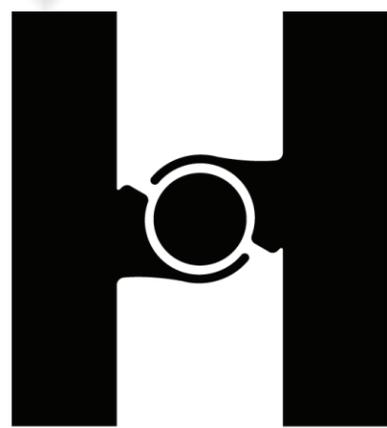


7<sup>th</sup> Annual

# Unlocked Voices

2016 Teen Writing Contest



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*Essay*

***Middle School Essayists***

Isaiah Belch  
Cheyenne Cork  
Madison Flanagan  
Trinity Jones  
Katie Lim  
Jocelyn Morris  
Dezel West

***High School Essayists***

Alexi Harber  
Witnee Hord  
Amy Kang  
Antonia Librizzi  
Mia Milberger  
Moxxy Rogers  
Grace Swanner

Isaiah Belch

Middle School Essay

## Essay

Bulling is defined as "the act of intimidating a weaker person to make them do something and nosily domineering or browbeating others", according to the dictionary. There are two types of bulling, in person and through technology. There are 77% of kids that get bullied every year.

On July 4th 2003, a devastated mother stated that her 11-year-old son committed suicide because of being bullied at school. Sandra Thompson came home from work and found her son Thomas Thompson in his room. He took an over dose of pain killers because other kids picked on him. The mother tried to perform CPR on him, but when the paramedics arrived they said he had a fatal heart attack. His mother stated that he was very smart and clever. Thomas is the youngest person to been believed to take his life due to bulling. The bulling stated in elementary school where Thomas attended near their home. The mother thought it would end once he went on to middle school, but it did not. This 33-year-old mother and an 8-year-old daughter, stated how the kids would strangle him with his tie and poke at him while making fun of him. Thomas told his mom and sister they called him "gay boy" and "fatso," he did not fit in with boys his own age. Thomas missed classes to avoid the teasing, on the day of his death Thomas got off the bus to escape the bullies. Sandra, Thomas's mother stated that "the boys killed her son" because he was different. What can I do about bulling situations, I can be friends with everyone and be nice?

What causes youth violence? Those who bully use power to hurt people. If their friends are being bullies to others they get pure pressured into being bullies too. Kids

bully kids because of popularity and smarts. The bully may also know a secret about the other kid. Sometimes when kids go to a new school and all the popular kids are being bullies, they just want to fit in so they do it to.

Some bullies just simply think they are better than the person they are bullying.

How has youth violence effected my life? It has always devastated me when I saw someone getting hurt because

they are getting bullied. Seven Hundred Thousand kids end up in the Emergency Room because of youth violence. Thirty-Three Percent of kids get in a fight by the ninth grade and ninety percent of that is because of bullying. These statistics have been on a raise for the past five years ago.

What can I do about youth violence? When kids are fighting I will try and stop it, not encourage it. I will help them talk the situation out instead of using their fists. I will be nice and an example for others around me. I believe we all can stand up and be nice. As kids we need to be the example for other peers around us, in our classes, our school, and on our teams. We all need to STOP BULLYING and Stand Together!

Cheyenne Cork  
Middle School Essay

## The Opinion of Others

In today's society, especially with today's youth, we are about the opinion of others. We care wither if someone likes our new hair color, and the clothes we wear. I think it's time for a change, were we shouldn't have to worry if people like the things we were or the choices we make.

Why should we care anyways! I don't care if someone looks at me and says "that shirt looks terrible on her!" well guess what, this is my shirt I bought it for a reason and that reason is not for you to say I look terrible in it. I bought it because it's part of my style. Express your style, make it seem unique! Don't let the opinion of others change your style.

The choices you make in your life are yours. No one can change that. They make their opinions on that because that person wouldn't have done what you did. That's what make you unique. Don't follow the crowd that makes all the same decisions. So what if they judge you for being different. I've always said to myself everyone is different in their own ways.

If you choose to think about the opinion of others, you will make your life less valuable. Reflecting on their opinions on you is crazy. You'll drive yourself mad, and unhappy. I cared about the opinion of others at a younger age. I wore long sleeves all the time, even in the scotching heat. Don't be like my young self.

Steve Jobs, once a big influence on today's generation said "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma – which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions voice. And most important. Have the

courage to follow your heart and intuition.” I agree with every word in that quote, don’t you? To be able to follow your heart takes courage because you don’t know what will happen once you do, but the thrill of not knowing what will happen is what makes it exciting.

Sometimes it’s hard for me to write essays like this because I don’t know what will happen afterwards. I don’t know if people will like it, or learn from it, but I need to stop worrying about these things because this is my essay! If someone learns from it I would be overjoyed, if someone decides that they didn’t enjoy my essay, well I need to learn to deal with that. Not to worry about the opinion of others. I advise you to try to do the same, as a friendly jester.

As I wrote this essay my only wish is for people to change, change their opinions of others, or themselves. For people to learn not to judge others for what they look like, or the choices they may make. To stop worrying about the opinions of others. Maybe even help the smallest of children to realize that no matter what you do, just be yourself, and not to worry what’s to happen or not to worry what people will say about you.

Madison Flanagan  
Middle School Essay

## Untitled

Have you ever wondered how to take care of a Guinea Pig? Well, if you have then this is really what you need to read.

When you think about taking care of a Guinea Pig it sounds pretty easy right? Well, it is not as easy as you think. When you take care of a Guinea Pig you need to make sure that you have the right stuff and the time to take care of it.

The first thing that you will need is the cage. Now, this cage needs to be big enough to have the Guinea Pig and its food, water, and you obviously cannot forget the toys. Depending on the size of the Guinea Pig is the size of the cage that you will need.



Trinity Jones  
Middle School Essay

## Youth Violence

Two words: youth violence. It's all around you! It happens every day in fact. Whether is around schools, playgrounds, or even at home. Most of it comes from bad parenting skills and a low self-esteem. There are teens every day under eighteen years of age that make preposterous decisions. Youth violence can ruin your life completely and you can't undo it. Those memories will haunt you for the rest of your life.

As a matter of fact, for example: on February 11, 2016 a thirteen-year-old tried to attack someone who played a practical joke on him. There were two deans and a couple of teachers trying to haul him down. Instead of stopping and cooling down, he tried to fight the deans and the teachers off of him. He screamed and shouted in anger. And guess what? He had gotten expelled from all Clark County School Districts (CCSD). Meaning he couldn't go schools that were associated with CCSD. If he would had stopped being violent he probably would have had never gotten expelled. In addition, a long time ago in Florida of 1999, another thirteen-year-old named Nathaniel Brazill killed his favorite language arts teacher, Barry Grunow. Before he killed his teacher, he was sent home early and came back to school with a gun while the school was on lockdown. He went up to Grunow's classroom to talk to his girlfriend but, Grunow said no. Although Brazill didn't want to kill him, he still pulled the trigger and shot him in the head. Grunow died in his own classroom at Lake Worth Middle School. Till' this day he still serves up to 28 years in prison. These two examples of youth violence can affect us is by the things we see on television and things we may overhear.

There are abundant amounts of reasons we can stop youth violence from happening today. How you may ask? Parents need to talk to their children about the world and how violence doesn't solve any of your problems. Studies show that 50% of teens either feel uncomfortable or just don't communicate to their parents about certain things. If teens did so we might not have as much violence that we have today. Including, the environment teens are exposed to that can influence their actions. We all know that some people do things just because someone else is doing it. They don't have their own set of mind. For example, if you lived in a neighborhood where people are being murdered every day at night or you have seen any type of violence happening then that can influence your actions to take part in it now or later on in life. Furthermore, we all can prevent youth violence by talking to younger kids about it and help them fully understand why it's not a very good idea and how they can help their community surpass youth violence.

Generally speaking, youth violence isn't the right path to choose. The thing is, you're not only hurting yourself you're also hurting all the people who might look up to you and your parents. Because we all know your parents don't want you to do bad they want you to do good, so the right path to take would be peace on Earth.



Katie Lim  
Middle School Essay

## Memories

One of my worst days had happened on a favorite holiday of mine; Halloween. My little sister, Chloe had got a minor concussion on the afternoon of October 31, 2011. I was 9 years of age at the time and doing my homework. When I heard the bang and clatter in the kitchen, I knew I wasn't going to be trick-or-treating that year. So what did I learn after this horrifying night? Don't ever let anybody dance on a high chair.

I sat in the white chair, my stubby legs dangling over the edge. Frowning at my math work, I took a deep breath and decided to take a short break. As I traipsed to the aroma of sweet bread, my little sister yanked my arm down so I was face-to-face with her looking directly in her beady, venomous eyes. As I tried to avoid making eye contact with her, she hissed at me, "Could you get the cookies in the jar up there PLEASE!!!" I knew this was an order from her, not a favor, but I was in no mood to get cookies for her.

I had work to do and she was annoying me. I had a foretaste about how she would retaliate for me, like germinating into some kind of monster and knocking me out, or hurtling a chair at me. She just shot daggers at me with her eyes as she grudgingly grabbed the nearest high stool she could find. As she dragged the stool across the floor, I saw a sullen, determined expression on her face as if she might go win the Olympics. As she set the stool down and pulled herself up with her chocolate smeared hands. I headed back to the office and started my hard work.

Not long after, I heard a huge crash, followed by a couple of bangs. I wasn't very startled or shaken up, but I went back to the kitchen anyways. What I found was a

couple of pots pots and lids clattered along the floor, broken glass, a splintered cabinet door, and Chloe sprawled across the floor with the faintest hint of blood trickling from her head.

My mom rushed to the kitchen not looking very surprised herself either, but when she saw Chloe, she immediately shouted, “Chloe!! Wake up! Can you hear me?”

I don’t know why, but I suddenly had the urge to laugh. My mom shot me a look that said, “You’re going to regret it if I become chafed.” My mom called my dad and they rushed her to the E.R. while I went to my friends’ house and slept there. We went trick-or-treating and ate more than our stomachs were satisfied with, while my sister threw up her ham sandwich and was diagnosed with a concussion. To be truthful, I hadn’t felt a bit of remorse at the time for my little sister. Now, my family and me look back at the experience and laugh it off while shaking our heads in the recalling of the memory.

Memories are like that, they have many emotions while they are happening, but they are later taken lightly. Memories make us who we are and help bond people together. All of our memories add up together and make each of us unique and special. This, eventually unites people together in the end. So what are your memories? And how do they characterize you?

Jocelyn Morris  
Middle School Essay

## Facebook is a Great Way to Communicate and Learn

Facebook is a fantastic way of learning and communicating with others. People can build positive connections with one another. It's not just about communicating, there are games and other fun things to do. Facebook could be a great tool.

Truly, Facebook can help build positive connections. If you choose to post things, some people use it to spread positive messages. Children sometimes know each other better online than at school. When some people get bored they use it for information. A lot of information gets posted every day. A lot of people post what they're doing that moment.

It follows that, tons of kids post messages on Facebook every day. Facebook should be used to learn things and to have fun and be able to communicate with friends. Some students at school do not have friends, so Facebook is an amazing tool. Talking to friends online is super cool. Other people get to see what you post.

Even though, some people use Facebook the wrong way. Rude comments have been posted about other people. Sometimes it goes way too far. Facebook could get a lot of people in trouble if they do not use it correctly. Some people spread rumors and talk about other people. But eventually those students will get in trouble. There are times when kids should be helping out at home instead of using their phones.

Furthermore, Facebook is an amazing source of internet for good purposes. Communicating with others. Games and posting can be fun and, can be helpful for others to. Internet sources like it are amazing for great purposes!!

In conclusion, Facebook is a fantastic way to learn and communicate with others.

# Dezel West

## Middle School Essay



## Untitled

My name is Dezel West I was born April 2003 in Las Vegas, Nevada. In 2007, I began my racing career in BMX at the age of three and a half. I got involved in racing because of my dad, he used to race and he was pretty good! I have been racing ever since. Someday I plan to be a big time racer.

The 2015 racing year was a really important move up for me. I turned 12 years old, making me old enough to race my first Legend car. A Legend car looks like a 1930's Coupe and does 130 miles per hour. We had to go out of town because my hometown track the Bullring here in Las Vegas had no race on my birthday. So, as a birthday gift my parents took me to race in Tucson, Arizona. We had a rough time; a steering part broke and put me into the wall the first night during practice. I was really upset; we didn't have the parts required to fix the car. My dad who is my crew chief, mechanic, and teammate scrambled trying to locate the parts we needed. Other racers came to our aid and shared their spare parts. My dad worked all night putting my car back together. The next day during the race my motor blew up. I was really disappointed, that was the end of my racing weekend. Then we got a call from one of our race friends, the Sorensen. They were racing trophy trucks in Phoenix, AZ. Which was on our way home, they needed a driver. I had never driven a trophy truck before that hit jumps and flew through the air 30ft high. I was getting the hang of it; I was in the middle of the pack in the main event until the battery shorted out. Once again my racing weekend was over. That was the best racing birthday weekend ever, even with all the problems.

Our next race was at the Bullring. I was just behind my competition Caden. Caden is two years older than I but we have a history. We have battled back and forth in other race cars. Now he has a year's practice on me but that didn't hold me back. In the main event, on the first lap there was a huge pile up like a Daytona 500 crash. Out of 25 cars on the track, nine came out of the crash. I happened to be one of them, Caden was not. Through the series, I progressively got faster. I was excited that I was ahead of my competition. I finished 3rd overall. At the awards ceremony, I wore a really silly outfit it made everyone laugh but not as much as my speech the year before.

During the winter we get to race the "Silver State Road Course". My dad was getting a new Legend car custom built for me to race the series. I love to race the road course; I look forward to the series every year. The Bullring is an oval course, but with road courses you have to have more skill to drive. All my go karting experience helps me beat the oval drivers. I've never raced it in a Legend car before but I have won several championships in the Brandolaro. The Legend car was more to handle on the road course so my dad took me to Robert Gayton driving school in New Mexico. He taught me how to brake really well and how to shift in the turns. I started out in the Miata and once I was smooth in that I went to the Legend car. A week later we went back out there to race the track I was practicing on. I ended up winning the race.

It was finally time to race the "Silver State Road Course" series. The series is 4 weekends of racing with 2 races a weekend. My age group is the "Young Lions" 12-16 years old but we also share the track with the old kids the "Semi-pros". I did great my first race, I finished 2nd overall, which means I beat everyone in my group and the older kids too except one. An eighteen-year-old girl named Lindsay Brewer kept beating me. Every race I was getting better. It was the last weekend and I was tied in points with competitor Caden for the championship. I finished in 2nd place and it wasn't enough to secure the championship. Then during tech (is a check for safety and following rules)

1st and 2nd place got DQ (disqualified) so I won the race and wrapped up the championship. For the last race I started on pole (in the front) and was freight trained to the back and slowly worked my way back up to third.

Then a caution came out, on the restart I zipped by everyone to lead and win. I was so excited to win the championship and Rookie of the Year award.

WOW what a year, 2015 was a really big year for me, I learned a lot! I give a big thanks to my dad for all the hard work he has done. I learned a lot in the dirt track, the circle track and, the road course racing in the Legend car. Now I'm getting ready for the 2016 racing year, I'm going to be racing the Legend car again at the Bullring. I'm starting a new series, in Madera, CA the "Junior Late-Model" that's going to be televised. I am also going to be racing the Dirt Midget at Ventura Motor Speedway. I am really looking forward to next year.

Alexi Harber  
High School Essay



## Untitled

When I was in ninth grade, I made the transition from a math and science magnet school to one of the top arts academies in the nation. It was unusual to say the least, but that experience is what I attribute to my personal growth over my high school years.

I'm not sure what the exact reason for my enrolling in a math and science high school was; it was probably a culmination of many things. Growing up, it was always instilled in me that math and science were vital to the world. My dad has a degree in computer science, my mom is a nurse, and my Aunt is a mathematician. I've been surrounded with math and science my whole life, and I've always believed that it was important. I still do. Certainly, my family influenced me the most to enroll into a math and science magnet middle school.

During my middle school years, I liked math and science. I can't say that I loved it, but I did love my teachers and I found the subject matters to be intriguing. I was always told that the math and science world needed more women, and that motivated me to keep studying it. I wanted to prove that women were just as capable as men to be engineers or mathematicians; I knew first hand because my Aunt was one. During this, I got caught up in the idea of being an engineer. I started to have a sinking feeling in my stomach that it wasn't what I was meant to be doing, but I did it anyway because I had painted this picture of what I thought I should be. Going into the math and science high school program seemed like a natural progression, and yet math and science had become an obligation—something

that I felt I couldn't change my mind about.

Just like a culmination of many things led me into math and science, a culmination of many things led me out of it. At the same time, I was heavily involved in community theatre as a member of the Rainbow Company Youth Theatre student ensemble. The ensemble is made up of about 40 students, aged 10 to 18, who study all aspects of theatre production and performance. Rainbow Company was my saving grace freshman year. At school, I was completely miserable. I was immersed in an unhealthy environment where teachers would tell me that I was stupid for asking a question and students were encouraged to sabotage other students. When asking another student for help, they would teach me the wrong way to do something simply so that they could have a higher class rank than me. I like competition, but not to the point where others are hurt in the process. I didn't want to be connected to this environment or endorse this hyper-competitive behavior in any way; it wasn't who I was then and it certainly isn't who I am now. I wanted to collaborate, support, encourage, and help cultivate an empowering environment for others.

On the last night of Spring Break vacation with my family, I realized that I had enough. I was at the point where I would rather do anything else in the world than go back to school the next day to be submerged in that toxic environment again. This was particularly unusual for me as I have always been the kid who loved to go to school. When I told my parents how I felt, they were incredibly supportive. My mom started to list off options such as homeschooling, online school, or maybe a charter school. I knew that I didn't want to be homeschooled or go to online school because I truly loved interacting and working with other people. In the back of mind, something was telling me that I was meant to do theatre. My involvement in Rainbow Company and being President of the drama club pushed me to the conclusion that I was happiest when I was in a theater. I think I had always known this; I just didn't want to let myself believe it because I was scared. My

whole life I thought I was so certain about what I wanted, and changing my mind seemed absolutely crazy. My brain is equally divided between the so-called right and left, between creativity and logic. Since my brain pulled me in two different directions, the tiebreaker had to be my heart.

Sitting there on the last night of Spring Break, I made the decision to pursue art. I told my mom that I thought I belonged at LVA, the Las Vegas Academy of the Arts. It was April, and I knew that auditions for LVA took place in January. I was also going into my sophomore year, and spots for students who aren't freshmen are incredibly limited. I thought that getting in was hopeless, but I decided to call the next day anyway. I was told that late auditions were coming up in five days, so I quickly prepared a technical theatre audition piece. Three days later, I was accepted. Over the course of merely 8 days, I took the initiative and changed my future. One phone call changed the course of my life, and it was the best decision that I've ever made for myself.

The transition to LVA wasn't easy. Going in as a sophomore, everyone pretty much had clear groups of friends, and I was just a kid that came in late; everyone assumed I didn't know anything about theatre. My peers didn't accept me at first, but it was only a matter of time before I had been fully integrated into the program, socially and academically. LVA had a reputation for maintaining the collaborative, empowering environment that I so desperately wanted to be a part of, and the program and students by far exceeded my expectations.

I'm now a senior at LVA, and I love what I'm doing. I'm inspired daily by my teachers and fellow students to become a better artist and person. Theatre has taught me things and fulfilled me in ways that math never could. I've grown to accept what I want, and myself, and to pursue the thing that burns with a passion deep within me. I wish that I could tell my freshman self that things get better. I wish that I could tell her that empowering others and building lasting relationships are far more important than your class

rank. I wish that I could tell her that failure is not a deep cut that leaves a permanent scar, but rather a bump that leaves a temporary bruise. There are a lot of things that I wish I could have done differently, but in the end, I don't regret any of it. I am no longer the freshman girl who thought she was unintelligent; I am the senior who thinks that she is resilient and worthwhile. If it weren't for the unhealthy environment I was in for a year, she might not have ever realized it. For that, I'm forever indebted to the math and science school that made me miserable because it also made me realize what I really wanted, and it gave me the motivation to chase after it.



Witnee Hord  
High School Essay

## Surviving

It was a chilly, windy February morning in 2014 and I was on my way to my first neurologist appointment with Dr. Donald Johns. I was 14 years old. We were going to look and examine my most recent MRI test. That would be my third one in a year and a half (that's one every six months).

My poor concerned mother appeared nervous. I could tell she was thinking intently because of the way she was fidgeting with her fingers. As the patient not exactly knowing what's going on with me, I was worried too. The doctor eventually came in and we went over my results. He finally told us what was going on inside my head.

I sat there glancing back at my mom, then back at the doctor several times. All I could focus on was my teary-eyed mother, she had completely lost it, but I had no room to talk, because so did I. The doctor continued and told us that the MRI had found an abnormality on the right parietal lobe; it's called a Venous Angioma. It all sounded like Greek to me. That is a congenital malformation of veins which drain normal brain fluid or blood depending on the severity. It's considered to be benign, yet he told based on other tests that were run in the past, I suffer from partial complex subtle seizures or 'staring spells'.

Those happened throughout the day every day and lasted between 15-20 seconds. Other symptoms include headaches or severe migraines and memory loss. In the beginning we thought it was a hereditary trait that came from either my mother's side or my father's' side. Since both my maternal grandmother and my paternal grandmother and my father all suffer from migraines, we thought they could

be the ones to pass on the trait. In searching through my Genealogy, we were told that it could be a slight possibility, yet it's not one hundred percent certain.

If the angioma (or anomaly) is benign, what seems to be causing all of these issues? Several tests and EEG's (electroencephalograms) later, the findings were conclusive to the earlier diagnosis. A couple of months flew by and I was given a 24-hour EEG study and the results still came up as conclusive to the last one. I felt as if there was no hope for finding any cure for my symptoms. Sure there are seizure medications to help subside my flare-ups, but I don't think the side effects for the medication were worth the risk. My mom had taught me something, she told me, "I shouldn't have pity for myself because there are people out there who do have it worse than I do. And that people are only given the battles they can handle." I took these words to heart and began to live by them.

It has been tough trying to act normal and pretend there's nothing wrong around all of my friends, but I'm slowly learning to accept myself and embrace the internal flaw and not let it bother me as much as it should.

I am fighting a tough battle, but I can get through it and I am surviving.

It has been a life changing experience and every day seems to be a struggle dealing with the headaches, like someone is throwing rocks at your skull, the embarrassment, not knowing what others think of you and forgetting information and having people look at you "weird" like you're crazy, and of course the medication with the side effects. With the constant tiredness, irritability and self-doubt, or better yet, the numerous blood tests to make sure my levels are adapting to the medication and are working in my favor – the struggle is real. I may have a disability, I may have been born with a "bad deck of cards", but I will not let it consume or destroy me.

I will fight because I am worth living and this is just the beginning of my journey with Epilepsy.

Amy Kang  
High School Essay

## Everyday Actions Lead to the Big Picture

Who you really are is determined by your actions when no one is around. Your reputation, on the other hand, is determined on your everyday actions around people. However, there will be a point in life where those two factors cross. Whether the crossing point aligns or gets tangled is a choice that is upon your hands right now.

Most people, put on a mask when they step outside their door, their comfort zone. This mask is invisible. It covers up who you really are. What you really like to do. Your real reactions. Your hope. And sometimes, even your dreams. You put it on to fit other peoples' needs. This is all because everyone wants to be loved, to be accepted, and to be respected.

It's never too late to change. Start with small actions, like making your bed in the morning. At first, you might get lazy, but push yourself to. A positive push can drive you to the right path. After the first few days, you will get used to doing it, and slowly, it will become a part of your daily routine. Soon enough, the daily routines turn into habits, in this chase, a good one.

Let's say you were running for class president, but you were known to talk behind people's backs and of cheating. Would you say that it's likely that you will win? Sure, if you are popular, then you can get your group of friends' votes. But what about those people out there? Those who you have hurt, ignored, or cheated on? They may seem like a small population, but every vote counts. Whether they are for you or against you.

Thus your small, everyday actions matter because they

build and make who you are. If you do bad things to others, it will eventually come running right back at you and same thing goes for all the good deeds. However, you shouldn't be expecting anything special in return if you picked up trash or helped an old lady cross the street. It should be done out of your heart because you wanted to do it.

All of these small actions will lead to something meaningful in the future. Not only that, you will be an example that everyone can look up to, perhaps even to your future children. So take off that mask you have on right now, and show the people around you what you really believe in and what you can do for them.

# Antonia Librizzi

## High School Essay

### Untitled

Most people think that high school is the time of your life. The greatest years you'll ever live through. I'm not saying that school doesn't have good aspects, but at the same time I have to ask myself, is school doing more harm than good? For some kids the answer is no, and school is perfectly fine and good, but the unfortunate truth for many others is yes. School is a primary source of stress for many students living in the United States. The stress can come from student loans/debt, group projects, missing a day of school, or the overall competitive nature that school holds.

School is incredibly expensive and hard to afford. If you're planning to attend college, it is near impossible to afford anything out of state. Even in-state schools can cost thousands of dollars. College Board has estimated that, on average, a year of tuition for in-state schools is \$9,410 and \$23,893 for out of state colleges. Many of my friends are seniors in high school this year and it is so heartbreaking to hear that they will be unable to attend their dream school because it is too expensive. College isn't the only aspect about school that is expensive, AP students in high school take an AP test at the end of the year, one for each AP class that they're taking. This wouldn't be a problem, except for the fact that each one of these test costs approximately \$92. My sister is a senior in high school, her freshman year, the exams costed \$87, then \$89, then \$91, and this year the price went up to \$92. My mother had to pay over \$500 for my sister and I to be able to take those tests this year. My family is fortunate enough to be able to afford such things, but not everyone is as lucky. It is an incredibly depressing thought

that there are students who are unable to prove the knowledge they already possess for the college credit because their family can't afford it.

I am currently a freshman in high school and, through all my years as a student, one of the most frustrating things that I constantly have to deal with is group projects. I've tried to be reasonable and understand why teachers give their students group projects, but in the end I just don't agree with them. There are so many things about group projects that just suck. There's the stress of finding a partner, for one. Often times, when you're so worried about not being the only one who nobody was partnered with, you end up with someone who either doesn't do the work or irritates you. I'm not suggesting an out-right ban of group projects; I just believe that a lot of kids would rest easier if there was always the option of working alone.

When a student is sick they should be able to stay home without stressing about all the things they are going to have to make up. Unfortunately, kids do stress about being absent. In my case, if I stay home for sickness, I'll get so stressed about all the things I'm missing that I'll only get more sick. This can be especially difficult to people with mental illnesses, people should always put their mental health first, but school makes that hard because it gives you so many other things to do and worry about. When you're absent, even for a day, you can be left with little understanding of new material and be left in the dust compared to the rest of the class.

