightly in soft agreement. “You deserve more. You and your sister are the only ones who have ever been truly beautiful. And you’ve told me so many times that you’re afraid of death. And I’m sorry I have to do this to you, but it’s all we can do before the courtiers destroy, all we can do before they take the kingdom, all we can do before the world is destroyed, all we can do before all the beauty is corrupted. I could think of no other way for us to die than the right one.”

The maiden of destruction had more of a heart than any of

the courtiers ever did. She at least gave the princess's sister a good way to die when tragedy was to befall them all. She gave the princess love and a way out in the most vaguely beautiful way possible.

Terrified, frightened, the princess sighed as a hot tear trickled down her cheek. Eliza looked to her to watch her. The princess nodded her agreement, simply smiled sadly and whispered, "okay". There was no other way to tell her everything in delicate, pretty words. All she had with her was the truth. And she hoped that would be enough, even if it was ugly and writhed in her hands. Even if death was the only way for them to end. Then the world fell apart and false beauty met its desolation.



Untitled

You know, when I was a kid, I used to enjoy going antique hunting. I liked the smell of the places, the retro bell-sleeve shirts and dresses that any healthy woman wouldn't fit into today. Those old second-hand stores may have been shady, but that never stopped me.

I wish it did that day. If I went in that store knowing what I was going to witness not thirty minutes later, I would have left, driven straight home, and enjoyed the idea that I hadn't just fallen into the trap of being obligated to save the world.

I should be a little clearer here. Hi there, my name is Emma Clara Penelope Evalina Kranz. (My parents weren't too keen on choosing just one name.) This all began when my friend, Sara, made the irresponsible decision to go on a road trip with me from one undisclosed location to another. I can't give you these locations because I've already told you my full name, and by this point that is already too much information. (If I even really gave you my real name. Try and prove it.) All that I can tell of the locations in this story is that they all begin somewhere in the Pacific Northwest and end around the middle of the country.

Along the way somewhere, we got swept up in a cute little tchotchke shop and saw something we definitely weren't supposed to see. Thus, began our long, unbelievable, and deeply disturbing adventure. I should advise you before you begin: if you were looking to read a heartwarming story wherein you feel inspired and are able to process things clearly after reading, you might want to find another story. It isn't this one.

As I mentioned before, I used to enjoy antique stores. That was most likely what brought us into Little Treasures Second-Hand Store in the first place.

A bell chimed to announce our entrance into the store. It was a cramped little place, books and papers stacked upon dusty counters of rotting boudoirs. There was a long rack of old clothing

sitting in one corner of the store, all the once-bright colors now fading. There was a glass counter displaying ancient jewelry with a register sitting atop it, but no clear owners or employees were there.

Sara, being an avid reader of cliché French novels from the 60s, headed immediately for the bookcase at the back of the store. I wandered through the tiny aisles for a few minutes and noticed that, although there were fluorescent lights installed in the ceiling, they weren't on. If a person went deep enough into the store, they could almost escape time.

My train of thought broke away from me as my foot hit something small and squared, causing me to hit the wooden flooring hard. Slowly sitting up, I rubbed my head. What kind of jerk leaves a book on the floor? But as I recovered, I realized I hadn't tripped on a book - it was a small cellphone, one of those little bricks that everyone had in the early 2000s. Someone must have left this here while looking around. I'd better find somebody to turn this in to. I made my way back to the glass counter, gleaming in the midday sunlight radiating through the doors.

I called out, leaning over the counter to attempt to peer into the darkened back room. "Excuse me? Anyone?" Tentatively, I moved around the counter and stepped into the room, fumbling for a light switch. I finally was able to get the lights on, and almost passed out then and there.

Directly in the center of the small square room was a petite, pasty older woman on her knees, bent over a body sprawled on the floor. That of a tanned girl, no older than 20.

"Ma'am? Is everything okay? I have a-"

The woman turned to me, and I could see she had blood dripping from her mouth. The girl on the floor was not passed out, but rather had a large amount of her abdomen missing in the shape of a ragged, bloody hole.

I put a trembling hand to my mouth, gripping the cell phone so tightly I thought it might crack open. I still swear to this day that the woman's eyes were pitch black.

My eyes blurred over, and all my senses began to dull. I heard tidal waves of static ringing in my ears. And then a voice.

"Emma? Where are you?"

I felt a hot tear tumbling down my face. I broke into a run, and

a guttural screech sounded from behind me, that of the old lady. She followed suit, and for a second, I thought about what my life could have been one day if I wasn't about to get my guts ripped out like that poor girl in the storage room.

I ripped the keys to the van we had rented out of my pocket, swiftly unlocking the doors and slipping in before the woman could follow. She pounded at the window, and I could see that her teeth were unusually pointed for a woman who should be polishing off puzzles and egg sandwiches at a retirement home somewhere.

The passenger seat door opened just as quickly as it shut again. Sara sat next to me, eyes wide and chest heaving. She looked silently from the growling woman-monster to me, then rubbed her temples gently.

“Do you have any explanation for what is happening right now? Fever dream, maybe?”

“If only.” My voice cracked with exhaustion.

Before either of us could catch our breath, the monster-woman jumped onto the hood, flashing her shark teeth once more while attempting to break through the windshield. My heart followed her lead by trying to get out of my chest. Sara screamed, and I felt my arm shove the key into the ignition. I backed out of the lot as fast as I could, but the woman hung on despite her brittle arms.

Possibly one of the only positives in this situation was that nobody happened to be on the street we turned out onto. If this weren't true, everyone involved would most likely be dead now.

“Get her off!” Sara screamed at me.

“What exactly do you think I'm trying to do here?!?”

Before I was able to stop her, Sara took hold of the wheel, swerving crazily through the street in an attempt to throw the monster off. Surprise surprise, it didn't work.

Being the human person I am with an easily dispensable life I didn't want to lose at 19, I shifted my foot from the gas pedal to the brake pedal, jerking everything forward violently (cause, y'know, inertia? It'd be seriously sad if you forgot about 8th grade science already). The woman was finally thrown from the hood of the car to the ground in front of us. I jumped out of the car (because despite the thing on the ground being a monster, she was also a woman, and it'd be a shame if I killed a small business

owner).

She lay sprawled out on the gravel road, a streak of blood leaking from her head. My stomach turned. I killed someone. I can't even drink yet.

Sara was standing across from me, the same expression of holycrapsomeoneisdeadin - frontofmycarandiamsomewhatresponsibleforit spreading across her face.

She took a sharp breath. "We need to go." I nodded silently and we both reentered the car, driving away while praying to whatever we needed to in order to not be damned for all eternity.

We didn't talk for a while after that; just drove. Miles went by of nothing around us except Chevrons and flat grasslands. It must have calmed us somewhat to be stuck in this scenery, because finally Sara was the first to speak.

"So, what now?"

An hour later we found ourselves in a hole-in-the-wall diner somewhere between Idaho and Nebraska with two waters, a stack of pancakes, and a bowl of chili between us.

"Why did you bring the cellphone you found inside?" Sara glanced at my hand. I realized it had barely left my hand since the entire antique store ordeal.

"Honestly, I couldn't even tell you that."

"Well why don't we look inside? It might give us some clues as to what the hell we just saw." I handed her the phone and we were in within seconds. (You have to remember just how old this phone is; I'm not even entirely sure passwords had been invented yet.)

So far everything looked normal: pretty scenic home screen, normal time zone, no notifications since we had picked it up. We checked the messages app first.

The last conversation this girl had before she was killed was with what we could only assume was one of her friends, a girl by the name of Kelly.

9:08 a.m.

[Bridget]: Just stopped at this super cute second-hand store. Maybe I'll be able to find a better phone lol.

"Geez, this girl really was as old as her phone." Sara pointed out.

“Most people don’t use that kind of slang anymore.”

[Kelly]: Lol good luck. If you find anything cute send me a pic.

[Bridget]: The woman who owns the store is just as cute. Little old lady with HUGE glasses.

“Huh.” I pondered this for a moment.

“She must have lost her glasses when she went ape and started eating the girl.”

[Kelly]: I might have to check this place out sometime lol.

[Bridget]: Hold on. Lady just started eyeing me weird and growling. Her eyes look kind of black.

[Kelly]: Eww, creepy.

