

6th Annual

Unlocked Voices

2015 Teen Writing Contest



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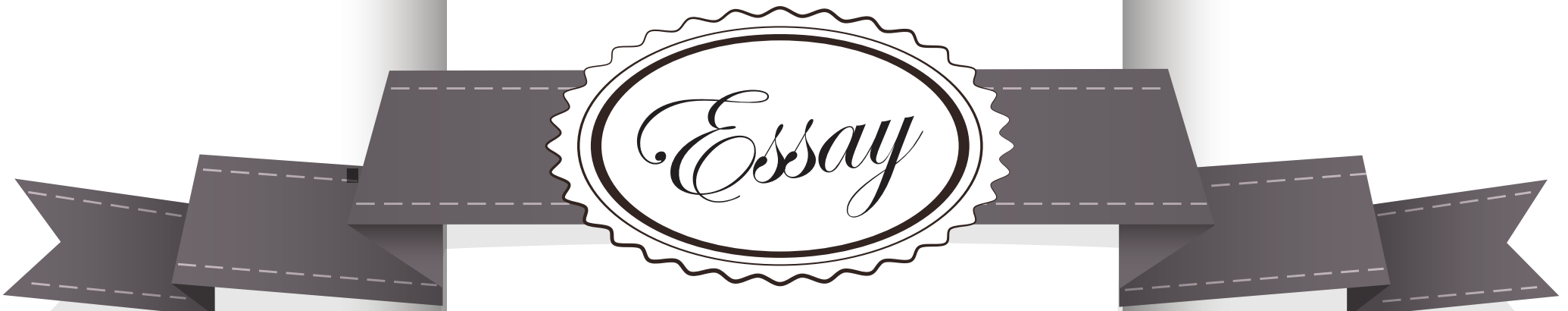
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Essay

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Bianca Castillo

High School Essay



Saturn

When a loved one dies, you can't become selfish. You turn to family for help and they turn to you. You all grieve together, looking out for one another when the other is broken into tiny pieces. My family has always been very united and very loveable. My father has 5 siblings and each and every one is constantly cheerful. Then my grandma fell ill. After many hospital visits, one doctor finally found the issue. A horrible monster, named cancer, took my grandmother's body as its new home. And sadly, that monster had made itself comfy in there for many years before we actually discovered it. The doctors tried to evict it, but he couldn't. The cancer defeated my grandmother and exactly a month later, she died in her home. I remember ever detail of that horrid night. As a teenager, I say the phrase 'this is the worst day of my life' quite often, but that was honestly the worst night of my life.

I remember my father waking me up at 2 AM, turning the light on and saying quietly as he stared down at my curtains, "You don't have to go to school tomorrow, we'll talk in the morning." Looking back at it now, I really should have expected the worse, but I'm in high school, of course I wasn't going to question getting to play hooky. I tried to go back to sleep afterwards and couldn't. I sighed as I kicked the blankets off and dragged my feet, making my way to the bathroom. When I returned, my dad was standing in my room again. He pulled me into a hug, took a deep breath and told me the worst thing I could have heard. My grandmother had died around 10 PM the night before. I never knew a heart could really feel as if it was broken but I learned that night, that it could. The tears slowly began to pool and spilled one by one. My heart ached to hear that this was a twisted joke. I wanted it to be. I begged and pleaded with my self-conscious that yelled out, 'HEY, IT'S APRIL FIRST. MAYBE YOUR DAD'S JUST A HUGE DICK.' Of course, my dad isn't a dick, so he wouldn't say or do something like this. My father lead me back to his room and I got in-between my mom and dad, thinking quietly to myself.

Somewhere around a year ago, I began to lose my faith. I became an agnostic atheist. I couldn't see how there couldn't be a god, but everything the church was teaching me sounded ridiculous. Science taught me evolution and all about reproduction. The Virgin Mary couldn't be a virgin if she was with child. It's impossible. But that's not important right now. When I found out my grandmother had cancer, the only thing I could think to do was find that last bit of myself that still believed. I remember praying night after night, telling God I would do anything so my grandmother could live. The night my grandmother died the part of being an agnostic atheist faded away. I became an atheist. I was disgusted with this so called God for not saving her. Maybe I knew that was impossible because of science and such, but I wanted her to be saved, I needed her to be saved!

I became quite isolated within the following months after my grandmothers death. I didn't even know how I felt. Was I angry? Was I sad? Was I even okay? I remember being sad first, and with the memory of me being sad was the sound of my father choking on his words as he tried to speak about my grandmother at her funeral. I remember my uncle getting up and holding onto my dad's shoulders, rubbing them and standing beside him for support. I remember that was when I began to cry, to really cry. I have only ever seen my dad cry one other time, and they were just a few stray tears. But he was sobbing and I couldn't do anything. I wanted to go up and hold his hand, but my grandmother's body was a few feet behind him, lying still and cold. I couldn't see her lifeless and I wish I had, I wish I had been stronger for my father in that moment. He needed me, he needed someone to hold his hand and lie to him, telling him things would be okay, at least for a while.

I remember being angry the following month. I had told all of my friends that the days I missed, I was just sick. I didn't think any of them were worthy enough to hear anything about my grandma. None of them would understand the relationship with her and how much her passing had hurt my family and me. I also remember being angry that it was my grandma that got sick. I lied in bed sometimes, wishing it could have been someone else's grandma. It only took me 3 seconds to realize what I was asking for was disgusting. If I was suffering so much, why would I wish that upon someone else? I wouldn't wish for it on anyone, even for my worst enemy.

I remember my parents going away to visit my cousin when

my first anxiety attack happened. I had been doing laundry and I felt my heart start to pound inside of me like a drum. The room began to seem...hazy? I was lacking oxygen in my head as I started hyperventilating. I picked my phone up and dialed my father as I sat down on the floor beside the entrance to my house. I started crying as my breathing increased as well as the irritating dial tone coming from the phone. I hung up and called again and again and again. I wanted to smash my phone on the ground and scream. I wanted to scream until my lungs begged me to stop, until my throat cried out in pain. I needed to get this pain out some way. But I was too weak. My hands shook hard as if I was standing in the freezing tundra without clothes on. My dog lied between my legs as I tried my mother. I sucked in a breath and composed myself as she answered. She made small talk and she asked me the dreaded question, "Are you alright?" My voice instantly cracked as I asked for my dad. My mom wouldn't understand, she wasn't close to my grandma like I was or my dad was. I remember feeling bitter, disgusted at the idea of my mother helping me. I spoke to a few people that night and ended up staying with my Godmother so she could keep a watch on me. I began to question my sanity. I started to see myself as Charlie from *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Was I going to be put in a hospital the way he had been? Would I have these attacks daily? I was scared to see myself as this slightly crazy character. How could I relate to him in any way? But it didn't matter because I was going insane.

Everyone in my family knew about my disorder in just a matter of hours and I got text after text telling me that I had their support. I didn't want it though. I wanted everyone to leave me alone. I wanted to call my grandmother and ask her how her day went or if she couldn't wait until the next time my baby cousin, Sophia, came to visit from California. But I couldn't do any of that. I had to sit alone in my room and stare at a wall as my sanity left me. My grandmother was dead and there was no way I could bring her back. What I would do to have her alive again. Maybe if she was still here, I wouldn't see myself as Charlie and I wouldn't have the sound of my father sobbing permanently stuck in my head.

Death is a horrible thing that happens to everyone, whether you like it or not. The image of your loved one lying so still will be stuck in your mind forever. Even my father's cry is burned into my mind as a daily reminder that life sucks. But with the beauty of life comes the horror of death. What you do after death comes

is up to you. My family grew stronger from this death and yet we're all still suffering in our own ways and keeping it to ourselves, we're still here. You can lose your sanity but at the end of the day, you're okay. You'll always have loved ones to take care of you when you have your next panic attack or your heart just can't take it anymore and bursts into tears. You might even have to see a therapist but eventually you'll be okay. You'll be able to tell funny stories eventually and all your anger will be replaced with love and happiness once again. As cheesy and as lame as it sounds, time heals all wounds. Some might take longer than others, but you'll get there one day.

Cheyenne Cork

Middle School Essay



Untitled

Everyone has dreams, but we all face our realities sooner or later. Possibly even more than once in a day. Well I wanted so share some experiences that you could have relate to, or you can just imagine how I thought of it, and how you see the problem.

It all starts when your born you wonder a lot of things when you're a toddler. Like when you see a bubble for the first time, you just see if you can touch that rainbow colored, flouting sphere. When you see a baby, and it talks to you in, "baby talk," you probably wonder, "What is that baby saying?" Well I have done that too. Have you ever seen a toddler clap for the first time, and see their face look curious? It just wants to make you laugh! So a little kid runs into a wall, and has no reaction, that makes me think if child has no brain!

Moving on in life you start school around the ages five, or six years old. When I was this age I had a lot of habits. The first day of Kinder garden I went to my arranged seat and hid my face in my arms then after the class started everyone looked at me weirdly, ever since then I've always have been weird, and I'm okay with that. Every first day of school now, I've put my head in my arms, it just calms me down, I guess.

I always thought that I would be part of the, "cool kids," in school, but I'm glad that I'm not because those people like to act as if they only like a certain people, and later on hurts them buy talking rudely about them. The kids who are annoying, weird, or geeks turn out to be the nicest people you could meet. Similar to me, my friends are weird or "geeks", but I would never hurt them. For me to hurt someone else, they would have to hurt my friends, or myself. When I started middle school I dreamed about good years, but that did not happen for me, if only the Earth could be a better place if people could be kind. When I first started middle school a lot of people back stabbed me, how do I know this? Well I have ears, everyone has ears, and some things you wish you

would have never heard, but I try to not get caught up in ridiculous things like that. Getting caught up in drama is stupid, especially in junior high, or high school. Bulling is not right anyways! So you shouldn't bully. If you are a bully, than just know that what you are doing to those kids, or adults in your life is not worth it. Whatever the reason it's for just move on in your life, and enjoy it.

I have a lot more to experiences in life to concur, but right now I'm just going to learn more from my past, and where I am today. We all should be excited for what's coming for us in the future. For now though I'm facing my new realities, and dreaming of my future, but not too much.

Kassandra Garcia

High School Essay

Untitled

I live in a world full of happiness. As if the world made us as happy as, well, whatever makes someone happy. Why wouldn't our world be full of happiness? Kids with smiles as wide as the singing Fat Lady. Parents smiling when their children smile, children smiling when then their parents are smiling; it's a whole cycle of smiling. You even say a friendly "Hello!" to someone followed by a smile most of the time. We live happy, we just do not always fully acknowledge it because sometimes we are concerned and stressed. I live in a world full of happiness.

The world I live in is safe. Only about 1.3 million people have car accidents, and per every 100,000 people only 16,238 are murdered on average per year. In the world I live in police officers know exactly when force should be used to apprehend a suspect. "I can't breathe." Yet we live on. I live in a world full of happiness.

It isn't all good but it's a happy place. We're all happy. Some are clinically depressed but they have medicine for that. "Major depressive disorder affects approximately 14.8 million American adults, or about 6.7 percent of the U.S. population age 18 and older, in a given year." They have medicine for many things. There are even vaccines to protect you from even receiving a disease of any sort. And if there isn't a pill there is probably a way of curing something, or attempting, except for polio, cancer, lupus, and so on. But when they die we manage to keep going and live. I live in a world full of happiness.

Only one in three Americans are very happy. In the number of those expecting the future to be even better is 89% of Americans. Those Americans stay happy because America is a country with freedom. "Black Lives Matter." Cubans might not live happy but that doesn't interfere with everyone's happiness. I'm still happy because even though they don't have freedom they

aren't all dead either. Not all countries are led by power hungry men. I live in a world full of happiness.

I live in a world with people who are happily controlled by society. "We live in a world full of people who are satisfied with pretending to be someone they are not." Pop culture: hitting every corner of the world. #Starbucks #MyShowIsOn #StopBullying... as if one hashtag and no action could help the cause. A world where people risk their lives every day for us: yet Taylor Swift is the one who won Woman of The Year for Times Magazine. Even as of the beginning of December Santa Claus has been a trending topic on social media. Why? This is because the happiness of a person comes by receiving gifts and not giving gifts in this world. I live in a world full of happiness.

Generation going down a black hole: no way out. Thots, sluts, ratchets: all coming out of the closet. They're the ones that should stay in. Discrimination; coming out from everyone's mouth. "The arc of American history almost inevitably moves toward freedom. Whether it's Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation, the expansion of women's rights or, now, gay rights, I think there is an almost-inevitable march toward greater civil liberties." A population full of reproducers still under the age of 18 and they can't even maintain a 2.0 grade point average. I live in a world full of happiness.

The amount of people obese in this world is at an all-time high. "About 31.8 percent (of children and adolescents) are considered to be either overweight or obese, and 16.9 percent are considered to be obese." And for adults, "More than 2 in 3 are considered to be overweight or obese." A world where eating, to people, is a way of coping with anger, sadness and happiness. We eat food when we are rewarded and food when we need to be cheered up or calmed down. When isn't food good? We're all on the verge of being diabetic with high blood pressure or cholesterol. When is the vast amount of food intake and going out just because we are too lazy to cook going to end? We cater to those obese by letting them drive up to ATM's instead of making people walk 10 steps, 10 steps that could be the only exercise people have per day. I live in a world full of happiness.

People all around the world are being controlled by money. "Paper" being the cause of problems, yet, ironically, it is also the solution to them. Countries in debt and countries going into debt:

all a big commotion. Is the problem us? Do we over think about money too much? Some people's lives revolve around money and those who have it. "Everyone wants to ride with you in the limo, but what you want is someone who will take the bus with you when the limo breaks down." Oprah Winfrey said. I live in a world full of happiness.

A world where women are not given the respect they deserve. Women: still getting less pay than men for working. "In 2013, female full-time workers made only 78 cents for every dollar earned by men, a gender wage gap of 22 percent." Even walking down the street could be a hassle. Men whistling, thinking it is more of a compliment than an insult. "Apparently women find compliments offensive. All compliments. And by compliments I mean 'compliments'. And, just to be even clearer, by 'compliments' I mean 'wolf whistling on the street'..." Men are completely wrong. Women everywhere deserve respect. Women's suffrage took us far but not far enough. I live in a world full of happiness.

I live in a world full of happiness. Not everything is happy life has its happy moments. You can't always have rainbows and sunshine. "Everybody wants happiness, nobody wants pain. But you can't have a rainbow without a little rain." Life has its ups and downs, it isn't easy but it is worth it. We all hit rock bottom at some point. We all peak at some point. No matter what it is everything has a strong impact on life. But if you look at life with a glass half full instead of half empty you will realize that all the things that happen in life are meant to lead you down the right path. "I truly believe that everything that we do and everyone that we meet is put in our path for a purpose. There are no accidents; we're all teachers - if we're willing to pay attention to the lessons we learn, trust our positive instincts and not be afraid to take risks or wait for some miracle to come knocking at our door." Everything is a lesson; keep your eyes open for what should be repeated and what you should avoid. I live in a world full of happiness... in the end it is what it is.

Morgan Johnson

High School Essay

John Hughes

Are You There, John? It's Me, Morgan

I have always wanted my life to be directed by John Hughes. Unfortunately, I am not Molly Ringwald. My parents will not forget about my sixteenth birthday; I most certainly will not be sitting on the table, leaning over my cake, about to kiss someone I would never have expected to kiss.

I will not be sitting in the back of detention, not even needing to be there. I will not put cereal on bread and douse it in sugar. I am not going to become this gorgeous, irresistible girl when I pull my hair out of my face and put on a dress. The popular wrestler is not going to kiss me goodbye as we wait for our parents to pick us up after eight hours of detention on a Saturday.

My parents are not going to fight over who deserves my love by buying me things. I will not, nor would I ever, be eating sushi for lunch.

I am not going to sit in a library with four strangers who I have never spoken with, going around, bonding, by telling stories you would not even dare to tell a psychiatrist.

My name is not a major appliance.

I am not going to become popular because of someone I made with a computer.

My parents are not going to forget me during the winter while they are on a plane. I am not going to come up with some brilliant scheme to keep robbers out of my house.

As hard as I try to make for it to be, I cannot plan my life perfectly enough to make it seem like it was directed. No one will be standing outside my window with a boom box, trying to serenade me, just to have me come back into their life.

I would not be able to plan my life down to the last detail where I would have time to be perfect.

I do not design my own clothes, and I do not have a friend name ducky.

I do not belong in detention.

Not being able to plan my life makes me feel lost, but I always have the company of films, and I always have the warmth of a blanket.

My parents always remember my birthday.

My life is not a John Hughes film. I have to remind myself of this often. My life is not a John Hughes film.

There is not going to be some cool dance montage in the library.

He does not call the shots.

He is not going to wake me up one day, and I will not have the mind of a sixteen year old, or the body of a fifteen year old.

He is not going to make me popular.

He is not going to make me feel like a brain, a basket case, a princess, an athlete, or a criminal.

My life is not that.

Learning to accept that, I have two questions;

Why aren't I Molly Ringwald?

Where's John Hughes?

Seth Larson
High School Essay



A Diet For The Self-Esteem

A recent conversation with my sister has made me reconsider the meaning of life. It went something like this:

Me: *Hey, do you want some ice cream?*

Sister: *No.*

Me: (a bit confused) *Why not?*

Sister: *I don't think it would be very good for me.*

Me: (sound FX: Heart dropping to the floor where it is trampled by a crash of rhinoceroses)

I am utterly flabbergasted as to why any human being on earth wouldn't eat ice cream because it wasn't "good for them". Humans are constantly doing things that aren't 'good for them' (such as the Harlem Shake and listening to Nicky Minaj). What is just a measly gallon of ice cream?

But my strong-held food beliefs are being challenged on every hand in the sanctuary of my own home. For example: I returned from school, practically starving, and asked my mother what was for dinner. The reply was "broccoli burgers on whole-wheat buns". And before I could even gasp, I was told that the only side dish available that night was – and you might want to cover the ears of small children – mashed cauliflower. I was aghast. The only cure for such a meal is a Twinkie covered in whipped cream and caramel, lightly dusted with butterscotch shavings and refined sugar.

And food isn't the only thing getting desecrated; my leisure time has turned into 'running time' (feel free to shiver). My father woke me up at the ungodly hour of 10:45 on a Saturday morning to tell me that we were going to jog for a mile. I tried to laugh, but it wasn't a joke. I reluctantly left the embrace of my warm bed to the blood, sweat, and tears of jogging around the block. When we finished, my father congratulated me, and then said it was good preparation for the 5K we were going to run in two months. I

quickly looked in the “Parenthood Contract” to see if my father could legally force me to run a 5K, but under Clause XI, there was a footnote saying “Yes, parenthood is actually a dictatorship, so if you refuse, you get sent to a gulag. ”

But this health craze isn’t confined to my house; it is spreading in a manner similar to diseases such as malaria, dysentery, and “Shake It Off” by Taylor Swift. While I was innocently standing in line in a fast-food joint, I noticed an advertisement for “50-calorie strawberry shake”. When was the last time you went to a FAST FOOD joint to order something that was only 50 calories? I thought so.

It’s not that I am a terribly unhealthy person; in fact, Richard Simmons has told me on many occasions that I am doing (and I quote) “fabulous”. But as I am being surrounded by healthy options, I am beginning to fear that my usual snack (which consists of sugar-coated peanut butter cupcakes with a scoop of chocolate syrup) is not exactly the right choice.

I guess that I’m really just afraid for what all this healthy food is doing to my self-esteem; the disapproval that radiates from my mother when I eat 57 Saltine crackers can be seen by the naked eye. Organic food is attacking my favorite activity: gluttony. And if organic food wants to hurt my friend, he’ll have to go through me first!

But I know I’ll have the last laugh. Someday, when I’m dying in bed with clogged arteries, rotten teeth, and a belly the size of the state of Rhode Island, I can say “well, at least my life tasted a lot better than my sister’s.”

(P.S. Also, I recommend that you run away from home if your mother tries to serve you ‘Spinach-Fish Oil Lasagna.)

1 Lose 12 pounds in two weeks!

2 Yours truly, Vladimir Putin.

3 I was there to buy a 47-ounce beef butt in hot lard sauce.

4 It also goes really well with Nutella.

Antonia Librizzi
Middle School Essay



Untitled

In this age and generation, it appears that children have lost many important skills. It seems that kids just don't know the basic principles of respect and acceptance. I see it on a daily basis and, quite frankly, I'm sick of it.

I often see students disrespect their teachers at school. It mainly occurs in my Spanish class, most of the kids in my class don't pay attention to the teacher and even text in class. We are more than half way into the year and all I ever hear is, "We never learn anything in that class!" Well, of course you're not learning anything, you don't pay attention. Because of this utter lack of respect and care for knowledge, we really aren't learning as much as we should, and it isn't our teacher's fault, but the students. If my teacher started teaching more in depth into subjects there would be kids who wouldn't listen and would fail. That'd be fine with me, but my teacher would have to go more slowly so her students don't all fail. Especially, since now high school elective packets have been handed out, many of my fellow classmates have decided to retake Spanish II and, therefore, have been even more disrespectful because they know they're going to be learning everything all over again next year. It's a horribly vicious cycle. Kids are always complaining about her, and really, they should instead spend their time and energy trying to learn and respect their elders. No matter how much a teacher annoys you, they still have gone through several years of college and deserve your respect.

There is also a large amount of cheating going around lately. Many of my classmates share answers to homework, worksheets, and even tests and quizzes! They are not learning how to work hard for their grades and instead have been taught that it's ok to cheat, after all, nobody ever seems to get caught. It's just sad. Recently, we took a multiple choice test in Spanish and people passed around the answers. My math teacher caught students passing around the answers and, although he told my Spanish

teacher and gave her the paper, she still didn't have us retake the test. Instead, she offered retakes, but she said it wasn't required, so the people who cheated got to keep their undeserved 100%s. A well taught student would have realized that, by passing around answers, they're not learning anything.

Kids also have a tendency to treat others rudely. There are so many bullies invading our schools and it is partly because kids just don't understand that you can't treat other people like that.

In 2013, I lost a good friend because she was bullied to the point of committing suicide. She was only 13 years old. She might still be here today if children could only realize that you aren't supposed to do this to other people. I myself have been bullied before and, believe me, it sucks. These kid's parents taught their kids that, in order to get further in life, you must bully and abuse your way to the top. There is hardly any discipline in our school systems and kids don't seem to be getting in trouble when they do something wrong.