School has turned out to be a lot more competitive than it should be. Many students that take the most difficult classes and get straight A's can have anxiety over keeping these grades. When I take a test, I don't want to worry about getting the highest grade, I just want to get a good enough grade to keep my A. However, there are students in my classes who constantly want to know what I got and I don't want them to know, even if I did well. On more than one occasion, a student has bragged to me about how he got a terrible grade on the test, only to reveal that it was

100% and was “terrible” because he usually gets over 100%. It is comments like these that make school difficult. He wants to make me feel bad about a good grade just because his was better. I’m sick and tired of this type of thing and just wish everyone would stop comparing and start only worrying about themselves.

There is never an easy solution to a hard problem. The thing that I hope to gain by writing this essay is to make things a little easier for students who, like me, have a great deal of school induced anxiety. While I know that school is an important part of life and knowledge is essential, I just wish that we could go through school and not have to deal with all the stress.

Mia Milberger  
High School Essay

## What Does Science Tell Us About God?

Perhaps one of the greatest unsolved mysteries of the universe is whether or not God exists. Many people today need to see to believe. The fact is, the proof of God's existence is all around us.

Take our own world, for example. According to [everystudent.com](http://everystudent.com), "Even a fractional variance in the Earth's position to the sun would make life on Earth impossible." This means that if we were just a little bit closer to the sun, we would burn up, but any farther away and we would freeze. Our moon is also in the perfect position. It keeps the oceans from flooding over, yet it keeps them moving to create tides and waves. Our position in the solar system is so perfect, how could Earth's creation happen by chance?

There's also evidence of God in us. Dr. Phillip Bishop, a professor of exercise physiology, puts it this way: "...it seems highly doubtful that we are the product of chance errors of our forebear's DNA." Certain areas of DNA have another message that's able to be read by a cell. The genome can mean something different when read backwards, which saves space. All parts of DNA are used in one way or another. Just DNA alone is proof that there is a God.

The laws of nature would be something else to consider. The website [allaboutphilosophy.org](http://allaboutphilosophy.org) mentions, "The combinations of physical constants in our universe are perfectly set for the existence of life." In other words, there's an endless amount of ways our universe could have been different. If that's the case, then the odds of us getting the universe we have today by random are one in a trillion. With this in mind, one can say that the universe and all the

laws of nature had to be set by someone.

The proof of God is everywhere. One just simply has to be open minded and alert. No one can tell others what to believe; each person must decide for themselves.

# Moxy Rogers

## High School Essay



## Fear

Fear. I've written that word over and over again, but nothing comes next. I think I'm afraid to continue, which is probably one of the greatest injustices I could ever experience with a pen in my hand. The words are supposed to flow like languid water against a river bed, but I keep getting stuck behind fear. It's the trepidation of where to start how will my beginning reflect my end? How do I create an essay that is both poetic and honest without underselling or overselling myself? I'm scared to begin because I'm scared of what the end will look like. Do I begin with being 8 years old and laughing until my stomach hurt because I was silly and the world was good? Or do I go straight into wishing I could forget being 8 because my stomach didn't hurt from laughter, it ached with regret and my bones were sore from his hands and my skin was bruised with filth and my innocence rested beneath the heavy panting of a man with no morals? Where do I possibly go from there? Is it fear that stops me from talking or writing about the nightmares? Is it fear that stops me when my throat constricts, my body tenses, my blood becomes poisoned with my past as someone ponders upon me, "are you okay?" What exactly am I so afraid of? I was only 8.

Fear. I don't want to be afraid anymore. I have looked at myself in the mirror too many times and witnessed the monsters that cling to my hair and sleep underneath my fingertips, laughing from the creases of my eyes, to be afraid of something like my future. I want to become something, be someone more than just the daughter of a codependent recovering crack addict. Fear is what made me swallow a

bottle of pills when I was 16. Fear is what had me in the bathroom at 2am clutching a half empty bottle of wine while I sobbed his name and threw up his memories. Fear is what kept me from learning how to love myself for 17 years. I was only 8.

Fear. I'm 17 now and it feels like the next time I blink, I'll be 18. That turning point in my life feels like a deadline that I must meet, whether I'm ready to do so or not. January 20th, 2016: Time To Stop Being Afraid. I know I was only 8, but I'm not 8 anymore. I was defenseless nearly 10 years ago and I cried until it stopped hurting, but it never stopped hurting, and I was 16 when I tried to make the pain stop forever, but no amount of bad poetry, handfuls of pills, or empty wine bottles can make you forget. I was only 8. I was only 8, but I'm about to be 18 and I don't want to be scared of a past I can't change because it'll affect a future that I can.

Fear? When I look in the mirror now, I don't see monsters. My hair is clean and my fingertips have been scrubbed. I haven't had any alcohol to drink in over a year and I don't cry about old wounds anymore. I'm ready to take the first steps into being okay again. Into being brave. There is an entire world ahead of me where the people smile and the kids are allowed to be kids, parents love their children, the only tears shed are the ones admiring beautiful art pieces in museums I've wished to see, bruises come from playing too hard not defending yourself and the only thing I'll ever be afraid of again will be the simple things; Does my hair look okay today? Did I remember to brush my teeth this morning? Will this college like my essay and accept me into their school?

Bravery.

# Grace Swanner

## High School Essay

### Untitled

The women went over and over her instructions and rules until I got incredibly sleepy for the first time in weeks. I don't remember what she told me. It really was a blur. My mom kept flashing looks of concern at my bone thin figure while nodding with comprehension at the strange woman's words. I had lost 10 pounds off my already skinny frame in one week alone. No, I wasn't anorexic, and I don't think I knew what that word meant anyway. Everything just tasted rotten in my mouth. Just imagine the grossest thing you have ever eaten, then imagine that being the only thing you can ever taste. Now you're close to the feeling I felt when I would try to eat.

"What are you in for?", the pale, decrepit looking girl asked with eyes bulging out of her skull. I rolled by her with my gaze to the ground. I did not need any problems on my first day there. I needed to be strategical in every action I took. The better behaved I was; the sooner I could leave. Leaving was the goal. Staying meant failure, so I could not let staying for any long period of time be an option. Sounds dramatic? Ha, you have no clue, do you? You're forgiven, the naive cannot be held accountable for what they do not know.

My first night in the psych ward wasn't too peachy. The nurse woke me up to check my vitals every 15 minutes. I would time it based on how long she took to go from my room and back around all the other rooms. Actually sleeping crossed my mind, but seemed like a far off impossibility. The nurse, I don't know her name. She was always crying once she got to my room. It was kind of

awkward, so I asked her why she was crying out of consideration for her feelings. She never answered my question.

We had a tight schedule. For those who have never experienced the joy of a psych ward, it is the same damn thing as school. We had a time for everything, down to our free time. What a funny concept, free time. Time is money, so it could never be considered free. I bet I wasted millions of seconds while I was locked away. It was a petri dish of emotionally unstable teenagers and children and nurses and doctors and any person who walks through those prison doors.

The screams came out of the heavily locked door when the little boy went inside. I didn't know what was wrong with him, or why they made me play games with him. The nurses would just stand there watching us as we played as though we were fish in an aquarium. One particular nurse shook her head at me when I didn't know how to play this simple children's game. I seem to recall it was called Battleship. I was confused by her frequent glares in my direction. It wasn't my fault that I wasn't allowed to go to the gym with the other kids my age. I couldn't walk down the stairs to get there.

I was bored to tears there. It was the middle of March and snowing, so I'm told. I don't remember much. Sleep deprivation is like being perpetually drunk. Everything is hazy and like a dream. Ever tried to remember a dream, or how the dream started out? Exactly. You can't remember. That's what it was like. A dream. A nightmare actually.

The nurses gave me a notebook. A black and white composition notebook. The basic kind your teachers might give you if they are nice. The odd thing was that they didn't give you pencils. That was confusing to me at first. I understood why over time though; because people might stab themselves with them. We only got pencils where they could watch us. It was like we were in kindergarten or something. I did not care or remember that we were not supposed to bring the pencils into our rooms. I just wanted to draw, not stab myself.

Don't get me started on the group therapy. The group part of the therapy cancelled out any help from therapy that might have been given if I was alone. We all had our pre-scripted answers for when the woman would ask ...”and why are you here?”. The answer was always some generic, “I tried to kill myself”, or “I took too many pills”. Mine was also generic to follow suit with my peers' responses.

“Why are you here, Z?” the ‘therapist’ would say. I would reluctantly look up from my little roost above the conversation and recite: “My name is Zanna and I am here for depression and sleep deprivation.”

She would never fail to say: “My bad, your name is written as Z on your file.”

I would fulfill my social obligation of politeness and reply: “It's alright, a common mistake.”

Then, once the socially awkward torture that was group therapy ended I would wait for my name to be called to meet with the doctor about why I was there. That is all they ever wanted to know. They would ask me if I knew my name. My own name. Then if I took a shit yet that day, which felt violating. Lastly, they would always ask; “...and why are you here, Zanna?”

“Great!” I would think. I don't even fit into the loony bin. That is when I felt shit get real. I needed to get out. That was my one and only goal. During visiting hours, I would beg my parents to get me out. I would beg the nurses to write out the release form, and get the doctor to sign it. For the therapist to tell everyone that I am miraculously cured! Something.

The begging wasn't enough. My parents eventually got involved. They talked to the doctor who wouldn't let me leave. To be honest, I don't remember what all they said or if I was even there to hear it. Regardless, it probably went something like this;

“Our daughter is perfectly fine, right? There is nothing wrong with her, she can leave?” My parents said to the doctor.

“Well, Mr. and Mrs. Swiss, that is not what your

daughter has conveyed to us. We are trained professionals and we know the signs. Your daughter has displayed most if not all of the signs of depression as well as suicidal thoughts. Due to this we will have to keep her another week for further examination”

Then my dad would probably chime in with the typical; “You all have had her here for a few days. Is she ready to go home?”

“Yes, I agree.” the discharge eventually person said.

A little more deliberation and signatures on piles of paperwork and bam!

Finally! Prison break. The light of day shined down on my face. The crisp March air slapped me wide awake. I was content just to be alive. To be free. In that moment I finally knew what they all meant by free time.



*Fiction*

***Middle School Storytellers***

Kira Abney  
Ryanishia Belton  
Kelcie Davies  
Rebekah Dalton  
Oriana Del Cid  
Destiny Fyke  
Isabelle Hanon  
Natalie Kassamanian  
Ashley Kavangh  
Ashley Royko  
Ellie Welch  
Anna Yacek  
Mia Smilla Zapata  
Karen Zavala

***High School Storytellers***

Bianca Castillo  
Cambria De Vries  
Maria Feil  
Rebecca Ioane  
Chisato Jacobson  
Sariyah Jerome  
Alex Jo  
Sheen Kim  
Christina King  
Seth Larson  
Harlee Miscovich  
Tyquiil Pollard  
Ariella Tjahjadi  
Alistair Wallen

Kira Abney  
Middle School Fiction

## Contaminated

May 26, 2016

The speedboat stopped. Jennifer exited the boat as her friends followed her. Jennifer listened to the angry, rushing waves hit the island shore. She tightly clutched her suitcase against her breast. She hesitated to step on Island Kama. She patted away her sweat and took a few steps to a shaded area. Her friends persuaded her to come, even though she didn't want to. She didn't want to disappoint her friends. The group set up a few tents to stay in. The light, tickling sand fell through Jen's toes. The trees danced in the wind. The island was covered with trees. Only the shore, that occupied the tents, was naked.

Her friends all cracked open a can of beer and turned on their radio they brought with them; however, Jen sat and began to read a book.

"Jen, come on and drink a beer. You turned 18 today," Meg exclaimed.

"Oh, um sorry, but I really shouldn't be drinking," Jen mentioned.

Jen's boyfriend, Nathan, sat with Jen and rested as Megan, Kyle, Brandon, Katie, Sam, and Daniel were swimming drunk in the ocean. Night swung over as fast as lightening. The drunk kids lay scattered on the sand, as Jen and Nathan were snoring in the tent. Morning came. Jen woke up and expected fresh eggs and bacon, but then she remembered that it was all just a pleasant memory. Tears sprung from her eyes.

"I know it's only been a few months since your parents died in a car crash Jen, but it's going to be fine," Nathan said calmly.

"Yes, but they were trying to save me from getting wasted at a party I was at, and I can never forgive myself," Jen said wiping away her tears.

Jen got up and left the tent. Everyone was still asleep, except for Daniel. Jen looked up and saw him standing at the edge of the

cliff above her. He didn't seem like himself. His face showed no emotion, and he was just standing there. Suddenly, he jumped off the cliff. SNAP. The fall was too forceful, and he broke his neck on the way down. The sound of it made Jen cry out in horror. She hadn't see anything as terrible as that before.

When the body of Daniel fell to the bottom of the cliff, he was sliced in half from sharp rocks and blood spattered on Jen. Jen screamed a horrifying shriek that made everyone come running over to her.

When Jen's friends saw the bloody scene, they went in shock and started screaming and crying, too. They didn't bother to identify what had happened, they just gathered everything together and got ready to leave. Terrified, everyone ran to the boat to leave and get help, but when they tried starting the boat, it wasn't cooperating. Nathan tried to turn on the boat many times, hoping for that one sound an engine makes when it starts. It never came, so they had to stay. The police boats wouldn't check around the islands for days, so the group of friends were doomed.

"Let's just rest and pretend that none of this happened," Katie said, trembling. "The more we think about what happened, the more we will be freaking out."

They put their tents back up and went inside of them. A few hours of sleep calmed them down, and by the time they were done relaxing, it was night. Suddenly, a scream shattered Jen's ears. Jen saw Katie and Sam dead in the tent with white foam coming from their mouths. Megan, Kyle and Brandon wanted to find some help, so they started searching the ocean for someone. Jen and Nathan stayed behind. They just cuddled together to calm themselves. They quickly fell asleep since they thought the group of friends weren't coming back anytime soon.

Jen woke up to a push in the middle of the night. She realized it was Nathan telling her to get up. He was holding a flashlight and gave her one too.

"Something's wrong with Kyle. It's like he's sick," Nathan said.

Jen's friends were all back, and they were standing by Kyle. Nobody knew what was going to happen next. Suddenly, foam was falling from Kyle's mouth. His mouth formed a sinister grin. Jennifer's face froze in horror. Kyle ran towards Brandon and tore off the skin from his face. Brandon screamed in pain, but the group of friends were too scared to help him. Brandon slowly got

devoured devoured as the group of friends ran away. Then, Kyle ran after them. They ran for their lives to a small cave. They hid there. This thing wasn't Kyle, it was like a person with rabies.

Jennifer screamed, trying to hold back tears, "This place isn't normal! All of our friends are dying here. It's like there is a disease on the island that has three side effects. I think it makes you commit suicide, it kills you itself, or it makes you have a zombie-like desire to eat people!"

Megan got the same look that Kyle did when he killed Brandon. Meg ran to Nathan. Jen quickly grabbed a rock and smashed it onto Meg's head. She fell on the sand. Jen realized Nathan had a bite on his arm. He was infected.

"Leave me here... Just be free and get away from this island," Nathan moaned in pain.

Jennifer ran and ran. She made sure Kyle was nowhere near her. When she got to the shore, she saw a police boat nearby. She got in the water and started swimming a few yards, and got the attention of the police boat. The police let Jen into their boat and drove away.

Jennifer was finally safe from that horrifying island. Unfortunately, Jen got a sinister grin and a terrifying look in her eyes. She bit the policemen and they both shot her. They drove back into town infected...

January 2, 2015

The mayor of California confirmed that there should be a dumping of animal feces into the ocean. He believed no harm would be done because it was dumped in the water near a faraway island named Island Kama. That was how it all started...

Ryanishia Belton  
Middle School Fiction

## The Demon Inside

*“It’s not that I’m afraid of the dark;  
I’m afraid of the things I see in the dark.”*

~ Ryanishia

As we watched the television I had heard slight mumbling.

“Did you hear that?” I enquired to my friend Emma.

“No, you’re probably hearing things. We didn’t get much sleep last night.”

“Hmm... okay. I’m going to go hop in the shower. Be right back.”

Quickly I gathered my things, but before I had gotten in I realized I had forgotten my towel. Steadily I walked out into the closet to grab the towel. But before I could reach it I paused. A male figurine about the same size as me walked through my room and behind the door. Immediately I asked “Who’s there?” After a few minutes of silence, I blanked out, and couldn’t remember what I was doing until my friends asked me who I was talking to. As I showered, constantly I had the feeling of being watched. I knew it wasn’t Emilia, but I hoped it was. As I was getting dressed I had noticed three large scratches down my back each about the same length of 4” and width of ½ 1”. Urgently I called Emma into the bathroom to look at the scratches but she saw nothing.

Urgently I called Emma into the bathroom to look at the scratches but she saw nothing.

Things like this always happen, although this time it was different. Why? I wish I knew myself.

Later on that night, the two of us thought it would be a good idea to do some prank calls. After an hour of doing that it got tiresome, and we decided to watch a few episodes of “Fuller House” on Netflix in the living room. Slowly I felt myself drifting off to sleep.

*Two hours later...*

I woke up on the couch by the computer with the light on. In front of me I saw a tall, slim, pitch black figure in front of me slowly fading away.

*Why am I on this couch I thought I fell asleep over there?*

I thought to myself as I glanced at the couch where I had fell asleep, and saw Emilia; knocked out, snoring. Suddenly I found my sister walking out of her room looking at me with wide eyes.

“What’s wrong? Why am I on this couch? And how did I get here?” I ramble without even realizing how fast I was speaking.

“What do you mean?” She stated as if I was forgetting something.

“What are you guys talking about and stop being so loud gee.” Emma joined in.

“I was just wondering why I am on this couch.”

Again she stated the same thing my sister had said “What do you mean?” it was as if everyone had this puzzle completely solved, and there I was without any of the pieces. I dismissed my sister to go back to bed and had walked over by Emma and had her explain everything to me.

*Emma’s point of view...*

“After you had fallen asleep on me while watching Netflix, your sister came home and watched a couple of movies with me. Soon after you started to snore like a cow.”

I paused as she looked up and gave me a mean glare. I decided to continue on, ignoring her spiteful glare.

“Your sister and I woke you up told you to go into your room.”

“Hold up, but I don’t remember being awake.” She said in more of a questioning matter.

“You were.”

“Were my eyes open?”

“Yes, almost pitch black to be exact. Anyways after minutes of trying to get you to go into your room after you refused to, we finally got you to sleep. Around 2:00 a.m. you had gotten up again and said you were going to get a drink of water but you never did. Instead you went over to the other couch and started singing in a weird voice. We decided not to bother you because we were too afraid. Slowly you started to spread out on the couch

and then I assumed you fell asleep. After that your sister went inside her room and asked if I could stay out here and keep an eye on you. Which I accepted and now it's 3:08 a.m. and I'm as tired as ever." I finished out of breath.

"Okay."

*Okay? Okay? After all that all she could say is okay, does she think that's normal or something?*

"Yeah; I'm going to head back to bed now. Don't bother waking up early in the morning; I will just call my mom to get me."

"Okay." She said once again.

*Now I see why people don't come over here very often.*

"Well goodnight."

"Night."

*Vanessa's point of view...*

I couldn't urge myself to say anything but "Okay" in response I didn't know what was wrong with me. I didn't sleep that night at all if you were wondering. Emilia left that morning and I pretend I was asleep as she left. Yet again another friend lost.

As I had expected I didn't get any calls from Emma for the next few months. Each night after what happened I would find myself awake between the times of 12:00 a.m. – 4:00 a.m. searching up things about the paranormal, and watching scary Story time videos on YouTube. I learned things I didn't need to know. About the shadow people. About the witching hour and how spirits like to come out and play with your mind. About the spirits and how they aren't always good. About how I'm not the only one experiencing these things. But, worst of all I learned about how I may be possessed by a demon.

His name is Jack, sometimes he can be good and sometimes he can be bad. He makes me go through things such as sleep paralysis. Which is an out of body experience, you cannot move or speak just look at your surroundings and there he is at the edge of your bed waiting for you to scream. You can't though so he just laughs at you, the most dreadful laugh ever known to man or should I say women, wait no, to child. They do say that children and animals have the most connection to spirits; they were right. I hate that they are right. I hate that they are causing the pain and fear in my life every day.

These are the things you learn to live with day by day. You learn to accept the fact that evil is in your life. That it's surrounding you everywhere you go. Or so they think. I know that there is an escape out there somewhere; an escape from this dreadful life that treats you no good. Soon enough I will escape but until then I still have time. In which that time I will spend finding my escape; my happy place, away from the demon which is inside of us all.

Kelcie Davies  
Middle School Fiction

## High in the Sky

While visiting their grandchildren Susan and Donald decided to do a once in a life time thing. After a delicious vegan meal, they pass down, with their grandchildren, the Strip. There were lots of pretty lights.

Susan said, "Look how much this has changed since I was a young girl."

"Well yeah," said Donald, "There has been such new developing technology that made this whole thing imaginable."

"Yeah." said Susan, "Can you even imagine a life without technology?"

"NO!" shouted both grandchildren.

After being in the car for a while they arrived to a hotel named The Linq. This hotel had a huge Ferris wheel in the front of it. The grandchildren sat in awe of the amazing sight. How could they have passed up the opportunity to ride it? They all decided to ride it one time to get the experience. Time to buy tickets. Each ticket had an amazing picture of the wheel on it. Climbing up the stairs and ramps was such a thrill already. They were so high up that the grandchildren got scared. Entering the huge pod, that could apparently hold up to 30 people, felt like a rush. The transition felt like you were rocking back and forth on a skateboard. Once they left the safety net everyone was all eyes. The strip a night was so beautiful, with all the flashing and attracting lights.

"Wow! What a sight." stated Susan.

Donald and Susan both were taking so many pictures. This was such an amazing sight, and everyone was enjoying it. Then a screen came on saying in the next 30 seconds you would be reaching the top of the Ferris wheel. Then it counted down.

FIVE

FOUR

THREE

TWO

ONE!

At this time, they were 555 feet high, and everyone was so amazed at the height. The Ferris wheel slowly reached the bottom. Everyone was sad to get off, because it was such a good event. They left down the ramps that led into a little room. This room took their picture.

"Three, two, one click." said the photographer.

The pictures were great. They all had such a good time, and bought all three pictures provided. The grandparents and grandchildren each bonded as a family. The importance of this trip was for the family. Family is such an important value in life. Family is the golden key to life. It's where everyone gets information on how to do things in life.

Rebekah Dayton  
Middle School Fiction



## The Third Stone

On the bright clear morning of July 16, 1942, a hint of sunlight crept through the slight crack in the curtains of the quaint house which stood on the banks of Lake Erie in Ohio shining directly in young Marigold Edward's window. She peaked on eye out on her brain turned on. "No!" she shouted. For she knew that when her brain wakes up there was nothing she could do to make herself go back to her peaceful, delightful slumber.

Her mother peeked her head in the creaking door, "Good," she exclaimed, "you're awake. Now get dressed in that cute summer dress I bought you last month, you need to make a good impression on your Aunt Cherise who's only coming to visit us today you know."

"Sure," Marigold replied, "but could I please be allowed to go to the lake today after I am done visiting with Aunt Cherise?"

"Absolutely Mari, but you'd better get on your dress without delay if you want to have time to explore down by the lake and do be very polite to your dear Aunt."

"I promise; now would you please excuse me to get dressed." She asked. Once her mother had left her room she scrambled out of bed and slipped on the frilly, pale pink dress. Then, she hurriedly rushed to the foyer where she would await her very rich and prestigious Aunt Cherise.

After a few minutes, there came a rapping upon the door and Mari opened the door with a flourish and was immediately in the piercing eyesight of her aristocrat aunt. Without a word to her young niece she handed her coat to her and started to the living room. Mari hurried and put the coat on the rack, then trailed into the living room where she tried to make small talk with her aunt, although it became exceedingly difficult whenever she was forced to meet those imposing light blue eyes which seemed to bore into her sole and shake her confidence. However, she was not going to give up and was able to get very short and well thought out responses from her aunt which always gave her something new and

intriguing to think about before her next question. After what seemed like days, her mother excused her to go outside, Mari was a little reluctant to leave after she learned the extensive knowledge this educated elder could bestow upon her, but she did as she was told.

When the cool, refreshing air greeted her as soon as she stepped outside she almost forgot why she was reluctant to come out into this old and exquisite world. The previously warm air was cooled as it glided across the top of the lake and eventually whooshed through her long, curly, chocolate brown hair. She raced down the steps toward the pond and found the quaint little spot with beautiful white stones, her secret place, and a rock that was worn from her sitting upon it so many times. She was just about to take her shoes off to dip her toes in the water of the lake, when a boy about two years older in age came crashing through the trees on the other side of the small clearing.

In a few seconds, Mari recognized his as Harold Mathews, her next door neighbor. She was not very enthusiastic to find him crashing in on her little retreat. He glanced at her and said, “Ah. Look who I’ve found wondering a little farther than she should from home, little Martha Edwards.”

“It’s Marigold, Harold,” she corrected him, standing up and placing her petite hands on her hips and continued, “and what do you suppose you’re doing here?”

“Why,” he glanced around on what she was standing on and replied, “I am here to skip these abundant stones.”

“Don’t you dare, these are all special to me and shouldn’t be thrown into the lake.” Harold wasn’t listening and picked up three stones in his left hand as Marigold worked her way over to him, he picked up one and skipped it as fog settled onto the lake. She hurried as fast as her legs could carry her, three-quarters of the way here when he skipped the second stone into the graying fog. “Stop!” Mari shrieked as she closed in on him while he took the third stone and skipped it into the impending fog. She lost her footing and because she could not do anything else she whispered, “Please, somebody, stop him from destroying my retreat.” At that moment, a skipping sound echoed out of the fog, and even though he had thrown with all his might, the third stone came skipping back. Mari grasped the stone in her hand, running her fingers on the damp surface and glanced at Harold. His mouth was hanging open, while his eyes couldn’t decide where to look at the lake or at the stone.

“W-w-what just h-happened?” He was able to choke out staring quizzically at the rock. The only answer she could provide was a shrug of her shoulders. He took one last look at the rock in her hand and stumbled back off the way he had come. She slipped this special rock that had come back to her into her pocket and walked back up the path to her house, all the while pondering what had happened with the rock. She knew someone or something had come and answered her plea for help in saving her sanctuary, but why?

Upon arriving at the top of the hill, she saw her the door opening and caught a glimpse of her aunt’s gown and hurried to greet her goodbye at the bottom of the steps. When she arrived her aunt seemed to glide gracefully down the steps. She spotted her niece and reaching the bottom of the steps she turned to Marigold and said, “There are some mysteries in life we will never be able to uncover, but my dear niece some will be revealed to us in unexpected ways. Treasure the third stone my dear, and always remember the adventures you have, and maybe sometime you will be the one to give someone their greatly needed third stone.” Apparently satisfied with her lesson Aunt Cherise walked to her car and Marigold could have sworn she had seen two smooth, pearlescent stones poking out of her aunt’s bag. That day she determined she would find an opportunity to return someone’s third stone.