[Bridget]: Gotta go, I’ll text you later.

[Kelly]: Good luck.

“Well it fits,” Sara sighed, “But what does that help us? The old lady was wacko from the start.”

“Hold on a second, we’re not done looking through the evidence,” I assured her. “There’s gotta be something more in here.”

Like an answer to my statement, I saw directly to the right of the messages app that Bridget had been an active member of one of those apps where you can converse with strangers on the internet. Totally safe and harmless, obviously. The last chat she had been active on was one targeting the topic of the supernatural.

[BridgeyKitty01]: Hey, does anyone on here know about demons or demonic possession? I’m in this totally creepy thrift store and the owner is an old woman who seems to have black eyes and won’t stop looking at me.

[hauntedhouselover]: creepy. I’m not totally familiar with this type of stuff.

[ghoulcore77]: sounds to me like a possession. I would get out of there while you still can, I’ve been hearing about a spread of demonism across the Midwest, kind of like a disease. Nobody knows where it’s coming from tho.

[punkbabey]: ohh yeah, I heard about that stuff. it apparently started somewhere in Kansas, in a little town called angel’s bend or

smthn.

[hauntedhouselover]: how delightfully ironic.

[punkbabey]: only way to fix demonic possession is through exorcism, tho. I would leave if you can. otherwise arm yourself with anything pointy and cover your stomach. demons usually go for your midsection.

“I did see that the woman had eaten into her stomach. Looks like she wasn’t able to help herself fast enough.” The whole situation had made me turn my pancakes away with disgust. If I knew I was going to be going through a dead girl’s phone, I wouldn’t have ever left my college for all the drunk homophobic frat boys in the world.

Sara didn’t speak, only thought things over for a minute, spooning chili out and dropping it back into the bowl continuously. She looked me in the eyes, a sense of cold justice residing there.

“I guess we’re headed to Angel’s Bend.”

The Silver Order

The night was still. Too still.

A light breeze ran past Milan causing goosebumps to ripple across his skin. He didn't dare move or even breathe, which added to the unusually quiet night.

Street lights flickered, casting dancing shadows across the deserted streets. A sudden movement caught Milan's eye. It moved so fast he almost missed it. Almost.

There was another blur of blue aimed towards him, causing him to burst into a run, his feet flying across the cobblestone street. He slowed after a moment, allowing the shadow behind him to keep up but making sure to leave distance between them. He turned a sharp corner, catching a glimpse of the glittering fur and razor claws.

Milan's confidence wavered for a moment but he quickly pushed his fear aside and ran into an alleyway, sliding to a stop at the towering brick wall in front of him. He spun around, his fingers tightening around the dagger in his palm, taking a step back as he heard the thundering steps approaching. "Lila," He called, as doubt seeped into his mind.

His knuckles turned white as the flickering blue animal appeared swiftly in front of him. Before he could react, he felt himself thrown backwards as the creature clawed at him, sending him crashing into the wall.

Milan's vision blurred as he crumpled to the ground, only catching shaky fragments of the six-foot-tall animal in front of him, watching as it unhinged its jaw and sprung towards him. Milan scrambled to get up, but before the animal could reach him there was an echoing 'bang' and it crumpled to the ground.

Milan released his breath and dropped his head against the wall watching the six foot, glowing-blue, saber tooth tiger lay unconscious in front of him.

"Well, that was fun!" Milan lifted his head to find a girl barely

over eighteen lowering her gun.

He shot her a glare. “For you, maybe. Try being the bait for once.”

Lila grinned. “Admit it, it's fun.”

He groaned. “I hate it.”

Lila chuckled kneeling beside the animal, which bled grey liquid from the bullet wound in its neck. She held a glass jar near the beast and it slowly deformed into a glittery mist, draining into the glass. She handed Milan the trapped enchantment.

Enchantments were sort of energies, energies which loved mischief. Most enchantments took shapes of monsters or beasts, running wild and causing chaos, and it was Milan and Lila's job, like the other members of the Silver Order, to capture them.

As Milan stood, Lila stretched her arms and sighed, staring up at the inky sky with a yawn. “Let's go back. I want to sleep.”

Milan had a feeling sleep wouldn't come easily as they entered the old mansion. The downstairs was deserted, the other members most likely sleeping peacefully upstairs, except for Simon, of course. He stood in the center of the dimly lit room, pulling on his coat. It wasn't a surprise, he was the Silver Order leader and he took that title very seriously.

“Any trouble?” Simon asked, inspecting the blue glow as Milan handed him the jar.

“Nope. All good. ‘Night,” Lila replied in a hurry and spun around towards the wooden stairs when a blinding light exploded throughout the room.

Milan shut his eyes at the sudden intrusion. He heard Lila curse beside him as she tripped on a step and landed on the ground with a thud.

With a groan, Milan forced his eyes open and attempted to move towards Lila but barely managed a step, the piercing light outside catching his attention. It was no longer an explosion of brightness but a beam of silvery grey in the far distance, shooting up through the trees.

The light dimmed, yet Lila stayed on the ground and even Simon, who had no doubt seen nearly everything when it came to enchantments, stood with unformed words on his tongue.

“What is that?” Lila asked, her voice barely above a whisper. The beam of light shot up straight into the sky, disappearing above

the clouds. “That’s not an enchantment.”

“It is.” Simon assured as he took a step closer to the foggy window pane.

“But the color-” Enchantments had never been anything but blue.

“It’s strong.” Simon explained. “The greyer the color, the stronger the energy.”

Milan finally unfroze and helped Lila up as Simon thought for a moment and turned around. “I already have something else to take care of but whatever is out there, can’t wait. You two have been doing this since you were children, you can handle it.”

Lila almost choked beside Milan. “Wha-”

Simon didn’t let her finish, and decided. “You will go.”

“Simon made a mistake,” Milan sighed, watching the trees above them block out the night sky.

“Way to boost my confidence,” Lila replied sarcastically, her teeth chattering harshly. It was dark and cold and their flashlights were barely enough to guide them.

Milan drowned down the last of his coffee, screwing the cap back onto the thermos and trying to relish the feeling of the heat. He blinked, feeling a familiar rush of energy.

He tried to focus on the thin beam of light from his flashlight as doubt gnawed at him. This wasn’t what he and Lila usually did. They took out normal enchantments, nothing like this.

“Stop it.” Lila broke the silence.

“Stop what?” His voice rasped due to the cold.

“Sounding like that.” She turned, somehow managing to walk backwards without tripping. “When you freak out, I freak out.”

“I’m not freaking out.”

Lila snorted, brushing her black hair over her shoulders. “I’ve known you long enough to know when you’re freaking out.”

“And you’re not?”

“Please, when was the last time we had this much fun?” She asked.

Apparently, her version of ‘fun’ was extremely different from his.

They trudged the rest of the walk-in silence with Lila’s grumbling complaints every now and then. The cold made it harder to move but they trudged through it.

“We’re almost there.” Lila said, her voice filled with relief as

she looked up. Through the entangled treetops they could faintly see the light glowing in front of them.

Milan felt himself moving faster as his heart sped up. Beside him Lila did the same and soon they were nearly running. His hand went to his belt, gripping his knives tightly as Lila did the same with her gun. The container in his pocket grew heavier with every step as the light grew closer. They took one last step and broke through a barrier of trees and stumbled into a large, empty clearing.

Milan expected to be instantly attacked with knives, or claws, or teeth, or anything really, but as they took a step forward, there was only silence. They stood in a peaceful clearing with a large boulder in the center where the light pulsed to life.

“It’s a rock...” Lila said with obvious disappointment. They drew closer to the boulder which was wrapped in thick green vines and a delicate purple flower at the very top. Lila sighed and placed her gun back into her belt. “Real dangerous,” she scoffed but Milan still felt a cold feeling of unease.

“All this for a flower?” Lila sighed. “Let’s just get it over with.” Milan pulled out the jar and unscrewed it. Lila grabbed the flower which seemed to produce the light beam and pulled it.

Instantly, the light faded and the world dimmed. Milan turned rigid at the sudden darkness. “What did you do?”

“I didn’t-” Lila began but her words turned into a sudden scream.

“Lila!” He moved his light in her direction but she was gone, the dim beam only catching the tips of her hair. Milan chased her through the clearing and into the trees, only to be thrown back by an invisible force.