In the past, when you were a kid, you were taught to work for things and not to harm others in the process. But nowadays, kids have been taught that if you cheat you won't be caught, if you're mean to others it doesn't matter, if you disrespect your teacher you won't have to try. It's really scary for the future of our world. I wouldn't want to trust any of my classmates with a job like a doctor or president or even a manager of a company. Kids need to begin learning how to be successful, kind, and independent.

Amanda Lok
High School Essay

Untitled

If you ever talk to me, then you will probably hear me complain about my height. Standing at a mere five feet, life can get difficult. But you really got to hand it to us short people, since we usually cannot reach it anyway. My height has made me who I am today, and it has played a major role in my day-to-day life. Fun fact: the length of your arm span is how tall you are, and the length of your forearm is your shoe size.

At first I thought it was always a bad thing. For instance, I can never see anything when I am in a large crowd or at concerts, and people would constantly elbow me in the face. Playing monkey in the middle and keep away are never fun for me. Also, I recently found out that taking group selfies can be a struggle because my arms are simply too short to include everyone in the picture. I have to roll up my pants and climb up the shelves at grocery stores to reach the top products. On occasion, a crowded elevator is less than pleasurable since my nose is usually at a normal person's armpit level. And, I have heard all the short jokes in the book. People always tell me the weirdest jokes like does the grass tickle you while you run? You make the perfect armrest. Are you legally a midget? Do you need to sit on a pillow when you drive? How's the weather down there?

Recently many of my family members came to Las Vegas, and I was standing by them one night, and I realized that I am the runt of the family. I am shorter than both my parents and my siblings. My mom would always tell me that I am adopted or say make do with what you got. And I hear quotes all the time saying something like everything happens for a reason or there is good in everything. I could not find anything good about being short. My friends always try to make the situation better by telling me to wear heels, but those are highly uncomfortable and I cannot wear them every day. Or another solution is to hang around short people like myself, but I think tall people are fun, too.

Surprisingly though, being vertically challenged has its drawbacks, but it also has its advantages.

It was hard to think of any good reasons at first. There are the obvious like I will always look younger, I have more legroom on airplanes, and I do not need to crouch down when walking through a door. I can also buy children's clothing, which I guess is a blessing in disguise. Interestingly though, this goes much farther than that. Turns out that there have been several scientific studies that say short people live longer. From Time magazine, researchers have found that for women, every extra four inches of height is another 13 percent chance of developing cancer. The logic here being that there is simply just more of you to potentially catch the disease.

As I was looking up why it is good to be short, I stumbled upon an article by NPR saying that short people perceive time faster than tall people. That's basically saying short people live in a faster time period. Which means shorts people live in the now whereas tall people live in the past. This is the abridged version, but if you think about it, if I touch my toes, then the reaction only has to travel five feet up to reach my brain, but if a six foot tall person touches his or her toes, then the receptors have to travel up six feet, a whole extra foot. It was an estimated 1/10 of a second that tall people experience things slower. So to all the short people out there, next time you watch an exciting movie with a tall person, you can turn to them and say, "I know what happens a 1/10 of a second before you." Unlike Randy Newman's opinion on short people, I can think of a few good reasons why short people have a reason to live.

Over the years, I have come to embrace my height and accept the fact that no matter how hard I try, my genetics simply will not allow me to grow any taller. Being short has become part of my identity, and it is what makes me, me. Although there is an entire world up there that I have yet to explore, sometimes I am glad I was not born a human giraffe.

Andrew Munoz
Middle School Essay

Memoir

One time, my friend and I had the brilliant idea to swim in my pool..In December. The water had to be at least close to freezing. After a bit of suspense and denial, I decided to just go for it. I jumped in. I instantly felt the feelings of the water sting me like icicles that stabbed my skin as well as a prominent feeling of regret. We stayed in there for about 10 minutes until we both decided to forfeit. In the end, he managed to only dip half of his body in the water. Still, he screamed the entire time. It was a bit like James Cameron's Titanic (1993) but with less romance.

Rachel Sanford
High School Essay

Benefits Of Apathy

Everyone has a part of themselves that they don't like. Sometimes it is as small as a mole in the wrong place, or as big as a birth defect. Either way, there is always something that makes us look in the mirror and doubt ourselves. For me, the thing I dislike the most is my emotions. Growing up, I was always told to be strong, to care about everyone around me. But how could I care when my very parents couldn't even get along for a day without arguing about something.

From a young age, I began to think that maybe it was me. After all, I am the reason they got married. If I hadn't ended up inside my mother's womb, they might not have ended up with rings on their fingers and having said "I do." Maybe my very existence is what drives them further and further apart. I've grown to feel that every time one of them looks at me, they can only see the bad parts of their spouse. For instance, whenever I say something that comes off as selfish, I hear my mother's nagging voice telling me that I'm just like my father. Whenever I spend more than I should, my father's voice comes into play. I hear him saying that the inability to control how much I spend comes from her. I am the spawn of everything they see wrong with each other.

This is where my emotions come into play, and how I wish I could rid myself of them. Perhaps if I didn't care what they thought, I could ignore their remarks and go on with life without constantly reminding myself that I am the cause of their discomfort. Without believing that if I had died during childbirth, or if I had never even been a possibility, that they would both be happier somewhere else in life.

I have learned to second guess myself. Every time I do anything, I always try to figure out who I would please by doing it, and who I would anger. I have found one way to make them both happy, even if it is only for a second. If I manage to keep my grades up,

and put on a smile, I can make them believe that I'm alright. That their arguing doesn't bother me. I can make them believe that everything they are doing doesn't affect me when in reality it is the reason that I stay awake all hours of the night crying when I know no one can hear me. It is the reason that I don't trust myself in a relationship. If my parents couldn't be happy together, then is there even a chance that I could be happy one day? All of these thoughts are brought on because of emotion.

I have lived my life up to this moment stepping on eggshells. Worrying that one wrong thing I might say could bring the carefully mended walls around me crashing back down in a second. I cannot rid myself internally of the emotions constantly swirling around and causing havoc wherever they touch, but I have learned to mask my internal pain behind a faux smile or a blank expression. I have learned that if I can make everyone believe that I'm alright, than I can slowly make myself believe it too.

Tatyona Smith
High School Essay

Legalize Same-Sex Marriage!

Gay marriage has been an issue all over the U.S.A. I feel that if two women or two men feel attracted to each other they should be able to be together without someone telling them they can't. "Gay marriage... always being an issue for the voting public when it should be an individual's private choice." G.A Hauser.

Denying same-sex marriage sends the message that it's okay to discriminate against gays. By legalizing gay marriage more children will be adopted and given a home. Also wedding companies will start getting more money because if gays are allowed to get married there going to want a wedding and weddings cost a lot of money. "Marriage should be between a spouse and a spouse not a gender and a gender." Hendrik Hertzberg.

Why are we constantly being judged by because of the things we like? That's unfair and violates our human rights. If we love someone of the same-sex we should be allowed to marry. Denying same-sex marriage can give people the impression that it's ok to belittle them. The government isn't supposed to bring their religion into law making but I feel that they do. Everyone has the right to love and denying same-sex marriage will make gays feel that they are not allowed to love someone sexually that's of the same race.

Gay marriage should be a couple's choice not a voting matter. Wouldn't you feel upset that your state, country, or city did not except that you have love for someone? Why deny someone because they feel more comfortable being with someone of the same-sex? We need to put a stop to this now and legalize gay marriage so that everyone can feel comfortable with their sexuality and being able to be himself or herself.

Reginald Stewart

High School Essay



This I Believe

I believe in self-definition. For most of my life I have found myself standing in front of a mirror, searching for the tiniest things that gives a hint on what makes me an individual, for what I can use to describe myself not to others but rather for myself. I've struggled (still struggle) with an identity crisis for a long time now, so long now that it has become what defines me. A mirror peering into a mirror, lost in an infinite loop of self-reflection.

Confusion left me a blank page, waiting for a pen to define it, make me something that others can read and understand indefinitely. Everyone around me became that pen, filling me with their scribbles and thoughts of what I should be, what they believed is best for me. I was not the one who wrote my bibliography, my character description, even my background and setting were not by my own hand. I left myself vulnerable to all of the self-deemed authors of the world. If someone wrote me as a winged monkey flying through a tornado in Kansas I would believe every word of it. I relinquished my right as the original publicist but rather relied on others artistic whimsies to write my life story.

The life journey of creating your own identity is not something that can be given to another to lessen the workload. It takes years of tooth fairies, divorced parents, unreciprocated feelings, and feeling the most extreme emotions that life can throw at you and survive it. Knowing who you are has no correct way process and no clear answer either. It is a way of life, a consistent state of mind that is always self-aware. Figuring out what one stands for, but is always open to the opinions and commentary of others.

For my schooling from preschool all the way to the seventh grade I was homeschooled. I spent years in my room, by myself, with only family to ever speak to. This isolation stunted my emotional and social growth. I didn't know how to interact with others, how to speak with others, or what I was to them. Was I

just another body taking up space and breathe in this world, or was I a person with a personality, goals, and dreams. Often I would not even know how to respond to certain events that required some sort of emotional response. When yelled at or insulted I would often have an internal monologue asking myself, “Should I be upset right now? Should I be feeling sad or angry right now”? This constant self-reflection of my own reactions made me feel like an alien in my own body. Staring at myself in a mirror questioning the true ownership of the face on the other side of the mirror. I often felt like another being inside of an empty shell looking out from glazed eyes.

Self-doubt is a dangerous state. It leaves people like a mollusk without its shell, exposing all of its most valuable meat to the predators of the wild, always ready to poach on any vulnerabilities. No one will truly understand who you are. Being misunderstood will always be part of life. You will honestly never fully find your identity but what is more important is the journey of trying to find yourself. Making that effort is an identity in itself. Self-discovery that is what I believe in.

Deejay Zimmerman
Middle School Essay



Cloud Seeding?

Do you want to know how to control the weather I know I do? That's why I think that cloud seeding should be funded. Cloud seeding is simply where scientists launch silver iodine into clouds to increase rainfall, or decrease hail. I think that if research and funds keep going towards cloud seeding that we'll be able to control all weather.

I think that we should fund cloud seeding because we could increase crops. We would make a lot more money with the increase of crop, because of the rain increase. We could double, triple, or even quadruple the amount of crops we have now. More rain more money. It could also eliminate droughts. Think about it, if we can control the rain we could control the rainfall anywhere.

Cloud seeding would stop hail. Hail is considered bad because it could damage cars, house windows, it can even hurt people. I know that cloud seeding seems expensive but imagine all the money there saving people from shattered windows to broken bones, because we all know that hail can get pretty big, and it hurts. If hail hits someone hard enough it could kill him or her, but that's a worst case scenario.

When cloud seeding was originally developed they signed a contract if some sort saying that it wouldn't be used in war. Honesty I think it should be. The United States has developed this creation so we should be able to use it to our advantage. Like I said that if they put enough effort into it they could control all weather. So they could send a tornado towards the enemy base. Just an example, but it's a good idea. They could have tsunamis destroy beach camps; the enemy wouldn't even see it coming. Think of the worst natural disaster possible we could control it. We could have tsunamis or whirlpools sink enemy ships. The possibilities are endless, and if our enemies were to start developing such machine we make something happen to that town near the lab.

I'm not going to lie there are some down sides to cloud seeding. It is expensive. We don't know if cloud seeding is bad for

the ecosystem or the ozone. Also it's not exactly proven possible. I'm sure that with enough research and funds it is possible. We don't know that if shooting silver iodine into clouds could do, it could back fire with the wrong combinations and mess up the weather forever, but who knows. That's why we're skeptical about cloud seeding, the results could be great, but the consequences, reaction, could be catastrophic.

Based on all of the information I have given you I would say that cloud seeding is a good idea. There are so many great things that cloud seeding could do for us. However there is the bad side on thing that could happen. Obviously we would have to do a lot of research before turning this idea into a reality. We have to make sure it is safe and not putting anyone in harm's way. So yes I do think that cloud seeding is a good idea.



Poetry

*Kimberly Banagan
Gwendolyn Berardinelli
Vaiutufealofa'I Dixon
Sheridan Drew
Mady Durbin
Faith Evans
Madison Flick
Isa Flores
Dara Franceshi
Annie Fuller
Griffin Garcia
Shayan Ghafoori
Sarah Gifford
Samantha Goodman
Nicole Hamaski
Robin Lim
Ivan Alexandro Lopez
Harlee Miscovich
Jasmine Mixson
Victoria Mulheron
Sophia Murray
Parker Nelson
Kelvin Omojola
Morgan Palmquist
Micah Simpkins
Maryam Sleiman
Makayla Townsend
Tia Valentine
Bethany Winder
Mackenzie Yeoman
Sara Younis*

Kimberly Banagan
High School Poetry

Déjà Vu

I know this story well,
yes I've read it many times

The past is but a memory,
yet I feel we've clicked rewind

The tales of loves who left me,
though the fault's always been mine

The ones I wish had kept me,
but I could never make my mind

This one's for you, whose hearts were true,
and only wished to please me

Stuck like glue, I thought I knew,
that you would never leave me

Then life goes on, you can't wait long,
and only time suspends

I write some songs to try and move on,
'cause now we're back to friends

(Read backwards)

Gwendolyn Berardinelli
Middle School Poetry



Moon

Black empty skies,
Except in your eyes,

One last light remains,
Though it is pale and wane.

A single crescent,
Which the sky resents,

It locks it away,
All the beautiful day,

And traps it in night,
A lonely, sorrowful light.

Vaiutufealofa'i Dixon

High School Poetry

Where You'll Find Me

Cradled in the bottom of
this orange inflated life boat,
rocked by the maternal
waves of the sea-
she comforts me;
that's where you'll find me.

No horizons, no direction.
Lost to her laps of indecision.
Find me, please.
This view would be beautiful
if not for the harsh blisters
from the sun on my face
and the bitter taste of her water
on my tongue.

I won't cry.
She rocks me, as you know.
She doesn't mean to be this way-
she is mother to children
different than me.

They are big and small,
caressed by the motions
of her back and forth.
The pulse of her children,
filling her vast womb;
the heartbeat of the sea.

Her salt is sweet to them,
she carries the warmth of the sun
gently to their backs.

Maps built into their hearts
and a compass to guide their lives;
yes, they are a different species than me.

We are not the same,
and I cannot blame this gentle sea.

Deep within her,
life grows.
life dies.

I think she must feel
more overwhelmed
than my heart should ever
have to endure.
I won't regret my choices.

Here I am,
lost in the expanse
of her unending grace.
I won't cry now,
not when my strength is so faint.
I cannot indulge
in self-pity.

I will lie here
and she will cradle me.
And, should I be found,
I would be grateful.

But if I should not,
I know she will not let
the storm bury me-
not before she cradles me,
and my eyes grow heavy
and my breathing evens out.

When she has carried me
to that sleep I've needed-
then the storm will come.
The storm will take me there.

Above her care, above her chaos,
above those clouds that gather gray
but leave soft white.

Above the stars that lost their meaning
when I drowned them out
with my burning desire for a closer comfort.

Above those dreams I forgot I had,
above those memories
overflowing and drifted from recollection.

Where rest comes
after a lifetime of struggle.
Where peace finds me laid out
between serenity and bliss.
Where a higher entity says to me,
"You're home now."

That's where you'll find me.

Sheridan Drew
High School Poetry

Pressure

Free me from the craters of the moon.

I am a golden balloon waiting to be filled with helium,
A constellation, a star against the pitched violet sky

A song that plays through dirtied speakers on repeat
until closed windows are fogged
and walls crying with beige paint

Melted wax and dust upon a dark wood floor
The no vacancy sign is illuminated in neon prayer.

The novel full of dog-eared, highlighted, scribbled-on pages
takes its final wheezy breath.

The cinders of my construction
are bound together with pale masking tape.

I am an ache behind a heavy skull
along a springboard spine.

The call into pine needle laden woods
that answer with their ghostly caressing touch,

The puzzle missing its final candy-colored piece,
And the glow of a fluorescent screen
into the midnight-soaked face of youth

I am a dam holding back the eye of the hurricane
As it is being squeezed through a telescope
into the vast sky.

Mady Durbin
High School Poetry



Biopoem

Wishing, wanting, wasting, growing.

Her girl, Slightly's Pan, optimism's plaything.

Who loved rattling stars until they fell and tumbled
across the grass, or flying up and dislodging them herself, or
simply misplacing them and finding them another day due
to serendipity's sweetness.

Whose heart pounded in time with the bassline,
whose eyes lit up like headlights if her anger was sparked
and overflowed like sinking ships afterwards.

Who hated when the thought of being lonely or lost or
unloved snuck into her mind and made her knees shake.

Who discovered who she was through tragedy
but still turned her back to Ophelia's lake.

Who couldn't wait to walk and wander
until her feet ached and her soul stopped at last.

Whose body was trapped in the boredom of small towns
and golf courses but whose heart would always long
for the California sunset.

Faith Evans

Middle School Poetry

Uphill Flowing Waters

I'm not quite sure when,
or how,
or why,
but at a certain point in my day,
It became clear that today was going to be extraordinary.

I woke up early,
like always,
And I sank back into the warm covers.
After turning off the alarm.
I could smell the universe cooking up some extraordinary
fate for me.

I stumbled through my morning routine,
with less time to spare than usual.
The bus seemed ominously quiet.
but maybe that was because I was studying for a test.
Today would for sure somehow be extraordinary.

In art I drew some crazy lines,
And failed at dividing my paper into six sections.
But I still had hope.
Something was going to happen to make today extraordi-
nary in every way.

I slouched through math,
And copied notes until my fingers ached.
I got most of the homework done.
Because I had to be ready for that extraordinary event.

Science was fun,
but not the in the extraordinary way.

We crushed soda cans,
and studied for the test that will be given tomorrow.
I was becoming impatient for my extraordinary.

Lunch was too ordinary.

Geography fell short in producing something
extraordinary.

Journalism was unusual and wonderful, but it scarcely
brushed extraordinary.

Health was not even the awkward type of extraordinary.

I practically gave up at that point.
But I grasped at my last few strands of hope.

I dived into a book and read until dinner.
It was splendid, but not extraordinary.

I had hot chocolate and ramen for dinner:
Not extraordinary.

I would force extraordinary to come!
I had my little brother put on my shoes:
It was an amazingly fun exercise, but...
Not extraordinary.

I went to the church for youth night;
It turns out all the girls were supposed to meet at
Sister R's house.

Brother R gave me and the other girl who hadn't gotten
the message a ride there.

It wasn't even the embarrassing type of extraordinary.

I sat in the back seat and watched the full moon
as we drove along.

It was very pretty.
But not extraordinary.

We came to their home,
and we entered through the front door.

I walked in.

Everybody was smiling and talking.
Sundae-making treats were out on the counter.

The other girl that hadn't gotten the message
quickly found her friends.

I turned to the girl standing by me,

“Hi.”

“Hi!”

“I'm going to walk home now.”

I turned and left.

I was not happy.

I was not sad.

I was not mad.

I just walked out the way I came in.

Sister R came out after me.

She invited me back in.

I said no thank you.

She asked if I would like a sundae.

I didn't want one.

She said that she would love if I could stay and socialize.

I needed to walk home.

She could give me a ride.

I really needed the walk.

She gave up and said goodbye.

I gave up on extraordinary.

I walked along the dark street.

I cut over the drainage ditch to take the long way home.

There was water in it;

That surprised me; not in the extraordinary way.

Just in the slightly unusual way.

I stepped onto the sidewalk on the other side of the drain.

I looked down from where I was standing.

I was at the top of a hill;
It was probably once a very great and mighty hill,
but humanity had cut it down,
paved a road over it,
and stuck houses all over it.

It was very silent.

My footsteps echoed down the street
As I walked down the once mighty hill.
The moonlight caught on the water flowing to the drainage
ditch.

It glistened very beautifully.
My eyes traveled along it.
In that instant,
I knew the water was flowing up the hill.
I leaned closer,
but I didn't do a double take,
or question my sanity.
Because for that moment,
uphill flowing water seemed like the most ordinary thing
that could ever happen.

Madison Flick
Middle School Poetry



I Remember

I remember a time
when people could love who they wanted.

I remember a time of peace, a time of truthfulness.

I remember a time
when our world was Eden.

Free. Full. Full of freedom.

I remember a time
when people could pray to any god they choose.

Simple enough, I suppose.

I remember a time
when one's skin or body meant nothing to their personality.

A time when the rain meant love, instead of sorrow.
The sun meant hope. The moon meant beauty.

I remember a time
when a flower didn't have to pray to be noticed.

A time when the simplest sunset was seen.

Why can't this beautiful Eden reappear?
Why must life be full of hatred? Of fear?

Imagine a time when the world was full of love.

If you can imagine this, then you will remember too.

Isa Flores

High School Poetry

Apology

Her baby swam in motel pools,
emerald from the lust of a thousand hands and tongues
and she took in mouthfuls of the salt

*(a taste acquired, a burning of the tongue, my teeth clicking,
throats gasping, hands grasping)*

and she lay upon the acrid carpet
and danced to the siren's songs

*(it felt like love but tasted like metal. She tried to kiss my hands,
but they were numb from an icy shell of temptation
and magnetism, and I felt nothing)*

and she was a keeper of palm trees

*(artificial in a home yet authentic in mine. They were dirty and
jagged, but the ones that have seen more than me
breathe and cry and choke on casino air)*

and she ate at the table

*(full of delicacies and blessed from the voices
and hands of a million small islands and tears)*

and she smiled through obsession and apathy
and ignorance and isolation

and she followed the voice of an entity unknown,
an entity disrespected by a daughter
yet worshipped by a grand

(a golden blizzard of knives and impiety ripped through my throat)

and she told me to "clean up, that's good enough"
with scarceness and wine
and coughs woven through her hair

(cotton candy pink and unforgettable)

*(a Sunday morning cry woke me, I scratched at the skin that
drowned in the scalding water of my sisters and my brothers
and my parents and my grandparents and the entity)*

and she wove through sand, water, garnets,
wooden spoons and grass

(deserts and bites seeped through my skin and into my stomach)

and she followed the rebels and the weapons
and the fists and burning eyes and throats
and she told me she dreamt of immortality
and lotus flowers

soliloquys and sharp wings and silver showers
and she said: your pale skin is as bitter as my blood
but not as bitter as my tears
and I apologize for all I've done
but it's time for me to go home.