## Loreive Part 2

I open my eyes to find that I am alive; in shock I stand up and look around at all the deranged people standing around me. “Why are you all looking at me?” I say angrily. A strange scrawny red haired lady walks to the front and looks up at me and says “those two people you almost died for...are not your real parents, I’m sorry.” She then puts her head down and covers her face with her soft small hands. I choke and ask her “what is your name?” “The name is Julie; we are not crazy, well not on purpose anyways. I can tell you how and much more if you listen to...” “Why should I even trust you!?” I can see the people start to twitch and turn and I begin to think that maybe I have startled them. I turn to notice something strange starting to appear with Julie’s eyes. The blue eye color starts to turn black and the whites of her eyes turn ink black in an instant. “You will trust us because we are all you have left!” I stand there speechless noticing that her voice turned demon-like. A million thoughts begin to flood my mind. “But what just happened to you? I was always told all of you people have always been crazy!” I say. “Awe your poor child they really did wipe out your memory.”

She then walks closer to me and tries to somehow comfort me. “Get away from me! You people don’t know who I am or what has happened to me! You’re lying to me Julie!” It is then that I see the transformation happen again. It is then that it hits my mind; anger is what sets these people off to go on a killing rampage. This time it is not just Julie whose eyes turn full demon black. Every single deranged person in the hospital room’s eyes begins to turn full demon black. I begin to turn to the hospital room’s door, easing my way through the door. Within seconds I begin running down the hallway looking around for an elevator. All the deranged people begin to run after me as they climb on the walls with blood dripping down their mouths. I then realize that all the power is out. My only chance of survival is to crash through the window. But what if I don’t make it? Then what?

I'll have died not knowing the answer to what Julie had said. It is a chance I am willing to take, without a moment of hesitation I jump out of the window and fall 15 flights down finally landing on the ground as it bounces back at me, almost as if it is a trampoline. Slowly, I begin to lift myself off the ground trying to escape. But I can't help but lay there and see if these people survive. My courage for curiosity keeps me from lifting myself off the ground as I watch the deranged people follow after me falling to the floor slamming flat into a pancake. I finally rise to my feet as my right ankle and spine disagree with a sharp pain. I begin struggling to run, I then calm down and realize that the deranged people couldn't have survived a fall that high right? I slowly turn around to see if anyone survived no sign of any danger in sight. I begin a smooth slow stride down the road coping with my injuries. Just then I feel something cold slide down my shirt. Looking to my left I find blood dripping down my shirt.

"Please no!" I shout.

"Did you miss me sweetheart?!" A strange man with big black covered eyes covered in dark blue clothes looks at me and smiles with yellow teeth covered in dark blood. I close my eyes hoping nothing will happen.

"Get out of here you putrid peasant." Then I notice two furry strong bull legs just before I pass out and hit my head I hear someone whisper in a deep grunting voice "hello Blossom." I find myself strapped down to a table unable to move. I look at my hand and realize that I am still the beast! This place is so familiar but I cannot seem to remember what this place is.

"Do you remember me Blossom?" It has to be Cybeast!

"Why did you save me?" I say trying not to sound grateful.

"I only saved you because you are worth saving Blossom."

"What do you possibly mean by that Cybeast?"

"You were never meant to be just an ordinary girl Blossom ....well beast now...there was a reason for why I tricked you into turning into this beast. It was before I learned that you were immune to the infection. I and everyone else already knew that you were born for the rebellion. This is why your parents sent you away. They didn't know at first that they were creating something that would make each human turn on each other. They were just trying to find a way to cure people of their sickness. The sickness that spread so fast no one could out run it no matter what they did. But then day after day they committed to

finding the cure even if it meant no sleep. They began to lose their minds not being able to separate the truth from fiction of what they were doing. Things went wrong and they decided to send you away knowing one day you would rebel against it all.”

Trying to take in everything Cybeast said I snapped and said “Look, I don’t want to be a part of any rebellion and no one can force me!” I began struggling to get out of the straps and trying to escape.

“If you tricked me. Isn’t there a reverse so that I am not this ugly beast anymore?”

“Yes but Blossom think about how much power you have!”

I look down at my arms and flex them noticing the strange pattern in my veins.

“I don’t care about power Cybeast. I just want to be me again. You don’t know how much pain and suffering I’ve been through please just change me back.” A tear begins to rush down my face.

“Alright, Blossom if that is what you have chosen so be it. But if you ever change your mind I’m always happy to help.”

Cybeast then grabs a clear vial filled with a dark blue liquid. He then puts it into a syringe and says “this will only hurt for a minute and you will pass out only for a few hours.”

I am then injected with the serum letting out a sigh of relief once the pain passes. The drug pulls me under and I begin to dream of something strange.

There is a lady in a fancy red sparkling dress yelling at me and telling me the loss of her son is my fault and that I must live with that misery now and forever. Her eyes begin to shift from all black to light blue eyes, from demon to human and back to demon. I just ignore her and look around to find myself in the middle of wheat fields higher than the eye can see. It is then that I realize those eyes that I saw weren’t real eyes. Everything everyone is telling me is all just real lies. None of this must exist. But the next scene in my dream leads me to believe it is all true.

I am standing in the middle of Critan surrounded by skulls and fire on all building burning with beauty. I look up to find two beady black eyes staring down at me.

“Wake up rose.”

“Oh how long was I out?”

“9 months.”

“You lied to me, you said just a few hours!”

“Yes but look what you did while you were out. We aren’t in Loreive, we are in Critan now.”

I get up to find all of Critan turned to ashes, people are fighting and some have turned to cannibalism.

“Wait Cybeast you are saying I have started this war?”

“No, your eyes turned into a bright white light and you began levitating. I wasn’t sure what to do so I just followed you. Then you began bringing people back from the dead murmuring the words “dark eyes, scary blood.”

You then began destroying the buildings in which the deranged people use to feed their hunger and the essence of what keeps them sane. I yelled to you and said “Blossom what is happening?!”

But you just stared deep into my eyes and threw me through a metal building. Blossom, you seemed so in rage, I was scared. I blacked out after that and you and I ended up here in Critan in a hospital room.

## The Visit

Many years ago, long before the time of humans lived these “modified humans.” Originally “modified humans” had powers that made them able to do special things like move an object using their brain, but over billions of years their powers slowly disappeared. There were some that still had powers to the common day but most of them didn’t even know they had powers. One of these families included the Smith family. Their parents had known about their powers for a significant amount of time but never decided to share it with their children. Their children grew up just like regular children. As they got older they began to sense something, they didn’t know what it was so they just ignored it for the time being. There would be a time when these powers would become useful. So they just waited until there were just days, then hours, then just minutes left until They appeared.

I see Tommy on his knees in the open field by the old evergreen tree that looked as if it had been there for billions of years. He’s still wearing his old faded out jeans and the awful looking shirt that resembled the look of puke. This past week has been hard on Tommy. Just last week our parents died. A sinkhole devoured our barn while our parents were inside on their nightly walks. I wish I could help Tommy but his pain still lingered.

As I walk up to Tommy I notice that he was crying. I try to get him up so we could go eat lunch.

“Tommy it’s time for lunch,” I say.

“K just give me a minute.”

“Okay...”

I sit there and wait in silence. After about 3 minutes Tommy gets up. I help him up and we go inside to our old beat up house. Four days ago our uncle, Rick, came to live with us, and with him the bottles of liquor he drank every night. There was no one else so I was glad that he had come. Even though our uncle didn’t necessarily make the greatest decisions he is still a good man. Being that our parents didn’t have a will and didn’t have very

much money due to bad paying jobs it was very hard to pay for food and other daily necessities.

Every day after school I go to the Jason Mit Public Library. I am one of those over achieving kids, my grades are picture-perfect but in order for them to stay that way I study. The library is a place where I am able to practice all my 10th grade skills and the library is also a place where I can think.

After school that Monday I go to the library. After studying I finally felt a little more confident for the exams that were coming up on Wednesday. Swatting my long red hair from my face I decided I should treat myself for studying so hard, ice cream!!! Just then my lame ringtone goes off. It's my friend Julliana. I wish I could be as pretty as her all I have to brag about and love was my ocean blue eyes and fire red hair, which everyone said were beautiful.

In a joyful voice I answered the phone, "Hi Julliana."

Julliana instantly responded, "Want to meet up at Sonic?"

"How did you read my mind. I just was thinking about going to get ice cream, but yeah I'll go."

"Ha-ha okay see you in about 10 minutes."

I walked up to the metal table and sat down. Julliana would be here in a few minutes. What I thought would be only a few minutes actually turned into 5 minutes. Julliana shows up in a navy blue polka dot dress with her long blond hair in curls. We sit and talk while we eat our ice-cream. We soon get talking about school and family.

"It's been so hard to concentrate in class," I said, "when all I'm thinking about is Tommy. I'm always worrying if he's okay, with mom and dad being gone."

"I'm pretty sure he'll feel better in a few months. Don't worry about it."

"Don't worry about it? What if he kills himself or beats up on someone at school? His grades are already plummeting."

"Sarah, you just have to take one day at a time. When my grandma died I mourned for months, but then I realized that nothing was going to bring her back."

"I miss them so much!!!"

"I know you do," said Julliana as she held me.

After a few hours I go home. I walk into the house and I automatically feel that something isn't right. As I walk into the kitchen I see Rick sitting in one of the wooden chairs with his head in his hands.

I say in a shaken voice, “Rick what’s wrong?”

He responds remorsefully, “I’ve lost Tommy. I knew I should have come out of the room to ask him how school was.”

“Wha...What do you mean you lost Tommy?”

“Tommy came back from school and was playing out in the yard. I heard a sound, sluggishly I went outside. I say sluggishly because I’m not going to lie I did have a few drinks while you guys were away at school. As I went outside all I saw was this flash of light.”

“I trusted you. How long has he been gone?”

“About 4 hours.”

I shouted, “What’s wrong with you?”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know what to do I am jus gettin use to this kid thing.”

“Okay we have to do something.”

Rick starts to cry and says wrenchingly, “I’m not doing nothin. I am so sorry. I don’t know what I would do if I lost you, and I know your parents would be livid with me, if they were alive, for losing both of you.”

I replied, “Fine, since you can’t seem to pull yourself together!”

In a few seconds I hear the T.V. turn on. Rick is in the recliner watching the news. I hear something that catches my attention.

The news caster states, “We have just got reports that a ship has crashed on the crossroads of Sky and Humvee. If anyone lives near this area the Police of Sharman have told people to evacuate. We’ll update you as soon as we get additional information.”

I know that I have to go, for mom, for dad.

I went into the closet to get my backpack. The old journal that I had found 4 days ago, while I was cleaning out mom and dad’s room was sitting on the shelf. On the cover it said in cursive lettering “Our History.” Of course I opened it up to a random page. I then started reading. It said....

*September 9, 2064*

*Today I saw Sarah in her room. She was focusing very intently on her closet. I knew why. She sensed it, her power. Ever since her and Tommy were born I wanted to keep their powers away from them. I didn’t want other kids thinking that they were different. They weren’t different to me they just had powers, but that was something I couldn’t*

*keep away from them even if I wanted to. It was a part of them and one day they would figure it out. For now, they wouldn't know but one day they would. That would be the day that they really needed it.*

Just like that it came to me. I stared at the door of the house. In a few seconds I was standing just outside the front door. I was amazed I did it. I practiced for a few times going back and forth from the closet to the entry of the house. It was my power I had finally figured it out, I could teleport.

As soon as I was able to control my excitement I went to the kitchen to get some granola bars and 4 bottles of water to put in my pack. It wouldn't be a lot but I would ration and that is how I would get to Tommy.

I went outside and was just about to leave the house but then I heard someone shouting at me, it was Rick.

“Where do you think you're goin?”

I respond in a sharp voice, “I'm going to find Tommy.”

“Ha and how do ya think you're gonna do that?”

I said defiantly, “By myself. He's my brother and I don't need your help!”

I turn away and walk off while Rick yells cursing at me while balling his eyes out. I don't care what anyone says I know that Tommy is alive and no one is going to tell me different. As soon as I get far enough away from the house I concentrate on the photo that the news reporter had shown on the T.V.

In what seems like no time I am standing in the middle of an open area. Towards the North I see a ship that looks as if it came off of “Star Trek”

Tommy has to be here. I teleport into the ship. I soon am standing in what seems like a corridor. I start to walk down the corridor but then I hear someone. It has to be one of them. I soon see the hideous face. It doesn't look like a human but more like an ALIEN. It had a dreadful wrinkly grey face with what looked like burn spots on it, maybe that theory of water burning aliens skin was actually true. I start to shake. I focus and soon teleport down the corridor. He notices me. I run. I see a fairly medium sized handgun with a bottle of water on the desk, I grab them. Without thinking twice, I throw the water on it, the skin starts to boil, soon after my astonishment I press the trigger of the gun. BANG!!!! I shot him square in the head. I start to run. I then start hearing shouts of fear a few chambers down. I recognize the voice, Tommy. I see the chamber and soon

recognize that there's not just Tommy in the chamber but two others, mom and dad.

Dad declares that we needed to get out of here before they came back.

I tell mom that I know about our powers. She says like she already knew, "Ya I knew you would figure it out. Now how about we put them to use."

Soon enough Tommy sees an alien, he focuses hard, the alien falls down to the ground in pain. Tommy had already figured his power out.

Mom says to Tommy and I, "Now I know you guys are probably mad at me and your father because we decided not to tell you guys about your powers but there was a reason we did this." Tommy says, "We understand the reason you kept it from us, you wanted us to grow up like normal children. I am very glad for you guys being my parents and I am also very happy for having these powers, it's our history."

Soon after I hear them coming. Dad tells us that we need to huddle together.

He then looks at me and says, "Now, get us out of here."

It's been three months since this incident. We figured out that the reason the aliens were here; they saw that we were the only living family left with powers. They wanted to understand how these powers came about, but they never did. A few days after the incident they left because they knew that our family was not going to be separated, but we all knew that they would be back. I am very glad to have such wonderful parents who never give up on us even though we can be a pain sometimes and with us having powers it's not bad, it's who we are, it's our history.

Isabelle Hanon  
Middle School Fiction

## Dear Friend

As I was walking at the park one day I saw a girl. She was not like any other girl, she had a beanie on the grass. She had short, brown hair. As I came up to her I asked her a question.

“Are you okay?” I said.

Her name is Emily and she is twelve years old. She had told me her story.

“One day,” she said,

“My mom was drinking in her room and my dad was out. I went to the kitchen,” I wasn’t sure what she was going to say next. It seemed so much for a stranger. I honestly have never seen her before. I was looking at her closely. She said

“I was in the kitchen,” she sniffled. “I was getting full of it. I got a knife, held it up, it was seconds the knife was about to be all bloody. As I was holding the knife I was started to think about what I could do in my life. I could be anything. If.....my treatment works.”

“Treatment?” I said.

“I.....,” she started crying again, “I have cancer.”

I had told her that that everything in life will be a fight, this will be another fight but harder. After 2 years of treatment she recovered from cancer. She was a stranger to me, but now she was a healthy one.

Natalie Kassamanian  
Middle School Fiction

## Christine's Birthday

It was the day before Christine's birthday, and her mom and she were setting up the house. Since her party was Indian themed and they were getting hennas they did an Indian theme. That night they put out a rug and pillows because they were sitting on the floor. Then they made a streamer curtain and they decorated the tables. Her aunt helped her out. Then Christine went to bed waiting anxiously for her party the next day.

It was Christine's birthday party today. Her mom and she woke up early and started making the food. They were having brunch. Then at eleven o'clock her friends started arriving. All the girls sat down and talked and played on their phones. At twelve they ate and talked. After eating the girls did an activity. They each got their own canvas, used henna stencils, and traced them out. Then the henna lady showed up. All the girls went first, they had a blast, then the parents went. While the girls let theirs dry they danced outside. The adults mingled.

Finally, at three the girls had cake. The cake was pink with henna designs on it. All the girls thought it was delicious. Everybody started to leave at four. After everyone left Christine opened her gifts and called everyone to thank them for everything. Then Christine's mom and her cleaned up and went to bed.

Ashley Kavangh  
Middle School Fiction

## Curiosity

It chased me past the large beam which had been chosen as our meeting place. The monstrosity growled. It was a disgusting noise which had a slight “sss” sound that snakes normally make. I made a sharp turn left. While out of breath, I met a dead end. I turned around quickly hoping to reach the tunnel directly across from the one I was in. I ran at full force and slammed straight into the monster. I pushed off hoping to get away. I then slammed hard on to the wall of rock behind me. The creature got ready to leap towards me. I knew I was going to die.

“Are you sure that we should go in?” Asked Liam. He seemed scared. He normally charged right in while everyone else got left behind. “The cops could find us here and we could get arrested.”

“We’re in the middle of nowhere hidden behind layers and layers of trees, we’ll be fine,” I said eagerly trying to get my best friend inside the old mine.

“Okay, but what if they found the website?” He was referring to the website that Donovan Co-owns with people around the world, posting about abandon locations that people could go and explore. There was the occasional abandon area which was unexplored. One of the owners would then travel to the area and explore the abandoned place, make maps of it and such. Once the area was explored it was added to the endless list of places to sneak in to. Other people could give it ratings of safety and how interesting it was. Today Donovan was exploring the run down mine located in my town’s forest. When he first arrived he found my best friend Liam and I sneaking into the town’s sewage tunnels. He stopped us and asked us if we liked a good adventure and when we replied with a yes he invited us to help him explore the mine with him. On our way to ask Michelle and Nicole if they wanted to explore it with us he explained why he was here. That’s how we got here.

“Donovan isn’t the website secure?” I asked trying to prove Liam wrong.

“Uh, yeah we have one of those scary Firewalls that keep people out,” He said as he wiped the sweat from his brow.

“See Liam we’ll be fine.”

“Can you two stop arguing and just go in,” Michelle butted in. She was always impatient.

“Fine,” Liam breathed out heavily, and with that we made our way in.

I have no idea why Donovan a overweight, 30 something year old man wanted to go into a dark mine with four teenagers who failed the majority of their classes, but even if he did try something I and everyone else knew that we could easily outrun him. Easily.

“Dan?” My train of thought was broken. “Can I hold your hand?” Liam whispered to me.

“Why what’s up?” I asked.

“I just don’t have a good feeling about this place,” Liam said softly. I’ve known Liam since 1st grade. He’s seen me do everything from streak to cry. He knows everything about me, almost everything. But not once in this long friendship has he ever asked to hold my hand not even when he was scared at the Haunted House during a Halloween Festival last year, or when he begged me sleep over his house because he was afraid that the murder talked about on the news was going to come and kill us. So I placed my hand in his and continued walking.

I felt much better with Dan holding my hand. It was something new and I think I liked it more than I should have, instead of showing it I put on a normal face and kept walking. I would have been fine for the rest of our journey, but I could feel Nicole's eyes burning into my back. I knew Nicole had a huge crush on Dan. I turned around quickly to catch a glimpse of her staring at me. I turned back around and squeezed Dan’s hand to see how jealous I could get Nicole. When Dan squeezed back I knew she would be angry.

When we reached a tall molded over beam holding up the ceiling. Donovan carved a large “D” on it.

“This is our meeting, you’ll wait here when you’re done creating your map,” He said. He then told us to split, he’d go left, Liam and I go right, Michelle and Nicole down the middle. I was perfectly okay with since I needed to tell Liam something. But not everyone was okay with this plan.

I was more than ecstatic when Donovan paired me with Dan. This meant I could mess around with Nicole who was now

arguing with Donovan.

“Donovan! I can’t go with Michelle we got like in like a huge fight earlier,” She whined in her high pitched voice.

“No we didn’t,” Michelle replied confused.

“She like hates my guts.”

“Shut up and start walking, you're stuck with me, Nicole,”

Nicole lost the fight and followed behind her friend. Dan grabbed my wrist and dragged me down our assigned tunnel. I yelled a quick goodbye to Donovan and caught up to Dan. We walked down the tunnel which was only lit up by Dan and I’s flashlights. In the distance I could hear the rhythmic drops of water falling from the ceiling of rock above us. The air gave of the stench that was associated with rain. I walked next to Dan and study his features. He had amazing hazel brown eyes which reminded me of almonds and the autumn season. His brown hair which always fell in his eyes was pushed back letting him be able to see. His arms and legs had bruises and cuts which I had always seen on him, ever since the day we met. I never questioned why they were there. He had his secrets and I had mine. His clothes had always been hand me downs, torn and stained, but he didn't mind. To me he was still Dan.

Michelle and I were walking down our long, dark tunnel. It smelled disgusting and made me gag.

“What was that back there?” Michelle asked me.

“Nothing, it’s just that like isn't it like a little sexist to put all the boys like together and all the girls together?” I lied.

“You’re lying, Nicole, I’ve known you since like forever,” She was right. We had been friends since 3rd grade when my family moved to town. She knows everything about me and I knew everything about her.

“You know why,” I said shyly.

“Whatever, if we die here he would have never even known,” She joked, hopefully.

“Can we talk about something else,” I asked, “Like maybe the smell of this place?” She laughed. We had then reached a fork in the road.

“Stay here I’ll BRB. I’m going to check this tunnel real quick,” She said as she walked down yet another long tunnel. I waited. About 10 minutes later I heard her scream, followed by a “grss” noise. I ran fast. Once I got to where Michelle was I was too late, a large monster had bitten down on her head. Her body covered in blood. It leaped towards me. I knew I was done for.

I heard a scream fairly close by. It was female meaning that the two girls probably found something. I started gathering my camera equipment and putting it away because I had finished photographing some rocks and wood for the website. I then heard something approaching me fast. When the “thing” came into view I was terrified. It was a monster with the head of a bear and the body of a wolf and a scaly tail. I had seen something like this before it’s what the Creepy Pasta kid called a Chimera.

“Please don’t I have a life to live, please,” I pleaded. The monster leaped towards me and I saw my life flash before my eyes.

Liam and I walked down more and more tunnels until we reached a large dugout room.

“Dan can I ask you something?” Liam said letting go of my hand.

“Sure, what’s on your mind?”

“Your bruises and cut where do you get them from?” He asked. I stopped. How was I supposed to answer this without letting him in on the truth?

“You really want to know?” I stalled.

“Yes,” I was defeated. I had no choice. I had to tell my best friend the truth. I braced myself.

“My parents,” I said coldly.

“Wait! What?”

“They hit me, Liam, they laugh when I cry,” I couldn’t hold it in any more. It was all going to come out, “I feel like no one cares about me anymore.”

“Dan! Look at me I care about you, I love you,” I stopped. Did he just say what I think he said? That he loves me. The sleepover, the staring, the hand holding, everything. Did Liam like me? “What was that?” he asked.

“What?” I said confused. Just as I said that a loud growl/slithering noise came from one of the tunnels. A monster then had jumped out of the shadows. We ran, Liam was a few feet behind me. I then heard a scream. I turned around quickly to see that Liam had tripped and the monster was only a few feet from him. When the “thing” reached my friend he bit down on his torso.

“Hey, over here you big monster loser,” I yelled at the “thing”. That got its attention. It started to chase me.

It chased me past the large beam which had been chosen as

our meeting place. The monstrosity growled. It was a disgusting noise which had a slight “sss” sound that snakes normally make. I made a sharp turn left. While out of breath, I met a dead end. I turned around quickly hoping to reach the tunnel directly across from the one I was in. I ran at full force and slammed straight into the monster. I pushed off hoping to get away. I then slammed hard on to the wall of rock behind me. The creature got ready to leap towards me. I woke up

Ashley Royko  
Middle School Fiction



## Ripple

It's the start of summer break, which is very long here in this dull small town. There's no sun in the sky, only the dark grey clouds over head. The distant smell of rainfall beckoned to me as if to remind me of that dreadful, tragic, stormy night. While walking I stumble upon my house with its clean white fences, powder blue walls, and tall roof that casts no shade, almost as if it were from a movie. I didn't like this house when I first saw it, and I never will like this house. Only one good thing came out of the move, the forest, I love the forest next door. With its dark looming trees, deep ponds, and dark shadowy grass. No one, but I, dare to go into the ancient forest, for I have seen true horrors. The inside of the house has white walls, wooden floors, and light blue furniture, unless you are in my room. My room is dark, the walls dark purple, floor covered in black carpet, bed like a crimson stone, my mirrors covered by ash colored sheets. I have covered my mirrors ever since the move, it makes me feel safe. I walk into the house and try to sneak past my parents to go upstairs.

"Sammantha! What are you doing?" my mother yelled.

"Nothing," I yelled back.

"Why don't I believe that?"

"You never believe anything I say."

"That's because you don't deserve my belief or trust," my mother said, "Why did your brother have to leave me and your father with you?"

My brother was 18 years old when he left to join the army, he died in a small war, but I'll never forget him, he treated me nicer than mom and dad ever will. Although he hit me and called me names it will never top what mom and dad do to me.

"I'm waiting for an answer," my mother said.

"What?"

Suddenly I felt her hand hit me as hard as she could across the face, but I refuse to cry. Instead I ran out into the forest. I ran to an area where a beautiful pond is, luckily I brought my writing

book with me, I don't want to go back to that house, ever.

I looked into the pond and saw my reflection, usually I'm too sucked into my writing or too afraid, to even look at my reflection. My hair looks like a long dark shadow, but also like a waterfall of black paint. My skin is so pale; I look as if I have never seen the sun. My eyes are like ice within the shadow of a great oak tree. My clothes are always dark colors. I am old enough to be on my own, but too young to move away from my "dear, loving" family. I can still feel the scars and bruises my parents have given me, if you look at me I look in pain, miserable, alone.

Nightfall was almost upon me, but before I could leave to go back to my house I drifted to sleep. My eyes closed, only to open to have me staring at the covered mirror of my bedroom. I tried to look away, but I'm frozen, stuck in time. Suddenly I hear a haunting voice cry out to me.

"Sammy, Sammy, why did you hide me? Why don't you want to see me? It's been so long since I have seen you please help me," pleaded the voice.

"No! Not again! I will never help you," I screamed as loud as I could.

"Oh yes you will Sammy. We are one, I am you and you are me. I may not act like you, but I know what you would do," the voice was so calm.

"No, we are nothing alike, we will never be alike!"

I could not control my hands; I pulled the sheet off of the mirror. There stood my reflection, with a sickening grin upon its face.

"I told you Sammy dear, but no, you didn't believe me. Maybe I should show you."

Suddenly its hands reached out for me, I backed up and fell on the floor. Next thing I knew I'm on the floor in the dark forest, I must have fallen asleep. I sat up and started skipping stones, I throw one like I always do, but when it hit the water there was no sound. I looked into the pond and my reflection stared straight at me, smiling a terrifying smile that I recall from that fateful night that me and my family had to move.