Grunting in surprise Milan got to his feet and prepared to try again but he was stopped by a thick vine curling around his wrist. He dropped his weapon in surprise as it tightened.

“What-” The vine yanked him back with so much force he nearly flew across the clearing before he slammed against a tree with a sickening crack.

“Milan!” He let out a choking groan as Lila rushed towards him, desperately fighting off the vines around her.

“Behind you!” He yelled just as two vines shot out, curling themselves around Lila’s ankles. She screamed as she was knocked to the floor and dragged back.

“Li-” He was cut off as a vine coiled around his neck, stealing the air from his lungs. Gasping, his hands flew to his neck, his mouth open in shock. Milan grabbed the vine around his neck with one hand, searching for his knife with the other.

Milan’s face turned purple from the lack of oxygen but somehow, he managed to grab his knife and slice through the vines just in time. He crumpled to the ground, coughing and gasping for air.

“I take it back!” He heard Lila. “It wasn’t just a flower!” Mud smeared her face as she scrambled towards him. “What’s going on?!”

With no answer he watched as more vines shot out of nowhere, aimed towards Lila. She jumped out of the way, only to have them snap back towards her, completely ignoring Milan.

“Why is it going after me?!” Lila ducked the hostile plants which lodged themselves into the tree behind her. The plants seemed to have lost interest in him and focused only on her. Lila screamed, causing Milan to snap out of his state of shock and scramble to his feet, watching as the plants curled up her leg and dipped into her pocket.

Twisting around, Lila cut the vine in half, repeatedly stabbing it with a battle cry. The flower, which she had stuffed into her pocket, tumbled out and fluttered to the ground.

As they quickly lost interest in Lila it all made sense. “They’re after the flower!” He told her. “It triggered the enchantment when you grabbed it!”

“Then, destroy it!”

Milan scrambled to grab the flower. Feeling the soft petals beneath his fingers he tightened his grip and was about to crush it when a vine shot towards him, gashing his hand, causing him to drop the flower. Instantly, vines sprouted from the ground, creating a wall around it, nearly cutting him in the process.

“Milan!” Lila called with concern.

“Distract them!” He jumped up and ran to the nearest tree, grabbing the closest branch without a second thought and pulling himself up.

He didn’t give himself time to realize what a crazy idea it was as he balanced himself on a branch, high above the ground. Lila understood what he was doing and with a nod, ran forward,

causing the vines to advance forward in protection, giving Milan just enough room to enter the barrier from above.

He let go of the tree and rolled onto the ground. The vines shot back towards him, aimed at his heart, but before they could reach him, he curled his fist around the flower, crushing it in his palm. As soon as he did, everything stopped.

The vines froze, inches from him and dropped to the ground, lifeless. The petals turned to mist and he scrambled to contain the glittering silver in the glass jar.

As he screwed on the lid, Lila collapsed on the ground. “That was insane!”

Milan agreed as he dropped right next to her. He groaned as his phone vibrated in his pocket and reluctantly answered it.

“Hello?”

“You sound happy.” Simon’s voice rang out sarcastically. “I’m guessing the mission was successful?” Milan moaned in response.

“We’ll be on our way,” Milan answered, ignoring his question. “Although we’ll need at least a week of sleep.”

Simon snorted. “Sleep? Please. You can sleep on the plane.”

Milan paused. “Plane?”

“Yes, plane. Hurry up, the Silver Order has another job.”



Kaitlyn Kutz

High School Short Stories

Elpis

Three thousand, one hundred eighteen years, six months and twelve days. That's how long it takes to get from Earth to the planet Ceres, the last hope of the human race.

It's also how long it's been since I last opened my eyes. Now, with a hiss and a jolt, they're fluttering open once again. I draw in a lungful of air as my pod explains to me my current predicament to jog my memory.

"Delia Everheart, your journey is almost over," it says in an overly cheery voice. "You've been asleep for over three thousand years on the Elpis. In one hour, you and your crew will land on Ceres and begin colonization." It then explains that by now, humanity is entirely wiped out, save for the seven people on this ship.

Hearing that out loud is so much worse than I ever thought possible. I mean, I've known about the end of the world and what would cause it since I was eight—it's not like it's a new thing—but I guess seeing segments about our "predicament" on the news 24-7 for twenty years made me think of it as something that would never actually happen—a monster that forever lurked in the dark, never actually striking.

Not that I didn't know when it would happen, of course. That was one of the first things humanity figured out. After the planet-sized asteroid hit Mars, elongating its orbit so it would almost overlap with the asteroid belt between it and Jupiter, every astronomer in the world sat down and did the math. It would be a little over twenty years until worlds collided. Humanity was going to be gone by the year 2042.

Now, it's 5159.

My pod finishes its speech, then slowly tilts upward. The last of the formaldehyde-methanol mix drains into the floor, leaving my skin feeling raw and exposed.

With necro sleep, your heart is actually stopped for long periods of time, your body frozen to prevent decay and a continuous current of electricity run through it to keep it from shutting down. When you're woken up, you're thawed and defibrillated, literally brought back from the dead. Your body is so confused by not being dead anymore that it doesn't really know how to react.

I stand there, letting my body adjust to the change, and examine my surroundings. I'm in a small room with silvery walls, strangely without a speck of dust—but everything's been vacuum-sealed this whole time to prevent oxidation, so I guess it makes sense. Seven bright white pods fill the space, each of which is going through the same process. Seven of us, all that's left of humanity.

After the end of the world.

Who knew that it would take such a terrible thing to unite it? The path of Mars was altered three years into the third world war, and as soon as humanity knew that it was on borrowed time, the war ended and a tenuous peace was struck—with a common enemy, infighting became pointless.

Every space program in the world fired back up again, intent on saving the human race. Fourteen different missions flew in those twenty years, from all across the globe, and every single one failed. That is, until this last-ditch effort to a planet that was originally too far away to be considered—even though it was the most likely candidate to support life within the entire Milky Way galaxy. It wasn't until the other thirteen missions failed, leaving only a year until the end of everything, that Ceres was deemed reasonable and a plan was assembled.

So, I'm here.

I'm the first to step out of my pod, almost tripping over my own feet. Coming out of necro sleep is always disorienting, but it only takes a few steps down the hallway to get used to the stretch and pull of my muscles once again.

The ship is small, with just the necessities for the founding of our colony—a bunk room, bathroom, pod room, bridge and galley adding up to less than a thousand square feet. Then there are the stores of water and necro packed seeds and food, along with a

myriad of other equipment we might need when we get packed into a cargo hold twice the size of the rest of the ship. And, of course, there are the flight computers and landing gear.

I head to the bathroom, then change out of my paper-thin, chemical-soaked jumpsuit and into a sturdier flight suit—the standard kind that astronauts wore to Earth’s orbit, to the moon, to Mars, and on every failed attempt at what I’m hopefully going to succeed at. Not hopefully. Definitely.

That’s what my mom told me just minutes before I boarded the Elpis. The last thing she ever said to me.

“Delia,” she said, her voice choked with tears. “I hope you know that I love you more than anything.” I nodded, not trusting myself to speak.

“You are the smartest and bravest woman I’ve ever known, and you’re going to do great things on that new planet of yours.” She cradled my cheek with her hand, wiped away an errant tear. I couldn’t believe that I’d never see her again...

“What if—” I start. “What if I don’t make it, or it’s actually a wasteland, or if we fail like all the rest?”

“You won’t.”

“How do you know?” Panic leaked into my voice.

“Because you’re my daughter. My daughter doesn’t fail.” Mom smiled, proudly instead of sadly like all the rest. She believed in me, she loved me, and even though I would never see her again, she would always be with me.

Behind me, I heard one of the Elpis crew, Oliver Thomas, call for me to hurry. Mars was set to collide in just a few hours. I glanced over my shoulder, shouted that I’d be right there. Then I met my mother’s eyes once again. I pulled her in for a hug, memorizing her flowery perfume, and the exact way she patted my back. “I love you, Deedee,” she whispered.

“I love you too, Mommy.” I sounded like a little girl again, and felt like one too. If only this were some childish game, without any real stakes or danger. In Mom’s arms, I could almost pretend that that’s what was happening. But then she let go, and the truth slapped me in the face once again.