Dara Franceshi
High School Poetry

Little Things

We are all humans fearing neglect and disregard;
the feeling that we cannot change an abundance of the
occurrences around us.

But in reality, we are the little things that make up
the entire world and everything we adore.

We are only humans,
a small piece of the creation of the universe.

From the biggest star in the entire galaxy
to the different solar systems, to our solar system:
the sun, the moon, the planets, and finally the earth.

We are a people among nature, animals and
everything included in life.
We are so small, yet so big and full of potential.

We are the drops in the ocean, making ripples upon ripples
which eventually create an immense wave.

We are the slight change in temperature that makes
a huge effect on the forecast for the day.

We are the lips of a smile
from a stranger that changes your entire mood.

We are the petals on the bouquet of roses
that a certain someone isn't expecting to receive.

We are the itch you were finally able to reach.

We are the small air molecules in the sky
producing vast and opulent sunsets.

We are the sound of your laugh
that you just could not contain
because your emotions were too much.

We are the bristle on a paintbrush
producing extravagant and unique art.

We are the realization that a moment of distress is nothing
compared to the size of the world and what we are.

We are the good kind of karma that we will receive
because we deserve everything good in life.

We are the ones who know we are making a difference
even through the seemingly ordinary things.

We are only humans, but we are doing the best we can.

Annie Fuller
High School Poetry

Little Blue Bird (Parts I-IV)

Little blue bird
You are such a little thing
How fragile and small you are, now
You perch at my window so timidly
Tell me, little bird
Do you not wish to fly?
Oh, little blue bird
Claim the skies, they are yours
Let your wings take you as high as they will
Now you are free
Now you can fly
And I am still here should you tire

~

Oh, little blue bird
How big you are growing
With each new day you are stronger
How happy the sky makes you
And how happy I am you smile
Oh little blue bird
How restless you are becoming
How thirsty you are to drink from the world
To know her oceans and plains
Oh little blue bird, with longing to leave
Tell me, little bird
Will you miss me?

Little blue bird

The winter came and swept you away

Up in the skies and off to be free

Oh how I shall miss you, my little blue bird

How fragile and small you once were

And now you have claimed the skies

They always were yours

How happy the sky used to make you

And oh how happy I was when you smiled

How happy you were in this corner of the sky

I wonder, little bird

Do you miss me?

~

Oh, little blue bird

You have flown so far

You perch at the window sill before me now

And I wonder where you have been

For all these months when you were gone

Did you see the world?

Was it as you expected?

Was it as you had hoped?

No, I suppose it can't have been

Little blue bird, you are with me now

I know, little bird

You have missed me

Griffin Garcia
Middle School Poetry



End The Silence

You're never alone we know how you feel,
You've been called names.

You might be embarrassed, be ashamed
You don't know where to turn you're filled with fear
Everything's against you,
You want to disappear

but

You're never alone we know how you feel,
you've been called names
you might be embarrassed, might be ashamed.
but in times like this,

Your feelings you need to share,
at times like this you will find people who do care.
It wasn't long ago I was choked and pushed down.
I was scared because I didn't see anyone around.
But I knew my silence had to end,
so I told my teacher and the bullying came to an end.

You're never alone we know how you feel,
You've been called names.

You might be embarrassed, be ashamed
You don't know where to turn you're filled with fear
Everything's against you,
You want to disappear

but

You're never alone we know how you feel,
you've been called names
you might be embarrassed, might be ashamed.

but in times like this,
Your feelings you need to share, at times like this
you will find people who do care.
Bullying happens and there's many reasons why.
Some bullies get bullied themselves,
And others can't say why.
And maybe some are filled with fear
or don't know how to make friends.
They don't know how much they hurt people in the end.
You're never alone we know how you feel,
You've been called names.
You might be embarrassed, be ashamed
You don't know where to turn you're filled with fear
Everything's against you,
You want to disappear

but

You're never alone we know how you feel,
you've been called names
you might be embarrassed, might be ashamed.
but in times like this,
Your feelings you need to share,
at times like this you will find people who do care.
End the violence end the silence.
The future can be clear and
together we can end bullying.
Together we can end the fear.
You're never alone we know how you feel,
You've been called names.
You might be embarrassed, be ashamed
You don't know where to turn you're filled with fear
Everything against you
You want to disappear

but

You're never alone we know how you feel,

you've been called names
you might be embarrassed might be ashamed
but in times like,
Your feelings you need to share at times like this
you will find people who do care.
You are not alone no matter how you feel
because the truth is
in our lives we've all been there.
End the violence, end the silence.
The future can be clear and
together we can end bullying.
Together we can end the fear.

Shayan Ghafoori

Middle School Poetry

Pear Haiku

I do not like pear

I always give pear a hard stare

Oh how I hate pear

Sarah Gifford
High School Poetry

Sight

I'm shaping up,
I'm looking around.
Seeing things I've never noticed before.
Rising from the ground,
This sweat and pain only
Strengthens the core.
I'm trimming the edges,
Coloring between the lines,
Well, moving the lines over makes it just fine.
I'm stitching this heart,
Staples and thick thread won't fall apart.
Lining up for a new start.
Those vices that once held me,
Can't take me anymore.
I'm my own center of the world.
Can't they see?
This clock rotates around me.
They said I was done.
They said I would lose.
They told me that I couldn't choose.
But what's the use,
Of believing in a name that doesn't exist?
"They" doesn't cover this.
They is we,
They is me.
They is limiting what I can be.
So now I stand,
I make myself free.
And for the first time in my life,
I can see.
See, free from the stereotypes,
Free from the vanity,
And normality forced upon me.

Feeling so ambitious,
 I look out to the world now,
 Appreciating the amity,
 Found within myself,
 That not everybody has;
 Much like sanity.

It's hard to understand and see through your own lies,
 When everything is built above intricate card houses,
 And under self-painted
 grey skies one

piece slips and your whole life is roused into doubt,
 But exposure is better than mind bound
 strife,

And hiding from it only limits your life.

It's hard to stand on the right side when it just feels wrong.

It's not easy to be me,

But I'm trying to stay strong.

Sure, the pressure has been here all along,

But now...

Wow! I can see!

Sometimes things seem without purpose,

With all of these hypocrites telling you that you're worthless.

Backed up by "they"

All you want is for it to go away,

Sometimes.

Sometimes I get scared.

Wondering why I even cared.

Crawling alone in the desolate streets,

Or screaming behind masking beats lost

and terrified of everything.

So scared of reality,

So scared of not seeing,

Not being,

Good enough for me.

But now,

I can see.

Free from the drugs,

Free from all things.

Finding an unfamiliar contentment in once rejected hugs,
 And a new sense of respect for rarely kept diamond rings unbroken
 promises and fulfilled dreams.

I looked in the mirror,

And that's when I saw,

That all of them was me.

Me.

How can I be happy,
After all that's happened?
How can I breathe;
Find the need to still be here?
Things can go bad,
And you may have lost what you thought you'd always have,
But it's the weak that stay sad.
Yet here I am,
Changed and surely glad,
Grinning as "They" scream I have gone mad.
But they are the ones insane,
Thinking they can see what's in my brain.
We're not all the same.
And it's shame,
They can't see not
yet at least.
People now,
We can be who we want to be.
We go through hell,
Our throats may swell,
But it's only ourselves who decide when we fail.
I took some advice,
Spat words that weren't so nice,
Apologized,
Recognized that I was doing it to myself,
Deliberately destroying my own health,
My undeserved wealth,
All that once mattered.
And now that I've dropped it all,
I stand here, free.
Able to be whatever I want to be,
Without them dictating me,
Because now,
I can see.

Samantha Goodman
High School Poetry



My Cookie Dough Heart

I'm a little girl on the sidewalk,
Selling lemonade and my heart.

The bump – bump's in my chest
Come from sweet honey water
That pumps through my clementine veins.
It costs a quarter for a cup of me,
A dollar for something sweet.

But as I pour away more and more
Of myself to every boy with a sugar smile,
The pitcher grows empty,
Butterflies aren't tugging at my tummy anymore,
And I'm thinking that
This is not love.

But it tastes like chocolate strawberries
And that's almost kind of close.
So kiss me on my citrus lips
Before the orangey sun goes down
And I run back inside
To hide from the dark.

Say things that make my nose blush princess pink
And my hands fiddle with the ends of my hair.
Because I'm pouring you a cup of me
Knowing I won't get it back.

Nicole Hamaski

High School Poetry

Lessons I Learned

I am a 4'8 girl full of pride and ambition
Yet I was blessed
With a body that could not stand up for itself!
So meeting him was a gift sent from heaven
When his hand held mine
I knew no one could stop me
Each and every compliment he threw at me
Rose the pedestal I was on
Every time his lips met mine
I knew what it felt to be loved
He taught me things I never knew
One of these lessons included
"How to be heartbroken"
It was a lesson that was forced upon me
A lesson I never wanted to know
He raised the pedestal I was on
Only to burn it to the ground
So you can understand how cautious I was
When I met the next guy
Yet I put everything into this one
Praying to God that I wouldn't be wronged
And I was right
But he taught me the lesson
Of walking away

Robin Lim
High School Poetry

Adulthood

This question has been on my mind for the longest time.
What happens when I become an adult?
I see my parents struggling, aging
Work is aging them,
and aging is holding them from working
Their life consists of 4 kids and a family owned donut shop.
If this is life, then what am I living for?
I am young, 16 if we're being honest
But I'm aware I don't want to be an adult

Adulthood has responsibilities
Being a child is better than being an adult
Being a child is living
What awaits me when I become an adult?
Bills need to be paid to live;
taxes need to be paid in order to be a citizen.
My best bet is to go to college,
where not all make it and not all can afford it
After college get a job that pays the right amount
Then find my destined person to start a family with
2 ½ kids, a husband, a house,
and a good paying job is what awaits me
All of it seems like the 1950s. Starting a family
for the sake of having one.
If you don't have a family, that being defined by society,
you would be incomplete

Some people don't fit into that type of mold
They're the people with dreams.

Dreams are for the ones that are risk takers
Ones that are willing to lose everything to fulfill a goal.
They are the extraordinary but I believe in the ordinary

People tell me not to think about it,
enjoy life to the fullest they say.
I'm only 16; I'm not going to miss a beat of life.
Treasure every moment before you regret it

Ivan Alexandro Lopez
High School Poetry

The Life That Passed On By

As your newborn eyes look out see,
All that is there is a world
that would only be found in a fantasy,

As you listen to a language
that you have never heard before,

You wonder in awe
as soon as your first words begin to pour,

Taking your first steps,
with legs so well preserved and pure,

Leaving you with a restless quest,
with adventure being the only cure,

Living in a world full of possibilities,
where nothing is ever expected,

You laugh and smile about all the things
that may come your way or pass you by undetected,

As life goes on, you begin to stop living
in this fairytale land and start to think about the past

While you spend your time thinking about events
that you wish you could change,
the world keeps turning, ever so fast.

You gain endless responsibilities,
finding ways to acquire them all,

You find every way to force yourself
into being portrayed as older,
never deciding to stall,

Before you know it, you begin to grow slower
and realize the world had much to offer everyone

You take your time, you no longer want to rush on by
and forget about the little things in life
that made living fun,

You begin to find those untouched eyes
that you haven't seen through in all your hasty years,

Looking around you, the ever-surprising world
that's been forgotten comes back
to leave you with belated tears,

Taking your last steps, with legs worn down
throughout the decades you no longer remember,

Your body slows down, yet embodies a soul that lasted
through the heat of your life's enigmatic fire,
leaving but a single ember,

You think about all the times you could've shared a laugh,
but rushed on by,

Leaving with only a chance to give one last regretful sigh,
As your last day comes into view,
And your face begins to glow with a golden hue,

You finally realize that age was only a number,
But the happiness and wonder that thrived unseen
throughout your life will carry on until your final slumber.

Harlee Miscovich
High School Poetry

The Rabbit Hole

An invitation into the rabbit hole
I give to you
a route to the true nature of
reality
is a lie straight from
hell
bent on the idea that
broken
dreams are dead
memories
from a time when nothing was
right
to the point of where we got
lost
in beauty of which was not our
own
ability to stand up after
falling
in love with those who only want
one
two three second
chances
in order to understand the
girl

Who is this rabbit hole
where
venturing too deep is labeled bad for the
soul
mates that she lost in
between
two worlds built on the
creation
of my love given to
me
when I was
born
into the rabbit hole

I give you this invitation
to explore my trenches in hopes
that one day true love will find me

Jasmine Mixson
High School Poetry

The Writer

They keep their ears open,
Pockets filled with lead,
A whistle constantly blowing
Deep in their head.

It spits out nonsense
To most common ears,
But to the writer,
It's one of the best things to hear.

Their ears pained from listening,
And their heads strained from thought,
But the writer always gives in
To their innermost thoughts.

Early in the morning,
And late at night
They're constantly writing
So they can sleep at night.

The writer has finished,
Yet again that whistle blows,
So they keep on writing
To and fro.

They don't have time to question
This powerful blow
Because their heads are always moving
To keep up the flow.

They keep their ears open,
Pockets filled with lead,
So when they hear that whistle blowing,
They can soon go to bed.

Victoria Mulheron
High School Poetry

Brushing Shoulders

As the population grows,
Every human being becomes less important,
Of less concern to the person next to them.

One day we will have found a solution
to running out of resources and created more,

Our population will grow by the billions quickly,
We will all be of less and less significance.

We will all perish as we begin.

Sophia Murray
High School Poetry

Untitled

Life is all around
It is just waiting to be found

But look do not look in the dark
Nor at the large oak in the park

Run, run for your life
Before you are hit with strife

Death will come a-calling
He watches you struggle as you are crawling

Your life flashes
As death passes

He does not look your way
But you know you will have to pay

Run as fast as your legs can take you
Your rent with death is past due

Death slows down
He looks down on you without a frown

A large smile upon his face
You both know you have lost this race

Hold your breath and dive right in
All you have done is sin

The world slowly fades away
It is your time to pay

Death turns to give you a smile
You feel the warmth that has been gone for a while

Welcoming hands pull you in
They do not mind your sin'

You finally have a family now
Life has been hard, so take a bow

Life was all around
It had been found

Now you face a new life
It has no strife

You have a warm feeling again
That one you have not felt since before you were ten

Sometimes you will look back
Wishing you had been with a pack

You never had many a-friend
But death was with you to your end

Those random times you felt happy
When the time went by awfully snappy

He was always there
To make sure you were not scare'

The warm, welcoming embrace
It told your heart not to race

Your breathing became calm
No sweat coming from your palm

So many people around you
They had been in the same shoe

Now you are all together
A new life you will have forever

Who would have known death would be your victory?

Soulmate

It's a look of complete surrender,
submitting his heart and soul
and she's promising him no hurt.

It's aching to breathe but aching more
for the feel of lips on lips.
Noses gliding until there is no space,
then lips touching and hearts beating fast.

He feels like home and she holds
his heart in cupped hands,
that tremble and quake.

Its fingers clasped tight and breaths in sync.
Just staring to memorize noses, eyes,
jaws, ears, eyelashes, freckles.
Every miniscule detail.

Starved for each other, thirst for the touch of a soulmate.
Connected by fate and choosing to stay,
'cause separation means pain.

Love so strong it's cosmic,
glorious, holy, pure.
Desperation as eyes drink up each
others image, committing to memory.

Every second apart equals torture.
Every second together means bliss.
Hope a beacon in the night.

Leaning towards the other,
craving the sweet touch.
Wanting the young love;
ignorance.

It's painful yet hopeful.
Greedy but selfless.
It's all a look of complete surrender.

Kelvin Omojola
High School Poetry

Untitled

My name is Kelvin and I'm just a regular guy
I have a couple things in life I would like to be

I've always been told I can achieve anything if I try
But it's going to take a lot of work from my family,
god, and me

First things first I want to make my family proud
This year it's a bit of a twist but it's still cool

I'll do anything to make sure I don't let them down
I want to try and get a full scholarship to a four year school

Next I want to try and get good grades for me.
Then I want to be able to persevere
and get through adversity
Just in case I have to end up going to UNLV.

It will help me not only in sports but in life itself,
if I can make past at thirty

I will keep trying to make my goals come true
I think I will but at the end of the day
I would do anything to achieve and not lose

But the most important things of all
is to appreciate god and my family.

Morgan Palmquist
High School Poetry

Late Nights

The screams in my head
Like voices from the dead,
Urging me to do things
That are best left unsaid.

But I put it down on paper,
Where the thoughts can be read.

Draining ink from my pen
Until the page is filled.
But it only takes me farther
Until my vision is red

As I grip the pen tighter
With a rising sense of dread
Writing faster now
The page starts to shred

For I can't pull away
Instead I try to move
But my hand attacks instead

Then continues
The frantic scratching
Writing with what I bled

Too terrified to move
Only wishing for my bed

Then suddenly I remember
I forgot to take my meds

They'd soon find out
And see what I wrote

For now they see
What my life's been about

No scar unseen
No stories untold

They know my life now
Now that it's gone

They say things
About how I'll be missed

How they loved me
But they didn't
They never did

They only ripped me apart
They ripped at my scars
That hadn't been wounded

They attacked
Always wanting me to end it

So I did
They got their way

Now I am gone
I hope they are happy

Micah Simpkins
High School Poetry

Untitled

Red for his words like fire
Igniting the torch of her heart

Yellow for length of his words
Slowing burning into her soul
Awaiting for the climax

Blue for the tears she's about to shed

BOOM for the sound of her exploding heart

From a four word story
"We're better as friends"

Maryam Sleiman
High School Poetry

Home Is To House

Home a place of love where one is always accepted
Home a place of sanctuary where one will go to be safe
Home a place of privacy where one will go to retreat
Home a place of family where one is big and happy
Home a place of hardship where one is strong
Home a place of fighting where one is filled with hatred
Home a place of yelling where quiet is no longer
Home a place of abuse where one is terrified
Home is no longer a place to be cherished
but a home has become a house.

Makayla Townsend

High School Poetry

Before And After The War

The fish swim
The river flows
The birds sing
The trees grow
The wolves howl
The children play
The women chatter
The elders teach

Everything is peaceful
Then more men come
Everything changes
War comes

The fish sink
The river red
The birds shot
The trees cut off
The wolves beheaded
The children sick
The women somber
The elders dead

War ends
Everything's different
We must change
We must survive

Tia Valentine
High School Poetry



Drowning Me

I had
drowned in
those river currents
they call your eyes

Swept away
without a word spoken,
strangled with glacier knuckles,
fingertips of metal
and thunder cottoning
my eardrums.

You wanted to save me
but I could not tell you
over the salt eroding
my throat

that you were the current drowning me.

Bethany Winder
High School Poetry

Willie the Witness Turned Down His Eyes

Vickie the Victim looked at the sky,
Called out the dark stars,
Cursed, "Why, oh, why?"

Where was the chef to feed her her meal?
"Where are the steamed carrots,
the beef spiced with zeal?"

Chester the Chef threw down his hands,
Pounded fists on the wall,
Muttered, "Isn't this grand..."

Nonpaying customers wanted his food,
But money was tight,
"And they're always so rude!"

Vickie the Victim called the police
"I need help over here,
I need something to eat!"

Dina the Dispatcher looked up and sighed
"Can't you eat on your own?
Please don't waste our time."

But Tyler the Tyrant whipped out his wand,
Waved it through the air
As fog waves o'er a pond
"Vickie the Victim deserves more than this,
She'll have that meal,
The cops will get it quick!"

Dina the Dispatcher offered a shrug
She called in the squad, ordered,

“Go squash that bug!”

The Pliant Police stormed through the door,
Punched Chester in the gut,
Pushed him onto the floor

“What’s this about?” Chester inquired

“Cook Vickie that meal,
Do it now!” they replied

“She won’t to pay,” said the chef,
“And I’m low on funds,
Low on materials; I’ve given enough.”

“She won’t pay? Is that what you say?”
The Pliant Police chuckled,
“Cook that meal anyway!”

They smashed his forehead onto the grill
The forlorn man yelped,
“Stop! Alright, I will!”

Vickie the Victim, again, got her food
Kicked feet onto the counter,
Ungrateful and rude

The Pliant Police chained the chef to his wall-
The wall Chester had pounded-
So he couldn’t leave at all

Tyler the Tyrant spoke in the phone,
“Are you satisfied, Vickie?
Do I have your vote?”

“Of course,” the freeloader replied with a grin
“Please always make sure
I’m the one to win.”

“This isn’t fair!” Chester cried out
But Vickie just smiled
To showcase her doubt

Willie the Witness turned down his eyes,
Sipped on his soda,
Tucked away his despise

Mackenzie Yeoman

Middle School Poetry

Softball

I cannot wait to go outside,
To try the new field on the far side.
The field is calling my name,
But brother trashed the house so I was to blame.

I cannot believe that rat,
I would have been able to try my new bat.
The new gloves I got would have been spick and spam,
While he sleeps quietly dreaming of lambs.

I sat angrily in my room,
Thinking about what I would do.
But I'm only grounded for a week,
So next week I'll set a new batting streak!

Sara Younis
High School Poetry

Untitled

All these thoughts about you gave me

Closer from the cold,
Warmth from your heart,
All of 2 am in the morning: all the words I never got to say

And I thought
Taking a bullet through the heart,
It was never only a physical thing.

The struggle
To breathe,
To maintain a constant heart rate

To unlit the burning sensation in my chest
And all that. Just by thinking about you.

I'm drowning in the thoughts of you,
And yet I do not want to be saved,

I can never be what you really need,
To be physically there when you needed help

And not a face on a screen
Or letters on an electronic device,
But to be giving you a hug rather than a smile.

Deep inside your eyes,
I could see the pain covered with your smile.

I despise how most of us only
See the surface and not what's under it
I despise how looks are so deceiving.

I wanted you to know
I'll do whatever it takes to make you happy.
To take you away from the pain you bared
And be the light to your tunnel.

But most importantly,
Know that you're much loved.



*Short
Story*

Mallory Carvalho

Sean Cridland

William Culbreth

Oriana Delcid

Jeanine Diehl

Robert Evans

Maria Feil

Angelica Fuller

Nicolle Guerrero

Alison Hartford

Averee Heinlen

Chisato Jacobson

Sariyah Jerome

Alexandria Jo

Sheen Kim

Isabel Mendez

Christian Millecam

Arianna Rosas

Cassidy Rotschenk-Kaliski

Elyeah Schweikert

Rebecca Yokoi

Leelo Yutuc

Mallory Carvalho
Middle School Short Story

Taking Her Hand-Revision

It all started when Tianna told me about Brianna and Kaytlain. Once I understood, I stamped to Emma. Before I approached her, I glimpsed that she was reading my emailed letter that said how much I loved her. I would miss that feeling of warmth but it was for the best.