This thing in the pond left me alone after I turned 10, why is it back now; it's been 6 whole years. I ran all the way back home; my parents were asleep, so I had no trouble getting to my room. I stayed in my bed till the sun roused over the mountains.

"Sammantha, your father and I are going on a trip for a few

months, you'll be safe right," my mother asked.

I could answer truthfully and say No I won't be safe, but they wouldn't care anyway, so I let them leave. So I sit on my bed, thinking, when out of the corner of my eye I saw the sheets fall from the mirror. I got up and ran out of the room, I know what made those sheets fall. Finally, I'm in the kitchen, but who is that near the counter? It's... it's... me, but how. It turned and looked at me.

"Well, hello Sammy, did you miss me," the creature smiled.

"W...why are you here? Why now, after 6 years, now you come to kill me," I said frantically.

"No...no Sammy, I'm not here to kill you," the creature's grin grew as it grabbed something off of the counter, "I just want to play."

I glance quickly over and see what it's holding.

"No, not again. This can't happen again," I scream.

In that instant I ran into the closet, but I can hear the creature whisper faintly from the other side of the door.

"You can't run, you can't hide, Sammy. I'll always be with you, were ever you are, were ever you go, I'll always be there."

I listened closely and I heard footsteps receding to the kitchen. So I open the door and ran quickly outside only to see it standing there waiting. SO I turned and ran to my room, where again it was waiting. I pick up my pencil and decided to end this. I stabbed it in the side.

"My dress, this was my favorite dress," it said so calmly and then looked down at my side, "Hurts doesn't it?"

I looked down only to gasp, at the horror that lay before me.

"W...w...what did you do? Why am I bleeding," I gasped.

"Oh silly you can't stab yourself and not expect to bleed. Remember what I said, I am you and you are me."

Then I realized it can't hurt me unless it wants to be hurt, but then it hit me that it doesn't care.

"What are you doing here," I asked finally.

"I just want my life back," it said.

"What?"

"Yeah the life you stole, 6 years ago, when you burnt my house down to the ground and pushed me through that dreadful mirror."

"Are you telling me that I'm your reflection?"

"No Sammy... not a reflection... we're special, both of us, or

do you not remember?"

"Remember what? What do you mean we're special?"

"Only special people like us can use mirrors to travel to alternate dimensions. Now it's time for you to go home."

"Home? I am Home... this is my home."

"No, this is my home... I belong here. Now it's time for you to go back where you belong, and you belong," it paused then pushed me into the mirror, "there."

As my back impacted the mirror I closed my eyes, then I opened my eyes to be sitting in front of a shattered mirror. I looked around to see people acting and looking strange.

"Orderly restrain that patient, she's breaking mirrors again," a mysterious voice called out.

Two men in white coats came and grabbed my arms and dragged me away. They put me in restraints and left me in a padded white room. As they left I heard them having an interesting conversation.

"She was playing with mirrors again," one asked.

"Yeah, I'm just glad that it wasn't matches again," the other one said.

So I sat, rocking back and forth in a corner, after they left.

Ellie Welch  
Middle School Fiction



## Time Goes Fast

August was awoken by a loud scream, one that makes her brain hit against the walls of her skull causing a tremendous headache to form. She sits up quickly; looking around the dark dirty room she called her own. Standing, she steps over her many unusual treasures, to get to the fire burnt door that had been there for several years. She opens it slowly, scared about what might be on the other side. She peaks through the small opening she had created to see her mother with a hand stretched outward, and her step father holding his cheek softly looking at her mother as if he could kill. She closes her door quickly knowing if she watched to long she would have to help her mother. She then hears another scream and knew the man her mother had only married for a year and a half was dead. August was sick of all the men and all the blood. She grabs a bag off her floor packing clothes, money, and her pocket watch that she had gotten from her great grandfather.

“Here August take this,” he hands her a gold pocket watch with his initials C.W. etched into the cover. “Remember August, time goes fast, so make the most of it.” She opens it. That saying is etched into the inside cover in beautiful cursive letters that seem to dance across the gold.

She hugs him sweetly, “Thank you grandpa!”

“I love you sweets.”

“I love you too.”

She’s finished packing and has decided to wait one day before she’s going to leave. She needed to steal a bit more money from her mother before she was to go anyway. She hid the bag under her bed. Walking out of her room, she stands barefoot in a pool of dark red blood. Looking down at it she sighs. Knowing it would never come out of their almost white hard wood flooring, which had already been stained by so many other terrible things. Walking past the blood she goes to the kitchen to check if her mother was making dinner yet, which she wasn’t, so August sneaks over to her purse grabbing her credit card and a

twenty-dollar bill, stuffing them in her pocket.

After dinner, August hugs her big brother tightly; he just stands there as glazed over as ever. She then hugs her mother hesitantly. “What’s with the hugs darling?”

“I just love you that’s all.” August lets go of her mother and walks quickly to her room jumping to the best of her ability past the blood. She lies in her bed looking up at the ceiling waiting for it to be mid night so she can sneak out her window and get away from all of this.

She checks her watch closely as it seems to tick slower and slower. Until finally it read the time, 12:00a.m. August stands, grabbing the bag. Tying her long red hair in to a messy pony tail, she walks around her room one more time looking at all the knickknacks she had acquired over the years. A few dozen stuffed animals from different men, as thanks for accepting me in your home gifts. Books, she knew she wouldn’t be able to take those. And laid all over her floor are clothes and wrappers of many colors and shapes, almost looking as if it is its own little universe. She sighs, picking up a flyer for a dance class she had wanted to attend.

August had wanted to go to a dance class since she was five. She had watched the nutcracker with her mother on T.V. once, and loved the way the dancers gracefully pranced across the stage making a story using only music and movements. But her mother called dancing a waste of time. She would rather have August join her in the “sacrifices.”

August climbs out of her window, her feet lightly hitting the dead grass that surrounded their broken down home in the outskirts of New York City. Their closest neighbor was about three miles away. And it was an hour trip to New York. She had known it was going to be a far walk. She wore her warmest jacket and pants. The ones with the least amount of holes. She starts to walk slowly knowing she’ll have to pace herself if she plans on getting to the city in the morning.

She walks and walks till she physically can’t walk any more. She looks around her for a place to stay the night. She sees a tree that looks like it has a few sturdy limbs. She walks over to it and climbs it carefully, making sure not to get too high up so that later it will be easy to get down. She places her bag down on the branch and uses it as a pillow, then drifts off into a peaceful sleep.

She wakes up and looks around her. The sun is just coming up over the horizon, layers of beautiful pastel colors make up the

sky. She slowly climbs out of the tree and grabs her bag. She looks back at the tree she had been staying in, the dark wood and the light leaves made for a beautiful picture she wished she could paint. August starts to walk again thinking of the Big Apple and what it will look like.

Since she could remember, she had always had a fascination with words and books, history in particular. One of the few times her real Dad had come to visit, he brought all of his books giving them to her big brother at first. Saying they were the only good thing her mother had ever liked. At the time August was only six and didn't understand why her mother and father didn't live together, and why her mother had so many men over. One day her father just stopped visiting. She didn't realize till she was about fifteen that her mother had killed him, and gave him to the wolves that had been like pets to them since her father had left.

August walks about one more mile when she gets to an abandoned house. She decides it might be a good place to rest. So she walks over to it slowly not knowing if someone else had the same idea. She gets to the house and knocks hesitantly hoping no one would answer. No one does, so she opens the door calling into the house in a raspy voice, "Hello is anyone in here?" she takes one step in. "I'm coming in!" she walks completely in the house and looks around.

The house is run down, old, and smells like goat cheese. She walks in and out of every room and stops when she finds one where a girl lived, she could tell from all of the pink things placed around. The room had clothes her size that had no holes. August changes into new clothes and grabs a few books off a shelf that look interesting, then looks around the room a bit more. When looking under the bed she finds a shoe box covered in dust, like everything else in the room, which someone had bedazzled and written in capital letters was the name 'Jasmine.' She opens the sparkly box to find a brand new pair of ballet shoes. She smiles widely knowing this is the start of something great. She puts them on, they're a little big but she thinks if she stuffs the toes with tissue paper they may fit better. She stands up pointing and flexing her toes then prances around the room gracefully trying her best not to trip over the large shoes. After she's finished fooling around she puts the shoes back in the box and puts it in her bag along with the books and a couple pairs of socks.

She goes into the kitchen next and looks in the cupboards to

find food. She finds cookies, crackers, and different expired fruits. She takes the cookies and crackers. Puts them in her bag then decides to leave the house. She's been there a long time and wants to get to the City sooner than later.

She starts walking again pulling out the crackers and munching on a few of them before she realizes that it was starting to get dark again. She looks for anything that would be a good place to sleep. She only sees a small tree that looks about as tall as she is, 5'1", and decides its better cover than anything else at the moment. She walks over to it and sits under it relaxing a bit and looking up and the dusk sky, with all its pinks, purples, and oranges that leave a bit of hope in her heart as the sky becomes a playground for the stars.

She wakes up not realizing she had even fallen asleep. She sits up and looks around. The sun is just coming over the mountains. Lighting the area with an orange sort of morning light you'd expect to only to be captured in a movie. She stands, grabbing her stuff, looking through it to find a book. When she finds one she continues walking again, tripping few times, because of her nose being pressed against the pages of the suspenseful book. Her stomach starts to growl and she looks to see nothing around her other than a few trees. Out in the distance she hears the roar of an engine. An engine she's heard many times before. Her mother's car was hurling down the road toward her. Her mother looks as mad as ever. Her hair is a mess and she was in her PJ's. When she spots August, she pulls over hurriedly and gets out of the car walking over to August grabbing her wrist forcefully. "You think you can get away from me that easily? Do you know who you're dealing with? I could find a needle in a hay stack. Finding you was the easiest thing I've done!" August winces in pain and looks up at her mother, "You are not allowed to leave that house let alone walk to New York City, next time think of leaving a note or something saying you're taking off like that!"

"Like you care where I go! You just came in fear of me telling the police about your men!" she spits in her mother's face which makes her let go to wipe it away, giving August time to run away from her.

"You'll be back August, just like your brother and you know how that ended for him! This time I won't be suckered into letting you stay!"

August hears her mother start the car and drive away. For

some reason tears are rolling down her face, though she doesn't feel sad or happy. No thoughts. No anything just the feeling of her feet hitting the road. She keeps running knowing if she stops she'll collapse in a big fit of tears. She runs just looking at her feet till she sees the lighting change. August is in a tunnel. One in which many cars are coming and going from everywhere and nowhere. She keeps to a steady sprint till she gets to the end of the tunnel. She stops in her tracks looking around. This is New York. This is a new life. This. Is. Freedom.

Anna Yacek  
Middle School Fiction

## Pinka-Mena's Ponie-fied Cupcakes

"Pinkie you still need me to taste cupcakes", Rainbow Dash said while putting her new Samsung edge phone on speaker.

There was silence from pinkie... then answered "...ya..." Pinkie said.

"Great! I'll be come over around... 5:30pm ok?" Rainbow replied.

"Good that's perfect" pinkie replied then hung up.

Pinkie wasn't herself for a while she was always going up to other pony-folk and asking them to go to her cupcake shop... then you never saw them again.

Is pinkie a murderer? Who knows... her cupcakes always tasted... weird but they always sold quickly, wittle kids and other aged ponies liked them too.

### Chapter One: She Acts...Weird

"HEY Rainbow Dash!" apple jack yelled

She was with Fluttershy, Twilight sparkle, and Rarity.

'Odd pinkies not with them....' rainbow thought for a few minutes.

"What are you guts doin'?" Rainbow asked as she tilted her head a bit to the right.

"Were going to the mall, care to join?" Rarity replied asking politely.

"Ya just as long as I leave at 5:00pm have to go to pinkies place to try some cupcakes" Rainbow said.

"Be careful when you go there..." Fluttershy said quietly.

"...why?" rainbow replied.

"Because pinkies... changed."

"Ya... Her hair is straight... and when she's around us she's..."

"She's...?"

"She's quiet and acts weird."

Rainbow was surprised, were they talking about the Pinkie Pie Rainbow knew? They kept on talking about her like: the way she talks, walks, and looks at you.

“And when you TALK to her she always looks... down, and keeps her hands in her sweater pockets.”

“Let’s just go to the mall before I have to go to pinkies place ok?” Rainbow Dash said.

“Ok-aye” all four of them said at the same time.

“...at the mall they were in hot topic...”

“Ya! That’ll be pretty on Pinkie!” Rainbow Dash said.

Later on it was time for rainbow dash to go to pinkies place. They all said bye to Rainbow and she was off to Pinkie’s place.

## Chapter Two: I Lost the Cupcake, Help Look

“Finally.” Rainbow was happy to be at the front door of pinkies place.

She knocked on the door. “Pinkie! I’m here!”

The front door opened, a face peeked out the door. It was pinkie.

“C’mon in.” Rainbow Dash smiled

She walked inside. She felt an odd feeling when she entered pinkies house.

“Oh I almost forgot” Rainbow said. She gave Pinkie the white sweater she bought to Pinkie, “Hope you like it.”

Pinkie grabbed it and took off the sweater she was wearing and put the sweater Rainbow bought her.

“Glad you like it.”

“Go to the kitchen be there in a few minutes.”

“Okay.”

Pinkie smiled and just went to fix her hair and then went in the kitchen and looked at Rainbow and said: “Back, sorry also I need you to help me find the cupcakes I made...”

“You misplaced them?”

“Ya.”

‘She’s looking down... what is she looking at??!?!?!?!’ she thought

“Ok were did u misplace them.”

“You look by the fridge I look over by the sink.”

“Okay.”

Pinkie grabbed her frying pan... and... BANG. In the head. Lights out...Hours later (about 48 hours=2 days)

“Wake up.”

Pinkie shot at her a DIRTY LOOK.

“Finally you’re awake” Pinkie said

The chains made sounds, “!”

“My name isn’t Pinkie PIE anymore stupid,” Rainbow frowned.

“Then who are YOU and why am I in these chains!?”

### Chapter 3: Episode Done with “You”

The shop doors opened the cute sound of jingle jangle as lyra and bonbon came in.

Pinkie put strong duct tape on Rainbow’s mouth.

“Don’t you dare say a word?” Rainbow nodded.

Pinkie tightened the chains on Rainbow’s wrists and tightened them on the wall too.

“Hello??~::~” Lyra said in a musical voice

Later after they left.

Rainbow Dash felt blood come from her left leg, from... her cutie mark.

“Why do I feel blood??” Rainbow said looking at her.

“I cut off your cutie mark and made it into a cupcake OUT OF IT.”

“Y-y-y-you didn’t!”

“I did AND NOW YOU WILL BE A CUPCAKE!!!!”

Pinkie said as she grabbed Rainbow’s arm and dragged Rainbow’s face up to hers.

“P-p-p-p-pinkie! Rainbow said in a crying voice.

### Chapter 4: Ending

“Any last words....?” Pinkie asked.

“Who are you!?... You’re NOT the Pinkie I know.”

Pinkie paused and looked at her with an evil grin, “...aww poor, poor Rainbow Dash.”

Pinkie got annoyed and swiped the right side of rainbows face and rainbow blacked out.

B-dump b-dump fainter and fainter it got...

“What \*cough\* are y-you?” She grinned slowly.

“My name...?”

“I guess... \*coughs\*”

“My name is Pinka-Mena.” BANG.

## Chapter 5: A Sad Ending, but Don't Lose Thought

Days, hours, weeks, months... they past and still.  
Pinkamena was still turning innocent pony-folk into cupcakes.

Everyone forgot about Rainbow Dash, but Pinkamena.  
She still wore the jacket Rainbow Dash got her, Pinkamena regretted it.

Don't eat cupcakes from a psycho-path DARING. Rest in peace RAINBOW DASH.

Mia Smilla Zapata  
Middle School Fiction

## Fireworks

I stare blankly ahead, not caring about my frizzy hair becoming a big knot. How dare he? She, Sierra had trusted Lamar, her now ex-boyfriend, with her secrets, even her darkest ones that she never could tell a soul. Before she had met carefree Lamar (Ilam), the handsome blonde with a constant cow lick, she had always been the smart chick, she was the student body president, head of the tutoring club. Up till now, he had been such a sweetheart, and made her stupid heart ache every time she glanced at him, even for a millisecond. A single stray tear escapes, causing even more rebellious tears to shed.

“Why’d you leave?!” I scream specifically to no one, Lamar maybe?

“Um... am I interrupting something here?”

I look up and strain my eyes to see a boy. I’ve had enough of boys. But I couldn’t help but notice how beautiful the caramel haired boy looks, similar to an angel. I sputter, an angel?! I stop myself from laughing at myself, what type of angel, if they do exist, wears a black faded t-shirt with black ripped jeans?

“Hello?” he says in a sing song voice.

“Are you okay?” he says.

I inhale and stop myself from weeping in his arms and letting him embrace me. “Er... I’m fine, thank you, it’s just that... umm...” I look through my most believable excuses, “My dog passed away today.” He nods slowly, clearly not believing my story.

“Splendid, what was its name?” He said with fake cheer. I instantly answer,

“Foofoo, a most satisfying and splendid name, wouldn't you say...?”

“Ethan Hunt, nice to make your acquaintance...?”

“Sierra MaCallister and umm... Hi?”

He grins with so much innocence, though it has so much mischief in it, it confuses me. His confusing grin dims a little,

when I fake a smile. He reaches his hand out, with a cute crooked grin that made my knees wobble. My face fills with confusion, but I understand enough to put my hand in his warm one, that instantly made my body feel warm.

“Where are you taking me?” I say as we exit the school and cross the parking lot. He says nothing and walks on and approaches a red convertible that had a bunch of quotes written on it. A quote in pink sharpie reads:

“Freedom is not given to us by anyone; we have to cultivate it ourselves.”

I smile and say sarcastically, “What’s this? The quote-mobile?”

His green eyes glint, “How’d you know?”

I gulp. “So, where are you taking me?”

I ask politely again, to make sure he doesn’t say something like lawn tennis.

“Um... ah- wait no... hmm?”, I look at him in disbelief, he doesn’t know.

“Ah! I’ve got it!” I blink as he says the most typical response.

“Let’s go to Town Square!”

His eyes glisten and become the color of leaves, “We could see the fireworks there! How about it, MaCallister?”

I think, would I rather stay here and cry my eyes out, or... leave and go with a mad stranger with leaf green eyes that can make me forget Lamar and the rest of my worries?

I grin, “As bad as you can be, yes, I’ll go.”

His grin matches mine now, “Great!”

He climbs in the convertible and motions for me to go in too. I climb in, at least I have tonight.

I jolt awake at the sound of a car horn beeping and words that my mother would’ve gasped at.

“Awake, are we?”

I blink and catch the now familiar green eyes that meet my own brown ones. “Mmm... where are we?”

I murmur as I look at my surroundings.

“Just outside Town Square, I’m thinking about ditching the quote-mobile.”

I smile and pat down my bed head. “Maybe we should, eh?”

He grins, “And maybe do some lawn tennis on the way.”

I roll my eyes as he laughs. What’s weird is that we literally met 3 hours ago and I’m already comfortable enough to crack a smile. He waggles his eyebrows as if he knows what I’m

thinking. I roll my eyes again and grin when my head is turned.

“So, you gonna tell me what Foofoo did to you, or am I gonna be left in suspense?”

I sigh, “How’d you know?”

He shrugs, “You can tell the dude did something bad.”

I look out onto the street filled with shrubs and oak trees with a couple of birds scatter everywhere.

“He dumped me today cause he said I’m a “bad kisser” of all the things that could’ve done wrong, he says that.” I feel the tears coming.

“Hmm...I think you’d be a great kisser actually.” He says like he’s talking about the weather.

“You’re weird, you know that right?” I say in disbelief.

He only grins, “I try!” I smile when I think he’s not looking.

“Shall we, milady?” I hear behind me.

I turn to see him not on the steering wheel, but exiting the car from behind.

“What the heck are you doing?!” I yell. He rubs at his ears.

“Didn’t have to yell, also, we’re ditching the quote-mobile.”

I widen my eyes, “Wha-”

I’m stopped by his meaningful stare that made me look down.

He grins, “Trust me.”

I feel myself giving in, dang it, only Lamar could do that, well could.

I look up, “I trust you...” I say before I can stop myself. He grins and grabs me by the waist with lightning speed, before I know it, he's carrying me bridal style.

“I can walk perfectly, you know.” I say in his ear, below a whisper.

He mocks heroism. “Well, I wouldn’t be your Prince Charming, if I didn’t.”

I blush as I mumble, “Idiot.”

He’s already distracted and putting me down, as he does, I feel a pang of disappointment. I mentally smack myself for feeling it, he’s just a boy that happens to be funny, sarcastic, crazy, and so, so beautiful. He’s just one boy in the world, no one special, just like Lamar. I realize I said that out loud, so now Ethan is giving me a serious look that makes his eyes glisten. I look away and down, not wanting to look him in the eye.

He starts, “Sierra, I ne-”

He’s stopped by a man who pushes him, grumbling “love

birds.”

Ethan glares at the man's back, making the man turn around. The man widens his eyes and hurriedly apologizes. Ethan nods and only stares at the ground. He suddenly says after a lifetime of silence, “We should go see the fireworks on a private deck, right, MaCallister?” I flinch, he’s back to calling me by my last name.

I plaster a hopefully excited smile, “Sure, sounds like a great idea!”

Ethan grins hesitantly and takes my hand, pulling me along with him. He pushes through the crowd, still pulling my hand softly, so as not to lose me among the dense crowd. I smile and let him.

We stop in front of a store with white lights covering the trees around it. Ethan catches my eye and looks away, making me confused. Did I do something? Other than making a fool of myself, I’m not sure what I did!

As we go inside, him still holding my hand, I look around and find myself in a room full of Christmas lights, although we’re still in summer wearing tank tops, sandals, and swimsuits. We approach the front desk with several snow globes with anime characters, Disney animated stars, and states. I smile and look up to see a woman with mousy brown hair, gray stormy eyes, and tight rosy lips. Her clothes the definition of sophisticated, a shirt the color of a rose, matched with red pumps under flowy black dress pants. Her tight lips form into something that looks like a smile.

“Welcome to Cassandra Suites, I’m Cassandra, room for two?” She says with polite chatter.

Ethan nods. “Yes, Cassandra, and may I ask, is there room service?”

I see Cassandras stormy eyes glare at Ethan, regarding him with a sharp tone.

“Yes, of course there is.” She says while looking at his black faded shirt like it’s a broken snow globe. Ethan grins, back to normal.

“Great! I’ll pay with cash!”

After paying for the one-day suite, we had gone into the suite and now, we’re gaping at the beautiful room standing before us.

“This is unreal!” Ethan exclaims as he drops onto the cream colored bed.

I grin. “So we’re both commoners?”

I laugh as I drop onto the bed by him.

“With all that money in your wallet, I thought you were rich!”

He pouts, “I am, in some way -”

We burst out laughing. We stop when we hear a lady in the next room yelling at us to shut up. We giggle quietly until we stop, realizing what situation we’re in. I’m in a room with a boy, and all alone! I blush at the thought, and Ethan sees me blushing that makes him start to blush. We stay there, laying down, blushing in the dark like kids with a secret.

“Sierra?” I hear Ethan whisper by me.

“Ethan?” I whisper back, I love how he says my name like it’s a precious thing to him, how he rolls the R’s. Lamar always said it roughly, like it’s just a mountain that they need to name in Geography.

“I need to tell you something.” He says under a whisper.

“Wha - ” I’m interrupted by the sound of explosions.

The fireworks. I had almost forgotten we had come here for them. I motion to get up, but I’m pulled down by Ethan pulling me back down by the waist. Before I know it, Ethan’s kissing me, softly at first, until it becomes more than that, like we’re telling each other how we feel about each other, just in a different way. We both pull away at the same time, catching our breath.

“Um... maybe...we should stop.” We both say at the same time. We stay there in a silence that’s anything but awkward, more like comforting, peaceful.

“I realize we missed the fireworks.” I say jokingly.

Ethan grins. “I think our fireworks were more exciting.”

I shake my head, faking seriousness.

“What? Too cheesy?” Ethan suggests. I shake my head again.

“No, I think it’s true.” I say softly. Ethan leans towards me.

“Me too.”

He kisses me again. I push him away.

“Remember we agreed to stop!” I laugh.

“Sierra, Foofoo couldn’t have been more wrong, you’re the best kisser I’ve ever met, although this is my first kiss.” Ethan’s exclaims.

I blush. “Maybe we should go...”

He nods and smirks at me, noticing I avoided his exclamation. We get up and leave the beautiful room with the cream colored sheets.

I grin when Ethan mumbles, “We didn’t even call room

service!”

We go down to the lobby, finding Cassandra as sophisticated as we left her. When she sees us, she grins.

“Keep a leash on your boyfriend, will you?”

I blush and nod. As we leave, I see a familiar head, blonde haired head to be exact. I freeze, am I ready to confront him, tell him I forgive him? Or should I slap him and act like it didn't mean anything?

Ethan notices me tense up, “You don't have to talk to Foofoo if you don't want to.” He smiles. I nod and decide, it was never about Lamar/Foofoo, it was about me, finding myself, facing myself, and convincing myself Lamar wasn't “it”. I smile and take Ethan's hand and realizing, maybe Ethan is an angel, a black faded t-shirt wearing angel.

Karen Zavala  
Middle School Fiction

## Why You're Mother?

It was dark... darker than usual. There was a slight fog with mists of deathly frequencies everywhere. I breathed disappointment. I beg you to leave me alone, but I want you to stay; only I see you in the mirror with that bloody disaster all over your face. Your hair is a mess, your clothes are dirty, there are holes in your shoes, and when you smile... it's cracked, like my whole life.

I'm hyperventilating, my chest heaves, slight chills down my spine that get deeper and deeper. More intensively they go. The less I move, the more my body tends to stand stuck. Not moving, not blinking, I'm just...just standing here in the dark. I look down seeing nothing but cracked headstones with spider webs creeping in the corners. Across the way are highly stood rocks, surrounding me with pointy chopped edges on the tops of the huge boulders.

I ask myself, "When did you want to go to the graveyard?" And I reply back. "You thought that like a crazy person, but I won't be afraid, now's a good time."

With a smirk on my face I think again and don't regret going to the graveyard. I stand tall and proud and remember what I did to my mother.

"This is why she's buried", I say softly.

I have little white stoned memories on what I did etch in my memory. It was petrifying. I stand there tall and proud above my own mother who lies dead beneath the surfaced floors. All I think about is how I killed her. I grabbed an axe and slashed her face. I grabbed forks and drilled into her eyes and ripped her own sockets out.

"I, I murdered my own mother", I said sadly.

Having shattered like noises behind my cracked baby like voice. A flashback to 1973 when I had a dream of killing myself.

One time I was so close to committing suicide that I had held a gun to my head saying, "no-one will care you're just another shot-lifted face in the crowd."

You screamed the words to the blank colored walls when nobody else cared to listen. The looking at my mother's graved imported headstone I see a letter for me.