The world was ending, and I was leaving my family behind to die. But what else could I do? I had worked so hard to qualify for the astronaut program, and even harder to earn a spot on this

mission. Abandoning it all for an extra few hours on Earth was foolhardy, even if it allowed me a bit of extra time with my family.

I met Mom's chocolate-brown eyes one last time. She was beaming. I forced myself to smile as big as I could, then to turn away, running to the gantry lift. I didn't let myself look back.

I step out of the bathroom, walk down the hall to the bridge, and take my seat at the front, next to the pilot's position.

A gigantic green and blue planet takes up much of the window in front of me, and I can't help but marvel. I never really thought this day would come. I'm surprised at how similar it looks to Earth. Similar, but still so different...

"Delia?" a voice asks behind me. I turn to see Akira Sato, our pilot, standing in the doorway, an uncertain smile on her face. It looks out of place on features that are usually so serious and focused. She's wearing the same flight suit as I am, but with a different patch on the shoulder—the Japanese flag instead of the American one I wear.

This journey was a joint mission with several other countries all hoping to have a lasting impact on the human race, so each of us is from a different one—America, Japan, Russia, the European Coalition, China, Iraq-Iran, and the Northafric Republic. I'm just glad that we all speak English.

"Are you okay?" she asks.

I snort. "Are any of us?"

"I guess not." Akira's smile widens as she strides forward and sits down in the chair next to mine. She meets my eyes. "But some of us might be worse off than others."

I grimace, looking away.

My mom may have been super encouraging about my running off to start a new civilization, but she was the only one. My brothers, Eric and Sam, refused to talk to me after I told them I was the commander of the Elpis. My dad told me I was going to die on a mission to some planet that probably didn't exist. He never really believed that the Earth was going to be destroyed—he thought that the scientists had gotten it all wrong, even as Mars came close enough to Earth for us to be able to see its decimated surface in broad daylight. I think the last thing he said to me was that I was an idiot for chasing a fairy tale. I won't let myself think

that he got what he deserved when the end actually came.

“I’m alright,” I sigh. “Or, I will be.” Akira reaches over, squeezing my hand. I smile, squeezing back.

“Hey,” someone says from the doorway. I can tell without looking that it’s Oliver, our botanist from the European Coalition. He has an accent that’s a cross between that of the States of Britain and France, lilting in a way that matches his chronic overconfidence.

“Hey, Oliver,” I reply. He saunters over, taking the seat behind mine.

“Are you ready?” he asks, buckling in.

“Not sure that’s possible,” I say.

“Fair enough,” he grins.

“Ten minutes till we land,” Akira says next to me, her fingers flying across the instruments. It’s weird to think that this ship has been on autopilot for thousands of years but still can’t land itself.

I count the seconds as my other four crewmates file into the bridge, each taking a seat and buckling up. Li Wei, Caveh Lankarani, Katarina Ivanov, Imani Nkosi. I’m the last to clip in.

“Ten seconds till landing,” Akira announces. Ceres is huge through the window, beautiful and foreign. I can’t believe this is real.

“Commander, are we a go?” Akira asks.

“We’re a go,” I say. She fingers the controls, steering us towards the planet’s surface. The ship shakes, my teeth rattle, the sound is deafening and everywhere. Then it stops.

“Landing successful,” Akira breathes. We all just sit there for a minute, awestruck. This is actually happening...

I’m the first to get up. I turn around, studying the faces of my crew. They’re all grinning hugely, exhilaration and anticipation mingling on their faces.

“Let’s go home,” I announce.

With that, the six of them unbuckle and stand up. Together, we walk down the hall and stand before the gateway to Ceres. I reach over and flip the switch to prime the door, my hand hovering over the button. There’s no airlock, and none of us wears a heavy-duty spacesuit, so this is the moment of truth. If the air or the pressure is wrong, we’re dead, and so is humanity. But we’ve made it this far.

I slam my hand against the button, and the gateway downward, becoming a ramp.

New sounds fill the ship, ones of life. Not-quite-birds, and almost-insects, and the chittering of animals that are just slightly different from those on Earth.

New sights meet my eyes, of vibrant plants and lush greenery, a thousand times denser and more colorful than I've ever seen.

New smells bombard my nose, of dirt and petrichor and flowers like my mother's perfume.

We succeeded. We're here. We're still alive. I suck in a deep gulp of air, then start down the ramp into the second era of humanity.



Elizabeth Monreal High School Short Stories

Immortal

The poison swirled in his glass as he picked up the cup and brought it to his lips. He had never been keen on drinking wine. The taste of it did not at all compare to the thickness and warmth of milk right before bed, but the poison in the drink transformed its flavor into something else entirely. It was something refreshing—a new flavor that he had never experienced before. The poison was deliciously sweet like honey. The wine was denser now, even the color of it had changed. It was no longer a deep scarlet, but rather the hue of golden ichor. He felt as if he were drinking the blood of gods. He had to remind himself that he was in the presence of a beautiful lady before downing it all at once.

The woman smiled what appeared to be a gentle, but condescending grin. Clearly, she thought of him as just another trivial mortal, inexperienced and naive to the life ahead of him. Her large amber eyes bore deeply into his as he drank. At times, her expression shifted from a tender smile to a downhearted gaze. Her eyes filled up with the presence of tears as if they cried, “Oh! You poor mortal, what sorrow awaits you! I pity you!” but when that occurred she blinked away her sympathy and smiled again. After a few moments, she finally opened her lips to speak. “How old are you?”

He felt like a child wiping his lips with the back of his hand as he set down the cup on the frosted table. It was the only structure that separated them besides air, yet she seemed so far away, almost as if miles of time were between them. But that was just what immortality did to people, he supposed. “Old enough to drink,” he said.

The woman laughed. “Is that so? You have a youthful face.”

He made an effort to conjure up some laughter, but found himself unable to. He shrugged instead. “You know everything about me.”

His house seemed desolate, hauntingly so. He lived alone, but

with the devil inside his home it felt even more lonely, as if it were no place light could enter. The day was dark. The light that did manage to seep in through the windows was nothing more than a faint flicker of sun. He shivered, though he was unsure if it was an effect of the temperature or fear. Chills gnawed at his arms and neck, numbing his body. She was feeding off of him again. He could feel the blood rush to his chest where her smile was aimed. All she needed to do now was sink her teeth in him and swallow.

She laughed again and sat up straighter, folding her perfect hands neatly on her lap. “Yes, I suppose that I do, but I would rather hear your mind than have to read it.”

“I want to live forever.” His voice came out as an unintended whisper. The pain of living was something he carried in his words. He had been living afraid of the end for a while. It was only a matter of time before he took a knife and drove it through his chest.

The woman’s smile faded until it fell completely off her face.

“The poison which you drink keeps you from dying, but if you wish to live forever, I fear I have given you the wrong kind of poison.”

He stared at the gold in his cup, eyeing it carefully, attempting to distinguish the end of wine and the beginning of venom.

“Why do you seek immortality?”

He brought his attention back to her. “I don’t want to die.”

The woman burst into a fit of laughter, though it seemed to be more of a cachinnation than the composed giggle from before. It was hard to be angry in the presence of wine and a beautiful woman. He had no trouble holding his tongue, but in an unconscious part of his mind lingered the thought of killing her. It was impossible. The devil was not someone who could die.

“What a reason that is!” She managed to say before laughter overcame her again.

“I really don’t see how that’s funny.”

“Why are you thinking about death? You have enough life to last you seventy years.”

“That’s not enough!”

“You are thoughtless.”

He sighed. Of course, she would never understand. She was

immortal. She did not need to live at all. “Look, I know I don’t need to worry about dying anytime soon, but I think I might end it myself and I don’t want that to happen.”

“I see. You like preparing for the worst.”

He felt himself nod. His tongue craved more poison. His hands absently reached for the cup again. Before he realized what he was doing, he took another sip. He drank until there was nothing left.

“Very well then. Let me fill your cup with death.”

“I don’t want it like that!”

“Every man must die if he wishes to see eternity. Sacrifice is necessary.”

“If this poison keeps me from dying, why can’t I just keep drinking this instead?”

“It will protect you from death as long as you are in my presence. If you had not drunk that you would be a corpse by now. Anyway, I cannot stay with you forever. My offer is the only way.”