“Brat,” I said into her crisp ear. I could see she perfectly understood me and she read the last words of the letter and ripped it into pieces and threw it into the trash. Addy looked around the cafeteria and followed Emma to the courtyard.

“It was for the better,” Tianna said behind me. “Now maybe you can have a chance with someone else.” She said. I wasn’t in the mood.

“NO! I am not going to date anyone else. You ruined me. My relationship. My heart. Now go away. I wish you could become a ghost in my life!” I said and ran into the boys stalls. I locked myself in the third one and put my feet onto the toilet. Drops of water poured from my face to the toilet bowl.

“Grant?” A voice said. Justin. Slams banged the stall sides and I knew Justin was looking for me. My feet didn’t show so he wouldn’t know right away what stall I was in. Then he approached the stall I was in. “Grant. I know you are in there. You never tie your shoe so the lace is dangling and it’s purple. Your favorite color.”

“My life is ruined all because of Tianna. She always finds the littlest specks of life and makes them big deals. I lost her!” I said and started water falling again. I clicked the stall door open and came in front of Justin.

“Dry those tears! Men don’t cry!” Justin said and grabbed two paper towels from the disposable canister and flicked them to me.

“Men?” I said and we both broke out laughing.

“Grant, please at least try to do the worksheet!” Mrs. Woods said and handed me my pencil that I had no intention on picking up.

“Woods? May I go to the bathroom?” I said avoiding the worksheet. I was thinking I was a master at dodging all and any work.

“As long as you promise to me to do your worksheet and homework. I really like you as a student Grant and I want you to pass 7th grade with all of your friends. This is supposed to be an easy class. I don’t like seeing my students twice!” Mrs. Woods said and it seemed to me she was pleading.

“Yah, yah!” I said and left the room. I didn’t really want to accept the promise but I knew I had to some way or another.

Emma might’ve taken the news a little harsher... as I thought. I logged onto Instagram and Emma changed her username from GJlovr4eva to 4evaAlone.

I guess she took the news significantly bad. I wouldn’t have ever thought that she would take the news so harshly. I mean, yah, it might’ve been for the better, but, that felt like a stab in the heart to see the username change in a matter of days.

“So how did you take the username change?” A voice said behind me. Justin came over after school to work on handling my problems with EmSter.

“EH. Not the worst, but, still ‘a stake in the heart’” I said and shut my Mac.

The only reason I had a Mac was because of Garrett, my brother from a different mother. He’s one of my least favorite relatives but, he is the wealthiest.

Last Christmas, I asked for a MJP90Y (Which is a video game console that costs about 5000 bucks) and what I got from Garrett was a Mac. It was the newest and greatest of all of the Macs.

“And I’m guessing Emma took the news the hardest?” Justin said and flumped on my bed. “For all I know, she is weeping on her bedside listening to Taylor Swift,” Justin said. It didn’t take long for him to evaluate that response. “My sister, Cennia, did that exact thing when Swacka Wacka, or Braden New, broke up with her about a week ago..... ABOUT A WEEK AGO!!” And then Justin started breaking out into song.

“God no! NO NO NO NO! Justin, ha, please, ha, stop, ha-ha!” I said. I started laughing. “Bae you guessed! Hou! Yous right.” I said. Then we started saying lines from the app Vine.

Justin cheered me up that day he started singing and we were saying famous lines from Vine. But, it didn't make me feel any better than to want to apologize to Emma.

"Mom. I am going over to my friend's house. I will be back in 4 hours. Love you!" I yelled. Mom usually didn't mind that I was leaving. As long as I told her.

"Okay honey. Just be back in time to be here for dinner. I will be setting it up at 5 so be back by then. Love you!" She yelled back up the stairs from her room.

I smiled and ran out the door. I grabbed my bike and biked all the way to Elmer Park Way and turned.

"Emma lives on Berkley Ohio. That's just a few blocks away," I whispered to myself. I wasn't out of breath, but it felt like I was.

"Ohio, Ohio!" I sang to myself. That helped me memorize where Emma lived.

In no time at all, I was set at Berkley Ohio. "That's her house." I said softly. I walked my bike all the block to get to her house to make the sweat go away and catch my breath. "I can do this. I am man." I say and drop my bike and approach Emma's house.

Ring Rong.

"Umm, hi. I am one of Emma's friends. May I talk to her please?" I said all hesitant.

Riley. Riley Hamilton. She was the hot-top nerd at Tusla Junior High School. Jocks asked Riley to do their homework, which in fact, were usually two-weeks already late.

When dances were held at night, Riley was never present. All students knew she was reading Athens, studying for the test next week, or learning algebra 2.

Sometimes, I feel sorry for Riley because she never gets asks out on dates. She will probably have her first kiss when she is 80. Not at all being rude, though.

"Hey Ry!" I say and pat Riley on her back. She turns around and looks at me. I stop and look at her too.

"Why are you suddenly being nice to me? And don't call me Ry, Grant Liam Johnson!" Riley says. She seems mad.

"Uh, wait! How do you know my full name? Oh, never mind. I'm also being nice because you seem to not have many friends. Maybe The Book of Athens is your friend!" I say and quickly wish to take it back.

"That's rude and offensive! I can violate you." Riley says and walks to class.

“You know, I didn’t mean it that way!” I yell. I continue to walk to science.

“Okay class! Please switch papers. Last night’s homework,” Mrs. Woods says and grabs her Teacher Key. “Grant, do not trade with Justin because from past experience, you draw weird vampire sketches on Justin’s paper.” She says. I look at Justin and laugh.

I look around class to find someone to trade papers with.

William? No, he drools and doesn’t pay attention.

Riley? No, she raged on me and will give me an F.

Emma? She is going to trade with Chase.

Addy. Addy. Addy. She hates me but, won’t flunk me on this assignment.

“Hey, Addy? Will you trade with me?” I ask and extend my arm to give her the paper.

“No. I’m trading with Emma. Riley is open.” Addy says and points to Riley.

“Thanks.” I say and head over to Riley’s direction. I should be ready to be flunked on this pre-quiz.

“Yah, yah. I will trade with you.” Riley says and gives me her paper.

Once I got my paper back, Riley marked 5, 6, and 7 down because my vowels looked like death figures.

“May I please have my paper back?” Riley asks. I dazed off.

“Yes.” I say and hand back her paper.

“Okay class, scores! In alpha order by last name.” Mrs. Woods says and gets the grading score paper.

“10/10,” Jessica Abrams says. She has to say it twice because she is the quietest in the grade. “10/10.”

“7/10.” Lilly Beau screams so she doesn’t have to say her score twice like Jessica Abrams. Also, that was her personal best. She was supposed to be in the eighth grade but, she got held back.

Many students passed and then it was my turn.

“Grant Johnson.” Mrs. Woods says.

“Umm... 6/10.” I say. I got a passing grade but, to Riley it was a flunk grade. The class made comments.

“Okay.” Mrs. Woods says. Then the bell rings. I scrunch up my paper, throw it out, and walk out of class. I head to math and then see a new chick by my locker.

Kendal Smith wrote on her paper Sexi Smith. She thinks she is

sexy. The teachers wouldn't let her write Sexy Smith on her paper. So, she wrote Sexi. She pronounces it in a Japanese accent.

"Derek is a female dog. He should choke and die from eating a bowl of carrots!" I hear Sexi telling Addy and Emma about her ex.

"Kendal!" Riley says and then gets back to reading Beau and Jaq on a High Adventure.

"Okay, I know you are all goody two-shoes and all, but at least call me Sexi. That is for you Nick, Michael, Jaiden, Lilly, and Jessica!" Sexi says pointing to all of the people. They were all in that class and were like Riley.

Emma passed a note down and Addy read it and giggled. What could it be about? Usually Addy and Emma paid attention in Math.

"Psst!" Addy whispered to me. She handed me the note and I snatched it from her hand. It read;

Grant, Grant, Grant
No one cares about you
Because you are a slant

As silent as you aren't
Don't take this the wrong way
But, you need a warrant

Was this really what Addy and Emma were laughing about? It was cruel, mean, and actually poetic.

"You know this is cruel and mean!" I whisper to Emma. All I wanted to do was duplicate that letter and give it to Chase and tell him how horrible of a person Emma is.

Mr. Rowe handed us a paper titled why did the retail buyer get mad? It was one of the homework worksheets that you needed to solve problems to solve the joke.

"Mr.? Can we have two days to do the homework so Riley has enough time to do my....." Matthew says. We all know that he was going to have Riley do his homework. Mr. Rowe knew that Matthew was going to have Riley do the worksheet.

"Nope. One day." Mr. Rowe says. He luckily didn't freak.

During the whole math period, I was thinking why Emma

would write such a cruel thing? She was the one that kinda broke up with me!

“Eyes on your own work, Johnson,” Mr. Rowe said. I wasn’t talking but I was trying to butt into Emma and Addy’s conversation which I think involved me. “Emma, Addy. Same goes to you.”

“Yes, Mr.” I said and tried to concentrate. But the equation $6n+13-n=43$ wasn’t making me go berserk, Emma was making me go berserk!

Throughout the whole day, distraction on top of eight other distractions didn’t make me swim. It was the feeling on the note that made me swim. All day I was thinking I need to get to Emma, I need to get to Emma; I need to get to Emma. That’s what kept me afloat all day.

The next period I had with Emma was U.S Natural History. It was the boring class of the day. It ended my day, also.

Emma arrived and I ran to her. “Why? Why those words? Why that poem? Why?” I said. She looked around and didn’t say a chirp quickly.

“Heres your go Snicks. My evil twin, Erma, comes to town 4 times a year. You got yourself in luck and she helped me make you go to hell,” She said and pointed to me when she said hell. “Lil’ Erma told me you were a d-bag and helped write that ugly poem. I made it look I wrote it.” She said and smiled deeply. I remember watching an episode of Glee with her and the episode talked about a cheerleader saying she had an evil twin named Snicks and when something happened, she blamed it on Snicks. I knew where she was going with this.

“I know you very, very well. You have no twin. You made that because you were so upset about how the way I broke up with you. Take the blame, and deal with it!” I said. Erma maybe was real, but not in my world.

“Fine, you caught on. You remember watching that episode of Glee with me and went back to Sensing Ville. Just remember that you don’t get what you always want.” Emma said and that ended the horrific conversation. We would never again have a real conversation again.

Sean Cridland
High School Short Story

The No Way Inn

It was September 20th. Location: Munich Germany. It was the first day of Oktoberfest. I have been waiting all year for this event. I arrive around two in the afternoon and drink until sundown. It's about time to leave. I call for a taxi and get a ride to the hotel. There weren't many hotels with vacancy, so I had no choice but to pick this one. The "No Way Inn."

The building's a bit strange. Made up of blocks covered in spider webs. The front sign was broken and the lights were burned out. There is not one person in sight. When I enter, I notice how messy and un-maintained the hotel really is. Rugged rugs, slimy ceilings, dust covering everything in sight. There's no light to be found, just candles hanging from the walls and dangling from the ceilings. I hear a noise, a creaking sound. A man, who seemed to be in his 30's, walks down some stairs to the side. He greets me. A polite man. Just a normal guy, working at a dump like this. He goes over to the counter and checks me in. There's no computer, just a book full of names. As he finishes, he hands me key. It reads "13-1." I thank him; pick up my bags, and head over to the elevator. It's a metal box, with a metal cage surrounding it. I walk in and notice that there are only 3 buttons. L for lobby, B for basement (which requires a key), and 13, for the 13th floor. This place just keeps on getting more and more "odd," but I figure a good night's sleep will help get my head together. I press the '13' and head up. It starts slowly with a rickety sound. It then accelerates, moving faster and faster rocking back and forth repeatedly, and then it stops. I fly upward and slam back down. My head hit pretty hard. With a headache and feeling a bit dizzy, I slowly rise to my feet again, trying to keep my balance. I stumbled out of the elevator and, coincidentally, see my room right in front of me. Rusty metal door with spider webs across the top. I walk to the door and try to open it. It won't budge.

After a little bit of struggling, I finally force the door open. As I enter, the door slams behind me, all by itself. It's dark, pitch black even. There's the tiniest of light against the wall. It's a light

switch. I turn it on and in shock... notice a couch in the middle of the room. It's a nice place to relax. But then I smell something, brutal, horrifying, getting worse and worse by the second. There's oddly no window, so I can't let the smell out. What kind of hotel has no window? I go to relax on the couch when the smell is even worse than before. It's coming from behind me, in the bathroom. The maids must have forgotten to clean it. I get up and head over to the stench, to see how bad it really was. As I enter, I notice that the bathroom is completely clean, spotless. But the smell is just horrible, worst smell of my life. I look over towards the shower, Bulls eye. I go over, slide the curtain to the side, and then jump back in horror.

A body, nude, covered in blood and exposed organs. The shower walls, the tile, all stained in blood. I make a run for it to my room's door. When I get there, I notice there's no door handle. There's then a different smell that fills the room. I turn around, and notice that there's a green smoke spraying from the corners of the walls. I bang on the door, yelling and screaming, hoping I'll somehow be saved. There's a sudden maniacal laugh. It sounds like the man who check me in, but it couldn't be, right? I sit in the middle of the room, hoping to stay from range of the gasses, awaiting death. I then see something. It looks to be a button, under a flap in the carpet. Since I'm in the worst situation even thinkable, I decide to press the button. A trap door released under me, making me fall into a dark abyss of terror and horror. I land on an old rusty slide. On the way down, I see human bones and skulls, buried into the dirt around me. I slide down for what seemed to be forever, until, it finally ended, falling onto a cold concrete floor, entering a haunted house where there is no hope for escape.

As I slam against the ground, I hit my head and pass out. Next thing I know, I'm lying on the ground, and my leg hurts like hell. I attempt to get up but fall back down. The room's dark, only lite by a furnace, on the other side of the room. It smelt like flesh, like I smelled in the room, only a lot worse. The room was covered with operating tools and tables. Each one with a deceased body on top. I attempt to lift myself again. This time, I get up and fall back on to something soft and squishy. I look back and, with the little light I have, see, that I am on a pile of dead corpses. Males, females, children, the elderly. I jump up in fear, and shout from the pain of my leg. Then, following my yell was another noise. It sounded like a creek. The same one that the elevator makes. Thinking the man probably heard me and is

heading down, I limp to the darkened corner and cower behind a table. The elevator comes down from above and stops. The man walks out. I could just see the outline of his face. I stare at him. He seemed oddly familiar. A man who I've once seen before. As the light of the furnace hits only the left side of his face, I see... a man. THE MAN, who checked me into the hotel. How did I not think of it to be him to begin with?! It was right there in front of me! He looks to the left, then to the right, and stops in my direction. I think he knows I'm there. He can smell my fear. He starts walking the other way. I let out a sigh of relief.

He walks toward the furnace and stops, right behind a pile of bodies. There's around 12 bodies give or take, soulless and emotionless. He opens up the furnace and throws the bodies in, one-by-one. I can hear the scream of the deceased, of what used to be, a father, a mother, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, son, and daughter. He throws in the last bodies, and closes the furnace. It's dark once again. I can't see anything, even my own hand right in front of my face. A door opens and closes and once again, the man is gone. I breathe out with a sigh of relief. Something then crawls up my hand. I jump up in fear. What could it be? A spider, a rodent of some sort, a rat even? I stand still, trying to silence the commotion I have caused. A couple seconds past and there's no sound. Something now grabs my shoulder, pulling me back. A light appears, a lantern, being held by the man I have seen some minutes earlier. The same man who runs this "hotel." I try to fight his hand, clenched against my shoulder. I run out of energy quickly from all this fear and intensity, which I have felt. He picks me up and slams me against the furnace. He opens the furnace door, grabs me by the neck and forces my head toward the flame from hell. As I could feel my hair start to light up, a loud commotion occurred from above. The ground and walls shook as if there was a giant earth quake. The man and I drop, causing the door to slam shut and the lantern to fall, breaking on impact. It's then silent and, again, the room is filled with complete, and udder, darkness.

William Culbreth

High School Short Story

The Detour

As our horses galloped through the frozen snow, I could feel the heat rise off their bodies. The warmth collided with the icy air while the horses whinnied breathlessly. A chilly wind whistled past us as the white blanket crunched under their hooves. The coldness bit my skin. My fingers were getting numb as I gripped the reins. Icicles like frozen daggers attacked my chapped, dry mouth. On this winter afternoon, a full moon rose in the dark sky illuminating the landscape. Bare trees like wooden sentries stood at attention. The scent of burning birch logs hung in the air. My thoughts turned to what we would find when we reached our destination.

Finally, the stone towers of the castle, loomed in front of us. After we solemnly crossed the massive drawbridge, we entered a huge cross-timbered hall. Gigantic wooden shields and metallic weapons hung from its white washed walls. The room was full of tables where men lay sleeping in front of overturned pewter goblets that spilled mead on the bare rock floor. Suddenly, an elderly figure with a short white beard, wearing a long, red, fur trimmed cape appeared. A shiny gold crown glistened on his head. He questioned me with an aggressive tone, “Who are you, stranger?” I replied that I was a warrior from the land across the fiord. Then the king addressed me again, “Why did you come here?” I explained that I had heard the news about the monster who attacked his village and that I had come to help. The eyes of the leader brightened with recognition and he bellowed excitedly “I am so glad you have come. We were seeking an audacious soul to defeat the monster that has his vicious grip on my kingdom!”

That evening, we joined the villagers as they lay snoring loudly in hay on the crude floor of a big, dark, stuffy barn. A smoky campfire kept us warm; the wood crackled comfortingly as a fierce wind howled outside. As I lay on a timber surface on the cold and airless second floor, I could not sleep because of the wheezing of the sleeping crowd. Suddenly, the sound of splintering doors startled me. I groped around my perch stealthily.

All of a sudden, I heard a voice below scream fearfully that the monster had stormed into the shed. I rushed towards the ladder and clambered down a few feet onto the ground, where I immediately came face to face with horror.

This enormous monster was covered with scruffy brown hair. Half man/half beast, he had razor-sharp wolf teeth, elongated arms, and long, curved, keen-edged claws like a vulture. A leather waistband encircled his awesome girth. The creature stared down at me, and asked me who I was with a loud, deep, froglike voice. I stated my identity and made my demand that he cease his reign of terror. I pulled my pointed polished sword out of my scabbard and I dashed like lightning to attack the beast. In response, he swung one arm and delivered a severe blow. I immediately dropped with a thud onto the dusty ground. My sword flew out of my hands like a mouse scurrying away in fright from danger. However, I managed to backtrack and grab the bejeweled hilt. Then, I rebounded waving my saber wildly. The monster recoiled as my weapon sliced his kneecap as if were dicing a vegetable. Then, he seized my body with one bare hand as he withdrew a dagger from his waistband with his other. The creature gripped me effortlessly as though I were a doll. I squirmed and flailed. Fortunately, I finagled my way to slide away from his grasp. Once again, I swung my weapon and succeeded in piercing his torso. With that blow, the monster collapsed in a pool of blood and died. Triumphant, I rose and held up his dagger. I displayed the trophy to the gathered villagers as I roared, "My subjects, do not fear anymore, the fearsome, monstrous creature is defeated! Behold the proof of his demise!" The group of villagers was amazed at my strength and audacity, and they cheered in unison elatedly. The sound echoed through the castle like thunder. From the far corner of the crowded mead-hall, the king, attired in regal finery, appeared through a massive timbered doorway and exclaimed, "Thank you! Because of your brave and noble deed, the people of my kingdom can live with no fear!" As I basked in their praise, I silently reflected on the events that led me to this point. I secretly worried that perhaps fate would be less kind to me in my next battle; for, life creates many detours and that there is no guarantee that they will end successfully.

Oriana Delcid

Middle School Short Story

Lorieve

The sky was bright blue with a tiny yellow circle of light in the sky that's what Lorieve used to look that was before the infection spread and before every human turned on each other. Now the skies are full of torcher and hate clouds filled with darkness and no sign of light. There used to be hope in Lorieve but I wonder. Where did that all go? Those who survived the infection like me are lucky but have yet to find out.

It's just me Blossom a 12 year old girl who has yet to see the world. With a small German Shepard puppy named Fenix who looks at the world as a game. Sometimes I wonder if my parents are still alive. Or if they are gone? But I will never stop trying to find them no matter what exhaustion or pain abounds I just need to keep faith that they are still alive. But the infection is by far the worst of my worries. This infection spreads like no other than anyone has ever seen before, by contact, once you touch the next victim you start to feel sick nauseas and like your hallucinating. Once that happens you feel invincible and like you want to terminate someone. Although I've only been here in Critan for half of my life I know this. You will never escape Lorieve unless you stay want to stay in your house for the rest of your life. Both Lorieve and Critan have a weakness but their only weakness is the smell of vinegar. You see vinegar is one of the many ingredients to this virus that has led people to terminate each other. One of the many things that drive them crazy but it also has the effect of driving them off. Although there are a few rumors of survivors stories have been told and legends have been said for generations of a man named the Mystery no one has ever seen him in about 1,000 years but we can imagine what he looks like so the nickname given to him became the Warlock. They say he has the brains of all knowing genius with many intelligent characteristics, a tall man with thrifty clothes, swift like movement and a squared jaw. Oh and let's not forget the amazing gadgets! Well he's been alive pretty much ever since this whole infection started. This is my one opportunity to find my parents with his help. But to get to where he may be I have to pass Lorieve.

“C’mon Fenix”. As soon as I leave my house there is a cat staring at me as if I’m some sort of toy? Its neon green eyes dark midnight fur with a pinch of brown swiftly moving from one side of the yard to the other. I leave the cat and keep walking when it jumps on my face and claws at my frightened brown eyes. “Get off of me, get off!” I shout but then cover my mouth faster than lighting as I see 2,000 more or so deranged infected people running towards me with hammers knives and what looks like a basket? I call to Fenix “get this cat off of me Fenix! Help would you!?” He just stands there in silence drawn to the deranged people. The cat finally jumps out of my eyes as they burn as though they were being lit up by fire. I grab Fenix and run back into the house when a force field appears? It sends me flying backwards when I smack the red brick wall head first. The last bit I see is a tall man in thrifty black clothes? He or she yells and says “run would you? Run!!” I just lay there helpless as I let the dark overtake me give one last breath.