I say chilled fully, "Honey, if your reading this it's too late, your dead, you killed yourself last week dreadfully with a blade in one had cutting an apology all up your arm and a gun held to your head screaming dirty lies at the broken drenched ceiling. Baby I'm sorry but just admit your dead and go back to bed...forever."

My face turned shocked, I don't know what to do besides speak my final words of truth before laying down forever.

So then I shuddered and shake saying softly to my mother," Mom I'm sorry, I really did this but my soul will never be the same because of doing this and after I'm with you in the afterlife I understand if you don't forgive me."

After saying those final words, I laid back down in my brown dragged coffin. The night died off as opaque as a blue galaxy's way with one shining star in the middle of no-where.

Bianca Castillo  
High School Fiction

## Headlights

The girls around me giggled as I shrieked, the knock at the door frightening me. “Clean up or hide everything! It could be Wes! I don’t want him to see all the bachelorette gifts you bought me!” I smiled, biting my lip before opening the door slightly. I opened it all the way when I saw it was only my maid of honor, Alexis.

“You are late babe; the strippers already came.” Penny giggled, winking as she poured herself another margarita. Alexis laughed nervously, my eyebrow raising in response.

“You know how I feel about naked men. I would’ve fainted!” Alexis choked out a laugh, but the rest of the girls believed it, laughing alongside her.

I grasped her arm gently, pulling her out into the hall. “What is it Alexis? You seem so...jittery.” Alexis’ eyes looked everywhere but at me, her hands shaking gently.

“As your maid of honor, it’s my job to make sure you stay as stress free as possible for your wedding. Especially since it’s only three days away. I didn’t know if I should tell you, so stop me at any time, okay?” Her voice rasped out, panic lacing her voice.

“Alexis, you’re scaring me. Is it my dress? Oh my god! It’s my dress!” My heart began to pound, every awful situation coming to mind.

“No, it’s not. I promise!” Alexis shook her head before stepping back, sighing heavily. She paced the hall, my eyes following her every move until she suddenly stopped, taking my hands in hers. “It’s Charlie,” she muttered.

Every hair on my body rose to attention, goosebumps lacing every inch of my skin. My stomach twisted, as if Charybdis made home in my body. My stomach had dropped 100 hundred stories, heart wanting so desperately to follow suit. The color in my face gone, leaving me the appearance of a ghost. I felt my hands shaking, my knees buckling, my stomach heaving violently. Nothing in the world could hurt me more than the news I’d just

received.

Every part of my body was getting ready to shut down. Charlie couldn't be back.

The snow continued to fall, but it seemed to be dancing. It swirled gently, moving through the air with such grace, I thought of ballet. I never thought of snow and imagined it falling the way it did during a blizzard. I always pictured a beautiful waltz. It spun and stepped forward before falling back again. It repeated the same steps until it landed gracefully onto your nose, your hair, your coat, or the floor with a final bow. But right now, I pictured it hurling itself across a stage, dancing angrily, even almost desperately. The moon followed each snowflake, giving each one its very own spotlight. Everything that made me blissful was now infuriating me because I don't even know how I feel about someone I haven't seen in years.

The night sky looked like dark waves of velvet drape; but with every step, the drapes seemed to get heavier and heavier, wanting to fall and engulf me. I wanted the sky to swallow me so I wouldn't ever have to hear about Charlie again. I heard the clinking of snow chains coming faintly behind me. I jumped when the car honked, glaring up to try to make a face through the blinding headlights.

"Hey Ruby." My knees locked into place as her features slowly became more visible. I noticed her lips first and remembered how soft they always felt against my own. Her top lip curved to form the top of a heart and the bottom lip was ample, always dragging against my own lips. My body shivered as I remembered the feeling of her lips against my skin.

"Charlie, please leave me alone." I whimpered. I suddenly felt how cold it was around me, every part of my body feeling numb. Her thin brows furrowed, eyes turning hard.

"I wish you would leave me alone. I can't shake you." Her voice rasped and I was hit with the memory of her moaning my name in protest whenever I tried waking her. It was always moaning and rasping; every word coming out with such viscosity. But her voice was always so bright as well, hearing the anger in her voice was new territory to me.

"Ruby, do you get that you hurt me? That you haunt my every memory, every dream, everything I ever enjoyed," she hissed. My eyes were suddenly blurred with tears and my nose began to drip. I couldn't tell if it was from the cold or the surrealness of seeing her. My stomach churned, trying to shake

the dreaded pit that had formed inside.

“And now you’re getting married and I can’t even say hello to you?”

I hated hearing her be so furious with me. Even after everything that happened, hearing the disappointment laced in her voice was like being yelled at as a kid. My hands clenched as I slowly began to realize, Charlie being angry at me was the worst feeling in the world. I shouldn’t even care, but I wanted her mouth to be turned up at the corners instead of downwards. “You hurt me too. It wasn’t just me. You... You slept with someone else.” My voice shook as I stepped to her car. I opened it, sliding in to speak to her. Every part of me was saying this was a bad idea, but I needed her to know I was sorry. That I never meant to break her.

Charlie laughed humorlessly and I could see now that her knuckles were the color of the snow falling. “We weren’t together Ruby! And you can’t blame me!” I looked at her with wide eyes. “You knew coming to terms with liking girls was the hardest thing for me to do, Charlotte. My parents wouldn’t want to see me and I thought you would’ve understood. I was never ashamed of you, but I didn’t want to lose my family.” My bottom lip began to quiver as my hand extended, touching her arm gently. She tensed.

*“I’m not embarrassed by you Charlotte. You should know that.” My eyes rolled while I continued to carefully polish my toenails. I could hear her pacing in front of me, huffing angrily.*

*“Then why won’t you introduce me to your family?” She stopped, falling to her knees in front of me. I bit my lip and knew it was time to confess.*

*“My parents...they’re homophobic, babe. They won’t understand.” My eyes slowly met hers and I knew things were about to go downhill.*

*“They don’t know you’re bisexual?” I couldn’t help but groan, shaking my head.*

*“Who cares Charlie? It’s not like we’re getting married.” Her olive eyes fell as her hand reached into her back pocket. She flung a ring at me, the diamond so small but I knew it was all she could afford with her student debt.*

*“Well, now I know we’re not.” I stared at the tiny, gold band before looking at her. Her face was unreadable as she stared at the carpet.*

“I thought I was going to be your new family.” Charlie’s voice wavered before she exhaled. I knew she was crying. I knew the noises she made when she cried and I knew what her

different laughs meant and when to tell if she was being serious. I knew Charlie better than I did my own body.

“I wanted you to- “

“Don’t lie! Don’t say that! If you wanted me, you would have told your parents! No matter the outcome!” Charlie cut me off, shaking her head furiously. Her hair swayed across her face and I realized she’d cut it quite short. It fell just beneath her chin, curling outwards. I wanted to brush it back but feared the reaction.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t tell my family. You didn’t deserve that.” She nodded before reaching across from me. She swung the door open and stared at me with cold eyes.

“Yeah, you’re right. I loved you for six years Ruby. And it’s barely now when you lied to my face about wanting me to be your family, that I’m realizing you didn’t even deserve to have me. I was an experiment to you. You never admitted you were bisexual to me. I remember you coming up to me, asking me to be your college experience. I’m such an idiot for believing you loved me back, for thinking the last two years we lived together were filled with love. You’re just crying now because you’re not used to being yelled at and you’re guilty. So thank you for showing me that you were a waste of my time. Six whole years.” She laughed again, brushing back her hair.

“I’d like it if you got out of my car now.” I listened, because I owed her that much. The door closed between us, but I realized it was also the door to the life we shared and everything I’d felt after she left me.

“Enjoy your wedding. I hope Wes knows the kind of person you truly are.” Charlie rolled up her window, slowly pulling away from the curb. I watched her car until it disappeared into the white haze of the snow.

I called to Charlotte because I wanted everyone to like me more. Every guy wanted me once they knew I had experimented with a girl. Maybe I did love her but I never loved Charlie the way she loved me. Everything I felt towards her was shame. She slept with someone to finalize our relationship being over and I was ashamed that she didn’t want me anymore. I really was sick.

I walked back to my home, glancing at my fiancé, Wes, as he called to me. I turned back to look at him, wondering if that’s what I’d done to him as well. I thought of our relationship and realized I’d taken advantage of him as well.

I recounted how I had made so many new relationships since

my own with Wes. I knew he came from a family of money and good background. I only began speaking to him because I had heard he could get me a connection to the job I wanted.

Charlie was the first and only person to let me know I was a black hole. All I ever did was take and take. For once in my life, I wanted to give.

I walked slowly to Wes, smiling sadly as I took my engagement ring off. His face lit up as I neared him, extending his hand for my own. His eyes looked questioningly at me when I dropped the ring into his warm palm. I heard him swallow when he saw what I had returned to him.

I cupped his face and kissed him slowly before going to our room. I packed a small bag, wrote a note to explain what had happened, and got into my car. Wes had stood, watching the whole scene go down. His body was frozen, unsure of what to do. I felt so wrong, I didn't feel good as I looked at him in my rearview mirror. But something inside of me told me, marrying him would feel even worse.

All the attention and good fortune I'd ever come by wasn't worth it as everything Charlie told me replayed in my head. I had taken her by her strings, working my way around her like she was my puppet to get what I wanted. I'd ruined another life by doing that to Wes. I didn't know where I was going or what I planned to do, but I didn't want any more puppets and I didn't want to be a black hole anymore.

I just wanted to be Ruby.

## The Photo Album

I slide my hand into my back pocket and pull out a rusty golden key. It's small and looks like it has been around for ages. It's the key for the attic. My mother and father always tell my brother and me never to go up there, who knows why, but I stole this key from my parent's dresser. I overheard my parents whispering about it when they were tucking in my brother one night and took the key when they were sleeping.

I approach the old chipped door and put the key into the keyhole. I twist it and the door slowly creeks open. I smile mischievously and walk in. Shutting the door slowly, I turn around to find a small room filled with boxes. Everything is layered in dust. I look around the whole room to find a small, dark crimson chest. I kneel next to it and try to get it open, but it's locked. Knowing there is no chance I am going to find a key, I look for something that could pry the chest open and I spot a crow bar. I pick it up and jam it under the lid and push down. The lid cracks and breaks open. I gasp and set the crow bar down on the ground. I look inside the chest and there is nothing but a beat up photo album. I pick it up and open it. There are a bunch of old photos of my childhood. I smile and flip through the pages. I study a photo of me hitting a piñata on my seventh birthday. That was the year my dad got me a dog. I'm about to turn the page when I see the picture move. I look closely at the page but the image was still. I let out a sigh of relief and once again study the picture. Suddenly the picture starts moving. I open my eyes wide in fear. I look at my seven-year-old self and she is smiling and then she slowly turns her head and looks strait at me. A chill runs down my spine. Her smile fades into a scowl.

"It's all your fault!" She screams. "They wouldn't have died if not for you and your stupid head!"

I drop the book and push myself away. I'm about to scream when I realize what she said. I slide myself forward and pick up the book. "Wait, what did you say?" I feel so stupid. I'm talking

to an old photo album that has moving pictures.

“You killed them! You’re a murderer!” She screams at me.

“K-killed who?”

“You know who you killed! You just won’t admit it!”

I wrinkle my forehead in confusion. “I have no clue what you are talking about!” I yell at her.

“You will soon.” She whispered. “Oh, and by the way, these pictures are your memories.” She then turned her head and froze in the position she was originally in.

I close my eyes and tell myself that I was just imagining things, after all I am tired. I reopen my eyes and look at the picture. It is unmoving and unchanged. I close the book and put it back in the chest. I stand up and pull the handle on the door but it’s stuck. I pull as hard as I can but it won’t budge. I go over to the crow bar and pick it up. Sticking it in between the door and the door’s frame, I pull as hard as I can, but the door will not open. I start to panic and call for my parents, only to realize that they aren’t home. I guess I will have to wait.

I grab the photo album and look through it again, remembering what the girl said in my imagination. The pictures are my memories, and as I look through all the pictures I realize that they are all my memories. I am looking at all of the pictures and see that one of the pictures is nothing from my memory. There is a car smashed into a wall. I have no recollection of this picture. I pull it out from its sleeve and look at the back. It’s dated 1999 and then says “The day mom, dad, and Dave died in a horrible accident.”

I open my eyes wide in fear. That was five years ago. So if my family is dead then this whole time I’ve been living with ghosts? I jump at the rattling of the door handle. It stops and I am frozen in a tense position for a few seconds. Suddenly the door opens and my mother walks in.

“I told you not to come in here.” She spots the album in my hand and then looks deep into my eyes. “Oh no. All of my hard work.” She slowly walks over to me or more like hovering over to me. “It’s your fault that I am what I am. You knew that the steering was messed up on the car, yet you didn’t tell us. You wanted us to die and now you I must repay you for that lethal decision you made.” She brings her hand out from behind her back. She’s holding the crow bar that I left over by the door.

“Please don’t do this.” I whisper, tears falling down my face.

“Oh, but I must.” She whispers. Lifting her arm up, she yells

and brings it down on my head jolting me awake.

I gasp and sit up. It was just a dream. I turn my head to see a picture on my night stand. I pick it up and bring it toward my face. It's a picture of my family. "I miss you guys." Tears fill my eyes. My parents died last year in a horrible accident that I still take the blame for even though it wasn't my fault. A drunk driver swung into the vehicle as I was driving my mom to the emergency room. She had a breakdown and my dad sat in the back to make sure nothing else would happen. My brother sat in the passenger seat helping me with the directions because he couldn't drive. I started driving when the light turned green and I saw the car coming but I didn't move out of the way in time.

I set the picture down and get out of bed. I walk out of my room. A chill runs down my spine at the sight of my mother. "Mom?" Tears fall down my face.

She stands up and lifts up a crow bar laughing in the process. "You thought that was a dream?"

Maria Feil  
High School Fiction

## The Beauty in All the Madness

It started off just like any relationship: with butterflies and a spark in his eyes. I fell for his sense of humor, his kindness, and his dorkiness. He seemed so similar to me, as if he fit perfectly in my madness.

But it just wasn't enough.

I've always been the kind of girl to be cynical in all regards to love. Always in love with the idea of being in love, I began to see falling in love as been a waste of time. Maybe that was because of the likelihood for him to break my heart.

But then again, it was wrong of me to leave my heart so vulnerable, so fragile.

Even so, the moment I met him he took my breath away. "I like you, Ana. Want to make it official?" Tristan asked me. We had been talking consistently for weeks. In reality, almost all of my free time was spent talking to him. We bonded over our mutual likes, such as the soothing power of water, the harsh sound of the drums in rock music, and finding solace in reading. He seemed perfect and we even wanted the same things out of relationships, which was a surprise for me because never before had I ever found a guy like that.

It was amazing.

So when he asked me out, I was beyond happy. I thought that maybe something really good could come from that new relationship. As we began acting like a couple, we made a pact to always spend time with each other. We reserved mornings, lunches, and time after school to hanging out.

"Let's go see a movie," he suggested.

I said, "Sure, as long as I get to cuddle with you."

"Okay, I know exactly what movie we'll see. Horror, of course," Tristan said with a devilish smirk on his face.

As we sat down in the theater, the movie started. It was a cheesy movie, but frightening for me nonetheless. I hugged Tristan every time I got scared though, which was a plus for me.

I screamed, and he responded with, “Why are you scared again?”

“What, it is scary!” I told him.

He chuckled and shook his head at me. He replied with, “You’re special.”

That became his “phrase.” Every time I said something that he would deem as being “stupid” or “foolish,” he would label it as being “special.”

At the end of the date, we walked and talked. A lot. About our favorite foods, family, school, life in general. It was amazing; I felt closer to him than I had with anybody else. I wanted to continue talking to him the whole night and never stop.

But the night had to come to an end, and it did. However, the magic from that first date became entangled in our after school “dates.”

“Hey beautiful.”

As I woke up to that text from him, I smiled with the widest smile possible, since he had been thinking of me. During the conversation, he kept using the word “beautiful.”

It made me feel so special and those messages helped to build up my self-confidence. I finally felt like I was enough now that I was appreciated by someone. I saw those texts as him being caring and loving, and I thought that as long as he would send me those kinds of messages everything would be fine. That was my first mistake.

I had my weak moments though, moments where I would do my best to demand love. I demanded for him to tell me he loved me by telling him that I loved him. I assumed that that he would feel obligated to tell me that he loved me as well.

I let my confidence be based on him telling me that he loved me, no matter if he really did or not. I never questioned him after he said those kinds of things, but maybe I should have.

No, I definitely should have.

One day after school we met at our usual spot in the quad. That day in particular he seemed less there. It was as if he was forcing himself to feel anything emotionally. I ignored it though and acted normally.

“So how was school?” he asked me.

I smiled and replied with, “I mean, it was school. So I guess as good as school can be.”

He laughed at that. “You’re special.”

He put his head on my lap and we just stayed like that. I

kissed him every now and then; lots, repetitively. Eventually, he got back up and put his head on my shoulder. He was so cute, and sometimes he was able to pull off the most innocent and puppy-like expressions ever. It was my favorite thing that he would do, and made me want to be with him more.

He kissed me multiple times that day, and I loved it beyond measure.

But it didn't last.

I thought we were happy together. But he wasn't. He wasn't happy, and I could tell from his eyes. They changed, and how it was possible, I never could understand. He didn't look at me the way he used to. I couldn't see any love; it had been replaced with doubt and regret. He regretted being with me, and I knew that was for certain.

Instead of dealing with it in a mature way, instead of letting it go - letting him go, I let it tear me down. I put school and writing to the backburner so I could "focus" on him. But it wasn't merely "focusing" on him. It became an obsession; I was addicted to his love as if it were a drug. But it wasn't just his love - I was in love with the idea of being in love.

It was the worst mistake I could have made. When I would say "I love you," he stopped saying it back, instead, he would gracefully change the subject. But even gracefully, I noticed, and I let it hurt me in the worst way possible.

I let his indifference control me, and eventually, I was possessed. My relationship with him was all I could think about, and it had crossed the line between healthy and unhealthy long ago. I let it define who I was, and who I could be in the future.

"I am never going to let a guy have such an advantage over me," I said to myself one day as I looked in the mirror and noticed how I had let him control even my physical appearance; I had stopped wearing my hair up out of fear that he would stop loving me. But then again, I had always been known for my wild assumptions, and the more insecure I felt, the more those illogical assumptions took hold of me.

The night before the end, I sent him a text. A short question filled with disguised uncertainties and insecurities.

"Do you want to be with me?"

His reply gave me the answer I had been looking for. I knew what the outcome was going to be and I knew that everything was going to have to come crashing down in order for anything to feel alright again. In order for me to feel alright again.

“I don’t know,” he replied.

That night, we agreed to end everything the next morning.

The following day, I met up with him once I got to school.

We walked and walked until we reached a certain area of the school that I unfortunately knew a little too well - it was “our spot.” As we stood side by side and looked at each other and the space all around us, we prepared ourselves for the end.

He looked me in the eyes the best he could in such circumstances. I knew what was coming before he had even said anything. But as he said those words he had planned, I still felt like I had been hit by a train. “I’m sorry, Ana. I don’t feel the same way you do, and I think we should break up.”

I knew I had to act strong. I knew I had to pretend that I wasn’t heartbroken inside, and I knew I had to look like I believed that I was better off without him. I had to pretend. So as a result, all I could say was “I agree,” and then I walked away.

It was over. Never again, our relationship would never again be giving me the love I desired.

I cried as I remembered and thought of everything that had happened between him and I. Why didn’t he love me? What did I do to lose his love? I should have done what I could to keep him. I should have changed. I should have.

But I didn’t.

I couldn’t sleep. When I dreamed, all I saw was him. I saw our past and what I wanted for our future. Then I would remember our present and the satisfying fantasy of my dreams would come crashing down on me.

I wanted him, but he didn’t want me. The reality of that hurt like a knife to the throat. He didn’t love me and I loved him. I began to lose all of the confidence I had in myself and suddenly, I saw myself in the same place that I used to be, before I had learned to be happy with myself. I was tearing myself apart, piece by piece, and I knew that there would eventually be nothing left.

The time that was spent crying over him turned into time crying over not knowing where the true Ana had gone. Time was spent crying over the fact that I no longer recognized who it was in my reflection. I let him have every piece of me, every piece of my heart even. Never, never did I ever get any such pieces in return from him. All I had gotten were the broken shards from the girls who had previously left him.

Who was I? Or I guess the question was, who was I

becoming?

I didn't know, and couldn't find a way to figure it out. No matter how much time I spent reading, writing, studying, or being alone, I couldn't find the answer.

Who was I?

One day, out of impulse, I grabbed a paintbrush and some of my best paints. That was the first day I experimented with the world of color and the allure of paint brushes on canvas.

Day after day, any time I felt lonely or lost, I would paint. Nothing in particular, just random combinations of color. But when I painted, I forgot. I got lost in a world of my own that no one could intrude in.

Not even the distorted me.

I was able to escape to a place where color was all that mattered and the control was in my own hands.

Through the days of experimentation and isolating myself to enter my newfound paradise, I found someone. I found Ana Evers, the genuine one. The one that was in me the whole time, but was buried deep inside.

I may have lost him. I may have lost what used to be my only source of happiness, and I may have lost the kind of love him and I once shared. I may have lost all of the affection and the feeling of being someone's love.

I may have lost all of that, but I found myself. I found the true me. I also gained love for myself. I began to love myself more after I realized that where Tristan and I had gone wrong was thinking we could love each other when we didn't love ourselves. But now I truly love myself, and I am ready to live for myself and make myself happy.

And with that, nothing else mattered.

Rebecca Ioane  
High School Fiction

## The Bunker

Small hands reached for the door handle and small feet stood on tippy-toes. Creaking open, the door let in a gust of hot wind and sand whipped across the floor, stinging skin and burning eyes. The people in the bunker barely dared to open their eyes, fearing the doom they had barely managed to escape. They refused to savor their first breath of fresh air in months, terrified of what was waiting for them outside.

The bright-eyed child responsible giggled, opening the door wider to get a better view. She ran outside barefoot, the sand burning the bottoms of her feet. It formed shapes that she had never seen in the wind and tangled her hair, but she didn't care. She was free. She was wild and she could roar back at the wind.

Her mother followed, grabbing her around her waist, picking her up and scolding her. "You know it isn't safe out here." The little girl nodded sadly and let her mother take her back into the bunker, stealing one last glance of the giant palm tree that stood in front of them. She knew she wouldn't see it for a long time.

The door shut and her mother tried to find a way to keep her daughter from the door. She slid an empty box from the back of the room and barricaded the door. They'd be safe from the inside, but she wasn't sure about the outside. She wondered if a night would ever come when she didn't have to convince herself that the dragging noise outside was fallen leaves sliding across the sand and not a Patho. The mother hoped and she dreamed and she prayed that her daughter never had to know her fear, but the little girl already knew it.

Her father coughed raggedly and brought a trembling hand to his face to cover his mouth. The mother wondered how much time he had left and if they would soon have to force him out. He wouldn't stop coughing. His face turned red and tears ran down his cheeks, air being squeezed out of his lungs and nothing replacing it. The mother's face paled and she took a shaky breath. She left her spot on the sandy floor and took one by his side. He

smiled sadly and squeezed her hand until he was breathing again.

“It’s too late for me,” he wheezed. “Please, just save yourselves.” She shook her head and squeezed his hand, denying him. “Diana...please...you know what you need to do.” He wrapped his hands around his neck and she kissed the top of his head, whispering his name and lifting him off the ground. He used her as a crutch and she moved the box to open the door. He took a few steps outside and then he fell to the ground. His eyes turned black and he stood back up again. “You’re too late,” it sang to her and she shut the door. She never saw him again.

Chisato Jacobson  
High School Fiction



## Anticipation

The blood is loud through my ears as the woman approaches. Tap, tap, tap. Each step echoes against the tiled floor, then reverberates again as the drumstick hitting the drum of my ears. I seem to freeze, encased in a crystal of glass that freezes my very surroundings, as her dark gaze meets with mine—my eyes stop wandering, my fingers stop twitching, my legs stop shaking. Even my breaths stop as everything becomes centered on that single approaching woman, that hard aged face, those piercing black eyes. I'm a deer in headlights, a mouse caught in a hawk's grasp, a rabbit slowly dying from a snake's venom. I'm absolutely and wholly petrified. The world spirals around me as the colors fade to leave only me and her, my stare and hers. Then she glances down at the bundle in her arms.

The spell breaks. I can breathe again and gasp for air, trying with all my petty might to recover a millennium's worth of oxygen all in just a few seconds. Colors return to the world as it stops spinning and my head pounds from the sudden change to motion from dead-Antarctican-winter-stillness. I feel my body start to quiver as I stare down at the hardwood desk in front of me, my breaths still ragged and desperate, my eyes still frantically wide, my mind still reeling from everything happening around me.

Calm down, I tell myself.

My heart doesn't listen.

Stop shaking, I command.

The shaking won't stop.

Nothing bad is going to happen, I insist.

Now that's a lie.

I slowly draw a shaky breath in as sweat collects in beads before running down my back. It's cold. I'm cold. I realize I'm numb all over, and my senses have dulled and become muted to my surroundings. My heartbeat is loud as ever in my ears, but everything else—nearby movement, the chattering of people around me, chairs being pushed back and objects being shoved

around—is all fuzzy and mixed together, as if coming in from some far-off place. My sight, too, is diminished, and all I can focus on are the swirls of the wood before me; even then the edges have been clouded and blurred together. The only things that are pointedly distinct are the tapping of shoes against tile as the footsteps become louder and the overbearing sense of dread looming overhead, always present, always threatening. Gravity seems to weigh down tenfold on me as if fed and strengthened by the suspended darkness. My body has become cold and heavy again. Sweat forms streams across my forehead and neck before traveling on the ever-lasting journey southward. I lick my lips (which had suddenly decided to vacation in the deserts of midday Las Vegas), suddenly aware of my acute desire for water. My head pounds in rhythm with the blood in my ears, but much-too-powerful the sounds of steps continue.

Tap. More steps approach.

Tap. The thumps intensify.

Tap.

The footfalls halt.

A quick glance upwards—and the woman is right in front of me. I brace myself.

Wordlessly, my teacher hands me back my graded exam.

Sariyah Jerome  
High School Fiction



## Untitled

“Momma!” A little girl raced down the hallway as fast as her tiny legs would take her, her feet making soft pitter patter sounds against the hardwood floors. “Papa!” Racing down the hallway, her small voice bounced off the walls.

“Lizzie, we’re in here, dear,” a woman’s voice called out from the last room on the right.

The little girl bounced into the room, her face beaming a big smile and threw herself into her mother’s open arms. Lizzie nuzzled into her neck, earning a small laugh.

“Come on, get off your mother.” Strong arms wrapped around the child’s waist, carefully pulling her off. “You know better than to jump on your mother in her current condition.” Her father sat the child on his lap, wrapping his arms around her.