“What are you offering exactly?”

“In exchange for immortality you will need to die. I need your soul.”

“My soul?”

The woman beamed as radiantly as a star. The very star that fell from heaven eons ago. She held out her hand to the empty air. Within seconds, the cup reappeared in her grasp. It was almost brimming with wine again, though this time, the poison that dissolved into the liquid colored the drink black. “Drink this,” she said. Her voice began to echo in his ears. “We can talk about payment after your death.”

“B-but my soul is what keeps me alive. I can’t give you that.” His voice had started to catch in his throat and his hands curled into tight fists.

“No? You would not grant me your soul even for eternal life?” Her voice was softer than before. It soothed him into a pacific serenity. Her offer seemed more tempting, the wine more alluring.

He felt his strength wither inside him and begin to evanesce. He wanted to refuse. He did not want to be deceived by illusory emotions. He fought the peace and prayed for a storm to overcome him.

“No!” He yelled, though he had already begun to lose his

breath. It was a struggle to oppose her. Arguing with the devil was not an easy feat. Fighting was tiring but so was living and he had been battling life since the day he was born. He reminded himself that he was a soldier and that this battle was nothing compared to the endless war he had fought every day of his life.

“I’m not stupid. I’m not like those other guys who shake hands with you without knowing what they’re getting themselves into. If I’m going to make a deal with you it has to be fair.”

Her smile widened. “Fair? I am nothing but fair. If you want injustice go to God. His grace is enough to pardon the worst of sinners, the undeserving. I do not give you life for nothing. I require sacrifice. Tell me what is unfair about me?”

“Souls are too valuable! Why can’t I pay you with something else instead?”

“Very well,” she said and set down the cup. She lifted her hands again and summoned a dagger. She slid her finger down its gleaming blade and pricked it on the blade’s point. A drop of blood the color of night fell into the cup. She looked up at him and smiled, pointing the knife directly at him.

“Cut off your hand.”

He flinched without meaning to, shrinking in his seat. “No way!”

“Surely your soul is more valuable than your hand.”

“It’s—”

“What do you see in it anyway? I would understand if you were a saint, but your soul is defiled and malevolent. Why do you need it?”

“Why do you?”

“I don’t. I have enough of them already. But this is about you. You are the one who seeks immortality.”

“I’m not falling for your lies.”

“Lying? Oh, no, no, no. I would never do that. Though if you must insist on eternal life without granting me your soul, then there is nothing I can do for you.” She set the knife down and exchanged it for the cup. Taking a drink and licking her lips, she crossed her legs and smiled seductively at him. “Unless...”

Unless. The word drew him in like a moth to flame. He leaned closer, wanting to catch her every breath, wanting to drink every

drop of sweet nectar that fell from her lips. He knew she was reeling him in and still he let himself go.

“What is it?”

“Oh, never mind. You would not be interested.” She took another drink before setting the cup down again. Her lipstick stuck to the glass as perfectly as a painted kiss.

“What?!”

“We could...exchange lives.”

Silence filled the room, drowning it in so much tranquility that he felt his breath stop in his lungs. “Exchange...lives?”

“Immortality is a curse, but if you wish this malison so desperately upon yourself, then perhaps you could be the devil.”

“M-me?”

“We were made to live the wrong lives. I still dream about being human.”

“What are you saying? Being human is terrible!” He stared at his flesh. He had never wanted to escape his skin so badly, but he was afraid of the pain that might come to him if he did.

“And so is being immortal, but you and I are the same. We do not listen to what others say. I cannot believe you until I have lived like you.”

“You really think I can be you?”

She smiled, this time with enough kindness and warmth to set the world ablaze. “A much better me than I could ever be.”

His hands trembled and his mind raced, but he felt a smile starting to grow on his face. He picked up the poison and gulped it down. It tasted like warm milk.

He felt himself die. The suffering that came with death, the pain, the regret, all of it accompanied the feeling, the only thing that did not come to pass was the stopping of his heart. He felt it beat strongly in his chest like the pounding of a thousand fists on the gates of hell, begging for forgiveness to a forgotten god. But for a reason unknown to him, he was still smiling.

The devil stretched her hand out and he took it, shaking it with more excitement than he could contain.

She laughed. “You are thoughtless.”

“So are you.”

She let go of his hand and immediately her body transformed from that of a fallen angel to one that seemed to have the

capability to bleed and cry and suffer, but he thought that she seemed even more beautiful this way.

Is this what the death of an immortal looks like? he wondered. I could watch her die forever.

“Will you not offer me a drank?” She laughed, though he could see that she was attempting to hide her pain.

“Oh!” He offered her the cup which changed into ichor again.

“Good idea. You shouldn’t die just yet.” Though he thought that she might want to soon enough.

She took the drink and brought it to her lips, swallowing it with thirsty desperation. She placed it on the table again.

“Let us meet in a thousand years,” she said. “Perhaps then our minds will have changed.”



Jake Orlinick
High School

Winner Take All

This story is a work of fiction.

Any resemblance to any real events or persons is purely coincidental.

Hello, Bonjour, or whatever tongue you speak in, I am Mr. N or Mr. Narrator. I'm here to tell you a story of Illegal activity, gang wars, a piece of jewelry, a Gentleman, and a... Guy. Yes, some Guy. Have I piqued your interest? Good. Well... Without further ado, let us begin the war.

Our story begins in beautiful California or Beverly Hills. A place of the cream of the crop for the movie industry or beyond. A land of immense wealth and people so famous that if they stepped on your face, you wouldn't care as their heels left a scar, and a memory of them and their gusto for the one-of-a-kind lady who generously stepped on your head. But, this wasn't the time when it was always on fire. This is the 60s. A time when the movie industry was booming and people want a respite from the ongoing war. What I mean to say is the time was different. But, at this time, something deeper was going on right under the noses of the husbands walking the adorable Pomeranians and endangering both the Pomeranian and their life for smoking a cigar. A gang war was on the horizon.

Under all this glitz and upset for not having a private life, was an illegal business, of which I am unsure of their exact purpose, but celebrities, particularly those of the hot variety, used their services, whether that be drugs, rigging, or anything else. Was important. At the head of this service, was a man, whose name to this day is still unknown, as he was so secretive and paranoid that his birth certificate and anything else about him was burned to a crisp. All his associates were instructed if they knew his true name, were to call him the Gentleman. He was called this due to his polite, yet sharp personality. It is rumored that his victims before dying were thanked for their life and prayed for to make a safe journey beyond the veil, then finally were shot and killed with

surgical accuracy as the victims were so calm that they didn't even believe they were about to be killed. Anyways, a new competitor in the same service was beyond the horizon, and he wanted that lucrative spot of Hollywood. See, the Gentleman, if he wasn't such a debonair, would've just killed the competitor on the spot, but due to his nature, and knowing that if he didn't follow, would be the first to meet an ungentlemanlike death, and so they agreed upon a Mexican standoff in the area beyond Hollywood, with a person who would make sure there was no foul play, who I will refer to as Chef because Chef rhymes with Ref. The winner would win a ring, and the rights to the land, as declared by Chef.

Now that we learned of our antagonist, let's learn a little about our heroes. The main character of this story is Guy. I know his name, but due to personal reasons, I do not want to name him out of fear. I call him Guy because he was the guy of his era. Famous for his jazz amongst California and beyond in the 40s, his talent with any instrument he picked up was unrivaled, and thus his songs were named after whatever instrument he picked up at the time. But as the 40s finished, and the 50s began, he stopped selling and became irrelevant, it was almost revolution-like. And due to how rich he was, he just retired. At this point, he picked up drinking and drugs, particularly cigars and whiskey, of which he used to drink 10-20 glasses a day to keep him out of this world. This was a problem because he'd get in a car and would drive and have severe road rage, and got banned from 5 limousine companies, 7 car dealerships, and had his license revoked once, and he found a good lawyer and had that reversed. He grew rotund, and thinned on top, and became a far-cry of his heyday. However, he found a few others like him. It is unknown as well what his friends did, but it most likely that they were movie stars, so I will treat them as such. I will call them Accomplice. They lived right across from someone quite important to this story. Which begins in Guy's house, or should I say, apartment as his alcoholic habits made him not able to afford a house, however, he still had enough to afford a penthouse. And in this penthouse, is where our story truly begins.