I wake up in what I think is a laboratory? It’s well lit with white walls and a black ceiling. I turn to look at my arm. It is a robot arm? “Ahhhh! What have I gotten myself into?” I say. A man appears and laughs as he says “you’re pretty good to survive all of that?” “Yes perhaps I am” I say “But how am I lucky again?” “You were hit by 20 deranged people or more” the man says. He then explains to me the powers he has given to me so that I would survive the attack. “Step into the light” I say. “Your... you’re the warlock!” “Yes I am” he says. “You can help me find my parents then!!!” I say. He then gives me a dark look where I know I’m good as gone! “I need something from you and you need something from me.” “So I will help you only if you follow through with the deal” he says with a grim smile. “Well what’s the deal then?” I say. He walks with a slow motion and turns ever so slightly and whispers to me “the head of Cybeast the Destroyer.” “Yes but I have a few questions”. “Where can I find him, which way do I go, and how hard is he?” “Well first I must train you” He says. “Just tell me how to control it!” I say.

AFTER THREE MONTHS OF TRAINING

“Alright I’m ready!” I say. He tells me to follow the Jangerians and throws me an enormous electric charged weapon as I spin it on the finger of my robot arm. Jangerians are large creatures that u can sometimes use for a ride and they are always looking for creeks such as turquoise creek to where I’m heading for Cybeast the Destroyer’s head. I grab a piece of rope and

jump onto a Jangerian and off I go. A couple 200 miles or so I find immensely humungous footsteps covered in red. "This is the Beast is foot prints I'm sure of it". As I follow the foot prints and leave the Jangerian tied to a thick block of wood 3,000 miles away I can see what looks like a creek? I finally get to the creek and spot a creature like no other! He turns around and says "Who goes there?" It frightens me how enormously huge this beast is and how hard this is going to be. I charge at the beast with full force getting the energy stored inside of me ready. When the unthinkable happens! He grabs my legs lifts me up and says "Hello dinner".

The beast sits me on a rock and says "so tell me who you are making a deal for now huh?" I keep my head down as he yells "Answer me!" wouldn't want you to be my dinner now would you?" Because I got a nice steaming pot for fresh food." "I was sent here on behalf of the Warlock" I shout. "Ah yes" he says ever so slowly. Many people need my head for the unthinkably disastrous plans they have." He says. "I made this deal with him only to find my parents". I say with a trembling voice. "Alright ill make you a deal sweetheart". "You will become a beast like me for the rest of your life." "Yes or no?" "Will I ever be able to get out of being a beast?" I say. He turns is head and says very slowly "no". There was a long pause. "I suppose I will be a beast then if it means finding my parents!" Great choice! I changed into a beast in an instant as I looked at myself I had thick fur a hard steel eye and the ugliest monster you have ever seen.

As I set out on my journey I got to Lorieve and headed for the hospital hoping to see if my parents were there or had left. That was the last place I saw them because when this whole thing started they were injured from a terrible car accident. I headed for the 5th floor finding my mother lay still as water on the ground and my father on his last breaths. I rush over to him and say "dad?" with the deep accent of this beastly voice. He stares at me and says "Blossom?!" "Stay with me dad you're going to be fine, everything's going to be alright, you don't have to worry now because I'm hear and ill protect you!" "You've always been the light of me and your mother". "Never forget how special you are". As he takes his final breath I lay him down and put a rose from the creek next to him. I look at my mom and say "I love you". Put a rose on her chest and lie next to both of them. "What have I done? All of this and now it's too late". I close my eyes and let the deranged people overtake me.

Jeanine Diehl
High School Short Story



Fragile Life

Life is a fragile thing. It can be taken at any moment, whether by one's own hand or another's. Death is an eternal existence in which everything one knows to be true comes crashing down. Every person wants to be remembered, to know that they had a purpose here on this earth. Life is not ours to keep. We are all pieces in a game, all part of a story. In order for the story to be complete, some people have to die, some things have to happen. Whether the time we are here is short or long, we are here for some reason or other. We all come with a programmed purpose; once we fulfill that purpose, we are no longer needed. Suicide is a form of feeling the effects of Time. If you serve no purpose, then what is the use of being alive? What people don't realize when someone commits suicide, is that to a depressed person, suicide seems to be the only way out. People who commit suicide do not want to die. They just want to end their pain. My name is Zachary Grey, and I remember the night I took my last breath.

January 5, 2006, was a cold and heartless existence of Time. On that night, I wrote my final words. I reached for the rope I had saved for months, on which I had tied and retied the loop that would be my death. As my shaking hands fumbled with the rope, I noticed that my scarred red arms appeared to look purple in the moonlight. Taking one last look at the world in which I did not belong, with a look full of anguish, the moon looked back with an expression filled with peace. After tying the rope to the ceiling, and as I stepped off the chair I remembered my childhood self-running across the golden meadow to give my grandfather a hug. As children's voices screamed with laughter, the sunshine reflected off the sunflowers crowning the meadow with everlasting glory, my fading life grasped at that last dying memory.

While I was growing up, I was always forgotten. By age seventeen, I had surrounded myself with friends who wouldn't care if one day I wasn't there. I disappeared in the crowd, but somehow always stood out to the bullies who were always around. Bashed and bruised at home and at school, I felt that the whole world was

against me, and I was giving up on life. College was around the corner, and that was stressful enough without my dad trying to plan my future.

Parents and teachers expected too much of me. With all my time devoted to school work, that's not how I wanted my life to be. I had always been a quiet person, smart and caring, but the weight of the world had been too strong on my slim shoulders. I couldn't bear to have my heart shattered once again, so I began to shut the world out. Being a tall teenage boy whose eyes were dark hollow sockets in a pale face, they held tears that were always threatening to fall. I hid away from the world behind my dark hair that framed my agony filled face. Slim from starving myself, I wore a hoodie to cover my deep scars. Beaten up and bruised, I felt like I couldn't go on in this big cruel world.

As time wore on, I saw the meaning of life dribble out onto the grains of sand. Reminding myself that I'm one in a million, that my problems are some of the thousands of which have no significant importance. What would be the difference if one day I just ceased to exist? I knew that if I killed myself, I would never get to experience all that comes with growing old. I knew that I would never get to graduate, find love, begin a family, experience the joy and hardships of starting a new life, and waking up every morning to begin a new day. But what the world had engrained into my mind as a perfect life, was a lie. There is no happily ever after. There is no real security in life. The cycle of life never ends, one thing ends, another begins. They say that every end is a new beginning, but the new beginning is just a side effect of what has just ended.

When I was little, I remember going down to Grenyard's Beach with my grandmother to watch the seagulls fly and the everlasting tide go in and out. Maine always had a slight chill in the wind, which added to the mysteriousness of the murky rocky beach. I'd always loved going to that solitary shore, it was so quiet there that one could hear the beat of the ocean. Once grandma died, that was the only place I could go to scream and cry, the temptation of drowning in the bottomless water was never ending. The seagulls screeched their songs of freedom, calling my soul to break free and fly away with them.

As news of my death began to circulate around to everyone who knew me or my family, people began to offer their condolences, saying over and over again how sorry they were. Most were never sincere. I became an embarrassment to my family. The church shunned them, and the school used my death as a

warning to other kids saying 'it' was a selfish act, that 'it' is such a disgrace. My family closed the door to my room; the haunting memory of my limp body hanging from the ceiling to unbearable to handle. Trying to forget that I existed was a constant effort.

I hadn't been around long in my short life, but I'd always felt that I was a bother just by being alive. Teachers and parents cleared out what I had left behind, making more space for what I hoped was someone new and better. Looking down on the world I left behind, I sometimes watch the human race and all that they go through. Sometimes I can feel the deep remorse and sadness that people feel deep down in their souls. I watch as their loved ones die, as a widow's only child dies from starvation, as a gallant soldier dies in battle, and sometimes a thought crosses my mind that makes me feel that how and why I died was.....foolish. Maybe killing one's self for reasons that are actually temporary or for problems that seem hopeless and despairing isn't always the answer. Every experience we have and every choice we make in life defines who we are. Molding us into who we become. Although life can be terribly cruel at times, life can be okay. Though we all have a part in the story, maybe if one fulfills their purpose in life, they can be of service to others. As I watch life move on from where mine left off, I see how circumstances changed, discovering that there was a sun behind those dark stormy clouds. If you're feeling like letting go, just know that everything will be okay in the end. If it's not okay, then it's not the end.

Robert Evans
High School Short Story

And Suddenly Love

Two dark figures hustled quickly through the rain to the shelter of the roof of the locked building. The dark rain poured all around and their breath slowed and the fog pooled around them, the signs of their fading breath dissipated into the night sky as the moon shines a dull fading white. The streets were desolate and empty such as Chernobyl was after its nuclear catastrophe. The wind carried raindrops to their huddled faces as they kissed their cheeks and the wind continued to carry them away onto a green leaf as it trickled down and rippled into a small puddle underneath.

The only heat was that of the two huddled together for warmth in a tight corner as breathing every breath as though it were their final, dying breath. The male was dressed in a nice suit and pea coat jacket while the girl next to him was a spitting image; their hair was matted and wet from the harshness of the wind and rain. Then the boy took the girl into a deep hug as they embraced each other as if there was nothing else to hold onto.

The rain began to settle and the wind started to slow. Grabbing her face in his hands he kissed her mouth and whispered three words to the young lady; taking them in stride, she repeated them. Just as this occurred the rain stopped and the soft light of a celestial body came through the darkness of the clouds and the wind scuttled to a halt. The two then stood hand in hand and journeyed on for them to be enamored in each other's company.

Maria Feil

High School Short Story

To Be Awakened

I feel the dark atmosphere all around me. It follows me where I go; it mocks me as I live my life. I hate it. I resent it for all of the loneliness that unpleasant aura has brought to me. Ever since I was little, my peers seem to all have this force that repels themselves from me. Maybe it's supposed to be an aide to them in some way. That force stops them from getting to know the lone girl who has been excluded from every group and social clique since she can remember. But what about the girl? What does she get from being rejected by others her age? The answer, regrettably, is an eternal loneliness. Or so it seems, since the girl might just be melodramatic.

“I hate you, you cow.” Ah. The melodious voice of Alondra, a girl who has no boundaries. I stare at her, watching her actions. Would she hit me? Push me? I can handle anything, at least anything that doesn't come out of her mouth. Her physical abuse is easy to ignore. I can close my eyes and bring myself to a place where I can find solace. It saves me, in a way, during her tormenting. But when she speaks, I can't help but hear what she says. Her spiteful words, they have a way of going from my ears to my heart. It creates this poison that seems to kill me from the inside out. And yet, I don't hate her.

“You pig! You have no friends, you lonely loser. No one likes you!” I've been putting up with her horrible comments since third grade. I guess I could be called crazy for not loathing her after all of these years. I don't hate her for one reason, and one reason only: she's the only one who ever talks to me. Alondra shoves me, and I land on my backside, covered in chocolate milk that some ninth grader had previously spilled. “Oops. Sorry, Rikki,” she says in a joking voice, indicating that it was indeed on purpose, contradictory to her words. I get up, soaking wet with my clothes stained brown. “You should get that cleaned. The milk will start smelling,” Alondra says, obviously feeling smug about her actions. I give her one last glare, and I walk away. I decide to go to the school library, my happy place. I go from one hallway to the next, and eventually, I get to the one closest to the library. There, I face an awkward situation. Harley.

“Rikki. Hello there,” she says to me, only greeting me to be polite. I force myself to smile as I reply with, “Hi, Harley.” It’s been years since I last spoke to her. Amazingly, we actually used to be the best of friends. That stopped, however, during the third grade. “How’s Alondra?” And that’s why our friendship ended. Alondra started following me around, choosing me as her next victim. Harley, who, being my best friend, was also always with me, couldn’t handle Alondra’s emotional torture. So, knowing that I’d never be free, she cut ties with me, and we stopped having any communication. The dark, repelling force I mentioned before, that force is Alondra. She won’t be satisfied until she knows for sure that I will always be alone in my own little world. I walk away without answering. I know I was being rude, but I don’t wish to talk about Alondra when it is not needed. Plus, Harley is the one who left me. I don’t owe her anything. I enter the library and wander over to my favorite section of fictional novels is located.

While searching for some familiar authors, the sound of books roughly hitting the gray carpet catches my attention. I turn around so I can face the source of the noise. A boy with eccentric jet black hair is kneeling down, gathering the encyclopedias that had tumbled to the ground. While watching the boy attempt to pick up more books than he could handle, I get down on my knees as well and help him finish clearing the area where the reference books had fallen. He looks up at me, glaring. I glare back, irritated by the fact that he won’t thank me. He seems to understand why I am noticeably annoyed, and he says, “Thank you.” I reply back with, “No problem. My name is Rikki. What’s your name?” He stares at me blankly, then responds by saying, “Excuse me, but I must leave.” He starts to exit the library, and I see my chance to make an actual friend disappear with him. I know that I can’t let my opportunity walk out that door, so I run fast enough to catch up to him but not fast enough to get yelled at by the old, ancient librarian, Mrs. Frano. “Wait!” I say as I grab his arm. He spins around to face me. “What do you want?” he asks me with a sharp tone. I hesitate, startled by the coldness in his expression. The fact that I am unexpectedly dumbfounded seems to infuriate him to an even greater extent. “C’mon girl. What do you want?” The attitude in which he speaks with is beginning to antagonize me. Instead of showing my anger and frustration, I take a few deep breaths to calm down my nerves. I keep a relaxed tone as I ask, “What’s your name?” He glares at me once again, but replies with, “Asher. Now leave me alone.” Despite that horrid first meeting in which he was rude and

heartless, from that moment, a great friendship is beginning to blossom. My first friendship, actually, since Harley. That scares me, to almost an infinite amount. What if I fail? What if he ends up hating me? What...What if Alondra ends up ruining it for me once again? I mean, people do say that history has a tendency of repeating itself. I hope with all of my heart that history does not repeat itself. I need a friend. That's the only thing I need. "Hey, Idiot, who's this in your photo album? Why is she in here so much?" Asher asks me. Today is a Tuesday, and a special one for a certain reason. It's been about a week since I had met Asher in the library, and he came over to my house today for the first time. I look at the picture he is pointing to in my photo album, and I sigh, not wanting to have to explain anything about my past with Harley. He's my friend, though, so I say, "That's Harley. We used to be best friends. But..." "What happened?" he asks. He stares at me, probably not sure how I will react to telling someone about my failed friendship with Harley, a subject that clearly affects me negatively. "Alondra," I reply. He looks at me, confused, and then he asks, "Who?" I think about it, not sure how much information I should give him. I don't want him to run away in fear after learning of how Alondra treats me. I want a friend...no...I need a friend. But is it fair? Is it fair for me to keep him in the dark? To not inform him on how my life is, and how much I suffer? I need a friend, though. This bullying has been getting to me, hurting me more and more day by day.

"Rikki, are you okay?" he asks me. He watches me, not knowing if I'll start crying or just continue to stare blankly at nothing in particular. I sigh and say, "She's a girl...a girl...who's been bullying me for quite some time." At that moment, Asher asks me a touchy question. "What does it feel like, being bullied?" I look at his eyes directly, not breaking the eye contact. "It sucks. You feel hopeless. You feel lonely. You feel useless. When being bullied, you feel many things, and a hundred percent of those feelings are negative. The worst feeling by far is the feeling you get when you hear that soft but deadly voice in your head say, 'Why don't you die already? It's not like you're loved.' When you are bullied, that is the one thing you know for a fact. You aren't loved." After I say all of that, the honest but depressing truth, I expect him to tell me that I am a psycho, walk away, and never speak to me ever again. He does the opposite. "What if I were to love you? Would you be able to overcome this?" I laughed. He didn't. "I don't need your pity," I tell him, my rage increasing with each second that passes. Asher then says, "I think

I have to go home now. Bye, Rikki!” He obviously doesn't know how to respond to what I have said to him. As I watch him leave my house, I try to predict if he will still want to be my friend.

What if he doesn't? What if he is afraid to be near me? What if he thinks I'm so strange? What if?

As these “What if’s” run around all over my brain, making me think and consider every horrendous possibility, I regret what I had said to Asher and hate myself even more. Well, if that is even possible. “Talk to Harley. Ask her about why she ended the friendship,” Asher suggests. I breathe a sigh of relief when I notice that Asher still wants to be near me. “Why?” I ask as I look at him as if he is crazy. He is crazy. Why would I talk to Harley? She hates me!

He smiles a bit of a bittersweet smile as he replies with, “I think part of your depression is because you never got closure. Talk it out with Harley. Do it. She's right over there.” Asher points to where Harley is standing by herself. Because Asher is still speaking to me after I freaked him out with my depressing, practically suicidal talk, I take a deep breath and begin my journey over to where Harley is. “Um...Hi Harley,” I greet her in a quiet voice. She looks at me and responds with, “Oh...Uh... Hey Rikki.” I take another deep breath. “I need to ask you something.” “What?” “Why did you stop being my friend?” As I ask this, Harley wears a confused expression on her face, then she begins to look frustrated. “I miss our friendship!” I guess I have finally reached my breaking point. Yippee. Is my sarcasm obvious? Harley frowns, and I can tell that she feels bad for me. She then tells me, “Sorry, Rikki, but no. I can't. I've moved on.” She then turned her back on me and left to go to the library.

Asher walks up to me and says, “You tried. I'm proud of you!” I stare at him and reply with, “I...I feel my heart breaking. I feel it! How could you suggest that I do such a thing? I feel more pain that I ever have before. Why? Well, maybe because I actually had hope. Up until this point, I had hope that maybe she would want to be my friend once again. But you killed it! You killed the last bit of hope I had left! I hate you!” He looked at me, no sympathy or even pity in his eyes, as he says, “Rikki, you need to wake up. You need to wake up to reality. Wake up, Rikki.” I open my eyes and search my surroundings. Where am I? Then I see familiar faces and I realize something: I am in my third grade classroom. I see Harley and I walk over to her. “Where are Asher and Alondra?” I ask her. She is dumbfounded, completely confused by my question. “Who are they? There's no one here with those names. Did you enjoy your nap?”

Angelica Fuller
High School Short Story



Flat Cakes

It was the soft pitter patter of raindrops on the stone walls that I noticed first. I looked around at the sunshine and the soft blue sky, a scene so beautiful it couldn't be true. And it wasn't. Soon the musty stench of decay overcame me, and I placed my sandwich down beside me on the park bench.

"I'll finish you later," I told my ham and cheese. Typically I go for a more exotic lunch, but there are days when I find myself in need of an old favorite: days like today. I packed up my things and prepared to leave. Looking down at my watch, I saw the time and began to sweat- 1:29. I tapped my watch nervously and began to pray to God for just one more minute. Just one more minute and the sunshine in her hair would light up the park, the laughter in her eyes would fill every dark corner and empty crevice, and the softness of her skin would cover all of New York in a blanket of silk... but I felt the tug. It was time to go.

"5... 4... 3... 2..."

I awoke with a start in my cold damp cell. The rain outside my cell now fell much heavier than before. There was a sort of persistence in the way it beat upon the prison, showering the bricks with such force it seemed that the stones would just collapse. Of course they never do. Of course they never will.

I stayed in that same way, standing on my bed and staring out my tear streaked window, considering the way the rain fell and the actual likelihood that nature's elements would cause the towers to erode and the innocent to be set free. Well... I like to consider myself innocent. I've been in here so long that I can't remember life before this. I don't know what I did before here, where I was before here, or who I was before here.

I like to think it was New York. It's my favorite place to dream. I like to sit on a bench in central park, and watch all the children play. I like to watch the way they all interact, the couples taking walks or having picnics, the families playing catch with

a Frisbee, the dogs just running and running and running...

I like to think it was New York. And I like to think that she is real. The beautiful girl with the sunshine in her hair, whose eyes sparkle with laughter, whose soft skin is epically flawless, whose smile has melted my world on more than one occasion... whose smile was missed today.

"Look... the sky is crying," I mumbled, stroking the glassy surface of the window pane. "I like to think it was New York," I said aloud, talking to the sky like it was her. "I like to think my dreams are real. I like to think that you're still there, sunlight dancing in your hair, laughter shining in your eyes, soft skin gleaming in the bright daylight that forever is and was New York... I like to think it was New York."

"It appears we have a poet in our midst." My head snapped in the direction of the feminine voice and I saw the figure of a woman standing hidden beneath the shadows of the doorway. "And he's one of the good ones, too." In the dark I saw her smile at me, her teeth so white they seemed to glow in the dark. It was such a radiant smile, one of genuine mirth that still had a certain warmth to it. I liked her smile. But it seemed familiar... Cautiously, I lowered myself into a sitting position on my bed. She stepped out of the entryway and into the light where her other features were visible. It was her.

"I'm Lana, your court assigned therapist. They said you'd be expecting me?"

She looked expectantly at me and I realized that I was being awfully quiet. And I was staring. And if I didn't come up with a response soon I was going to look like an idiot. So, out of complete nervousness and without thinking, I spoke.

"You're her," I gaped in wonder. So much for not looking like an idiot, I thought.

"Yes, good, so they did tell you I was coming," she said.

Enchanted by the woman standing there, who was quite literally the girl of my dreams, I began to nod, then realized I actually had no idea what she was talking about and should probably find out what she was doing there in my cell with me.

"Wait, court assigned therapist? What is the purpose of your visit?" I questioned. I mean, sure, I knew I was crazy, but since when did they care?

"Oh, well, basically my job is to provide an overall assessment of your emotional stability and mental health, and see if you qualify for release," she explained.

"Release?" I asked aloud, my eyes wide and bewildered.

“You mean... you mean they want to release me? To let me go?” I was amazed, thinking of all the years I had spent believing I was an innocent. Perhaps now was my chance to live up to that characteristic...

Or perhaps I was a terrible person and didn't at all deserve to leave prison, the possibility of which made me cringe. “Do I even deserve to be released?”

Lana looked me in the eye. “Well, how do you feel? Do you think the things you did warrant forgiveness? Do you believe that you deserve to be released based on who you are and what you've done?”

My gaze shifted uncomfortably. I didn't know what I'd done. I didn't know if my actions were forgivable. I had no sense of identity. I didn't know who I even was. “Well, I'm not sure,” I said cautiously. “In your professional opinion, do you think I deserve to be released?”

“Well, what did you do?”