“Sorry Papa.” She wiggled around trying to get off him and whined a little when she was unable to free herself from his arms.

“Let me go, please.” She began trying to pull his fingers apart one by one.

“I don’t think I’m ready to let you go.” He grabbed her sides, tickling her tummy, neck, and feet. He smirked as her giggles sounded throughout the room.

“Stop!” Her giggles, mixed with her squirming, prevented her from speaking too long. “Papa stop! Please!” She squealed as she tried to hold back his hands for a moment. “I want to touch Momma’s tummy!” She quickly hopped off his lap, running to hide behind her Mom.

Her mother turned and took the girl’s hand, leading her around so that she stood in front of her. She laid the child’s hand on her stomach, pressing lightly.

“Can you feel her, Lizzie?” Her mother’s soft, angel-like voice caught her attention, and she was silent a moment before her eyes widened.

“I felt a kick!” Once again, Lizzie beamed with a smile up at her mother, her eyes full of awe.

“Her? I thought we were hoping for a boy.” Her father knelt next to his wife and daughter and placed his hand next to Lizzie’s, tapping lightly.

“We won’t know until it’s born, but I’m hoping for a girl.” Her mother smiled at the two of them, placing her free hand over her husband’s. “Lizzie, do you want a little brother or a little sister?”

“Both! I just want to be a big sister.” She moved her hand away, putting her ear in its place. She closed her eyes as she listened to the small heart that beat within her mother’s stomach.

“Hey Honey, can we go hunting? I haven’t been out in a while, and it’s getting a little stuffy in here.” Lizzie’s mother looked at her father with pleading eyes.

“I just got you fresh blood yesterday. Is it already gone?” He looked up at her, worry evident on his face.

“No, but there’s not enough to last me all night,” she whined softly.

He watched her for a moment before having to turn away. “How is it that I can never say ‘NO’ to you?” He sighed and ran his fingers through his hair.

“Victory!” Mother’s mood instantly brightened ten-fold. “Just let me get my shoes on.” With a little help, she slowly got up from the chair, and hurried out of the room in search of her boots.

Lizzie’s Papa shook his head and stood up, taking her hand in his. Papa led her down the hallway, opening the only purple door in the entire house. Letting go of her hand, he crouched in front of her.

“Lizzie, your mother and I are going out, so I need you to wait in here alone for us, okay?” He waited for her to nod. “Good. You know the rules when we’re not home. Don’t come out of your bedroom until your mom and I come to get you. If you hear someone else in the house, hide. Do you understand?”

Lizzie gave a firm nod. When her father moved to stand, she quickly flung her arms around his neck, pulling him close, and stated, “Be safe.” Her arms tightened before she finally let go and took a step back.

Papa gave her a reassuring smile and straightened back up. With a wave, he moved back, shutting the purple door with Lizzie inside her room.

Lizzie sat for a while, staring at the back of her door. The whole house was so silent you could hear a pin drop on the other

side. It felt like forever before she finally turned away from her door, scanning her room. When she saw an acceptable toy, she grinned slightly as she moved over to it. She picked up the small, purple and silver stuffed rabbit, adjusting its bow tie.

“Hello Mr. Rabbit. Momma and Papa are gone. They left to get more food.” She carried the rabbit over to her window, lifting it up so it could see out. “It’s so nice outside, Mr. Rabbit. I wish I was old enough to go hunting with them.” She let out a tiny huff and turned on her heel. Puffing out her cheeks, she ran at her bed, flinging herself onto it. Mr. Rabbit was flung from her arms, hitting the door before falling to the floor.

Lizzie watched as it fell, giggling all the while. She hopped off her bed, skipping over to it. Crouching down to grab it, she froze as she heard a crash when the front door was forced open. Three sets of footsteps sounded throughout the house, announcing the intruders. When they moved past the front room and started down the hall, Lizzie sucked in a breath and shot under the bed. She pulled in aura and scent, making herself undetectable.

She watched anxiously as someone stopped in front of her door, their shoes visible along the small opening at the bottom edge. Her body began to shake uncontrollably as the smell of iron and silver drifted into the room.

After a few, dead seconds, the door was pushed open, the hinges screeching in protest. Two men stood on either side of a young woman. All three of the intruders carried handguns, one on their hips and one in their hands.

“Miss, there’s no one here…” “Check the other rooms!” the woman interrupted, waving at the two men with her gun before pulling her attention back to the child’s room. Toys, clothes, and stuffed animals littered the floor, creating a maze-like scene. She stepped over one pile of toys and began moving around others, looking through them.

Lizzie held her breath, seeming to shrink into herself. Tears streamed down her cheeks, and her fangs pierced her bottom lip. She was terrified beyond belief and was having trouble holding in her aura and scent.

The other two men appeared in the doorway. “Miss, there’s no one here. The whole house is empty.” The woman straightened up from her search, gazing at them before giving a huff and shoving past them. “They must be out hunting then.” She spoke over her shoulder as she headed for the front door.

“Do keep up, ladies. We need to get this done quickly.”

With that said, all three of the intruders walked out, leaving Lizzie alone once again. She let out the breath she had been holding and tried to calm down. She wiped her face dry and slowly crawled out from under her bed. With new determination in her eyes, she stood up and moved over to her door, peeking out at the front door. Seeing it wide open, moonlight pouring in, she quickly grabbed Mr. Rabbit and ran out, following her parents' fading scents.

“Careful now, I don't want you to trip and fall,” Papa called over to Lizzie's mother as they crept over tree roots towards their next victim.

“Calm down, you worry too much,” Mama laughed softly and moved forward a little more. Just as she was about to attack, a gunshot rang out, scaring the deer away. She cursed and turned to her husband, who looked equally frustrated and confused. Another gunshot was heard, and she gasped, falling down, her hands instantly going to her calf, where blood was quickly staining her pants red.

“Sarah!” Richard ran, kneeling next to her. Another gunshot rang out, and he fell on top of her, blood seeping into the back of his shirt. Sarah screamed in horror, her bloodied hands covering her mouth in shock. She reached out with one hand and lightly shook her husband's shoulder.

“Richard? Please... say something! Don't leave me!” She began sobbing uncontrollably and clutched his shirt, leaning over him.

“You look truly pathetic right now, Sarah.” She looked up, straight into the barrel of a gun in the hands of a female vampire hunter, the owner of said gun. Two men stood behind her, their guns drawn as well.

Sarah didn't even bother wiping her tears away as she glared up at the woman. “You killed him!” She screamed up at them. “Just because you couldn't find love, you killed mine! I'll kill you!” Her pupils sharpened, and her fangs elongated. She bore her fangs dangerously, blood-lust evident in her eyes.

“Such a pity you have to end like this. I had been hoping for a fair match, but we don't have time.” The hunter lowered her gun. “Too bad you'll never experience being a mother.” With that said, she shot Sarah's stomach, killing the baby within.

Sarah screamed in pain, doubling over, her arms flying to her stomach. She choked on her own blood as the bullet took full

effect, the silver burning her from the inside.

The hunters watched unamused by her display. The female vampire hunter stepped forward, resting the point of her gun on Sarah's head, and announced, "Die, demon." One last shot rang out, leaving dead silence in its wake, and a lonely, orphaned little girl's life at stake.

Alex Jo

High School Fiction

## The Flight of the Dove

As I approached the steps of my porch, I ran my hand through my hair which was sweaty after the walk home from school on this hot May day. And thinking about Mrs. Chan's exciting lessons about seventh grade environmental science did nothing to assuage the fact that the burning sun penetrated my skin in the form of uncomfortable heat. Remembering the group research project on sunspots that was due in two days only added to my annoyance. Thanks Mrs. Chan.

My four-year-old little brother jumped on the couch and waved at me through the window, and I saw him mouth to my mom, "Calem's here!" This was always the routine: I'd be complaining to myself and reflecting on the day, and then Noah would announce my grand arrival and beat me to the door. Sure enough, before my hand could even wrap around the doorknob, little Noah opened the door and greeted me with his signature cheeky grin.

Before I could even bring my own lips to form a smile, something on the door exploded with a deafening BOOM. I heard Noah scream my name in terror as an overpowering force violently flung my limp body through the air.

Furious red flames and sparks were all I could see around me and my screams drowned out all the sounds. I was flying through a storm of smoke and fire, no control of my body, no outlet to escape, no way to save myself. The toxic air choked me and my eyes were blinded by the ash and soot.

And then suddenly I was falling rapidly, my back towards the smoldering earth and my head facing up at the smoke filled heavens.

I landed hard on the ground of what I think was my front yard. I saw an enormous fire beside me and felt its heat wrap around my skin like a thick blanket. I tried to turn and see the fire more clearly, but as I shifted my body, I felt the pain. The pain was indescribable. My entire upper body was paralyzed. My legs

could only move slightly back and forth as I was quivering and shaking with fear. I couldn't see the extent of my wounds, but I could feel my shoulders, my chest and my stomach screeching out in hurt. I could feel the wet, slimy blood on my exposed skin and bones. I could feel the place where the blast had hit me the worst: my left shoulder, too close to my half beating heart.

I wasn't going to survive. In fact, I shouldn't be alive right now, lying awake and awaiting my final slumber.

And that's all I could do. Breathing was laborious, moving was impossible, and my throat was so dry that I couldn't even call out for help. So I lied there, just looking at the burning flames in the corner of my eye. They didn't flicker, never faltered, never receded even for a moment. The ravenous flames from the mouth of the evil bomb mercilessly consumed everything in its path.

You hear about people seeing their whole life flashing before their eyes as they die, but in reality, it's nothing like that. At least for me, the unbearable pain somehow numbed me, and I couldn't even think. I didn't lament about the future that I wouldn't have, I didn't reflect on the past thirteen years of my life. I never even wondered about who planted and denoted the bomb or why. The only clear thought that remained on my broken mind was seeing my brother Noah, moments before the bomb went off.

After what felt like hours, my vision started cutting in and out, and my mind felt boggy and languid. From the corner of my eye, I could vaguely make out an amorphous red shape shrinking and disappearing. Then it was dark. I don't know if I was imagining it, or if I really saw it, but I saw Noah running towards me with my parents close behind. Their faces were all stained with soot and ash and they all had burns. Then it was dark. I tried to speak but my voice failed me, and I could feel my spirit slipping away from my body. Then it was dark. The last time I opened my eyes, I could see Noah's face clearly, and I could see his lips form my name, "Calem." Somehow, I felt like I was at peace. And then it was dark.

Sheen Kim  
High School Fiction



## Untitled

“Oh, oh,” I heard someone saying as I knocked on the door. “I’ll be right there.”

“Take your time,” I called back, hearing the pattering of feet inside. In a heartbeat, the lock merrily clicked. The door swung open, showing a pleasant visage.

I took my hat off, clutching it to my chest. “Marielle, you look as beautiful as ever. How have you been?” I managed to say, sticking my arm out for an embrace.

“You are always too kind, Lucas.” She looped her arm underneath and hugged me, then pulled away in a brief moment.

She motioned me inside, closing and locking the door behind me.

I handed her a loop of chocolate-brown scarf with a flourish. “For you, my love.”

“Lucas, please! You’re spoiling me!” She said in a scolding tone, but I knew she was pleased. I could see it in the way she smiled, with that perfect turn of her lips... the tiny crinkles next to her dark eyes...

I loved her. She was absolutely perfect. She took the scarf from me, briefly touching her fingers to mine.

Even her hands... I loved even the calluses on her hands from years of work, the way she kept her nails clean and neatly cut them right before someone came over, the way they moved so smoothly, as if the world were her piano...

“—Are you getting back into clothes-making again?” She asked, interrupting my train of thought. She had put the scarf around her neck. It looked great on her.

“I, um, haven’t thought much about it. My father’s still pestering me about going back to university this spring, but I’m not sure what I want to do yet.”

“I understand. I don’t know what I want to do yet either,” she said, laughing. Somehow I felt that it wasn’t a happy laugh.

I decided to change the topic. It would do no use talking

about something we both weren't comfortable with. I turned and saw a pot boiling on the stove. Marielle followed my line of sight. "Oh, would you like to stay for dinner, Lucas? It's freshly-killed pork, yes? I was just making some for myself, but it's no problem for me to prepare some more for you."

"I would love to." I replied, sitting down at the table. I could have easily watched her moving about the kitchen all day.

The savory aroma of meat and spices filled the room, tickling my nose. I looked out the window overlooking the dinner table. I bet the foxes hiding in the snowy woods outside would've been salivating if they'd smelled the food.

A few moments of silence passed while she purposefully chopped vegetables and cooked rice.

"Lucas..." She suddenly started, breaking my moment of bliss from watching her.

"Hm?"

She scooped the rice into a bowl. "Why did you stop visiting me for so long? It's been around a month since I last saw you. I've missed you."

I froze.

"Has someone else taken your heart?" She asked, jesting. She did that a lot: the whole serious-to-joking shtick. It left me baffled sometime, but I still loved her for it.

"I—no! Of course not!" And that was the truth. My heart belonged to her, and her alone. I knew she feared that I would be swept away by one of the other sprightly youths. But I could understand her worry. I'd suddenly left her alone, and the last time I saw her had been around the beginning of November.

"My youngest brother went missing sometime in the middle of November." I said. It had been a while and the pain had numbed, but it still hurt to know that we would probably never see him again.

Her joking smile faded into a straight line. "Lucas, I'm so sorry. I never knew." She came over to me and rubbed my shoulders with her slender hands. "You don't have to talk about it."

"No, no, it's fine." I replied. And it really was. It had been long enough where it really didn't matter. Everyone understood that he was gone—I was just surprised that she hadn't heard about it earlier. "You deserve a justification for why I was gone for so long."

I began to tell her everything as she set down the food—a

beautiful cut of pork with some greens and rice—in front of us.

“You know my youngest brother, right?”

“Gabriel, wasn’t he?”

“Yes, Gabriel.”

“I remember him. He was the one that would always help me pick the weeds out of my garden,” she said fondly, melancholy. She cut a small piece of the pork and swallowed.

“He especially loved the ducks that would come through here to get to the river.” She paused. “So that was why he hadn’t been coming around for a while.” Her dark eyes gazed at me, sympathetically.

“Oh,” I said, at a loss for words. I hadn’t known he had been coming around here. Her talking about him had suddenly made me a lot sadder. “Yeah, that was why. He promised that he was going to run some errands. He never came back.”

Her eyes widened. “Oh!” She pulled trembling hands to her mouth. “He never told you about coming over here, did he? He must’ve been on his way over here when he...” she cut off.

“T-this is all my fault. I’m so sorry...”

“No, Marielle, it’s fine. It’s not your fault. We don’t know what happened to him.” I reached over the table and put my hand atop hers.

“Oh... but... still!” She cried, grabbing mine back. “If he had never been with me, this never would’ve happened! You still would’ve had Gabriel with you!”

She looked on the verge of tears. “It doesn’t matter.” I replied, trying to reassure her.

“You didn’t do anything wrong by allowing him to help you.”

She closed her mouth, steadying herself. “I won’t take the blame for it... but I still feel horrible.”

“It’s okay. It’s okay.” I reassured her. “It won’t do us any good to talk about it.”

We ate in silence for a few minutes, the only voice being me occasionally complementing her on how good the food was. And it really was! She really had a gift for cooking.

Finally, I decided to speak. “But Marielle... I really missed you. I missed everything about you.”

Her mouth curved up into that little cute smile I loved. “Is that so? I really missed you too.” She said, lightly. She seemed to have gotten over her worry for Gabriel. Good. It would’ve been

awkward if she was thinking about that still.

“Which is why,” I pulled a small box out of my pocket. I couldn’t wait any longer. “I wanted to ask you something very special.” I paused. I wasn’t supposed to be this nervous. “I don’t know if this is the right time, or the right day or anything like that... but... well, I don’t want to miss you anymore. I’d rather see you by my side every day.”

Her eyes glowed with happiness; she knew what I was about to do.

I flicked open the box. A diamond ring lay inside—a bird in its little satin nest. It sparkled in the light. I had saved all my money just for this.

“I can’t guarantee you a great future, and I can’t say that our parents will approve, but...” I rambled.

She laughed, joyful. “Oh, shut up and just ask me the question.”

I steadied myself. “Marielle, will you marry me?” I asked.

She got up from the table and came behind me, unhooking the scarf from her neck. “I don’t know...” she said, her voice playful.

“Really? —I mean, what?” I asked. Admittedly, I had been expecting an immediate “yes”.

She looped the brown scarf around my neck romantically, clasping it in her two hands. “I love you, Lucas,” she whispered into my ear from behind me. The ring lay on the table, the bird waiting for its mother to come home.

“I love you too, Marielle,” I replied, almost waiting for her to take the ring and give me a blissful yes.

Her light fingers danced on my cheek, and suddenly—the scarf tightened.

“Hey...” I managed to choke out. It kept getting tighter and tighter, a vice around my neck.

She didn’t respond.

“This isn’t... funny,” I managed to say, trying to reach behind me. My arms were lead. It was cutting into my throat like a surgeon making an incision and oh god oh my god I couldn’t swallow I felt my breath catching in my throat, the only sound in the room Marielle’s calm breathing.

My jaw froze, the pain becoming unbearable. I couldn’t move and the world started spinning to black, my mouth opening and closing and nothing was coming out

The scene in front of me started turning to dark fuzz as she spoke for the last time, “By the way, Lucas, how did Gabriel taste?”

Christina King  
High School Fiction

## All the Shades of Gray

I sit atop a gray building under a gray sky staring at a gray wall. Not that that's unusual, everything is gray in Utopia. My mother told me when I discovered my gift that before the Utopia everything had a color. Before they took her away she said to me "Hazel, you must never stop fighting them." So that's what I do.

I stare at the wall a moment longer, imagining what it will look like when I am finished with it. Then I clamber down from the roof top flicking my uneven silver hair over my shoulder. I slip into an alley to wait until night.

After dark I return to the wall. I stare at its blank surface for a moment remembering my mother's words "Never stop fighting." I reach out to touch the cold concrete. Wherever my fingertips touch there is color. Reds, blues, pinks, yellows, greens, oranges, and purples. My favorite are the greens. All the colors swirl together on the wall. Ribbons of color twisting, turning, twirling together under my fingertips. This is my gift. The gift of color. My mother and her twin, my aunt, had the gift of sound, my grandmother had the gifts of smell and taste. She was double gifted, which is very rare. Our family chose to share our gifts with the world, but that was before the Utopia. My grandfather was the first one taken. It was strange because he and my father married into the family and did not have the gift. After he was taken, we went into hiding. Then one day a group of men came to our house. I was only five. My mother saw them coming and hid me under the bed. She kissed me and told me that she loved me. She told me to never stop fighting. The men took my family away. After they left, I was scared and stayed under the bed until I got hungry and had to come out. There is something else that happened that day, something important. Something I can't remember. That was ten years ago. Now I use my gift to fight. It doesn't help much. I color things and the Peacekeepers paint over it. Everything has its own color that just feels right. Some things, like the wall, are made for dramatic multicolored displays, others

are more simple.

I stand back to admire my artwork. Suddenly I hear the voices and footsteps of Peacekeepers. It sounds as though they are looking for someone. I climb to the roof of the building. A girl enters the alley below me, running hard. Her hair is silver. A color I have only seen on the heads of my mother, my aunt, my grandmother, and on myself. I follow her, leaping from rooftop to rooftop. I glance behind me to see the Peacekeepers turn down the wrong street. We have lost them. When I turn back, the girl is gone. However, the alley looks as good a place as any to spend the night. I settle down beside a dumpster to sleep. A hand taps my shoulder. I whirl around, slapping the person's knee.

“Ow!” It was the girl. All I can do is stare. I feel as though I am looking into a mirror.

“Who are you?” I ask. The girl looks as startled as I feel.

“My - My name is Fern.”

I scramble to my feet. “I'm Hazel. Why were they chasing you?” I blurt. Fern stares at me hard, as if deciding whether to trust me or not.

“Follow me.” she says at last and takes off down the alley. I follow her, my curiosity getting the better of me.

When at last we stop we are in an alley just like all the others except for a piece of artwork on one of the walls. Strange. I think. The last time I was in this part of town was three days ago. The Peacekeepers have never left my artwork up for longer than an hour, let alone three days. Then I realize that this is not my artwork. The colors twirl differently, and they are different. Warmer, I think, and with more purples. Slowly I turn for face Fern. “Did you... make this?” I ask.

She nods. My mind reels. Fern has the gift? But only the family has the gift...

I flash back to the day my family was taken. There is Mother, Auntie, and Grandmother crying and Father trying not to. This time, though, there is someone else too. A girl with silver hair. My mother hides her in the closet, whispering in her ear. Then it hits me. The girl is my sister.

When I open my eyes, Fern is watching me with a concerned look on her face.

“Are you OK?” she asks.

“Fern, did you have a family?” I ask.

She drops her head. “I used to live with my parents, my

grandparents, my sister, and my aunt, but they were taken by the Peacekeepers when I was five.”

“Did you say you had a sister?” I ask. She nods sadly.

“Could she make art like you?”

“Yes, why?”

“Watch.” I touch the nearest wall and color explodes beneath my fingertips as if it can't wait to get out. Fern stares at me with her mouth hanging open.

“You can... But that would make you...”

I nod. Fern tackles me with a hug.

“I can't believe you're alive!” she squeals. I can't breathe, so I just hug her back.

Fern and I sit on the dirty alley floor and talk for what must be hours. Suddenly, I have crazy idea.

“So, like, we both use our art to fight, but the peacekeepers always wash it away before anyone can see it, right? So what if we make one together? A really big one somewhere everyone can see it?”

“That's a great idea! I know just the place.”

“Where?” I ask.

“Inside the Utopia Help Center.”

The next day we entered the help center along with all of the other people there to complain about one thing or another and probably wait months for a paper to be mailed to them saying the problem has been fixed even though it wouldn't have been. Fern and I wander around occasionally bumping into one of the many other people in the lobby. Each person that we bump into has a mysterious wash of color spread over them (well, mysterious to them...). Pretty soon, chaos breaks out. People run about, shouting in confusion. Peacekeepers swarm the lobby. Fern and I stand in a corner to avoid being trampled. I try hard not to grin. Two Peacekeepers approach us and grab our wrists. One speaks into a communications device. “We have them.” Too late, I notice the wall we were leaning against is flooded with color.

The guards drag us down corridor after corridor right into the heart of the building... or maybe its stomach. Finally, we stop at a heavy steel door. One of the guards punches in the pass code and the door swings open. On the far side of the room sits a man in a wheelchair who I recognize immediately.

“Grandfather?!” I shout in surprise. Fern does the same, a split second after me.

“My darling Hazel and Fern, how are you? You seem to have grown a quite a bit since I last saw you.” Grandfather's voice is flat as if he is reciting a speech.

“What- what are you doing here?” Fern asks.

“This is my home.”

I don't see how this cold, colorless, metal building could be anyone's home. Then it dawns on me what he really means.

“You made the Utopia?” I ask, dumbfounded.

“Yes, a society where everyone is equal, no one is different, and everyone shares the workload.”

“My- our family, what did you do with them?”

“Hazel...” Fern interrupts. She is staring at a glass case embedded in one of the walls. Suspended in the case is the rest of our family. Their eyes are closed as if they are sleeping. Then I see the enormous bolts on the case. They are rusted and covered in dust. My family is dead.

“NO! Why?!” I scream, unable to look away. How could my own grandfather have done this?

Grandfather answers my unasked question. “Every day I watched all of you using your gifts to help the world. Your grandmother especially always looked so tired, and I could do nothing to help. She always said she enjoyed doing what she did, but she never rested, never used her gifts to help herself. She said that if she only had so much time on this earth, then she wanted to use it to make a difference with the gifts that were given to her. I knew that if I didn't make her rest, then she never would. I tried to convince your father to help me, but he refused. So I did it myself.”

He's insane. I think. Absolutely insane. He doesn't know what he did.

How can I stay angry with someone who was only trying to help? “It still hurts.” The little voice in my head tells me. Yes, it still hurts. It probably always will. Now I have lost my family twice. Fern is all I have left. Fern and Grandfather.

I inhale deeply. “I forgive you.” I say quietly. Grandfather looks stunned. He seems completely confused by what I have just said. I glance at Fern, and suddenly both of us know exactly what to do. We wrench our arms away from the Peacekeepers holding us and run for the glass case. We hit it at the same time, color exploding beneath us. Hairline cracks form in the glass. We hit it again and again. Finally, the wall shatters, multicolored pieces of glass flying everywhere. It is as if I have suddenly

woken up from a dream. The air smells of rust. There is a coppery taste in the back of my mouth, and the sound of breaking glass is sharper somehow. The gifts are free.

I turn to grandfather. His eyes are wide, and his mouth drops open. I feel a hand on my shoulder and turn around, expecting to see Fern. Instead I jump about three feet into the air. “Mother!” I shriek.

“You're alive!” Fern shouts at the same time. She is standing in front of the glass case along with Father, Auntie and Grandmother. All of us hug.

“Imprisoning our gifts put us into a deep, hibernation like, sleep. When you broke the glass and freed our gifts, you freed us.” Mother explains.

“Your grandfather's mind has been going for a long time.” Father continues, “Unfortunately, by the time we realized it, he had gone away and founded the Utopia.”

“So, what do we do now?” Fern asks. I am wondering the same thing.

“We rebuild.” Mother replies.

So we do. We explain what happened as best as we can to the people, who have basically been brainwashed onto thinking that nothing was wrong. We turn the Help Center into a place where people can actually get help. Grandmother works with Grandfather every day, and slowly, he shows some improvement. We all decided to live in the Help Center, only we added widows and comfortable furniture and took out all the steel doors. Mother has Fern and I decorate the walls. We create artwork twice as well together as we did on our own. After all, together is what family is meant to be.

Seth Larson  
High School Fiction

## A Briefer History of Time

As an informed member of our society in 2100, I believe it is my duty to tell my story to the generation of the future in what I hope will be a comprehensive history of mankind.

I suppose we must begin when time began; that is, the year 1960. This is the year that my parents were born, thus marking the beginning of recorded history. Although it is difficult to believe, the people of the first generation managed to survive without Siri's guiding hand. We can only assume that they had the help of some sort of technology when they built the pyramids and battled the dinosaurs.

True civilization began in the year of our Lord 2007, when the Apple Company launched the indispensable iPhone, a tool that shaped the rest of human history. Without this noble offering from genius Thomas Edison, there is no telling what horrors might have befallen our planet.

It was also around this time that the Public Education system went through its largest reform, namely the Minecraft Revolution. Now, millions of young Americans had the ability to build virtual kingdoms with virtual material through virtual characters; thus, they were virtually perfect for planning the future of American reality.

A little later on the timeline of our story is the infamous election of 2016, when front-runner Republican Candidate Donald Trump faced off with Democrat Abraham Lincoln. Although the campaign trail was messy, the winner was come-from-behind first female President Kim Kardashian.