It was a brisk fall day, and it was drizzling outside. Upon the 75th floor, the Guy and Accomplice were drinking, the Guy was guzzling a whole whiskey, and the Accomplice fancied himself a

Manhattan.

“You know I miss those (censored) days. When I could just smooze a lady and she’d look at me, hungover, and she would say “Wanna sleep?”,” said Guy (Guy tends to swear more when he was tipsy, and I will censor any swearing I found in the records).

“Guy, I swear to god, you act as you can still do that. Ladies don’t want a washed-up Jazz star, they want one of those spies or one of those guys who sound like they are singing out of their (censored).” Accomplice replied

“Y’know Accomplice, I don’t (censored) care. I really don’t give a (censored). If those (censored) can find some nice lady, who says I, Guy Mann, can’t find a wife to hold.” Guy spat back.

“A restraining order and a divorce caused by a drunk episode in which you threw a bottle of 100 proof and gave your actress wife 3rd-degree burns would like to speak to that.”

“Oh (censored) off with that (censored). I totally can get a wife again. She’d just need to not know about that little incident.”

“It was on the front page of the Los Angeles Times. That would be a tad bit hard ain’t it?”

“Nah, jus-jus some woMA-who-uhhhh... What the (censored) was I saying?” Guy who was clearly inebriated slurred.

But this awkward conversation ended abruptly when a banging at the door and trailing footsteps occurred. Guy who couldn’t even walk straight, as he was most likely on his 15th whiskey and cola, commanded Accomplice to get it, and he got a package. The conversation eventually trailed off from his grandiose quest for love, and turned into about the package as when Guy opened it up-

“Holy (censored).” said a bewildered Guy.

“I know I heard about this thing from some of my friends. We are gonna (censored) die now.” said a fearful Accomplice.

“What does this thing say, Accomplice? I drank too much and I can’t understand this.” replied an oddly sober Guy.

“Winner take all.” Accomplice read and then replied, “Jesus, why us, we are just some old (censored) bums who are too old to be handsome and to do our roles right.”

“Hmm... I think that whoever those steps were, meant someone else, and now, we are caught in a web of war,” said Guy.

“Yeh, but can’t we just deliver this to the right person?”

“Hell no, we opened it and if whoever he is finds out, we’d become mincemeat and end up in some meatloaf downtown.”

“I mean, what if we use our brains, and figure out whoever this package was meant for.” (Just for some context, this package was a brown package, rather large, filled with peanuts and covered in sticky tape, and had no label in case the police intercept the package.)

“Uh, I dunno who the (censored) would be a referee on that.”

“Has to be someone close, as they might’ve confused us with them.”

“Makes enough sense. What about Chef?”

“Mmm. I dunno. I just come here to drink my life away with you.”

And so, Guy and Accomplice went along to Chef and knocked, but the door was open. Three men and Chef were standing there.

“YOU WHAT.” Said one of the Men.

“I accidentally left the package-” Said the Mail Runner.

“YOU ARE GONNA (censored) DIE!” Said the other man. Then the man in a large plush chair gently moved his hands and calmly stated “Men, stop the bickering, he made a simple error, as long as the package made it safely-” He spotted Guy and Accomplice.

The two men by the side of him immediately picked up their submachine guns and aimed at them, seeing the opened package.

“Put your guns down, they have no threat to us... yet.” said who was clearly the Gentleman.

“Hello.” Chuckled Guy sheepishly.

“Hello, I see you have something of much importance to the man beside me.” The Gentleman almost trance-like pointed over to a gagged Chef. Guy was about to open his mouth then the Gentleman spoke once again.

“I’m going to make an offer you can’t refuse. I remember almost all of my customers who use my services. You are one of them (No one truly knows whether or not this is true. To my understanding, it was not, but it seems the Gentleman wanted something.) and I never kill my customers unless they pose a threat to me or my business, and at the current moment, you do. So, I am going to make an offer. You return the ring to me, don’t

rat me out to the police, and NEVER EVER speak of this event again, and you and this guy's life are spared. However, do not return this ring, and my "dogs" have fresh meat for target practice."

"Sure. Sure. Sure." Said a nervous Guy.

Guy then proceeded to place the parcel in Chef's lap, and the Gentleman said one last word.

"Now, one last thing. Scram or else, you'll look like a sponge for my bullets."

Of course, due to the Gentleman's imposing nature, they ran faster than they ever did. The duel happened, and of course, the Gentleman won as he is a natural at sharpshooting due to his past in filming westerns. But this story does not end happily. It turns out in a room left of this conversation was an amateur actor. He carefully watched the Gentleman leave, and got his license plate, and sent the tip to watch that car. Weeks passed, and eventually, they found him speeding through a red light, and arrested him. He got the electric chair, and before death row got him, burned his files, and killed Guy and Accomplice, believing they were behind this scheme. The actor was then uncovered to be the one behind the anonymous tip and became ridiculously famous beyond your wildest dreams overnight. I eventually got to learn of how he found out about The Gentleman's deeds and wrote this story. I fear this work, as maybe, just maybe one of his men, still extant, finds out and wants to make me the next block of swiss cheese in this yarn? But I am wanting to share this, as I found this yarn about mistakes, quite an interesting one, but maybe what I am telling you is wrong? What if it was right? What if I was the Actor? What if I was Chef's son? What if...

A Piece Forever Missing

It's been a month since my sister disappeared. Just one week after my seventeenth birthday, you'd think life could only get better from there. Although, I know I should have seen the warning signs. Losing her plane ticket two days before her flight. The car breaking down before arriving at the airport. The delayed flight with no explanation. Everything kept going wrong, little things keeping her from completing her plan to travel the world. But Bailey was always stubborn, never ready to give in and realize that some things happen for a good reason.

I should have known this would happen. There were so many small losses leading up to it. Both of my best friends moving away, my teacher and mentor quitting her job, my grandfather dying, my big brother moving away to a different country for college. People have been leaving me my whole life and I only started noticing it recently. I think it's all been preparing me for losing my big sister. I never really thought about it, but with all the people in my life who were leaving me, that was the last blow I could take. I was already fractured, and all it took was one last devastating blow to shatter my soul into a million pieces.

The situation has been especially hard on my sweet, loving mother. I hear her quiet and stifled sobs every night after she thinks I've gone to sleep. Truth is, these days, sleep hasn't come easy. Without my big sister here, without the assurance that she's alive and breathing, my mind plays tricks on me in the dark. I close my eyes and fall asleep, but then I hear her voice and see her face, which always wakes me up too soon. Every single time, she's just out of reach, fading away as if she was never there.

As if my newfound insomnia isn't bad enough, my brother hasn't called since she went missing. He acts as if nothing has happened in the past month that's worth remembering. All my life he's been there for me. The big brother there to protect me from this terrible, lying, cheating world. And yet now, when I need him

more than I've ever needed him before, he has the nerve to ignore my calls and texts begging him to come home and spend time with me before I lose him too. It's as if he's trying to pretend that he never had a big sister in the first place and that he doesn't still have his little sister.

My world is crumbling all around me. Even my best friends, Rhea and Angus, don't know how to act toward me. They'll call me regularly and tell me they love me and that they miss me, but I still notice all the things they're holding back. All of the small remarks I know are swirling through their heads, like "Poor Mia" and "What can I do to help her?" But the truth is, I can't be helped. I'm broken beyond repair, shattered to my hollow core, and nothing can fix me.

Every day is a struggle, every emotion a hurdle for me to jump. I can't pretend I don't miss her. The evidence is in my eyes when I look in the mirror, empty and devoid of happiness. I never would have thought a loss like this could be so crippling. But, then again, you never know what anything is like until you've tried it. I wish I didn't know what losing my big sister felt like. But that's not something I have any control over. If I did, she'd still be here.

I'm unable to focus on anything important. I've fallen into a constant state of depression and loneliness. Nothing feels the same anymore. It seems like I'm helpless against the memories that flood my mind, threatening to bring me to tears every moment of every day. I'm losing my ability to function, little by little. I'm on the edge of my sanity, my mind threatening to wander away from me and never return. The only solution I can even imagine attempting is letting go.