“I don't know, read the file,” I replied, knowing I probably sounded like a smart-ass and feeling terrible for it. “I mean, the file probably has a less subjective view of the story than I do,” I said carefully, hoping to redeem myself for my seeming rudeness and to provide an explanation for my lack of a response.

“Well, that might have been true... if you had a file,” she said.

I suddenly sat erect in my bed, eyes wide with confusion and excitement. “What? What does that mean? You mean I don't have a file?”

Lana nodded apologetically. “I'm sorry, but there is no record of you at this prison. We have been looking into your case for the last few months, and not a single mention. We have no idea why you're in here. Actually,” she began, looking down sheepishly. “We don't even know what your name is.” She looked up at me, eyes once again expectant, waiting for me to interject my name. When it was clear I had no plan of doing so, she proceeded. “Having no idea as to why you are here, when no record of you exists, we don't know if you are meant to be in here or not. On the one hand, there's no file of your arrest, trial, or imprisonment, so officially, those things probably never happened, which means you are probably innocent. On the other hand, though, you are in a high defense security guarded prison. One does not simply walk into prison and ask for a room. There's probably a reason you're in here. So if you would just be willing to cooperate, I know I can help you,” she said reassuringly,

placing a firm hand on my shoulder.

At this kind, simple gesture, I broke. Tears streamed violently down my cheeks, and I cried, and wept, and whined. “I don’t know,” I sobbed.

“Well, you don’t have to decide right away. Whenever you feel like cooperating,” she began.

“No! You don’t understand,” I continued, weeping with all of my being. “I don’t know who I am.”

Lana’s eyes widened in shock, and we sat in silence for a moment as she assessed the situation in her mind. After a while, she glanced down at her watch and sighed, “Well, it’s getting a bit late for lunch anyway. I might as well cancel...”

“No, you can’t!” I exclaimed, realizing how oddly zealous I sounded about what appeared to be a random woman I’d just met getting lunch. As she arched her brow at me questioningly, I rapidly continued, “Um, well you can’t skip lunch. It’s the most important meal of the day!”

“Breakfast,” she interjected with a laugh.

“Okay,” I continued. “You can have breakfast; whatever you’re in the mood for. I’m sure there are a few places that will serve flat cakes at this hour.”

Lana laughed. “No, breakfast is the most important meal of the day,” she said. “It isn’t lunch.”

“But isn’t it?” I arched my brow. “Think about it. It’s in the middle of the day, perfectly in between the ability to wait a few more hours and the leftover sustenance from a few hours ago. Without it, your day would lag. Lunch takes place at the climax of your day and provides you with the energy you need to fuel you through the rest of your work day.” Lana just giggled and looked at me skeptically. “What I mean by all this is... you can’t skip lunch on my account. Go out. Take your break. Your friends are probably waiting for you.”

“Actually, I typically just eat by myself,” she said. “At the park.”

My heart leapt into my throat. “Well, I’m sure there are other souls in need of your presence. I won’t steal you from them,” I said.

“Alright, I’ll go,” she conceded. “But just know that I’m doing this for you.”

“Then I am very grateful,” I responded lightly. She smiled back at me and walked out of the room. After she left, I mentally slapped myself in the face. The first time I talk to anyone in at least two years and I mess it up, I think. What is wrong with me?

...I guess we'll find out.

Thirty minutes later, there was a knock at the door, and Lana walked briskly in.

"Surprise!" she exclaimed. I looked up with wide, expectant eyes.

"What is it?" I question.

With a grin that spreads from ear to ear, she answers excitedly, "I've brought you flat cakes!"

I laugh appreciatively and thank her for her kindness.

"It was nothing," she shrugged. "After all, lunch is the most important meal of the day, and I'd do anything for my poet." Her poet, I thought, and smiled curiously at her. "Yes, well I don't know what else to call you," she explained, "except maybe flat cakes," she giggled. Finding her sense of humor refreshing, I joined in her laughter.

"I'd prefer you not call me a breakfast food," I chuckled. "Perhaps, something masculine, mysterious," I began.

"Brooding," she input with a smirk.

I gaped. "I'm not brooding."

She laughed, "Well, you're a very complex person, flat cakes."

"Will I ever live this down?" I cried.

"Not for as long as I breathe," she responded. I hung my head in shame. "Cheer up, old boy. There is some good news. We did a scan and we were able to find something on you, though it isn't much, and it's a bit curious, truthfully."

"What is it?"

"We linked you to an identity in the national security data base, but the records have no formal name or description."

"Well, what does it say?" I ask.

"Just one word: doctor," she says. "Pretty weird, eh, flat cakes?"

"Let it go!"

"It's too late. Your name is flat cakes."

"Well, maybe you can call me that. But as for everyone else," I said. "I think the doctor has a nice ring to it."

Nicolle Guerrero
High School Short Story

Stuck in the Never After

Nowhere and oblivion were completely different things...oblivion is when something goes into nothing and nowhere is the place where something can come out of nothing.

-Carlton Mellick III

Something must have happened. I don't know when or why, but something happened. It couldn't have always been this way: running, hiding, searching for something that will forever remain lost because I am afraid I've gotten lost; both mentally and physically.

Where am I? The world is in my view, massive buildings and towering skyscrapers, undersized houses and sunken apartments. But it seems as if the world is abandoned just as it has abandoned me. The streets are coated with trash and sinkholes, shops graffitied with spray paint and aging with dirt and chipped walls. The sun's made it a mission to stay hidden behind the grey clouds that cast shadow over this life. Cars parked in the center of the street and sidewalks, few wrecked into a building or telephone pole, but all vandalized with broken windows and lost owners.

Has it always been this way? I can't seem to remember the difference from yesterday, or the days aforesaid. My mind must be broken because there is no recollection of how long I've been...alive here. The worst part is it's gotten too frighteningly easy being alone, the same howls, same breaths, same routine; wake up, tread the boulevard shouting for aid, scream over the failure before falling into the limbo of my consciousness once the moon arises. And the full moon is forever abiding; last nightfall it's a mystery how I fell asleep but yet my eyes managed to peel open at daybreak. Sometimes I wish they wouldn't. This way staying dead is, in more ways than one, better than living an empty life where there is nobody left to live for. Nobody. All alone.

Can anybody save me?

Alison Hartford
High School Short Story

Welcome To The Mind Of A Less Than Normal Girl

He's all I see. There's nothing else. Only this moment. Only us. Only the sound of my name as it falls from his lips. Allie...

"Allie."

I look back at Stacy Kim, who, judging by the look on her face, has said my name more than once. I become suddenly aware of a slight pain in my right arm and look to the spot where Stacy has poked and prodded me with a pencil in a desperate attempt to drag me out of my dreamy state. I shake my head as if to clear it of daydreams the way a child would clear a drawing from an etch-a-sketch.

"I'm sorry," I stammer, suddenly ashamed. "I'm not... I was just-"

"Staring at Aiden?" she offers blatantly with an amused grin and an arched brow as a warm blush spreads over my cheeks. Noting my blush and lack of a response, Stacy presses onward.

"Sheesh, why do you fuss over him like that?"

"Like what?" I implore sheepishly. Lowering my eyes to my hands folded atop my desk, I turn an awkward shade of pink, as fear makes my insides churn and my outsides pale, and as embarrassment makes my body heat up and my face blush profusely.

"Am I terribly obvious?"

Stacy smiles at me as though I am a child. "Hmmm," she giggles playfully, putting a finger to her chin as though she were pondering some serious question.

"Well, you have a few problem areas, I suppose. Every time he talks to you, you jump out of your skin like you've just been caught robbing a bank, and articulation and eye contact are two areas in definite need of some improvement, but...I think he's too caught up in staring at the back of your head to notice you staring at the back of his."

My face lights up at that last part. "You really think so?" I ask

with childlike hope.

“I have no idea,” she admits, and I feel my earlier brightness begin to falter and dim. It was stupid of me to think she was actually serious. “But, Allie,” Stacy begins.

“Yeah?”

“He’d be stupid not to like you back. You guys are perfect for each other,” she says kindly. “And if you’re not... well, he’s just a boy.”

I appreciate her pep talk and all, but she is so wrong. Aiden Jesperson is far from “just a boy.” Aiden Jesperson is like the god of the 10th grade; every guy wants his approval and every girl wants his affection (and his last name). At this moment, though, all I want is my “wife,” Tori Palmer, who is away in New York with the band for the Macy’s Day Parade. In addition to being super sweet and hilarious, she is also seated right behind Aiden Jesperson, which makes him feel that whatever conversation I have with Tori is his conversation as well. Of course, it’s a bit terrible to be constantly put into situations where I can’t form sentences, but it’s also adorable that he’s so interested in my conversations anyways.

Just a week ago, I strutted over to Tori’s desk, ready to share with her my pain caused by some stupid football players.

“Wifey,” I had whimpered, “I need you to beat up some football players for me.” No sooner had these words escaped my lips when all of a sudden Aiden Jesperson whipped around in his seat and said with great heroism, “I’ll beat up anyone for you.” Wow. That was just...wow. I was not expecting that, I mean... wow. I tried to think of some witty or flirtatious response, and there are so many things that I thought of saying; they just sucked. Really, though, they were bad. The first thing I thought of was, “Me too. I mean for you. Except probably not, because I’m weak and not good at fighting people.” That was the first thing I thought of, and from there, it couldn’t have gotten worse. The next few were relatively okay I think, at least by comparison. They were like, “Really? That’s so sweet,” or “Oh, you’re just saying that,” or “You’d do that for me?”

I especially liked that last one: “You’d do that for me?” It seemed flirty in a way that could be joking or sweet, which I liked because it didn’t sound too desperate or too impersonal. So that was it, that’s what I decided I wanted to say. But instead, what I actually said was this: “Yeah, umm... That’s the floor!” I exclaimed, and I even pointed at the floor, like I’d made some

kind of great discovery, and upon making this great discovery of tacky school carpets, I proceeded to say, “Well I’m leaving, so bye.”

Then I walked to the other side of the room and took my seat by Stacy, mentally slapping in my face for being the biggest loser on the planet. So, in conclusion, Tori’s seat right behind Aiden is both a blessing and a curse, because I have opportunities to get to know him more, and he has opportunities to wish he knew me less.

With this encounter being so fresh in my mind, of course I have no interest in making myself look any stupider than I already have. So instead, I daydream. I picture a kiss, one that will probably never happen. But even still, I’ve dreamt up at least a thousand different scenarios since I first met him, each of them perfect in their own way, and very few of them actually possible. Given that Aiden even liked me (which is highly unlikely, given his social status and my lack thereof), most of these farfetched scenarios have perfecting details that make them even more impossible.

For example, in one fantasy, we walk down the winter-worn streets with our hands shoved deep in our pockets, the air ringing with the sound of our mingled laughter. Everyone is inside, hiding from the cold weather, and flustering about within yellow-windowed shops as they rush for every item on their Christmas lists. The streetlights are bedazzled with Christmas lights, and in the air we hear the tinkling of jingle bells, as if the universe was elated by the idea of our unity. As we walk and laugh, covered from head to toe in our wintry apparel, slipping in sleet and tripping on snow mounds, we come to a convenient street light at the corner of the snow covered sidewalk. We laugh a few moments, and when our laughter subsides, I look up at him, and realize he is staring at me. His earlier jubilant smile has softened to become one of admiration. I bite my lip as a blush adds warmth and color to my frozen face. And then...oh and then.

As the snowflakes fall all around us in a swirl of wintry white, he kisses me with all of the sweetness and goodness of this world, and in that moment when his lips brush against mine, I know I will never be cold again, because I will always have that heart stopping, foot-popping, perfect winter kiss. And then we live happily ever after, because that’s how all impossible stories end. And what’s so impossible about this dream? Well, other

than the idea of Aiden ever admiring me, there's the fact that I live in Henderson, Nevada, and it really doesn't snow, and even if it did, a boy like Aiden chasing after a girl like me? That could never happen. Yet, still I dream on. I like him so much! Does he even get it?

"Allie." A whisper from Stacy drags me out of my thoughts and back into the reality of my drab, grey algebra class. "Do you get this?" she asks in a quiet whisper.

Before I have time to think, I ask in confusion, "What?" I look down at my desk and find a yellow sheet of paper covered in little math problems. What? What is this? Apparently, it's a quiz.

"Crap," I sigh.

"I'm going to take that as a no," Stacy responds dejectedly.

"No, I just... Let me look at it."

"Okay," she whispers.

Ten minutes later, Stacy and I have fudged our way through ten questions about who knows what. Well, she fudged her way through ten questions. I copied five, fudged one, and now I'm drawing a mermaid where the last four questions are. I'm adding snake tattoos to my gothic Ariel, when suddenly my teacher spins the page to face her.

"Oh, how lovely, Allie!" Ms. Cruz exclaims with genuine excitement. I start giggling uncontrollably and blush with the scarlet intensity of an overripe tomato, one hand covering my face both to contain myself and hide my red face. As I calm down, Ms. Cruz asks, "Is this you?" Whatever containment of laughter I had earlier achieved was now completely nonexistent.

"What? No!" I laughed.

"Then who did you draw?" Ms. Cruz asked.

"I drew Ariel!" I exclaimed. "You know, from the Little Mermaid?" Ms. Cruz just kind of tilted her head to the side and walked away as if she had never heard of such a thing, though she probably isn't confused because she has no idea who Ariel is, but rather because she has never seen Ariel pierced and heavily tattooed. Personally, I'm not into that kind of stuff, because, to me, it's kind of like when a twelve year old girl tries to wear make-up for the first time and goes to school looking like a mix between Nicki Minaj and Pennywise the clown. Now, personally, I don't find that attractive, but hey, to each his own, right?

Anyways, the reason I drew so many tattoos on Ariel was because I had run out of space to draw, I was still bored, and her arms were completely blank. I got carried away, but the point is

the girl in my drawing had many tattoos (along with a twig waist, long hair, and, oh yeah, a tail!), and I (clearly) have none of those things. So what could possibly possess her to think it was a self-portrait? Did she think that, like Lewis Carol, I was high on LSD every time I peered into a mirror? (Explain: Lewis Carol wrote *Alice in Wonderland, Through the Looking Glass*, which is another word for mirror. If you got that reference by yourself, congratulations, you should be high fived. If you didn't, I'm sad for you, and you deserve a sympathy high five... like, in the face.) I mean, that's a really dumb question! And it's funny, because teachers always say there's no such thing as a stupid question. That's a lie. There is such thing, and nobody asks stupider questions than teachers.

I walk in to class when it's raining outside, and I'll just be soaking wet. The teacher then finds it appropriate to ask what happened. What do you think happened? I got wet! I ask for permission to utilize the restroom facilities, and the teacher then finds it appropriate to ask why I need to go there. "To open the chamber of secrets." What do you think I'm going in there for? Even it was for something else, like texting or drugs or whatever stupid teenagers like doing, it's not like I'd come out and say so. "Ya see I really need some more weed, cuz I used my last batch to watch E.T. in the theaters. So I'm gonna meet my dealer in the second stall to the right." (Peter Pan reference!) And even if you do have to really go, you can't make it sound like you're too desperate about it. You can't just come out and say, "I need to take a massive deuce" because that's socially unacceptable.

Anyways, these are the things I think about in the few minutes before the bell rings to announce that school has ended for the day.

Averee Heinlen
High School Short Story

My Wish For You

The first time the bird spoke to me I thought it was solely my imagination. Its little blue feathers just fueling my intoxication and sending me into a whirlwind of madness. I easily forgot what it said to me and walked away, laughing at myself. The second time, I was sober and on my way to work. I blamed this incident on the stress that my boss had put on me, propelling me into insanity. The third, and final time, the bird spoke to me, I knelt to the ground and put my head in my hands, begging myself to forget this bird and abandon the road of mental instability ahead but as it spoke, again, I knew it wasn't in my head. I accepted that this bird was talking to me and shared many intellectual and philosophical conversations inside the comforts of my home. We debated women roles, religion, and political issues plaguing, not only the United States, but the world. Then one day, the bird would not speak to me. It bobbed its head and pecked at the food we had usually eaten as we conversed. Tied to its neck was a small paper with writing scrawled across it in black ink. It read:

Dearest friend,

The last time we spoke, you debated to me that life, as is sanity, is fleeting. I must regretfully, and humbly, inform you that you were quite correct. I have enjoyed many afternoons of conversation and meals with you and will miss you very much, but feel that it is time to move on. As my conscious leaves this body, I pose to you a most intriguing question:

Why sit and debate about facts that others have provided to us?

Why not go and live these adventures and learn how to love ourselves?

As I move on to another world, an afterlife if you will, I am proud to say that I will be learning the truth behind the questions and debates we exchanged about religion and philosophy. And, as I leave this world, I beg that you do as I have done, and live to see the world that you have read about, to go and learn the philosophy and religion and politics first hand, and never stop dreaming. Never stop living. Question everything and do not overlook anything.

Your dearest friend,

Phillip B. Bird III

That's what I've done. I've traveled to every country, learned each religion, advised every political party, questioned authority, and dissected every philosophy. And what I took away from it is this:

No one and everyone is right. We scrutinize each other out of fear of change, fear of the different. We shun those who oppose us and crave to be alike and to be different at the same time. It is true that it is impossible to make everyone happy, but I feel there is a way to do the closest thing to that. To come together.

We all have many ideas that are mind boggling and intelligent, yet we turn our eyes away from the ideas because they aren't like our own. Imagine the progress we could make in equality, technology, and peace when we come together and realize that we all have something to contribute to the world.

And, as I move forward, not in life but in death, and join my feathered friend who led me to live this magical life, I advise you to heed my advice, the same that one small, intelligent, blue bird lent to me. See the world through your own eyes and come to your own conclusions on everything that you have been told is right or wrong. Leave no stone untouched in your journey to seek the truth and the knowledge required to truly see the world as it is. For life, as is sanity, is fleeting and truth is fragile, easily lost in translation.

Chisato Jacobson

High School Short Story

Untitled

A ring of people surrounds a circular object in the center of the darkened room. The people are dressed in extraordinary clothing; so different from their normal attire, in fact, that it is obviously evident that their costumes have been set aside for special occasions, for ceremonies, for certain celebrations that require such extensive flair and finery. A certain individual in particular, seated in the middle of the band, is dressed in exquisite dress that even sets her apart from the elaborately-dressed society. One person, a woman, separates from the gathering and goes to retrieve an object from the neighboring room. All eyes follow her retreating figure as she leaves the chamber. The gazes are sharp, anxious, expectant, all waiting for her to return to signal the start of the routine ritual.

It is not long before she returns, yet everyone feels an excited impatience that makes them feel that she took a much longer time than she actually did. But of course she did not, her brief expedition lasted no more than a minute at most—as one of the most important ceremonies of the year, she knew she must make haste.

In her hands is a fire-starter. At a light press that flares a small flicker of flame to life, the room falls silent. The people, who had all been softly murmuring to one another before, have fallen silent. Dead-silent. It is a silence befitting the dead, a silence befitting a graveyard, a silence befitting a gray mist traveling silently and slowly, consuming and enveloping the tops of gravestones at a surreal, torpid pace.

A practiced, fluid movement lights a single candle. Cautiously continuing to light the wicks of the other candles in a circular motion, in a clockwise pattern beginning on the right and starting from the first tier before moving onto the second, she continues to light the candles. After illuminating the fourth candle, she rotates the round cylindrical object—to the right, always to the right—in order to reach the fifth candle. But alas, she shifted the object too fast. The sudden movement caused the candles to flicker,

momentarily giving the illusion that the miniscule flames blinked out. Shocked gasps run through the sparking silence—is the ritual a failure? Will they be punished with misfortune and misery for the rest of the year? Would all their efforts and struggles for today be in vain?—but the tiny beacons prevail, flaring back to life and igniting the dark room and hopes of the assembled people. The gasps stop to simultaneously evolve into a single breath of relief, yet tension still lingers in the shared air. A soft apology is announced, nervous smiles are shared, knowledge that the ritual will still go on is known to all, yet the almost fatal accident and the short delay to the continuation of the ritual creates a cumbrous weight of unease between the members of the congregation.

The woman continues to light the candles, this time taking extensive care to delicately turn the object when necessary, and within minutes fifteen candles are set ablaze. Fifteen is the year's number, the designated number, the sacred number, the chosen number. The glow from the miniature torches warms the faces of the assemblage, lighting them up at an angle that softens their anxious faces. A member stands and asks a question to the candle-lighter, to which she curtly nods and agrees to.

Without any sign or warning, the room falls into a deep, inky darkness, lit only by the small fire in the center of the gathering. The glowing softness has disappeared from the organization's faces. Masks, eerily hidden by shadows and candlelight, become a play of dancing shadows of grass at the entrance of a forbidden cursed forest. The masks turn to look at one another; darkened eyes share a glance that confirms one thing: they must now begin the chant. But the chant must be simultaneous, must be all of them at once, must have all of them begin at the same time, and end at the same time, and share the same rhythm, the same pace, the same speed, the same tone and volume and pitch and no one must speed up or slow down or mess up or say the wrong words or repeat in the wrong order or—

They began to chant. Together, all at once, they began the incantation that they all had heard the first year after their birth, and the first mantra they had learned in their early years of childhood. They chant with modulated voices all as one, with the countless practices as individuals permitting them to follow through without a single mistake. However, one person does not chant. Just one person. A young virgin girl, she is seated at the center of the ring, is the one who is dressed the most finely and with the most beauty. Yet it is fine, it is alright, she is not

supposed to join in the chant, only listen. The circled society speaks her name with the air of a certain important meaning, then finishes the intonation with another line of the chant. The girl makes sure to pause for just a second—nothing more, nothing less—then thinks of a prayer for her offering before promptly blowing out the candles, all at once, all in one breath, just as she had been instructed to do.

The light perishes to cast the entire room into a sudden pure, raw darkness. A squeak, and a bustle of obscure noises later, lights flicker back on, dramatically inflaming the nighttime chamber with a brightness likened to a portal connecting the day-break sun of the dawn of faraway region.