At this point in time, person-to-person communication was very basic in its rudiments (an archaic system known as "email"), but was soon improved with the introduction of SnapChat, an application that allowed significant dialogue on important issues to take place. It is widely believed that the Watergate scandal resulted from a glitchy SnapChat video in which Richard Nixon took a video of himself stealing the Declaration of Independence

with the banner “#thuglife”.

Another form of communication that has developed over time is the growth of music. The most primitive music recorded is cryptic in lyric (“Someone left the cake out in the rain/I don't think that I can take it/'Cause it took so long to bake it/And I'll never have that recipe again), but with the advances of technology came the ability for ANY person with a pretty face and a mediocre voice to become popular – even Taylor Swift!

The course of our story was interrupted several times by warfare, and the Clash of many Clans. The most devastating of these conflicts is Battle of the Bands – or perhaps it was the Bulge – when Pink Floyd came under Arcade Fire from the British Invasion, but survived and brought hope to the nation. We still celebrate this victory on Green Day.

The business aspect of history also should not be ignored. The foundations of commerce were introduced to America by the famous Craig Lists, whose pioneering spirit facilitated the Disney – Pixar merger, LeBron James’s switch to the Heat, and the Louisiana Purchase. More complex forms of bartering were eventually created, leading to the shopping chains we know today (the most popular being The App Store).

With greater business and prosperity, humans began to seek recreation in sports. Originally, people were able to get exercise from their back-breaking labor in cubicles across the country, but with the introduction of new brands of exercise (such as Wii Sports), men and women achieved new levels of athleticism and fitness. Among the most extreme breeds of the early physical activities was an activity called “Just Dance”, a sport requiring so much energy that only 4% of the nation was able to compete legitimately. This is still an Olympic event today.

In today’s society, as we continue to depend on Wikipedia and technology, I am sure we can only move forward in knowledge and achievement. Just look at how much we’ve learned already!

Of course, this brief history ignores some of the biggest achievements in entertainment (Star Wars Episode XXVIII was particularly momentous), it suffices in its basic conception and information. Not every generation has access to such an accurately succinct document of time’s history; now it is YOUR turn to change the world.

You might have to ask Siri how to do it.

# Harlee Miscovich

## High School Fiction

### Willow's

We hadn't been dating for two weeks and I was to meet his brother. It was a bit ironic. The day had come for me to be introduced to his brother, but he would never be introduced to mine. They would have been lovely together. Charles was always on his best behavior while within my family's presence. Yes, ma'am. No sir. Perhaps he would have been startled to know Lee. He was not as proper as the rest of us. Lee was always covered in oil and grime; I wonder if Charles would have run to wash his hand immediately after the first shake. I would have hoped not. He would have never lived it down with Lee.

I sat on the porch, waiting for the Cadillac to arrive in front of me. It was his grandfather's, as Charles told me. The man sold it to the oldest grandson to keep it in the family. Pulling me out of my own analysis, the creaking engine sputtered into the driveway. I arose from the antique swing seat to mirror Charles' lengthy figure emerging out of the car. "Good morning." He greeted me with a kiss on the cheek.

"Good morning." I replied, peering into the car doorway to catch a glimpse of the guest of honor. Or perhaps I was the guest of honor, as I was the one crouching into his car.

"Dear, this is my brother, Richard."

"Nice to meet you." I quietly greeted him and he responded with a polite nod. The back of his head looked similar to Charles'. This was the only aspect of the two that I could compare, as he never turned around to face me. I didn't quite mind. I preferred not to engage in small talk and awkward eye contact. Thankfully, the majority of the car ride consisted of none of that. Charles and I interlocked fingers, while Richard constantly fiddled with the radio.

"Did you two bring your swimsuits?" Richard questioned us once we fumbled out of the car. I was unaware that we were to pack anything, which I confessed.

"No, but I don't mind swimming in my underwear." Charles

commented. His brother remained quiet as he walked around to the trunk of the car. They discussed extra swimming trunks and t-shirts that had been packed while I observed the scenery.

A rotting, wooden sign read "Willow Beach" next to our convenient parking spot. The entire asphalt lot was empty. However, I could have seen from a mile away that the water was teeming with energy and life. The miniscule lake rippled with waves that couldn't drown a worm. Which was beneficial for the multitude of birds that littered the rocks and sand surrounding the body. Although, their chirping was not filling the air between the mountains in which we stood. The lake overflowed with activity, but the dry world outside of the water was especially dry that day.

"Jean," His voice startled me, causing me to jump slightly, "I'm sorry dear, I didn't mean to scare you. We're going to get in. Will you come with me?"

I turned my back to him to evaluate the water one last time. Besides the slight tide rushing in and out, it was eerily quiet. I wasn't sure how I felt exactly when facing this place, but I didn't entirely enjoy it. "I don't feel well. Perhaps I will join you two soon." I retreated to the sitting area, closer to the car than the water, after he kissed my forehead.

The two boys clumsily fell into the water, presenting me the opportunity to analyze their similarities. Charles was much taller than his brother, although they held the same build. Strong bone structures complimented their height to affix their comparisons away from a string bean. However, their faces were where they differed. Richard held a more developed collection of features due to his age. His eyes were closer to each other than his younger brother, although this lack of space was made up with a larger forehead. Their hair was drenched as a result of their obnoxious splashing and the sunshine glimmering through the clouds caused the curls to resemble Lee's hair.

He would have frowned at my lack of participation. He adored the water. Every second he could spare, Lee spent it fishing, swimming, diving. The irony arose back in my mind that his source of love became the possible area of ending. His full bodied laugh resonated in my eardrums. Suddenly, I heard the forceful tone of voice telling me to go. I understood that it was Lee. I shook my head and silently replied to him that I couldn't, for I didn't have a swimsuit.

Beside me, a limping pigeon rested near the shoreline. The

poor creature hopped towards the water and gently dipped individual parts of its body to bathe itself. It dawned on me that if this lonesome cripple could enjoy the refreshing bath, so could I.

I removed my shoes and socks after deciding that I would only wade, as I didn't want to sit in my own filth and grime the entire trip home. As I stood on the waterline, I shyly smiled at Charles. "Come in! It's perfect right now." He yelled across the lake.

"I'm only going to stand here. I don't want to be drenched." I replied calmly to his cheerfulness. He resumed to splashing his brother. My toes inched closer to the thriving waterbed and I could already sense the warmth. I shut my eyelids before dunking my entire foot. In that quiet moment, everything came rushing to me.

The birds began squealing. Their wings covered the sky and blocked the sunlight. Through the darkness, I could still observe the mountain of fish rising to the water's surface. The bodies littered the entire lake. The purring of a motor fishing boat pulled my eyes to across the way. It spun in short circles with two cocker spaniels atop the wooden seats. The angler was gone. Their howling echoed between the walls of a nearby cave. Suddenly, I could sense something warm by my feet. My eyes shot down to where the tadpoles should have been, but the only thing I saw was a spilling cloud of green throughout the water around my ankle. This was where it happened. This is his spot. His first burial ground. I could no longer breath knowing that my brother had breathed this same air. I could no longer stand in this water knowing that this is where his body resides. I jumped back out of the lake and covered my eyes with my palms. I didn't want to see a world without him anymore. Eventually I opened my eyes to the returning sunlight. I saw that the region was back to its quiet normality, as if nothing had happened. I wanted to go home. I couldn't stand to be here anymore.

"Dear, are you going to get in?" Charles' calming voice called across the water.

"No, thank you. I'm going to sit out for a while. I don't want to be in the water currently." I replied as I shuffled to get my socks back on.

I sat down on the bench behind me, as I viewed the brothers bonding. All three of them. Two laughing and splashing. One calmly watching.

A sudden car door slammed, startling me. A thin man emerged from a jeep and carried a long board to the shoreline. I couldn't quite grasp what the board was used for until the man placed it atop the water and struggled to stand firmly on it. I watched quietly as he slowly paddled across the lake. His figure began to disappear around the mountain. Alone. I said a silent prayer that he would be able to return home to his family tonight. To kiss his little sister goodnight. To leave, as not another body in the water.

## Hunters of the Unknown

### Chapter I: Siblings

The night air carried the smell of the changing seasons. The sky was clear of any clouds, revealing a bright full moon and dazzling stars. The young girl, waiting in the grassy fields, looked up and recognized all of the constellations she had been taught.

She looked as if she were fifteen, but was actually nearing the age of adult hood. Her long blond hair was put into a long single braid that rested on her shoulder and her eyes were a startling blue; as blue as a summer's day sky. Her skin was smooth and flawless. Her entire self was flawless. But despite what her friends and family had told her, she still considered herself short.

As she stood waiting in the dark, she constantly played with a loose thread of her clothing. Although she was a teenager, she wasn't wearing jeans, or a t-shirt, or even a jacket to fight off the cold air. Instead she wore a mix of armor and clothing; thick leather combined with sturdy fabric that allowed for easy movement.

The hard leather covered some of her most vital areas. Her chest, neck, and stomach were covered as well as the fronts of her legs, knees, and shoulders; giving her a look of someone that played a rough sport like football or hockey. Dangling from her hip was a sheathed short sword.

She was starting to get tired of waiting. "He was supposed to be here an hour ago!" she thought. The girl had received an odd note asking her to meet up in the field that day and had arrived minutes earlier to be sure she wasn't late.

As the moon rose higher and higher in the sky, she became more annoyed and worried.

"I don't have time for this." She said to herself. The girl stretched out her arms and began to walk away when she noticed a figure moving in the dark towards her.

She recognized the way the figure moved. The way they

always moved when they were in no hurry to get to somewhere important. It was one of the many things that she hated about her brother; her adoptive brother anyway.

As he grew closer, more of his features could be made out. His dark hair, recently dyed black, reflected the light of the moon and stars. His green eyes seemed to flash with every step. He wore the same clothes as his sister and even carried a similar sword with him. In the line of work they did, these items were always required to be with them.

Seeing her brother, she changed direction and moved towards him. He made no effort to move any faster. Once they were within talking distance, they both stopped. They stared each other in the eye, waiting for the other to talk first. In the end, it was the sister he spoke.

“Why did you drag me out here Kane?” Her voice carried hints of annoyance. Her brother, Kane, lifted his chin, making him look slightly taller. “As if he needs to look taller” she thought. He was taller than his sister by at least two inches; another thing she disliked about him.

Kane looked at his sister with neutral eyes; showing no feeling towards his sister. “I wanted to ask you something in private.” He took a casual step towards her as he talked. “I thought that this was the best place for it.”

“It would have been better if we had talked in my room back at home, at least it’s warm there” she countered. Kane shook his head. “You know nothing can be kept secret there, Crystal”, he took another step towards her. “At least here no one can hear what happens.”

Crystal unbuckled her sword, as was tradition when talking to others in private meetings. It wasn’t an officially held meeting, but the rules and knowledge of her job were like second nature to her. Her brother did the same and tossed it to the ground while Crystal used hers to lean on.

“So what did you want to talk about?” she asked, “Did mom and dad bust you for something, cause I’m not bailing you out this time.” She was still suffering for his mess up in the subway three weeks ago.

Kane looked at her as a sly smile crossed his face. “I came here to bail you out, dear sister” he said with a new, un-nerving tone. He stalked towards her as if her were a cat attempting to catch a mouse. “I wanted to give you a chance at living a better life.”

Crystal wasn't quite sure what he meant; his actions set off alarms in her head, causing her to grip the handle of her sword. "If you're trying to set me up with one of your friends, forget it." She stood up straight and replaced her sword. "I don't know what you're up to, but if this is some kind of joke it's not funny." She turned her back to him. "I'm going home; try not to freeze to death out here."

She had only taken a few steps when she heard the crunching of dead grass grow closer behind her. She looked over her shoulder to see her brother rushing towards her as something flashed silver in his hand. Instinct took over reason and she stepped to the side as her brother lashed out at her with a dagger; the blade just cutting through fabric and skin. The wound on her arm was nothing serious; what pain she felt from it was overshadowed by the shock and surprise by her brother's sudden attack.

"What are you doing?!" she said as she pulled her sword from its scabbard. "Is this some kind of test?!"

Kane straightened from his crouched stance and threw away the knife; the weapon lost somewhere in the tall grass. He had picked up his sword and now drew it. "It's a test that you've already failed" he said as he swung the sword around playfully. "You had a chance to do this peacefully and listen; but if you won't even do that then I'll take you by force."

He rushed her again, swinging his sword in a wide arc; but Crystal was ready for him this time. The siblings took turns swinging and blocking, seeming to be equally matched. The swords flashed a brilliant white under the moon light; the ringing sound of metal seemed to carry out for miles. Crystal was in a loss of words. This was no training exercise; her brother was really trying to kill her. What was even more shocking was that he was equal with her.

All her life she had sparred against her brother and had never really needed to try. Occasionally she would throw a match just to help him with his confidence; but now she was truly fighting for her life. It was as if she were fighting someone entirely different. His strikes were faster and well placed, and his foot work had significantly improved. "Since when was he ever this good?" she thought.

The fight was indeed equally matched, but soon Crystal's movements began to become sluggish. Her brother had managed to cut her forearm and her left leg. Her arms and legs were

beginning to feel less steady. . When she lunged at her brother, he simple stepped aside and smacked her in the back with the flat of his blade, causing her to fall flat on her face. As she turned over while she spat grass out of her mouth, Kane moved in and kicked her sword from her hands, causing it to vanish in the sea of grass. Kane had his sword poised to strike her in her throat; the tip of the blade drawing a bead of blood.

Crystal's vision began to blurry as she looked at her brother with a new found hatred. "What...did you do...?"

Kane walked away from her field of vision. She should have taken this opportunity to retrieve her sword or even run and get help, but her body wouldn't respond. Kane soon came back wielding the knife he had attacked her with earlier. He held it carefully as if it might shatter if he held it too hard; his thumb moved absently across the flat of the blade.

"It's amazing how fast manticore venom can paralyze its victims" he said as he began to wipe the blood off of his weapons with a white handkerchief. "It only needs a minute to take effect and then the person is completely immobile for hours while their unconscious."

Crystal was having trouble hearing what he was saying; it was as if he were in a large hole or on the other side of a long tunnel, calling out to her. Her mind was sluggish as she tried to understand what was happening. She tried to talk but couldn't even manage a sound. Her eyes were beginning to close.

"You should have just listened to me when you had the chance, baby sister" his voice was now dark and foreboding. "All I wanted was to keep you safe." "Times are changing, and our people are fighting a losing battle." He placed his sword back in its sheath and lifted his sister over his shoulder. "And I know for a fact that that war is about to come to an end."

Kane walked away with his unconscious sister and disappeared into the night. There were no noticeable traces of the fight that had happened there moments ago except for the bloodied handkerchief held down by a dagger.

## Expansion Pack

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty.”*

~ Gen. 1.1

And blah, blah, blah. Everyone knows how the story starts, so let's just get to the good part.

*“So God created mankind in his own image.”*

~ Gen. 1.27

Now, that's more like it. Yes, it's true that He modeled mankind after Himself, but were they really all that appealing? Of course not. Who creates things with the intent of making them just as, or even more, attractive than themselves? No one in their right mind, and that includes God.

The first humans that were made had more of a... caveman-like appearance, to put it in layman's terms. They seemed to have little intelligence and self-awareness, so God took it upon Himself to help out His new creations.

Up in His white, puffy, and light filled home, God set up an interface in the clouds so He could see the humans, but made sure that they were unaware of these intrusions. At first, He was just going to watch, a little nudge here and there, but the humans didn't do very much. He got bored and so began to actively meddle in their lives. After a certain point, He basically controlled their every move and their destinies were entirely in His hands. As expected, God took great enjoyment in this task. He controlled where they lived, who they interacted with, what they ate, and, of course, when they died. The only bothersome thing was that God could never understand what mankind ever said. Perhaps he was too high up in the clouds, or perhaps His humans just didn't know what they were talking about. Either way, their “language” became known as CM-rish (short for caveman gibberish).

In those early days, harmony was ensured. God made sure that all of humanity was comfortable and taken care of and overpopulation was unheard of. This took up most of His free time, however, and the angels were starting to get a bit frustrated with this mankind. God hardly had any time to do his normal duties. He hadn't even finished creating darkness, which, honestly, was not that bad. The problem was that He finished light long before he made mankind, so there was just all this light all the time. Too much dang light!

As a result, the job of forming some semblance of night or darkness fell to the angels and they were not happy about it. They already had many menial angel tasks to take care of and making night was just stressing them out. In addition to that, they all had to deal with God's constant nagging at his cloud screen and his many demands.

"Don't forget to diversify the animals."

"Make that half hot and that half cold."

"Keep those giant reptiles away from my humans."

It was never ending! Every angel would try to pawn off a new request to his brother or sister with a "Well, he's your father!" They always managed to keep this task-tag going until it reached a certain angel that had no one else to ask. Because of all these new responsibilities, some of them were slacking off on their assigned jobs. For instance, there was one angel, who was in charge of the animals, that was starting to tire of all these requirements getting dumped on him. One day, he was lazily creating some beneficial bugs when he accidentally flicked his wrist with a bit too much zeal and suddenly wasps, locusts, and mosquitoes popped up. God ignored that angel for some time.

As time went on, God was starting to get bored again and wanted to see how well His humans could get on without Him. He lessened His control bit by bit and mankind began to develop into better versions of themselves, all by their lonesome. At the behest of the angels, He granted the humans free will, but did not shut down the cloud screen.

Many years passed and God decided that mankind was doing very well for itself, with only the occasional misdemeanor. But those mistakes led God to the conclusion that man was not perfect. Far from it. In fact, He saw them more and more as sinners, not that this was a bad thing. Nothing that couldn't be fixed, at least.

One day, while contemplating on his throne, God came up

with a brilliant idea. Instead of assuming control again, He would send someone down there to live with mankind. . He or she would go down and save His humans, His sinners. Someone to save the lost, to judge the world, and most importantly, become a demonstration of His love. But who? Who could be asked to do such a thing? He spent a few hours pondering on the most worthy and willing... wait! He had it!

“Gabriel!” God shouted to the 26th cloud down, where this particular angel liked to relax.

Gabriel woke with a start and floated up to his Father and asked what was needed of him.

“It’s time to help and maybe save some of the lost souls of humanity. Now, I obviously can’t do it. You and all of your siblings made that obvious. So I would like to send a child of mine down to do it for me.”

“Which one would you like, my lord?” Gabriel asked, motioning to the other cloud habitats. “Uriel and Zachariah haven’t much to do and I’ve just finished up my-”

“No,” God interrupted with his booming voice. “You are all busy up here and I wouldn’t want to disrupt that. No, I want you to give someone my child. A certain woman of Nazareth I’ve kept an eye on. Her name is Mary and her husband, Joseph. Tell her that she will conceive a son and his name shall be... Jesus! Don’t forget to tell her that it is God’s will. She is still a virgin, after all.”

“Wait, but if she’s-”

God held his hand out to silence the angel. “No, there is no time for discussion! Go now. I shall be awaiting your return.”

Gabriel flew down to Earth to do what was asked of him. As he bowed and walked away, Gabriel thought that the Lord was quite the imaginative person.

## Untitled

“Laune,” a whimper in the night suddenly wakes my blissful sleep. A shadow arises from the bedroom door, and my nerves turn fright. No one to protect my innocence if he appears to be a robber. My breath at a moderate pace; my sheets covering my face. “Who’s there?” I whispered silently.

“Galan.”

“Galan?” my mind in query, “what are you doing here? How did you escape? Who let you out?”

“Shhh...” he put his hand on my mouth. It was soft.... I want to hold his hand .....but clammy.

“Galan, why did you follow me here?” I fold the sheets neatly so he can get a better glimpse on how I look..... No. Stop. This isn’t normal.

“Can I tell you a secret?” his smile glistens. He holds my hands and lightly kisses both of them, “I’m madly in love you with you, Laune.”

“No.” I swiftly get up and grab my robe.

“What do you mean by no?” his voice turns into a worrisome feel.

“There is no love in this Utopia. We are all here to survive and produce more technology as much as we can. Love will get in the way of studies, I cannot love. I am not meant to feel this way, Galan,” my face was stern, I was confident with my words.

“C’mon, love is....is knowing that you can care for someone. Lay down their life, being able to be happy....”

“Lying one’s life down for another is wrong,” my voice cracks. “I am happy...I am happy with the way I am,” I look into his tearful eyes.

“How could one know what happiness is if emotion is known as a disorder? Does this clarify that this whole Utopia has a disorder?”

I ignore his statement and continue on with my words, “This is for the better. We will cure you...I was like you, ever since I was

little. . They cured me Galan, and we will find a solution...”

“What solution? Be a slave to this computer master world? I don’t want to spend my life worshipping something that takes away the foundation of a true life,” he blew up.

“Galan, you need to be silent, or Achtung will do terrible, awful things if he found out you arrived at this location. I could be fired,” my hand lays on his chest...his heart is wonderful, I once remember this..... You’re not that way anymore.

“Laune,” his hand on my cheek.

“Galan I can’t do this... the medicine is wearing off and if I do something unspeakable. I’ll be in your position.”

“I want to see the real you, the one that’s kept silent. I know it has a voice and it dies for chance to speak. It’s in there Laune...you must set it free.”

“Galan,” I walk towards the center of my room, “if you don’t leave...I’ll have no choice but to tell Achtung that you were stalking my space.”

“And Achtung is any better?” he laughs, “Laune, have you seen what he does to girls in that office. What about all those things he did to you. I know he did terrible, awful things...”

“Enough!” I interrupt his thought, “Anything that happens between Achtung and I.... stays with Achtung and I!”

“Of course,” his face in frown, “I knew I couldn’t get through to you.”

“There’s hope Galan, I will fix you,” my hand felt the gentle skin of his neck.

“I don’t need to be fix, I’m not broken Laune,” his eyes fill with water, a tear I figure.

“What are you feeling, the human does not show sadness.... only of happiness,” we sat on the bed creating wrinkles, ruining the perfection.

“Being sad is a normal emotion Laune, you can’t be happy all the time,” our hands intertwined.

“I don’t understand,” my face still, and I feel something run down my cheek.

“See, Laune you are sad... embrace that emotion.”

“I’m not in deject, I have minor flaws.”

“And that’s what every human has. Society changed that...this Utopia is more of a mind control than a paradise,” his face was close to mine, “please, let yourself go. Don’t hold back.”

Rapid beats of my heart flourish the nature of my system,

my eyes were in drown, my vocabulary begins to slip through my brain. My stomach twists and my chest in agony. I hid my face away from Galan... he's here to comfort you Laune .... get him out, he's a threat. My body feels the sensation of - of e-e-emotion. Emotion: an unnatural cause in the human brain, is a mental disorder. My disorder took over, my life in an end. I knew the mental asylum wasn't far.... quick take your pills.

I jump to the nightstand to grab the orange bottle laying upon it. It was disturbed by Galan. He forced me away from the medicine.

"No more will this world control how you think, you have a mind of your own," his hands squeeze my arms...the pain swelled to my head. My memories and ideas burst through my skull, something I never knew I could feel again. I daze into the mirror and saw how beautiful I looked; the way my face was structured, the soft desired hands, and my hair, luscious with the shine of copper. Then my eyes glance at Galan, his reflection so amazing; he was more handsome in person. Why hadn't I seen this side of the world before? It's so familiar to me.

"Laune?" his hand holding mine, "if you could describe this moment in one word...what would it be?"

I paused, "It would be.... a form of happiness."

He smiled, "There's the true Laune." He gave me a side hug as I looked over many things in my room. "Galan, I feel disrupted inside, I don't know how to describe it. Whenever I look at you the feeling gets stronger."

We turn to face each other, our hands locked. My mouth begins to move in an upwards position. "I get the same way... look you're smiling."

I felt different, and a spark of goodness came through, "Oh my, what am I doing?"

"You're laughing, and your smile is beautiful but not as much as you."

"Why can't I feel this way all the time?" I smile but then it stops.

"Laune, that's what I've been trying to get through to you."

"This world will never be happy, nor sad, nor angry, nor anything. No guilt or regret, no stress or anxiety, the freedom to do what they want and no one bats an eye. What even is freedom anymore? Is it nearly amidst? I'm so stupid to ever think that their world is better, when right here, right now this moment will

be the most happiness thing I will remember. Galan,” I look into his eyes.

“Yes Laune?” his hand twiddling in my hair.

“I know what love is; merely something that cannot be explained. I think my emotions fall into you.”

“Laune?”

“I love you Galan.”

His face rejoiced in pure joy, and our faces next to each other.

“Galan what are you doing?”

“I’m going to kiss you,” his hands warm on my cheeks.

“What will this prove?” I wrap my arms around his neck.

“I’ll show you.” He pushed our lips together, the disrupts filled my limbs, the blood pumped through my veins, and all I could feel was his hand in my hair and the other holding my back. I remember doing something like this with Achtung, but this time I want it to happen. A kiss I will remember, a face that engraves in my brain, and the warmth his body produces.

“Oh my,” I breathe heavily.

“Did you like it?” he smiles.

“It was extravagant,” my thumb traced the structure of his face. It felt pleasing, my fingers start to shake and my words fall into pieces.

“You’re nervous,” he took my flawless hand and kissed the base of my forehead.

“Is that bad?”

“Depends, this time no.”

“What are you feeling?”

“Nervous.”

“Of what?”

“That I’ll make a fool out of myself in front of you.”

“It’s okay, you already have,” I giggled.

“Jerk,” he simpered. My index finger begins to outline his mouth; soft and warm. I never knew how alluring he was until my eyes were open. Things opened up inside me, another person was walking along me; something I wasn’t able to be because it could cause harm and damage the system. I want him, I want him as my own. Galan is able to show me the wrongs of the Utopia; what I need to be.

My hands played in his hair, my lips on his again, “I must stop.”

He looks into my desire eyes, “Why?”

“You must be back before three, and I have to take shift in

the afternoon. You must go Galan.”

"Laune..." he paused and my face fills his hands, "...don't forget me."

"I cannot promise anything, once I take my balance pills I will be back to normal."

"No one is never normal, there is nothing that can define it. Everyone was made unique, but now this Utopia puts a standard on everyone hiding the fact that we are all different."

"Galan you just don't understand how it works," I place my hand on his shoulder.