The only problem is, I don't want to let go of my pain and heartbreak and loss if it means forgetting my big sister. I don't want to feel the way I do for a moment longer, but how can I just forget? The mask I wear is the outside picture of me that everyone sees, the one that covers up the gray abyss that is my devastated soul. Is it possible that forgetting about her will give me the chance to take it off?

I can teach myself to forget despite not wanting to forget her on purpose. Though maybe losing her for good would be better than keeping her memory in my heart and feeling the pain of it every time life throws something at me that should remind me of her. For now, I'm still hurting, still lonely, still sad. At least I've

started to let her go. Yes, a lot of my most cherished memories now come with pain and heartache. But thinking about my plan, the loss doesn't feel as terrible as before. Before, I felt alone, like a prisoner stuck in shackles inside my own mind. Now that I've begun to let go, I finally feel free.

I understand that it might not be easy. After all, what in this life is meant to be easy? As long as I work hard, I can learn to piece myself together. It could take the rest of my life. But one day, I'll be finished picking up the broken shards that once made up my soul. I know that when that day comes, I won't even remember that there's still a piece missing.

TWO YEARS LATER

"Good morning, Andrew." I push through the door into the coffee shop feeling excited. My cousin, Andrew sits at a table, alongside Rhea and Angus. I smile upon seeing two empty chairs, one for me and one for my brother. My brother Peter is late, as per usual. There's an air of hope in the room, a light, happy feeling bubbling up inside of me. I'm not sure why or how, but I'm glad it's there. An odd sense of déjà vu gives me the slightest shiver. I shrug it off and take my seat.

"How've you been, Mia?" Rhea asks with a kind, sad smile. I'm not sure why she gives me the look, so I shrug it off when Angus drapes his arm over her shoulders and gives me a quick wink. I laugh, remembering all the times when he asked me to help him win her over in high school.

"I'm doing great. How are you two?" I wink back at Angus and he laughs, that warm hearty laugh that can fill a room and make anyone smile. The small talk continues for a while until Peter arrives and we all greet him.

"Late, as usual, are we?" Andrew gives Peter a warm smile even as he says it. I can't remember the last time I saw him smile like that. He and Peter were always close, but Drew's been distant the past couple of years. I'm not really sure why.

"Fashionably late, you mean?" Peter grins back.

"No," Angus leans over the table as Peter sits down and pats him on the shoulder a couple of times, "just late."

We all laugh at this and just like that, we launch into a

conversation about how Peter's new job is going, how Andrew's fiancé is stressing about the upcoming wedding, Rhea and Angus's new puppy, and my experience at college so far.

After a good hour spent at the coffee shop, my eye wanders around the room and I notice a girl looking through the window who can't be more than five years older than I am now. She has brown hair and striking green eyes and she looks to be about five foot four or less. She seems so familiar, yet I have no memory of ever meeting her before. The strange sense of déjà vu I felt earlier returns full force.

Only when our eyes meet do I realize I've been staring at her. An unfamiliar name, Bailey, appears in the back of my mind and just as quickly vanishes. The girl startles when she notices me staring at her and begins to turn away.

"Mia?" Rhea says, "Did you hear me?"

"Sorry, no," I reply, my eyes darting away from the window to look at my best friend, "I must have spaced out."

Rhea repeats what she said as I turn to look back at the window. The girl is gone, taking the strange sense of familiarity I felt with her. I turn back to the table and within a couple of minutes, I've forgotten all about the girl who seemed so familiar to me, despite my not being able to ever remember meeting her.

Untitled

The bullets left the barrel of the gun and hit its target's leg. I tried to hold back any tears leaving my eyes. As I clenched my fists and called out her name, Kelly fell to the floor. She tried smiling through the pain as I pounded on the door to the room. It wasn't fair that she was taking my punishment. I struggled to save her despite being on the opposite side of the wall. Another gunshot rang through my ears. Checking through the glass once more, Kelly's body laid on the ground. Soon enough, the guards pulled me back as they opened the door to Kelly.

Bolting through like the speed of light, I fell by her side. Her radiant smile never wiped her face even through death. My tears fell on top of her yellow dress as I softly said to her dead body, "I'm sorry, sweetheart. I didn't mean for any of this. It was just a joke, but..." I couldn't force myself to speak any longer. She couldn't hear me, and it was all nonsense. I laid down near the limp body and sobbed myself to sleep.

My mind wandered for a bit until I found myself in the library I first saw her. She stood up and walked towards the plentiful bookshelves. I tried to follow her, but something held me back. Kelly and I were destined to be together as long as neither of us messed up. Now I've ruined my chances with her for good. Her outfit wasn't the same as it was when I met her, but rather her outfit she died in. I just wish I will get over her.

Untitled

You know when you feel as if someone is staring at you but you don't want to look because you're afraid that you'll be right and make awkward eye contact? Yeah, well that's what is happening at this moment. The guy that keeps watching me is one of the most mysterious and hot guys in the class. I mean, honestly, why would he want to watch me? Then again, I could be completely wrong and he could be looking at someone besides me. But, uh, I'll look just once. Okay, here I go.

I move my head to look over my shoulder at the guy. I started at the table and made my way up from his shirt and slowly made it up to his face, his eyes were on the teacher at the moment. His jawline was flawless, as was his face, his lips were rosy red, his eyes were grey with a hint of something I couldn't see, I wasn't close enough to see what color. When I reached his eyes, they averted to me and then back to the teacher and his face turned bright red as if he was blushing and he looked down. I took the hint and looked back towards the teacher.

The bell rang this old creepy ring, like from the old days. I grabbed my black and neon colored backpack so that I could put my stuff away, starting with my notebook then my binder. I made my way to the front of the class to go to second period. On my way through the door the mysterious guy came up to me

“Hey um, I was wondering, if um, if um you were, uh, like busy tonight? I mean if you are that's cool, I would totally understand. It was a question, you know.” He said while rubbing the back of his head awkwardly.

Ok, he did not just ask that. what the hell? I mean, he is cute and I don't think I have anything to do tonight and I know he has been watching me. I don't care that he was watching me it fine with me. So, my stupid ass says this,

“I'm not doing anything tonight, so I wouldn't mind doing something with you, I mean only if you still want to.”

“Oh, cool, um, I was wondering if we could go to the movies and then to dinner, or we could do dinner and then a movie. It's really up to you,” he said but it wasn't all sweet like his tone is always. It was in this “I'm pissed so leave me the hell alone” tone but you know, it fits him.

“Ok so I'll met——”

“No, I'm going to pick you up, it's what every guy should do when he takes a girl out.” He cut me off, “Oh, ok then that fine um what time would you be getting me?”

“How's four o'clock?”

“Sounds great! I'll be ready!” Oh my god I'm not going to be ready, sh*t.

Holy crap this is not good, I get home at = 3:30.

Oh my god, oh my god! I can't believe I'm going on a date with a hot ass guy. Holy sh*t.

I walked to the end of the hall to grab my stuff from my locker, why in the hell would I say that. I should have waited, I mean don't you think it's too soon to go on a date with this guy. I don't even know his name that's sad. We have been in school for six months and me and this guy have the same schedule and I have yet to find out this guys' name.

As he walked away, I ran after him, “Wait, wait a second, what's your name?”

“Aaron Cadence, and you're Lilith George, but you like to go by Lily. I'll see you soon, ok?”

“Uh yeah, thanks, see you soon!”

“Yeah, sure thing, sweetheart.” we were standing close enough where

I could see the little flash of lavender in the gray in his eyes. He leaned down towards me and kissed my cheek and a rush of heat flooded to my face and I knew I was blushing. His lips lingered on my cheek.

I can't believe she let me kiss her cheek, she's so beautiful.

He looked at me with concerned eyes and then started towards his end class, not before he said, “I'll see you soon but we should get to class before we are late.”

He walked in front of me, but I could still hear the voice that came to my head.

Oh my god, she's so beautiful.

I wonder if she is looking at me. Maybe if I just glanced back ...

At that moment he looked back at me, and when he saw that I was looking at him, his face turned bright red.