Immediately, the first woman, the fire-starter, removes the candles, yet does so meticulously with great care and caution before prudently arranging them onto a solid, flat surface set out beforehand. She then rises and collects round ceramics—they must be round, they must be ceramic—and enough tools for all the people present. Before distributing them, however, she summons a sharp tool—a large pointed knife, elaborately decorated about the handle, specially designated to be used only one time throughout each year for this exact ceremony—and orients it in front of the now-unilluminated object. She places the ceramics, stacked each on top of each other, and the tools, all positioned neatly beside each other without overlapping on top, prior to picking up the serrated blade. She grasps the appliance, holds it over the cylindrical object, and hovers for a second, vigilantly trying to determine the exact location to mark first. The society urges her to be quick, to finish up the process, to hurriedly decide, to finally complete the ritual. The woman identifies the appropriate position, then violently stabs the sharpened dagger into the center of the object. She hacks into the object with fierce vigor, cutting and cutting until she sees that she has done enough to be seen fit. Drawing a single round adorned ceramic, she sets it down in front of the mutilated object and withdraws one of the other honed tools. Tightly grabbing the second tool in her clenched fist, she thrusts it into one part of the object and uses the knife to rend into the slashed cylinder again before transporting the piece out. Throwing it onto the allocated ceramic, she passes the tool and ceramic with the gorged-out section to the girl, the central-seated beautiful virgin. She accepts the offering with relish and excitement, enthusiastically placing it before her and tightly gripping her pointed utensil, waiting. The fire-starter woman continues to pierce and distribute the pieces to

all members of the assembly, then takes a part for herself. The virgin girl cuts off a fraction of her own piece, then...then she devours it. She eats it with relish and continues to consume the rest, as well. The other people eat their respective portions, savagely, hungrily, greedily. They make sure to reach all possible remnants of their pieces, scraping their tools to collect every bit, every section, and every possible remaining fragment to absorb into their bodies. They lick their tools clean, in the nature of rabid black dogs starving in a dim street alleyway, and pass them down to the fire-starter. She, in turn, collects them and washes them, making sure to erase all evidence of the object ever being there, making sure that nothing remained of what was once present. The gathering collect offerings for the girl, colorful offerings of different sizes and colors, vibrant tones and varied patterns, and presents them, to which she happily accepts. She tears into the offerings with delight, ripping apart the coverings and revealing the disguised identities of the offerings inside. She screams and exclaims; bright flashes illuminate her face as the fire-starter returns from ridding all the remaining traces, with an odd, rectangular device, the producer of the flashes, in her hands. Then, the assemblage starts to disband; a person leaves, one-at-a-time, without anyone departing concurrently with another, all at a time that was predetermined beforehand. Each person disappears until all guests have defected, and the fire-starter works to make the chamber clean again, with no possible clues left to show that a birthday party had taken place that night.

Sariyah Jerome

High School Short Story

A New Future Lies Ahead

"Mommy? Daddy! Where are you?!" She stumbled down the hall frantically as the fire roared around her. "Mommy! Daddy!" She yelled over and over, desperately listening for her parents. As she started up the stairs, she tripped over her own feet and hit her head on the wooden step in front of her. As her world suddenly slowed, tears began streaming down her cheeks. "Mommy... Daddy... Help me..." She cried quietly as her vision went black.

...

A young woman of age 19 raced down the street, pulling her hood tight around her head as her white hair flew around her. She was panting hard as she ran down countless streets. A few of the neighbors from down the street were chasing after her, yelling loudly and throwing whatever they could find. She glanced over her shoulder and stuck her tongue out. Suddenly a loud yell was heard from the other direction, causing her to skid to a stop. A young man of age 21 was running their way, yelling at the others to back off. He slowed as he came close to the girl, stepping in front of her. Spreading his arms out to either side he stood his ground. "How dare you hurt my sister. What has she done to deserve this hatred? She is innocent." He spoke with a voice full of confidence and authority. Turning back to the young woman, he brought his arm around her shoulder, leading her back towards their home.

No one followed them on the way home. They respected the man too much to dare challenge him. He had done a great job finding himself a place in their town, and he was a vital part of everything. Upon opening the door, both stepped inside their small home. The man turned to the woman beside him and frowned, his arms crossed and his lips pressed into a thin line. Under his hard stare, she seemed to shrink into herself. She wrung her hands nervously and pulled on her sweater sleeves. "Holly, what on Earth did you do to cause them to come after you?" He furrowed his brow. "I was simply playing with a few children at the park. We were playing tag and one of the kids fell while

chasing me." She paused a moment and bit her lip. "As soon as the child began crying the adults hurried over and... Please don't yell at me Green. I don't think I can take much more..." Her Green was silent a moment before letting out a heavy sigh. He pulled her into his embrace and drew circles on her back.

"How could I yell at my little sister for something like that?"

His voice was placid and soothing, calming Holly immediately.

"Really now. The town's people are just being ridiculous. The child tripping was obviously an accident and it was in no way your fault Holly." He eased her back so he could look at her face.

"Don't believe anything the town's people tell you. Understand?"

When she gave a small nod he smiled and hugged her once more before pulling away. "Green. What were you doing outside?

Aren't you supposed to be at work?" Holly glanced up at him as he headed into the kitchen. "I got off early so I could come home to have dinner with you. Is that okay? Or would you prefer I go back?" He looked at her over his shoulder. "No. I want you here." She fiddled with the lint stuck to the bottom of her jacket.

"Thank you for saving me once again." Her voice was soft, almost too soft for Green to catch. A fond smile crept up onto his lips as he turned on the stove. "I think we'll have your favorite stuffed shells for dinner. Does that sound okay?" He brought a pot of water to boil over the flame. "That sounds wonderful." Holly giggled and skipped into the kitchen. She grabbed a few things out of the fridge and began mixing them in a large bowl.

A loud knock on the door awoke Holly from her sleep. Seeing as Green was already at work, she moaned loudly and sat up, slipping on her robe before making her way to the door. Upon opening the door, she was met with the sight of a few of the townspeople accompanied by a police man. Her mood instantly soured. She really didn't feel like dealing with these people right now. All she wanted to do was go back to her room and fall back asleep. Was that really too much to ask for? It was only 9 in the morning! She couldn't be the only one who needed sleep in this town. Right? "Holly, you have been accused of stealing from two houses down the street. Now, before you resist, let me just say this. There are many witnesses, including a few of the children. I have been asked to bring you in for questioning. So if you will please follow me down to the courthouse, we can get this over with quickly." He motioned down the street, in the opposite direction of Green's work. Holly knew immediately what they were trying to do. They all knew she was innocent, but the town had pretty much made it their goal to get rid of her. In

order to do that though they had to wait until Green was unable to protect her. “No. I’m not leaving without Green. If it were really so important, you should be able to wait until he comes home.” She stepped back, attempting to slam the door shut. “I simply cannot accept that Holly.” The police officer pushed the door back open and stepped in the doorway. Without a second thought, Holly kicked the man in the shin and ran through the living room, racing down the hallway. She flew into Green’s room, slamming the door behind her. Hurrying over to the bed, she began to move stuff from under it. Quickly slipping under, she moved everything back to the way she found it. She was pressed against the wall in the far back corner under his bed with a smirk dancing across her lips. Her whole body shook with anticipation when she heard the policeman’s steps grow closer. When he stepped into the room, her breath caught in her throat.

“Come now Holly, the only reason you would be hiding was if you really were guilty. We both know what’s going to happen, so why don’t you come out and make it easier for the both of us?” He began moving things around and shoving stuff out of the way. She allowed a soft giggle to pass her lips. Instantly, the man was pulling stuff away from the bed. His hand caught her hair, and he drug her out by the white strands. Holly’s hand shot up to pull her hair back towards her head in order to lessen the pain coming from the long strands. Even though she had been able to weaken the pain, he still guided her through the house. When they finally exit the house, he let go of her hair and took hold of her wrist instead. She tried to yank her arm back to her side fiercely, but only succeeding in pulling a muscle in her shoulder when his grip would not falter. He calmly directed her down the street towards the courthouse.

“Holly, I’m home.” Green had finally come home after six hours at work and slipped off his windbreaker, hanging it on a hook by the door. When no response was heard, it threw him off. “Holly?” He called down the hall. Usually Holly ran to the door to greet him. Worried, he made his way towards their rooms. Finding nothing in her room, he opened the door to his own and froze in his tracks. His room was a complete mess. It looked as if a tornado had hit it. His room was usually a mess, but this was too much, even for him. “Holly?” He looked in the closet and rummaged past the stuff blocking his bed. Glancing up, he noticed his laptop open on his desk. He sat down and opened a few files before a video came up. His laptop was set to take a video when it sensed motion in the room. The video that played

made his blood boil. It showed Holly racing into his room, the policeman following quickly after. Green's knuckles turned white with rage when he saw the man pull Holly's hair. Closing his laptop, he charged down the hall, back out the door. He ran down the street as fast as he could. The town's women giggled behind their hands when they saw him run by. Almost everyone knew what was happening down in the courthouse. Events that involved Holly were never secret. Usually the whole town, if not most, was involved. Bursting into the courthouse, Green looked around before running down the hall to his right, growling dangerously as he ran past a few policemen. He turned down various passages, running down flights of stairs as he made his way down. The town was always picking on Holly, but they had never gone this far before. Panting, he finally made it to a heavy steel door at the bottom of the stairs. He pushed open the door and he was met with the sight of the same policeman from the video standing in front of a cell. As he came farther in, Holly finally came into sight. She sat in the cell her hands chained above her, her hair creating a curtain around her face and white pools at her feet. Green didn't say a word. He simply charged towards the man and punched the side of his face. The man flew back, his hands flying up to hold his injured jaw. Green smirked when a satisfying thud was heard as the man stumbled back and hit the ground. He moved over and tore the keys away from the man's belt loop. Holly's head shot up when she heard the jingle of keys. Her eyes widening when she saw Green unlocking the cell. "You came." Her voice cracked when she spoke. Green wincing as he opened the door and moved over to her. "I'm sorry it took so long." He carefully unlocked the cuffs from around her wrists and took them into his hands, rubbing gently at the red marks. Carefully, he helped her stand up and brushed the little bit of dirt off her pants. Glaring at the policeman that sat rubbing his jaw tenderly, Green led Holly back upstairs and away from those who harmed her. It comforted Holly to no end to know that her older brother would protect her no matter what. Green had never cared if she was his biological sister or not. His parents had taken her in as their own and that's all that mattered.

Leading her back out of the courthouse, Green kept his arm draped over her shoulders protectively. The two of them walked back to the house and Green helped her get ready for bed. He made sure she had everything she needed and allowed her to sleep in his room. Of course he had to clear a spot and put a mattress down, but he didn't really mind. For the moment, both

were simply glad to be back in one another's presence. Both knowing that they were safe together. Green sat at his desk on his laptop as he thought over the day's events. So much had happened in just one day. Slowly turning to look at Holly's sleeping form, he gave a faint smile. "Sleep well Holly. A better future lies ahead." He closed his laptop and crawled into his own bed, turning off the lamp.

Alexandria Jo
High School Short Story



Unexpected Victory

Through the thick morning mist, an army donned in obsidian black armor marched in rhythm from the valley. One by one, a soldier emerged from the hill and marched onto the battlefield. From the other side, the opposing army, clad in white, took their positions and defiantly faced their enemy. For a single moment that passed as if it were an eternity, the armies looked at each other dead in the eyes with passion and rage. A soldier on the front line tentatively stepped forward and yelled, “Charge!”

Both sides ran towards each other with a distinct battle cry, and the bloody battle began. Swords clashed, collided, and crushed the enemy. Horses galloped through the curtain of mist and caught the opposing soldiers off guard. Arrows were nocked and released in rapid succession and knocked soldiers down as if they were dominoes. Some skirmishes were short and abrupt while others were lengthy and agonizing. To the right, a skilled soldier punctured another with a swift swipe of the sword, and the fallen let out a blood curling cry. To the left, two soldiers danced cautiously around each other with their swords half drawn, ready-but reluctant- to strike. Many men were lost on both sides, and several were wounded beyond repair.

As one knight finished off a soldier, he saw a small twinkle in the fog that caught his attention. He sneaked away from the battle and followed the glistening object in the distance. He walked until the sounds of the battle were muffled and far. From a hole in the leaves of the bushes, he saw a royal carriage adorned with shining jewels. Entering the carriage were the king and queen of the enemy land; the very land that he and his comrades sought to conquer. It was as if victory was in front of him on a silver platter. The King was already seated in the carriage, and he was looking down at his hands with a helpless expression on his face. The Queen entered moments later, took the King’s hands into her own, and gave the King a reassuring smile.

The knight quietly took an arrow from his quiver and nocked it in the taut string of his bow. He took a careful aim at the tiny open window of the carriage that was closest to him, he aimed his bloodthirsty arrow at the King. The knight could sense the King's fear and discomfort. The knight drew his arrow back and whispered, "checkmate."

Sheen Kim

Middle School Short Story



Saturday, November 4

oldenwarrior: *Good morning, Ada!*
mechbearcat: *Good morning, Jayne.*
goldenwarrior: *So, do you wanna try going to the park again today?*

Ada's grip on the mouse tightened, her free hand hovering over the keyboard. Jayne had been asking this question as far as she could remember. It probably had something to do with the fact every time they tried to go, something happened that kept them from going. Why always the park? Even Ada didn't know.

mechbearcat: *Again? lol*
goldenwarrior: *Yeah. Haha*
mechbearcat: *Alright, fine fine. I'll meet you at the intersection in a bit.*
goldenwarrior: *Ye!! I'll go right now!*

Ada put her computer to sleep and threw on a jacket, knowing the cool weather of November. It had always been like this as far as she could remember. She opened the door and headed outside to the intersection between their houses, to see Jayne sitting on the sidewalk, fiddling with leaves blown onto the ground. "Hey, Jayne." Ada said, lifting the other girl's hood up. Jayne looked up with a smile on her face. "Ada! I just got here too!" She stood up, dusting stray dust off her jeans, and squeezed Ada's hand. "Let's go!" "You seem cheerful today," Ada said with a wry grin herself. She was always cheerful. "The weather's so nice, and I haven't been outside like this in so long. I'm so glad we have a break!" she rapidly chattered, doing a twirl. "I heard there's a lot of boys at the park." Her eyes sparkled. Ada wasn't interested. "We're a little too young for that, aren't we?" "Aw, come on, Ada. We're growing up, you know." Jayne teased. Ada shrugged. Seemed like it had been a while since she herself had grown any. They started walking over to the large park near their houses, when they stopped at a particularly long stretch of road.

They both knew that the drivers around here were partial to going faster than the speed limit and not looking out for others, so they took care. "Come to think of it," Ada thought as they crossed the road, "she's probably trying to take me to some thing again. Like last time." "Oh, there it is!" Jayne said pointing towards a group of people gathered near one of the barbeques at the park. "Wait, don't tell me you brought me to a party!" Ada said, a note of knowing in her voice. "Woops, haha." Jayne said. "C'mon, it'll be fun. I know you don't really go to these things, but I thought I could bring you to one." Ada noticed the tone in her voice was the same as the last time they had gone, when they were interrupted. She had come to realize that Jayne had a certain jesting tone when she was trying to introduce Ada to something, as if she were a mother trying to get a child to eat their broccoli. Just as Ada was about to consent and head down with her, she heard the loud honking of a truck driving through the park while kids and adults scattered, screaming. And they both froze.

Suddenly, the bright lights and the honking and flash were right in front of them and they couldn't do anything. Ada managed to throw out both of her arms, pushing Jayne down to the ground and away from the mechanical monster. The last thing she heard was Jayne yelling as everything went black.

Saturday, November 4

Another one. Ada jumped up from her bed and looked at the date on her computer. Her heart dropped as she opened up her messaging program, knowing exactly what she would find. She had memorized it at this point, and was repeating what it would say over and over.

oldenwarrior: *Good morning, Ada!*

mechbearcat: *Good morning, Jayne.*

goldenwarrior: *So, do you wanna try going to the park again today?*

Ada sighed loudly as she agreed and threw on her jacket again. She walked to the intersection and greeted Jayne, who had that same smile on her face again. Ada must've had an expression of unhappiness on her face, because Jayne quickly asked her if she was alright. She said she was. The trip over was filled with small talk, because Ada didn't feel like talking when she had heard everything that Jayne would've said so many times, and Jayne

seemed perfectly content talking about little going ons that were happening in her own life. They walked to the park together in the brisk air, coming to the concrete stairs that led down to the park. Ada walked, confident, when her toe hit something strong. She felt herself fall forwards. And she was falling, falling,

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Saturday, November 4

Ada threw off the cover sheets as she bolted upright, waking up. She booted up her computer and turned on her messaging program, awaiting that message from Jayne.

oldenwarrior: *Good morning, Ada!*

mechbearcat: *Good morning, Jayne.*

goldenwarrior: *So, do you wanna try going to the park again today?*

The same messages. Again. And again. And again. And then they decided to go to the park. Again. She wanted to cry, even if it was disheartening. Over and over, the cycle had been repeating. They went to the park together, something bad happened, and then Ada would just wake up again on the same day. She couldn't remember how long it had been since November 3, and couldn't remember a time when she had so desperately longed for November 5. She had tried doing everything differently, but it somehow always ended up at the park. Ada had determined that whatever loop she was stuck in, she could get out of it by changing the end. There was no avoiding it, was there? Again, she put on her jacket and exited the house. Again, she greeted Jayne at the intersection. Again, they walked to the park across the road. It wasn't always a truck. Sometimes it was her tripping down the hill and falling. Sometimes it was an accident. Sometimes, nothing happened at all. But every single time, it was that cool morning on November 4th. Ada didn't know how she got into it. She was just an average girl at school who hung out with an average group of friends, and maybe the only thing odd about her was that she had a fixation with machines. Jayne was another

average girl in that average group, and they had become attached to each other. That was all. She tried to remember back to November 3, but it was so long ago. It had been an average day, she thought. Suddenly, her mind snapped back to attention. Jayne had been chattering on about something and turned to her, expecting a reply. Ada tried to mention that she hadn't heard, but Jayne didn't seem to care. She kept thinking how to get out of it. And suddenly, it hit her. It hit her like the truck hit her. She knew how to get out of this, she thought, and even if what she thought wasn't the case, she had to try. She waited for something to happen, idly filling the air with chatter with Jayne. She had stopped paying attention to what Jayne said at this point, knowing she would always hear it again. They arrived at the park again, and came to the stairs. Ada went down with extreme caution, watching out for Jayne behind her. Suddenly, she saw a flash of moment. The park was unnaturally deserted, except for a man playing a shoddy violin in front of an empty bucket. Suddenly, there was a gun in her face and the violin music had stopped. Jayne froze too, looking ready to bolt. And then Ada said two words, tossed money at him and booked it, but not before seeing the look of pure betrayal Jayne had shot at her. She heard a shot and a scream/groan, before recalling what words she had said. "Her instead." Ada had said. A relieved smile crossed her face as she felt herself becoming dizzy and fading away once more.

Saturday, November 4

She woke up again and turned on her computer again, on the verge of tears. She burst out into them when she saw the date and waited for the dreaded messages.

mechbearcat: *Good morning, Jayne.*
goldenwarrior: *Good morning, Ada.*
mechbearcat: *How does the park sound today?*

Jayne looked out the window, feeling wetness on her cheeks. Again.

Isabel Mendez
High School Short Story

The Auction

At the start of 1788 convicts were sent to Australia for their crimes, banished to die in a place of unforgiving foreign fears. In 1868, that hell ended, they were lucky, there was a light at the end of their tunnel. In 1954, the World sent their convicts to Mars, and there is no light, no hope, and no end to our greedy demons. Everyone has a story that needs to be shared, and luckily for you, this is not your story, because stories can only be told when the creature no longer struggles to survive.

The last hope for one criminal died moments before her blood rushed to her heart for the last time. The crime that banished her to Mars was arson. The crowd that gathered for her later came to watch the last of a traitors dignity crumble. You might ask how that is possible, don't worry I'll tell you, but you will wish I had not.

No one actually knew what the girl did, there were rumors of course, but no one should ever trust rumors. There were two men that brought her out. These men were much like stereotypical bouncers or bodybuilders. Men you took three steps away from, when they took one towards you. Her hands were chained, and her smile was covered in the ugly sneer that now adorned her face. She was pretty, but only when she held her face still. There was a long chain attached to her hands, and those chains were held in one of the man's hands. Every so often she was stop and the man would have to jerk her forward, stupid girl.

Many thoughts jumbled in the crowd: most wanted to be the winner of their desired piece, some wanted to feel important as they throw money around, only one wanted to save her. I am not ashamed to admit that it was not me. "State your name," the man commanded of her as he tugged her onto the ground. Her knees kissed the floor, and her gasp christened the air, "Anya," she barely breathed out. He smirked at her, then addressed the crowd, "Who wants her name. We start at 500." A pregnant woman raised her hand. No one else raised their hand, or argued the price. Anya raised her head, and the pretty curls that bounced in

the light, caught the man's eye. He then opened his mouth, trying to announce the price of her hair when a bellow of, "STOP! WAIT! THIS IS WRONG!" stopped him in his tracks.

The barely-a-man stepped out of the safety of the crowd, his breath came in short, sharp gasps. Anaya glared at him, "Humanity, this isn't your fight! Go home!"

Another pair of burly men came out of the shadow before the boy could sass her back. "I love you, Anaya," Humanity yelled as he was dragged off the scene. Don't get any big ideas, it was her brother. She closed her eyes, "I love you," she bellowed back. It was a sweet goodbye, but no one teared up. Before the auction was over, there was a loud pop of a guns ripping apart the air, and it seemed to settle over her, too thickly. Her Humanity was dead, and in the moments afterward so was she. I auctioned that day, for her secret. I asked her the crime she committed. Her answer? "I refused to kill."

So we killed her. She was the last of those who refused to take a life. My body is failing to exist on this hellish planet, so I will tell you my secret. I never fought for what I believed, I was never a warrior. The outcome? My hands are red, but my eyes are dry. And I sit on this planet alone, the others are dead, and no one cares. Not even me.

Christian Millecam

Middle School Short Story



James Kalac And The Quest To Find The Branch Of Hypnos

Hey, my names James. James Kalac. Or Games, as my high school friends call me. Cause that's what I like to do. Play video games. At least, that's what I liked to do before I suffered {not fun} amnesia. Before I met her.

Before I continue with the story, I think you deserve a little info about my past. My father disappeared before I was even born. I've never met him. And my mother..... Well, my mother isn't even worth having. I mean, all she does is sleep, eat, and more importantly, drink. On the nights that she does drink {and don't ask me how she gets the money for drinks, or basically anything, because she hasn't had a job for the last 7 years of her life} she gets drunk and if I'm there, she throws empty bottles at me and if I'm not there, well, actually I have no idea what she does when I'm not there. So, yeah, that's my past.