"No Laune...you don't understand," he shoves my hand of his shoulder and he walks out the door, gloomy.... *Gloomy, an emotion that one feels unhappy.*

"Galan.... please be safe," as I take my medications.... *Love a rigorous feeling, maybe one I figured out. I will never forget this moment, never.*



*Poetry*

***Middle School Poets***

Brinley Douglas  
Madison Flick  
Derek Knight  
Adison Milne  
Grace Neveaux-Perkins  
Kayla Pham  
Alissa Thomas  
Haylee Zwahlen

***High School Poets***

Jenny Byington  
Roi Caldejon  
Valerie Croswhite  
Maggie Devlin  
Jeanine Diehl  
Sophia Dominguez  
Faith Evans  
Mckenna Ewing  
Sarah Gifford  
Shontarious Golden  
Nicolle Guerrero  
Nicole Rae Hamasaki  
Savannah Hankikns  
Bridget Harris  
Hailey Krantz  
Christina Mata  
Vincenzo Milione  
Jasmine Mixson  
Parker Nelson  
Jaela Pipkins  
Alicia Ross

Brinley Douglas  
Middle School Poetry

## Friends

Sometimes I wonder as I look around the room,  
If anyone notices me,

I see the smiles, laughter and happiness next to me,  
None of which I can hear,

The ones closest to me  
have pushed me off the bench not caring,

I wonder if I even matter,  
It's hard to tell anymore,

Somedays they say "hi",  
Somedays they don't say anything at all,

My best friend walks in, but even then I am left alone again,

It is hard to start a conversation,  
I don't talk much anyways,  
I want to say something, but I don't know what to say,

So instead I sit there and watch,  
Wondering if this will ever change,

By then it's time to go back to class,  
Hoping tomorrow will be a better day.

Madison Flick  
Middle School Poetry



## The Voice, Lost at Sea

On a stormy night, with a lightning flash  
A voice cries out through the sea's thundering crash

“Worry not! Do not fear me,  
For I am the voice, lost at sea.”

“Come dear sailors, weary at mind,  
Where you can rest your sleepy eyes.  
Jump into the ocean, I welcome thee  
Feast with the voice, lost at sea.”

“Join the fun, drink and be merry  
We shall fill with water and seaweed berries  
Open your mouths, sing out to me,  
Join the voice, lost at sea.”

“Soon the storm will be over, I know  
However, your debt shall grow and grow  
You cannot leave, your life belongs to me  
The all-powerful voice, lost at sea”

Soon the storm was over, and morning was nigh,  
As if to repent for the sailors who died.  
All the while, a voice giggled with glee,  
‘Twas not but the voice, lost at sea.

## When I was 4

It was a sunny day  
I'm so tired, car moving fast but smooth  
I was looking out the window  
wondering what I should do.

I was 4

I heard the wind and  
saw the gleaming light in the window  
and my sister sitting beside me  
snoring like a bear hibernating.

I was 4

Then it hit me  
I could take off my seat belt  
climb out the window  
get on top of the car  
and surf it like a wave  
or act like Tarzan

When I took off my seat belt  
and got close to the window  
my mom told me to  
put my sit belt back on  
and sit down.

I hate being 4

Adison Milne  
Middle School Poetry



## The Soccer Match

The game's about to start,  
I can feel my beating heart.

We circle together as a team,  
and cheer to fulfill our winning dream!

In our positions we wait to go,  
when finally, we hear the whistle blow.

The battle begins and we fight for the ball,  
it's a long aggressive fight between us all.

The game feels long as nobody scores,  
the goalies must be getting very bored.

With only a minute to go,  
the yearning within me to win only grows.

Suddenly the ball is at my feet,  
with only one opponent that I have to beat.

Fast and quick my feet begin to sway,  
and I finally get my breakaway.

Just seconds before the game is over,  
I shoot the ball towards the net, top corner.

The goalie's fingertips brush the ball,  
will it go in or will it fall?

Slowly it drops over her head,  
it's in the goal, we just got ahead!

Once again I can feel my beating heart,  
my teammates cheer, we have made our mark!

Then we finally hear the whistle blow,  
our team has won and it's time to go.

Grace Neveaux-Perkins

Middle School Poetry

## Strings

I had heard somewhere that whenever someone  
is really sad or depressed it is because  
something is broke inside them.

I always thought that maybe it was their heart  
or that their mind was shattered into millions of  
thoughts and ideas that were once  
beautiful things turned dark.

But now I think what if that is not the only  
thing that is happening?

What if there are strings in everyone,  
holding them up, keeping them from falling?

And that day the strings in that  
person all broke.  
The strings that keep the person going,  
made them who they are.

Broken.

Leaving them in utter darkness.  
You can try to help that person  
get back up, but as they say, it's  
ten times harder to put yourself  
back together than it is to fall apart.

Kayla Pham

Middle School Poetry

## Untitled

People think that I'm perfect  
That I don't have to try  
I make my mistakes  
Maybe once or twice  
But I try hard. I try hard

It's not easy having an expectation  
When everyone pays attention  
You have to live up to it  
But they don't know it's a misapprehension  
I'm not perfect  
I'm just human

Act like you know me, but you never will.

Alissa Thomas  
Middle School Poetry

## I Couldn't Find the Light

I was alone in the dark,  
I was alone in life,  
I couldn't see my way through,  
I couldn't find the light.

Why should I talk?  
They wouldn't understand,  
No one to turn to,  
No one to say I can.

They ask what's wrong,  
I couldn't explain.  
I can take the pain,  
I'm okay.

Of course I lied,  
They couldn't do anything anyway.  
I have so much to hide,  
My sorrows would stay.

The darkness grew darker,  
My cries grew longer,  
The pain was stronger,  
I couldn't find the light.

Then a voice spoke to me,  
It told me to get on my knees,  
Fold my arms,  
And speak.

The voice was strong,  
So I gave it a try.  
Then all of a sudden,  
My tears started to dry.

I wasn't alone,  
He was there.  
He gave me a reason  
To not be scared,

From one candle to another,  
My darkness got bright.  
And eventually,  
I found the light.

Haylee Zwahlen  
Middle School Poetry



## Fall

Colors, colors all around  
It won't be long till the leaves are on the ground  
Orange, yellow, and brilliant bright red  
All the colors above my head.

The weathers changing, I can feel it in the air  
The crisp cool breeze blows through my hair  
The smells of season drift to my nose,  
The dew on the grass freezes my toes.

Pumpkin, turkey, apple pie  
So many foods for me to try  
The table is set with delicious things  
I enjoy the treats that the harvest brings.

I love when the calendars hit September  
A lot of memories for me to remember  
All of these things are truly the reason  
That fall is my favorite season.

Jenny Byington  
High School Poetry



## Control

A man huddles in his home.  
He wants to connect, but it is Forbidden.  
No contact, no learning,  
No truth.

A man slouches at his desk.  
He wants to create, but it is Forbidden.  
No inventions, no improvement,  
No change.

A man weeps in a gazebo.  
He wants to love, but it is Forbidden.  
No affection, no attachment,  
No companion.

A man kneels by his bed.  
He wants to hope, but it is Forbidden.  
No goals, no dreams,  
No future.

A man stares at a wall.  
He wants to think, but it is Forbidden.  
No ideas, no desires.  
Nothing.

Roi Caldejon  
High School Poetry

## I Want Him to Make You Cry

I want him to make you cry.  
I want him to make you cry so much that your tears run out.  
To the point that,  
You're so filled with emotion  
that it becomes far too much to handle.  
I want him to make you cry even when you're in the shower  
and there's already enough water,  
Because your tears are strong enough to pierce the weight of  
the shower's pattering.  
I want him to make you cry so much that the rain outside  
can't measure up to it.  
You'd cry so much that  
Your tears become distinguishable from the impurity of the  
Earth's salinity.  
I want him to make you cry.

But.

I want him to make you cry when you receive a text.  
The kind of text that makes you realize just how lucky you  
are to have him.

I want him to make you cry when you're smiling.  
Because you forget every single ache and pain when you're  
with him.

And

He should remember your birthday and your favorite  
color

He should remember your favorite food when you go out

And he should remember that

You love it when he hugs you an extra half second

longer than you hug him

Especially when you're sad,

Because then, you don't feel so alone and you feel those  
butterflies instead.

Not the monarch kind, though.

The Ulysses butterflies,

Because they're my favorite shade of blue,

Because some part of me still wants to reside with you.

And it's why those butterflies are blue.

Also.

He should remember to say please and thank you  
Because sometimes we forget that even the smallest  
things,

The smallest things are what matter.

And he should remember to say "I love you,"

Right after you fall asleep just because he can,

Because he's yours and you're his and he doesn't want to  
admit it

But he loves you and he's just too shy to tell you directly.

So yeah.

The guy I want for you?

I want him to make you experience the tears I wasn't good  
enough to give you.

The sweetest kind that tells you you've found your place in  
this world.

I...I want him to be the guy to make you cry tears of joy.

Valerie Crosswhite

High School Poetry

## Song of Anyone

The world is vast, and we are a piece of its vastness,  
The world is great, and we are a part of its greatness,  
The world is beautiful, and we are a piece of its beauty,  
The world is wonderful, and we are a part of its wonder.

The world and we are self-possessed,  
Encompassed in each other we are,  
One can feel the world all around them,  
It is with us, every day.

Of and in this world, nature!  
It is important to all,  
Yet some are ignorant, and unknowing.

One can feel in awe of nature,  
One can feel alone in nature,  
Yet I feel among others in nature.  
In nature is where I feel I belong, yet urban as well,  
Both have so much to offer someone.

I feel drawn to each individually, for nature is calming and  
restful for the soul,  
Though the city has its pulls too, like much socialization and  
technology.  
Seemingly impossible, I believe it is possible to have the best  
of both worlds.

In cities much there is for people;  
Skyscrapers with their many levels to be summited,  
Parks filled with family and friends in which to enjoy,  
Schools with teachers that teach, and students who learn  
the things of life,  
Libraries with so much knowledge to be offered and  
learned,  
Roads on which to travel far and wide,  
Restaurants in which to dine with others,  
Stores to fill all needs and desires,  
Holidays to celebrate all throughout the year,  
All these are of cities.

Nature has much to offer as well;  
Forests of varying trees, in which one can lose oneself,  
Plains, prairies, and meadows of grasses, in which many  
sun rises and sets, can be enjoyed,  
Canyons with multiple deposits pleasing to the eye,  
Ever flowing rivers in which to go kayaking, canoeing,  
swimming, and more,  
Caves in which many adventures have been had, and are  
yet to happen,  
Oceans with their depths still to be explored,  
These are the things in nature for us.

You see so much, it can be hard,  
It can be hard to know which road in life to take.  
But maybe it is possible to find another,  
A road down the middle,  
Or perhaps we can all find our own way...

Maggie Devlin  
High School Poetry

## What They Don't Know

What they don't know  
I've locked my mind up tight  
Still they continue to fight  
They try with all their might  
To rescue my hidden light.

What they don't know is,

The dark has consumed my soul  
And now it's taking its toll  
My insides have turned to coal  
And my thoughts no longer roll.

And what they don't know is,

I'm trying the best I can  
To follow their thorough plan  
They're trying to lend a hand  
But I can no longer stand.

What they don't know is,

My color has faded to grey,  
The darkness decided to stay  
The places I used to play  
Have fallen into decay.

I'm banging  
I'm pounding  
My effort's astounding

But I cannot free  
The light inside me,  
I've lost the key  
To the darkness.

And what they don't know is,

I'm fighting a war in my mind  
And to myself I'm unkind  
I still get up in the morning  
And cry without warning  
But look,  
I'm still alive.

What they don't know is,  
I refuse to lay down my arms  
I'm sounding my minds alarms  
I'm prepared to fight  
From day until night,  
Until I'm better again.

Jeanine Diehl  
High School Poetry

## Enduring Roots

Long ago, a seed of hope, a tree seedling was planted  
A fragile little thing left to stand against the forces of nature  
Lifting his little leaves for sunlight to nurture  
Battered by the rains and torn by the wind  
Still he picks himself up  
Staying ever in a lighthearted state of mind  
Patiently, our little tree grows slowly  
Standing strong and resilient but quiet and lowly  
Watching as the seasons go by  
A home to animals of all kinds  
Enduring like a tree - staying hopeful of all that could be

To get through life, you have to endure as a tree does  
When Mother Nature brings you down,  
New hope you will have found  
You will never fall; your roots will ground and support you  
For all those trials you've been through will test you  
But your bark will grow back stronger than ever  
Gaining knowledge and experience from all your endeavors  
When your leaves fall off, never fear, there will be more to  
take their place  
They'll come and go throughout your life  
After enduring many forest fires and falling leaves  
Your own saplings will fall and start anew  
Just like those before you.

Sophia Dominguez

High School Poetry

## Just Why

There's something simple  
Something so small  
That I must confess  
And my question is  
Why?

Why people choose fools  
To act as kings  
Expecting to go up  
When we really go down  
Why?

Why do women order men  
Like they are slaves  
Why do men order women  
Like they're property  
Why?

Why do men have to be fit  
And be charming  
As women need to be  
Skinny  
Why?

Why society  
We don't wake up  
Just to impress you  
We only wake up  
To live

Why society  
Why do you have to choose  
To choose our ways  
Can't we just be  
Happy?

Faith Evans  
High School Poetry



## When They Crossed Paths

A young lady walked down the road,  
Through her gait, her wealth showed.  
She sniffed flowers as she went,  
leaving not a single stem bent,  
Her coats were arranged just-so,  
and poverty she'd never known,  
On that fine summer's day in November.

On that road also walked the tramp;  
he was the town's thief and scamp.  
We all watched in wonder,  
This extreme social blunder:  
A fine young girl such as her,  
Near a converse monsieur.  
On a tense summer's day in November.

The two met at the road's middle;  
the suspense has us all a-twiddle.  
She curtsied to the man,  
and he took her two hands,  
Then they twirled down the street,  
With no music or beat,  
on an odd summer's day in November.

Down the avenue they danced,  
Leaving us all entranced,  
And, oh, was it grand!  
We don't know if they planned,  
To make us forget that summer's not in November.

Mckenna Ewing  
High School Poetry

## Untitled

You were my sunshine  
My everything  
Then suddenly  
You turned into a rainstorm  
That washed away all light  
And left me in the dark.

Sarah Gifford  
High School Poetry

## Gutter Face

The gutter is my home,  
The gutter is all time.  
Silent and filthy,  
I live in world that lacks a state of mind.  
It's a sticky lullaby--  
One that clings to all thought, hopes and aspirations.  
This gutter is a place deprived of inspiration.  
Half rhymes that so quickly fade,  
Eat up my gutter face.  
And not a phrase can escape lips brown from decay,  
So what could've been is all that remains.  
Passion traded for the glow of gutter slime;  
A pretentious sparkle of something filthy.  
It's crime to protest,  
Because such honesty violates the goals of humanity.  
Not that it would matter anyway,  
Because real sparkles were betrayed in such haste,  
For a false success,  
Leaving an empty gutter face.

Shontarious Golden  
High School Poetry



## Untitled

We are physically free, but our minds are stuck in chains.  
If you don't see a change, then you gotta be the change.

Money made a difference, but it never made me different.  
Life is a lesson, but sometimes I never pay attention.

The floor was my bed, and my hand was my pillow.  
had a drive thru at my house, selling dope out the window.

I was so broke, I couldn't afford to pay attention.  
I would get in trouble cause I wouldn't wanna listen.

Pops yelling at me cause he knew I could do better.  
Moms was never there, but I never could forget her.

The world calls me crazy, but my father called me different.  
But you wouldn't understand cause we're on a different  
mission.

Life is a game, so I try to find the cheat code.  
I never had a glimpse of fame, so I find a peep hole.

I'll never forget the hood and where I came from.  
I'll never turned my back on the one I got my name from.

I'm clearly seriously spiritually lyrically.  
I specifically got the ability to make my own conspiracy.

I remember doing drugs cause my dad was in the dirt.  
I would get so high, I felt like I could leave this earth.

Life tries to beat me like I'm Rodney King,  
But I'm drinking red bull and I'm growing wings.

I'll never trust a braud cause Eva set up Adam.  
So all I do is split her legs in two like an atom.

I'm always getting blessed even though I am a sinner.  
I can never lose because my God said that I'm a winner.

In order to receive, you have to give.  
In order to be happy, you have to live.

I was always been told that you are your worst enemy.  
Well that ironic cause my inner me just asked me for  
inner peace.

I use to be a boy in a man's world,  
But now I'm just a man in a strange world.

Life taught me that what you love always seems to  
kill you.  
Death taught me that what you love always seems to  
leave you.

I read people like a book, but sometimes I flip the page.  
I have so much knowledge, the old heads forget my age.

I needed food for thought, so I started making my  
own plate.  
I had the world on my shoulders, so I started pushing  
my own weight.

I'm tryna cheat death, but they say cheaters never win.  
I'm just a dark boy with a bright spirit that's within.

Nicolle Guerrero

High School Poetry

## Untitled

I stood my cracking ground amongst the Earth,  
I took the pain they gave so generously  
And willingly sold my soul  
To the red dancing devil next door.

Now I lay above them all.  
Above the starving lions with sickly bodies  
And flying over impatient condors with broken beaks,  
Waiting for me to make the mistakes I am bound to.

I am king of all tormented souls.  
Sweet, kind, malicious, evil.  
A tasty treat to satisfy my need.  
But time's a tickin'  
And mountains will shatter  
And statues will cry crimson  
As the clock strikes the end of my reign.

I saved my strength and pride for the battle.  
I broke my angels grace like the stained glass of my past  
And threw my life away  
To the black stallion singing in the parade.

Now I lay above them all,  
Above the nonbelievers  
And high from the dark wolves who feed on my agony  
Waiting for the blood from my mistakes to pour like  
acid rain.

I am king of the hate we love to have.  
Everlasting, aching, and never ending.

A meal fit for a king! A king like me!

But time's a tickin'

And I will regret calling to the Anti.

And learn to love what I used to have  
And sacrifice what was wrongfully given,  
As hounds of hell drag me to the fires.

But for now I am king!

And a king like me does not repent and pray.  
A king like me does not shed drops of weakness.

A king like me does not speak to the father  
who art in heaven,

For hallowed be MY name!

And to love thyself

Is to love someone like me.

Nicole Rae Hamasaki  
High School Poetry

## Untitled

My fingers trembled as I clicked the keys on my laptop.

My heart pounded as if a stampede of buffalo were  
somehow able to make its way into my heart  
and run without a care in the world.

“It shouldn't be this hard,” I thought.  
I shouldn't have so much trouble doing this.  
It's easy.

Or, at least, it's supposed to be.

One message, that's all it takes  
to start a conversation with you.

One message that could open  
countless possibilities in my life.

We could become lovers,  
and I wouldn't mind.

Or, we would just be friends.

Friends that can divulge in each other,  
that are there for each other.

Perhaps one day we'll take a road trip out to California,  
and relax on the warm sands of their beaches

Or to New York,  
and be awed by the hustle and bustle of the city

Or, nothing could happen at all.

You could ignore my message,  
ignore the several doors presented to you,  
and not reply

And my life would continue  
the way it has been for the past sixteen years.

Yet, I can't let the possibility of 'nothing' stop me  
from trying

My hand hovers over send.

“Hey.”

Savannah Hankikns

High School Poetry

## Clockwork

Round and round we go like a clock.  
Never ending and constantly dreading the next hour.

One o'clock, two o'clock, four.

Will you love me?

Six o'clock, seven o'clock, nine.

Will you hate me? I don't know, I have to check the hour.

Ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, twelve.

Am I worthless Daddy?  
Or am I your little girl like you "said",  
you say I'm your biggest mistake,  
until it's time for me to put on a show  
in your perfect little family.

You say I'm just like you that's why you abuse,  
but I'm worth more than what you call me.

So, walk a little slower Daddy,  
I want to show you how I'm better than you'd thought I'd be.

Maybe someday you'll realize  
how much you need me  
as the hour begins to fade for you,  
but by then it'll be too late.

I'll never check the hour to see if you need me again.

One o'clock, two o'clock, four.

I don't need you anymore.

Six o'clock. Seven o'clock, nine.

I don't feel guilt for walking away.

Ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, twelve.

I am finally free,  
no longer daddy's little broken girl.

Bridget Harris  
High School Poetry

## Dance Like Everyone's Watching

Someone once said, "White men can't jump."  
Society always says "White girls can't dance."

Tap no longer considered among the craft of dancing  
dubbed by the social elite of generation teen. The politics of  
motion are vetoed by the executive orders of a racial stigma.

Because Flap. Ball. Change.  
Becomes Trap. Twerk. Whip.

The size of the air moved when the rump of the girl goes up  
down up down determines the skill required to have the  
magic sex appeal. The young white female must learn to stay  
anchored in her place in the club.

In the back.  
Ignored without back.

A sweating body knows no race and a simple rhythm knows  
no skin but if everyone has free speech why is my freedom to  
move restricted by a social contract that only exists in the  
pages of everyone's minds?

The constitution I write for myself should not be amended  
by a quorum of scholars and peers.

Respect is given to the brave.  
Reject those who misbehave.

The one who drops it lowest is regarded in reverence.  
The deep joyful OH's! that escape the lips of a sweaty  
population grant an acceptance rate more selective than  
an Ivy League.

Piercing strobe lights blind eyes.  
ParentsPeersPeople. Blind judgement.

Maybe the modern expression of bodies is  
the newest art of communication.

Maybe getting down doesn't mean getting dirty.

Maybe the only intoxication I get is from the drug  
we call music.

Get drunk on rhythm and lose some rager.

Maybe congressman should have the occasional rager.

Maybe towards each other they'll lose some rager.

Maybe young people should be more encouRAGERed.

Because in this place we are one.  
We are not light or dark.

We are only lights  
that shine in the darkness of this club.

Hailey Krantz  
High School Poetry

## *Society vs. The Average People*

*Wake up, eat, work,  
return, sleep  
The same routine day in  
and day out  
Many mindless mundanes.  
Never changing  
Always the same.*

*Pick 1, keep the rest of life  
Work hard,  
earn money  
Live carefree by sixty.  
Pay taxes,  
go to jury duty  
Don't step out of line.*

*Poor, no money  
Starving?  
Poor you!  
What will we do?  
Nothing we have no money.*

Wake up, eat, work,  
return, sleep  
Dreading each waking  
moment  
Working, wary, wavered.  
Wanting change  
Always the same.

Pick 1, keep the rest of life  
Warrants no change,  
earns pennies  
Live carefree by death.  
Support the society,  
do your duty  
Step out of line.

Poor, only pennies  
Hungry for change  
They don't understand  
Doesn't care about us.  
They have all the money.

*People screaming,  
wanting more  
At the gates of us*

We scream,  
wanting them to look  
We destroy, wanting them to  
acknowledge

*Rioting, Starving, Fighting.*

We riot, starve,  
but keep fighting.

Savages, Beasts, Wild  
Uncultured, Uncontrolled, Barbarians  
Ruining Society.

Christina Mata  
High School Poetry

## Future

Flowing impermanence, he threatens a smile  
Showing no teeth, truthfully hostile  
We greet each other with open arms  
His aura possessed otherworldly charms  
He did not speak of himself, to my dismay  
I begged for confessions as if Judgment Day  
But he said he preferred surprises

Strung into him, I apologized, pleading forgiveness  
“It was my fault!” he replies  
This was not the first time  
I despised my clumsiness.

He screams at me:  
A car, a house, monogamy!  
is it strange these things do not interest me?  
With transcript in hand, I shall finally accept  
comfort will soon Elude me  
Tis' quite simply a product of life's inevitability

He grabs my shoulder  
"why do you always expect the worst of me?"  
I suppose it's just my guess,  
or my fixation with distress  
but so easily I assume my fate denied

But as I looked at him longer,  
I noticed a shift  
perhaps it's his enigma that fuels our happiness  
for what could bring anguish, could also bring my content  
and though I had asked moreover and again,  
his curiosity paralleled my own  
he did not know the answers either.

Vincenzo Milione

High School Poetry

## Ode to Jazz

Praise be, the mother of the popstar,  
brain child of an oppressed people.  
souls let free by the wails of great brass,  
and, finally, they have an outlet.  
no longer slaves to me, yet slaves to be;  
indentured servitude to the expression.

I listen; sympathy ebbs from me.  
I bask in the improvisation;  
wrong once, mistake, wrong twice, call me swing.  
once imperialized, it's all gone;  
the soul, jive; allure keeping it alive,  
southern trees bear a strange fruit, they do indeed.

They cry, voices amplified for their gods;  
faltering beliefs, eloquently;  
degeneration by poverty;  
pianos whisper such woe with grace.  
past, never to forget, art they beget;  
bottom of the caste never sounded so good.

Jasmine Mixson  
High School Poetry

## Labyrinth

I heard no drum guiding me  
As I land heavy steps upon the ground  
Forever lost in these unending twists and turns.

I see no light guiding me  
As the dark encases me  
In its cold embrace.

I'm lost—  
Without a purpose,  
Without a meaning  
As I travel down these accursed twists and turns.

There is no touch;  
There is no sight;  
There is no golden beating light.

So I continue to land these heavy steps,  
Forever hoping,  
Forever praying  
For that beating drum to guide me back.

Parker Nelson  
High School Poetry

## Bare My Soul

You asked me to bare my soul,  
it was only fair since I stole your heart.

But my soul is ugly; broken and bruised.

It is stitched together with tape and glue,  
only pieced together with a fragment of hope  
and the promise of revenge.

I guard my soul. I keep it hidden.  
Under lock and key; surrounded by barbed wire.

It so hideously wears my sorrows  
and it so desperately seeks the light.

I'm worried though,  
that if you see my soul you would turn tail and run,  
far away where my demons can't find you.

I guess it's the thought that counts;  
the sweet act of wanting me to trust you.

But honey I never learned to trust.

So you ask me, "Bare your soul"...

Do you really want to see it?  
Maybe we could do a trade: your heart for my soul.

Because I don't think that either of us  
could live without them.

I don't mean to sound harsh or callous,  
trust me, my dear,  
but it all goes back to the beginning.

Why do you want me to bare my soul?

Is it because I already hold your heart  
and know all your secrets?

Or is it because you actually love me?

That makes me laugh.  
But maybe it's true. Maybe you do love me.  
Maybe I should lower my barbed wire.

Oh, you got me.  
Ensnared me in your big brown eyes and dimples.

I'm worried now.  
Worried that I might hand you the key  
to the lock that keeps my soul protected.

Oh my, what have you done?

I'm a goner, totally head over heels for you.  
Completely and utterly in love with you.

Where did this come from? When did this happen?  
I might actually trust you.

Now I'm scared.  
Please be careful; my soul is fragile.

Remember the tape and glue? The hope and revenge?  
Okay, I think I'm ready...or maybe not. I don't know.

On the count of three.  
1, 2, 3:  
This is my soul.

Jaela Pipkins  
High School Poetry

## A Bird's Eye View

Tweet, Tweet, is what I say  
I fly around feeling gay  
I see the world more than you  
From up here it seems so small  
Sometimes I want to leave them all  
People always tell me shoo  
I move to get a better view  
Every day is like déjà vu  
I see little people with things to do  
Sometimes I wish I could be there to.

Alicia Ross  
High School Poetry

## The Moon

The moon spoke to me tonight,  
with a soft, sensitive voice.  
She told me not, that it would all be okay,  
but that I, myself, held the choice.

She said that within my hands,  
lay both a rose and a blade.  
A rose for life's beauty,  
a blade for life's shade.

If I choose the rose,  
into my body, happiness may pervade.  
If I choose the blade,  
out of my body, happiness may fade.

So I dropped the blade below my feet,  
and buried it beneath the better choice:  
The rose that I raised up to my heart,  
then planted in the soil as the moon rejoiced.



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