Was I hearing his thoughts? Could I hear all people's thoughts? I have only 20 minutes before he's supposed to be here at my house, and I still have yet to take a shower, do my makeup, get dressed. That is, if I even have something nice to wear. Aww man, this sucks ass. O.M.G. I'm not gonna be ready! It usually takes me 30 to 40 minutes to shower, 15 minutes to do my makeup, and 30 minutes to do my hair. I have only 20 minutes.

I look into the mirror and see my reflection. when I look in the mirror I wish I saw what I liked, but I don't. My mom is always telling me that people come up to her and say, "Oh my goodness, Lily looks so beautiful today!" or "Lily's looking great today!" and "Have you seen lily today? She looks great!" I just want to ask everyone to stop lying. It doesn't help to lie to someone who wants to believe you but can't because she knows the truth.

My platinum blonde hair is tied up in a rainbow looking bun. My under eyes are dark from a long day of school and my makeup is wearing off, leaving a black residue underneath. My reddish pink lipstick is barely visible. My eyes are this gross chocolate brown. My body is, as some would say, "slim thick," but I don't see it. All my friends are always telling me how beautiful I am. I guess some days I can see it; others, like today, I don't.

I step into the shower and let the water pour over me, watching as every water droplet rolls off of me and hits the floor with a little splash. With every drop that falls, I say one horrible thing that could happen.

"You could get run over."

"There could be a mass shooting tomorrow."

"We could all die."

"You could be enough but... you're not."

There was a knock on the door.

"Come in, who is it?" I yell over the water that is still falling over every curve of my body.

"Adelynn, you know, your wickedly sexy as f**k sister, you have to remember me!" A small giggle eluded from my mouth. Damn.

Adelynn, as you just heard is my sister. She is always trying to make me laugh; she succeeds sometimes, other times it ends with her getting bitch slapped.

“How could I forget? You’re my only one. What do you want?”

“Well, there's this hot ass guy outside that says he's here for you! And where did you get a guy like that?”

“WHAT!!! What time is it?!” And I'm still in the shower. I turn off the shower and wait.

“4:02,” she said with a little giggle.

“Ok, do something for me!” I was frantically worrying about if he was okay, and whether or not she invited him into the house or left him outside the house, alone.

“Why should I do something for you?” Oh, when I get back she is gonna get it.

“Cause you'll get to say 9 words to the extremely hot guy who is waiting outside for me!”

“Ok, ok, ok, what do I get to say!!”

“Repeat after me... ‘You can wait in her room. I'll show you.’ Got it?”

“Yes, yes, your room, show him, got it!!”



Natalya Webster
High School

Through the Universe

“What posts do you think we will be assigned too?”, Kian looked starry eyed as he thought about being initiated into the fleet.

Flopping down onto the bed on my back it had bounced for a moment and I thought about his question. “I don’t know, but I really hope that I am stationed on Xilian. I heard that they have the most prestigious science facility in the entire fleet! Can you imagine how amazing that would be?” Turning my head to the side to look at Calix by the vid screen, “How about you Cal, where would your dream post be?” For a moment I thought that he wasn’t going to answer, too busy typing away on the holographic keyboard.

“Anywhere that gets me the hell out of here.” He turns his chair to look at the both of us, “Look, we will all be fresh from recruit training we all will most likely get the worst posts because we lack the experience, no use in false hope.” The room was quiet for a few moments as a heavy tense silence settles over the three of us that seemed to weigh on our chest making it a struggle to breathe.

“Attention all recruits please head to the exits and evacuate all buildings! Attention all recruits please head to the exits and evacuate all buildings! This is not a drill I repeat this is not a drill!”, the alarm blares through every intercom and loud speaker in the barracks and around the base it seemed. While that was being screeched through our ears a bright fluorescent light was flashing from the ceilings plunging the barracks into veil of red. Sitting up quickly I threw my legs over the edge of the bed. “What’s going on?”

Kian and Calix are already at the door punching the code in for it to slide open. “Come on! We don’t have time to ask questions, we need to evacuate.” Kian throws my coat to me and steps out of my room. Following them out panic seeps into my

bones and worry intertwines with my muscles. Stepping out and finally being able to see what is happening outside of my quarters, there was a flood of other recruits filling out of their rooms and rushing to the nearest exit that they could find. Kian pulled me into the flood but right as he does shoulders smack into me and throw me off balance, making me fall to me hands and knees. Pain blooms in my legs when they make contact with the hard concrete.

“Argh!”

Trying to get back on my feet before I get trampled but as I am pushing up legs brush past me, some running into me and knocking me over once again. Rolling myself into a ball and wrapping my arms around my head for protection from the onslaught of recruits heading towards me. Large, calloused hands grab my biceps roughly and pulled me to my feet. Opening my eyes, I search for the face of whoever helped me to find Calix. The red emergency light gave a dangerous hue to his features. “Nova, are you okay?”, when I nodded unable to speak at that moment he continued. “Come on, we need to get to the shuttles, that's where everyone else is heading!”

“Thanks”, breathless my words are drowned out by the instructions being yelled out by the loudspeakers. The pair reaches the exit of the barracks opening the doors the chilled wind bites at my skin as we were jogging close to the building, keeping low out of sight. The flight hangar was a couple hundred feet away from the barracks.

“Okay, we aren’t going to have anything to cover us so you are going to have to run as you can to the doors. There is a small opening that we can get through. When I give you the all clear you need to give it everything you got, okay?”, I nodded and readied myself for the run, seconds ticked by which turned into minutes when he gave me the all clear. Pumping my arms and legs as hard and fast as I could to make it to the pod without being spotted. A fierce burn settled in my leg muscles, not used to running I gulped for air like a dying fish would, my lungs flooded with cold air making my chest heave, but not letting that slow me down I pushed forward with everything that I had. Reaching the massive doors and sliding through the opening in the middle to get into the room with all of the pods, or what was supposed to hold all the

Pods. Looking around the room seemed deserted, all of the shuttles, fighter jets, and other pods were all gone.

Looking up at the ceiling to find it folded back revealing the night sky and the reason why the planes were missing. Calix came up behind me and nudged me in the direction of the pod, “Over here.” Jogging over to it and listening to any sounds that might indicate anything was wrong besides the obvious but only could make out the sound of their feet pounding on the concrete as they rushed to the small shuttle. When the sound of an explosion erupted in the distance. Slowing my pace almost to a stop but Calix’s hand on my back spurs me forward.

“Don’t stop, we don’t have much time before they find us.”, Calix’s voice held so much authority that it almost scared me.

“Who? Who is going to find us? What’s going on?”, Frustration bubbles in the pit of my stomach but before I could yell at him again but another BOOM rattles the building once again. The small shuttle came into view only a few feet away and relief floods my system. The shuttle was just a small square with a dome for the top and windows on two of the sides letting us see inside. Kian is standing right outside of it motioning for us to get there. “Hurry, everything is set but we need to leave now!” Twenty more steps, ten, eight, five, two, one, leaping into the metal box with Calix right behind me, I immediately strapped myself into one of the three seats that were inside.

“Coordinates are set, now we just need to get off Arexore. The only other safe place close enough to us is the base on Kalara, five jumps away.” I look out of the window and I start to make out moving figures in the shadows. “Guys, I think someone is getting closer.”, Their heads snap in the direction I was pointing too and a sober look crosses their faces. Kian seemed to be struggling to get the controls to work and fumbling to click the right buttons. “You know how to get this thing off the ground, right?”, my voice becoming frantic trying to focus on the people that are circling the pod. “I had a crash course of getting these things off the ground a few years ago.”, smiling assuredly trying to ease my anxiety. “How many years ago?”, his comforting smile shift into one of guilt. “Five years ago, but I have a good memory. See, I have it set up. I was just having a few issues with starting everything up to get off the ground.”

“We are going to die, aren’t we? This is how it ends, I am going to die in a small pod, sweaty and with my hair probably looking like a tereens nest!”, starting to hyperventilate Calix tilts my head to meet his eyes.

“Stop freaking out! Kian knows what he’s doing and the men out there can’t hurt us, there is thousands of pounds of steel between us and them including bullet proof glass.” Calix gives a nod to Kian and he starts to press buttons on the control panel and the pod whirred to life. The propellers under our feet groaning in protest.

“Ready?”, Calix gazes at me with such intensity it was hard to tear my eyes away from him.

“Ready.”, and the pod roared and clanked, thrusting us into the sky towards Kalara.

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