I was just finishing up eighth period when I heard a strange kind of song, like a cappella, but weird. Now, I'm not normally a curious person, but I had to check this out. I slipped out the door when the teachers head was turned, knowing one of my friends would cover for me, probably say I was going to the bathroom, or detention. My guess is the latter, seeing as I'm one of those kids who ends up in the principals' office at least 3 times a week. Anyways, I was following the sound of the music, and had found my way to an abandoned classroom, and I was surprised, because nobody even used that room except for splitting classes, extra classes, and storage. Then I saw her. I knew as soon as I saw her that she was the one who had been singing. She was sitting on a pile of boxes and had been singing when I came in but she stopped and we both stared at each other. I spoke first.

"ERRRR..... You have a beautiful voice". She was easily one of the cutest girls I had ever seen. "All voices are beautiful, they're owners just have to learn how to use them, don't you think?"

"UH...UH-HUH". I stammered. Then I got this strange feeling, like I shouldn't be here, in this classroom, talking to this strange

girl. "You'll be a wonderful prize for my collection". She said. Her voice didn't sound like her regular voice, it sounded like she was hissing at me. But her words left a mark on me. I blinked and I felt like I had snapped out of a daze. In fact, later on, I had trouble even recalling this entire conversation.

"UH...what do you mean"? I said. "I mean, she said, I'm going to devour you". I just kind of stood there and stared at her for a while. Then I cracked up. "HAHAHA". I laughed. "You're going to devour me? Yeah right." I laughed again and this time she really did hiss at me. "GER, DEMIGODS ARE SO ARROGANT!!!" she said. "UH, demi- what?" I said. Then I saw a flash of flame and her skin turned as pale as milk, her hair turned to flame, her fingers turned into talons, and her eyes turned blood-red. Then she lunged at me and I heard an explosion and somebody shouted. All I saw were blurs and then everything went black.

I woke up in a field of wildflowers. I didn't know what time it was or even what day it was. I looked around me and saw a field of wildflowers and what looked like a small town in the distance. "Hi" said a voice behind me. I yelped, turned around, and jumped back, all at the same time. There was a girl standing behind me. At first, I thought she was the girl from the abandoned classroom, and I picked up a branch that was lying in the grass beside me and said "Don't come near me, you demon". She just stared at me and then threw her head back and started laughing. "I'm not a demon, I'm your guide". She said. "UHHH, guide"? I replied. "Yes, your guide". She said sarcastically. "That's what I said, didn't I"? "Um... Yeah, I guess" I replied. "Who are you"? I asked. "My names Kate, and you don't need to explain who you are because I already know everything there is to know about you". She said. "Um, okay". I said. Then she explained that the thing that had attacked me had been called an Empousai, that my father was Hypnos, the Greek god of sleep, and how the Greek gods were still around and they traveled to whatever continent they were the most fabricated into at the time, and how every child of Hypnos had to lose their memory and suffer amnesia until they proved themselves with the mission they were given, and that I would lose my memory in about 2 minutes. "What"!!!! I exclaimed. Then everything went black for the second time in the last 30 minutes of my or time that it was, or how I was in the situation I was in. Then a voice sounded right behind me. "Hi" it said. I spun around and

grabbed a branch that was lying on the ground next to me and and whipped around. “WWWHHAAA” I said. The voice belonged to a girl with curly, mousy brown hair. Then she spoke again. “You do not know who I am and you probably never will, you must find the branch of Hypnos” She said. “Um, is this it”? I asked, and offered her the branch that I had picked up earlier and that I was still holding in my hand. “Oh, um, yes it is the branch of Hypnos. UHH, dad, he found it!” She yelled into the sky then a massive cloud of pink powder erupted by our feet and a man appeared in a nightcap and nightgown and he yawned, and then me and the girl yawned, too. “Hey kid thanks for finding my branch”. He grabbed the branch out of my hands and cuddled it like a teddy bear. He waved his hand in front of my face and muttered something underneath his breath and then I suddenly remembered everything that had happened in my life. Then everything went black once again and I woke up standing in the abandoned classroom again and with the principal and several teachers glowering down at me. “OH, you are in so much trouble” my friend Seth said. “Don’t I know it” I muttered under my breath as the principal dragged me towards his office with several teachers’ right behind us.

Arianna Rosas
High School Short Story

Making A Difference

There is a boy named Edward Johnathan Kent. He is twelve years old. Although I suppose 'is' is a bit of a derogatory term. You see, upon entering public schooling, Edward was teased for his facial deformity, a large bump inflating his nose, giving him a wheezy inhalation. The kids with whom he was schooled with, shunned his appearance instead of befriending him. It left him alone and sad. Yet the boy, with a strength none of us could ever procure, would put a smile on his face and pretended to his parents that life was good.

For years this went unnoticed, though the mere teasing of childhood grew to a more brutal force of torment. It was, on his tenth birthday that Edward decided that he would change things. He would stand up for himself and make things different. He had an essay due for class, and he decided to make that essay the way he open people's eyes. The next day when the teacher called his name, he sucked in a breath, took 15 long steps to the front of the class room, and took a deep breath.

"Hello everyone." He mumbled in a shaky voice.

"We can't hear you freak!" A tall blonde boy proudly jested from the back of the room. It took several minutes for the teacher to quiet the kids and in that time Edward managed to wash the blush that had crept up his cheek and continued on in a stronger voice.

"My essay is about bullying." He shot the child who had yelled a firm look. "I wanted to show the importance of not hurting others, and not making people feel like they don't belong. For 5 long years, I've tried to make friends, I've tried to fit in, I've tried to be something that I'm not. It's gotten so bad that even teachers and staff have commented about my mistakes or looks. I am so sick and tired of this." His teacher, who had before been mesmerized by the transformation of the usually shy boy into the loud figure before her, broke out of her trance and stood up.

"Edward, I think we've had enough." He glared at her.

“No, I’ve had enough of the agony that goes unnoticed each and every day. I will speak! My voice will be heard!” Stunned by his words, Ms. Adstat sat down at the command of the small hurt child.

“All I want,” he spoke now on the verge of tears, “Is for the anger, and the torture, and the hatred, and the pain to stop.” He whisper the last few words, a lump forming in his throat. The children looked at him in fear, many of them also tearing up. His suffering made his seem older, in the way that war made boys men. He shut his eyes deliver the last sentence he had from memory.

“All I want, is to make a difference.” He opened his eyes, hoping that his peers would applaud or cheer but only found silence. Then one kid stood up and pointed at him.

In a loud voice the kid screeched, “Edward’s gone crazy!” The other kids laughed, uneasy at first, but then with encouragement from Edward’s horrified expression, jubilantly. A few more squealed criticisms at him, but they all faded into the back ground for Edward. He felt the wetness streaming down his face and ran from the classroom.

The teacher called the class to order, and went to look for Edward, but did not find him. To be honest, she did not look hard because she did not want to find him. His words had stung with truth, and the ancient educator did not enjoy the confrontation. Due to protocol, she called the boy’s parents who had been at work and the police. They did not find the child as well. Somberly, the Kents returned to their now sorrowful home, and while looking for a sign to see if he had returned, Mrs. Kent found him swinging slowly in his own closet. In a state of disbelief over her son’s body, she let out a blood-curdling scream and fell to the floor. While rocking back in forth, sobbing into the arms of her husband (who after hearing her scream came running to react just as she had), she saw a note in his limp hand. Shakily she stood up and pulled it from his grasp. It read “If my words can’t, maybe my death can make a difference. - Edward Johnathan Kent.”

Cassidy Rotschenk-Kaliski
High School Short Story



Karma

This pitiful land filled with undeserving imbeciles is so fortunate as to have been blessed with me as its queen. Although most of my daily tasks are tedious and awfully boring, I do enjoy judging the crimes of fools who should spend every breath serving me no matter what corner of the kingdom they squat in. Listening to their distasteful crimes is a bother, but generously handing out punishments is the joy of my life.

The room designated for judgment and justice is fit for a queen like me – magnificently large, made completely of cold metal, and colored the harshest shade of gray. I sit on an elevated chair thrice my size to intensify the intimidation.

Today's criminals are a filthy group of peasants: a mother, a father, and two children. The daughter is a disgusting little baby and the son is a foul-looking man in his early twenties. Their crime: thievery.

"We were so hungry, your Glorious Highness. We needed food, your Glorious Highness, or we would have starved. We took a small amount, your Glorious Highness." The father of the thieves blubbers on and on until I cannot bear his idiocy a moment longer.

With a hint of irrepressible glee, I calmly say, "Stealing is against the law. Even rats such as yourselves should know that."

The family cowers together into a protective clump. A wicked smile splits my face. How delicious it is, when they cower in front of me.

"Murder is also against the law," mutters the son.

My smile sours into a scowl. Who is he, to tell me what the law is? "As queen, I am exempt from the law," I retort viciously. The fool's voice is louder and clearer when he speaks once more.

"Killing your family members is not only against the law, it is wrong."

A horrid laugh bursts from my throat. "Wrong? A queen never does anything wrong. Not that you are capable of

understanding how right it felt when I sliced my parents and relatives, when I watched them bleed, when I pushed their carcasses out the balcony.” I grin at the fond memory.

Abruptly I say, “I have decided on your punishment.” The felons hold each other’s hands and their countenances are so shamelessly hopeful that I cannot wait to destroy every last shred of hope and optimism. “I was originally planning on locking you up in the dungeons, but thanks to your son’s back-talk, I have changed my mind.”

I pause for dramatic effect, expanding the time between their hope growing and being crushed.

“You will all be put in the dungeon and fed Devil’s Laughter with every meal. You will remain there until you die.”

Devil’s Laughter is a highly poisonous plant rare to my country. It possesses no scent or taste. It slowly kills one over a duration of a few weeks when ingested with solids. When ingested with liquids, it kills within minutes.

Inexplicable joy fills me as I watch the family freeze with horror and then begin to weep. “We don’t deserve this,” the audacious son shouts.

I reply with what I always say to the convicted. “Karma rules all. Karma and only karma will judge your actions. And then you will be given what you deserve.” Queens shall forever enact karma’s will.

The offensive group of culprits is escorted by my guards to the dungeons. As they leave, my laughter echoes down the hall. Days pass. Criminals are sentenced. Bodies are buried. Life goes on.

I play with my knife as I wait for dinner in the dining room. It is the same knife I used to kill my relatives. What a beautiful tool it is.

My advisor, a cowardly and ugly woman, enters with her eyes to the ground. She knows better than to dare looking me in the eyes. She stops a few feet away from me. I never can remember her name.

“What is it?” I bark.

“My Glorious Highness.” She bows her pathetically frail body. “The chef has become ill and is unable to serve you tonight.”

I slam my knife into the table. “Idiot! How dare the chef, a peasant, refuse to serve me, her queen? Fire her immediately.” My advisor nods like the obedient dog she is.

“It is done, my Glorious Highness. For now, we replaced her

with a prisoner named Phillip. He..." She blabbers on for minutes. Her voice can bore me so easily. My attention is drawn to my nails painted the color of blood, my favorite color. I imagine my hands soaked in the blood of my enemies. My advisor continues, "...he will make a simple dish tonight..."

Oh how privileged I am to have so many enemies. I wonder when our neighboring country will finally grow the guts to invade. Wars are such fun. Finally the yammering ends with my advisor asking, "Is there anything else you need, my Glorious Highness?"

"No. Leave." I dismiss her with a wave of my hand.

A servant enters carrying a bowl of soup and places it before me. He waits in the corner in case I need something. I sip my soup with a spoon made of silver. Oddly, the soup is completely dark liquid with no meat or vegetables. I shall have to fire this new chef who is so incapable of.

I cough. Something is wrong inside of me. I cough again. My throat burns. I fall out of my chair and collide with the hard, marble floor. I unsuccessfully attempt to choke out a cry for help.

"Did you enjoy your soup?" the servant asks in a surprisingly light tone. I face him and see he is smiling. What is happening?

"Remember me? The one you sentenced to eat Devil's Laughter?" This time his tone is sharp and unforgiving.

My eyes widen in disbelief as I recognize him. The defiant brat who was stupid enough to verbally fight with me.

"When your advisor asked if any of the prisoners were able to cook, I promised her I was one of the best cooks in the land."

I crawl away from him, desperate to reach a door where I can escape and find a guard. He follows me at a leisurely pace that infuriates me amidst my sickness.

"Did you know that if you grind Devil's Laughter into powder, you can put it into any liquid, perhaps a soup? And it would simply change the shade of the liquid to a darker color? It was mighty convenient to me."

My entire body feels as if it is on fire. I cannot speak. I can no longer move. I lie on the ground helplessly.

"Karma rules all."

No I am not ready. No I do not want to die.

"Karma and only karma will judge your actions."

I am forced to listen to him as I heave my final breath.

"And then you will be given what you deserve."

Elyeah Schweikert
Middle School Short Story

Bermuda Troubles

Once there was a beautiful seahorse named Tylo he lived in the Bermuda triangle. He was in a pitiful and comfortless mood. For there was no company in the Bermuda triangle the only way in is if a plane crashes which is how he got there but we'll talk about that a different time. Anyway he was swimming and swimming about while he was thinking about what he should do. All of a sudden he got an answer on how to escape. He was going to try to gain all of his strength and swam out. After many failed attempts he was bruised. So he thought and thought again finally after three horrific days of thinking he found his answer. He was going to wait till the next plane came and jump off of it while it is sinking. When the next plane crashed he was ready to jump then he saw other animals in the plane and he wasn't about to let get stuck. So he rescued them since they were stuck on the plane. When he rescued them he realized they were a water snake (named Ted), frog (named Marvin), and a pink goose (named Sal). After a while, they became the best of friends, but they all had a common interest getting out alive and they were about to. After three short years they finally escaped. They all had friends on the outside. One was another water snake, the other was a green purpled eye frog, one was a blue goose, and the last one was another coral colored purple eyed multicolored.

Rebecca Yokoi
Middle School Short Story

The Magic Bracelet

Once upon a time, there was a young girl and her name was Elizabeth but everybody called her Liz. Liz loved jewelry and she wore necklaces all the time. She and her mother went to shop for jewelry a lot. One day they both went shopping for a bracelet or two. When they got to the store, they were really excited about getting new things. Liz had seen this really cute bracelet that she liked a lot, and of course she had to try it on! After Liz tried on the bracelet, something happened.

She felt kind of weird. Liz didn't think anything really happened to her so she ignored it. The next day Liz asked her mom, "Hey mom yesterday when I tried on my bracelet I felt something weird, what do I do?"

"Well, first what did you feel?" asked her mom with concern. "I felt really weird. Should I take the bracelet off? What am I supposed to do?" asked Liz.

Later the next day Elizabeth was thinking that the bracelet was just testing her imagination. So she decided to try to make a wish with her imagination. So she wished that she had magical powers. With her hands she pretended to create a fake fire ball. Then she realized that it was working. So she played around with it for a little while. Liz never told her mother about having magic. Well, at least for now. Liz was the proper fancy kind; she had a sister that was not fancy and proper. Sometimes they would get into small fights but I mean they are sisters. Can you blame them! So anyway, the next day they got into a little bit of a bigger fight than usual. Liz wished that her sister was gone. She made this wish right before she had gone to bed. When she woke up in the morning her sister wasn't there. After making that wish the night before she decided to apologize for what she had done to make her mad.

Elizabeth was looking for her sister for about an hour now and she couldn't find her sister. Liz started to freak out and so she

asked her mom where her sister was. Her mom didn't know who in the world she was talking about. That is when Elizabeth was really freaking out. Now that she had asked her mom about her sister and she didn't know who Liz was talking about, Liz finally realized that when she wished her sister away, no one would ever remember her again!

After realizing that nobody would ever remember her sister again, she looked down at her bracelet and thought that it was making all of the wishes, so Liz threw the bracelet away. Not realizing that it was trash day! The garbage truck came and took the trash. After the garbage truck took the trash, Liz thought that since the bracelet made all of those wishes it could take the wishes back. She started to run after the garbage truck yelling "Stop, Stop!" She kept running and ended up following the truck all the way to its next stop. When the garbage driver came to a stop, she jumped into the back. She did not like the smell, the look, the height off the ground, but she had to find that bracelet. She was determined.

While Liz was in the back of the garbage truck, she found the trash bag from her house. She opened it up and she had to dig all the way through the trash to the bottom of the bag to get the bracelet. When she finally had the bracelet, she was about to get out of the truck but the garbage truck started to drive off. Liz ended up being in the truck all the way to the landfill. After she got out she walked home, which wasn't that far away. When she got home she ran into her room and had the bracelet in her hand.

So Elizabeth took the bracelet wiped it off and wished for her sister to be back hoping that it wasn't too late. She wished her sister back and waited for something to happen. So far nothing was happening. Liz was freaking out. Liz started passing. Then after a few minutes of passing, her sister finally appeared in their room. Elizabeth screamed with mostly joy. Her sister didn't know what happened to her but they both ran up and hugged each other like they haven't seen each other in a year.

Liz wasn't sure if her sister knew what had happened so she asked her sister, "Hey do you remember anything that happened?"

Her sister replied, "No I don't think so, why what just happened?"

"Nothing, nothing happened." said Elizabeth.

"Are you sure, I mean you seem kind of suspicious" said Elizabeth's sister.

Elizabeth.

Later that day they both were hanging out at the park. Now Liz never wanted her sister gone. Even if they got into many different fights. She enjoyed every minute she could have with her sister. She threw away the bracelet and never saw it again.

“Why do you say I seem kind of suspicious?” Asked Liz.

“Well, you are acting really, really strange. Are you okay, you don’t really seem like yourself?” Said Liz’s sister.

“I’m fine I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Said Elizabeth.

Later that day they both were hanging out at the park. Now Liz never wanted her sister gone. Even if they got into many different fights. She enjoyed every minute she could have with her sister. She threw away the bracelet and never saw it again.

Leeloo Yutuc

High School Short Story

Untitled

See the girl with the dark hair? The one looking around and clutching a note in her hand? The one who looks like she can't believe she's here? She's the new girl, and the new girl goes by the name Valerie. Last names will come later. They don't matter right now. Right now, we need to focus on Valerie. Ignore all the plum trees and cherry trees, all the neatly paved walkways and the little flower beds surrounding it. Although, they are very pretty to look at, yes? So instead of ignoring the background, ignore all the people staring at her. Ignore all the girls with perfect faces and perfect hair, pointing at the new girl's eternally messy curly hair and hoodie. Ignore all the guys who are ignoring the new girl. Ignore them all – look, Valerie's doing so wonderfully. Focus on her as she follows the instructions written on the note clutched in her hand. Along the vast gardens, and past the bricked buildings. Across the wide river that separated the front garden from the back, and to the edge of the cedar-filled forest. And then – she paused and bit her lip. Should she just give up on being here, or will she (probably) risk her life to get in? You're probably wondering how a moderately well-off girl ended up in school full of geniuses and virtuosos and somewhat stuck-up kids who can afford the expensive boarding school. And that is why the author (me) is here – to tell a story.

After she graduated from middle school, Valerie had been attempting to enter multiple boarding schools dedicated to cultivating a genius – even in the most simple of minds. Except, she didn't have the money to get in, nor did she have the brains to attain any kind of scholarship. So after a multitude of failures two years later, she had completely given up. Our story starts on a somewhat chilly afternoon, when a degraded Valerie walked home. She nudged some unfortunate pebbled away from her with a bit of force (so you can say she was kicking it). But, you would have to try and be more understanding, because she still wasn't over her recent rejection a few days ago. She was used to it, yes, but the repetitiveness of her rejections made her feel even worse.

So our Valerie walked home with her depressing thoughts and pebble-kicking feet. While she was walking, she vowed to herself that she would never try again. Just like she was during her two years of high school. Okay maybe it wasn't a total rejection. In her first year, she and her classmates were separated by a fragile barrier, which was occasionally crossed her middle-school friends and people who wanted to work with her on classwork. However, when winter break came and ended, nobody, exempting the teachers, went near her. Of course, at first, she never noticed anything different – she still spent her time at the library during breaks and sat in the front corner nearest the window. Then slowly, the feeling of loneliness and the cold began to creep into her person – but it wasn't from the weather. It was the feeling of knowing your friends had somehow forgotten about you, and (in school) you are really, truly alone. At first she repeatedly attempted to mend the broken bonds, but her classmates proved difficult to work with. Until eventually, she gave up and learned the ways of surviving high school alone and friendless. And so, the fragile barrier became a wooden plank, then a brick wall, and finally, a metal shield that separated her inner thoughts from her outer self. However, she still did everything as she normally would, to avoid raising suspicion, and nobody ever worried. Nobody noticed the little smiles she gave often faded into sad ones. Nobody noticed that her eyes were dead. Nobody noticed the wound – they could only see the scar. And that depressing story brings us back to the present. Or to Valerie walking home on a moderately chilly afternoon. She arrived home to her mother excitedly handing her an envelope. It was another rejection, she could feel it. Cautiously, she struck the letter opener under the flap and slid it neatly across. She gently took the letter nestled in the envelope addressed to her, unfolded it and began to read. "Congratulations," was the first line. Congratulations. Wordlessly, she handed the letter to her mother, who let out a little squeal of excitement. "Oh, Valerie!" She cried, "It's what you always wanted!" "I know," she replied quietly, looking at the letter on the table. But was it really what she wanted? That night, when everyone was asleep, she unfolded the letter further, to see the "welcoming present" that was for "her eyes only". Out tumbled another letter and a little note. She delicately picked up the letter and began to read.

Now we are back to the original present. At the present in which Valerie is standing in front of the cedar-filled woods, contemplating. She was chewing on her bottom lip, staring

blankly at the vast expanse of greenery in front of her. She lifted a foot, as if about to take a step, and then abruptly put it back down again. She began to contemplate some more. The letter looked like the real thing, right? It doesn't seem like a prank someone would play. And she was sure she wasn't dreaming. Valerie began the process of sorting out the pros and the cons of the situation. It was something she was quite good at, having no friends to waste her time with. For this situation, the cons outweighed the pros, as it almost always did for her. And Valerie decided to take the stupidly daring choice – to step into the woods.

A Special Thank You

We would like to dedicate this publication to:

The Friends of Henderson Libraries

for their generous contribution to this project.



We would also like to thank

ThinkArt! - Think & Wonder Inc.

for judging and mentoring the participants of the
Teen Creative Writing Contest, and for their
generous contribution to this project.