

Et Cetera

Huntington High School's
Literary Magazine

2013-2014

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Ms. Dianna Molenko

Dear Reader,

As this is my final year serving as editor of *Et Cetera* since I will be graduating this June with the Class of 2014, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on my first year with the magazine:

I burst through the door of room 239, eager to complete the 2011-2012 issue of Huntington High School's literary magazine, Et Cetera. All that was left to do was to create the cover. We decided on splatter painting with art supplies that my friend Asar had asked to borrow from her teacher. There was just one problem: the art room was locked. With a week left of school, we knew that we had to finish that day in order to have the magazines printed and delivered on time.

It had been a challenging year for the literary magazine staff. In December, the club advisor disappeared, as did all but four members. By February we had a new advisor, Ms. Molenko, who had taken on the role to help save the club. Months passed quickly as we scrambled to get short stories, poetry, and art contributions from friends. Eventually June arrived, and we had compiled enough of our classmates' written material to fill twenty-two pages. However, we were still without a cover.

"Well, we can use a piece of sketch paper," Asar suggested.

"I have markers," Ms. Molenko offered.

"And a water bottle," I added. In that moment the three of us were thinking the same thing.

We each picked up a marker, dipped it in water, and laughed as we began flinging marker ink.

Just before sending the magazine off, Ms. Molenko smiled when she revealed to us the inside cover page, where the names Greta Farrell and Asar Nadi appeared under "Editors."

Since the 2011-2012 school year, the literary magazine has significantly grown, and I cannot thank everyone enough who has contributed to its success. Thank you all for an unforgettable three years!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Greta Farrell". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Greta" being more prominent than the last name "Farrell".

Greta Farrell
Senior Editor of *Et Cetera*

Members

Sarah Aloe	Asar Nadi
Charles Beers	Mary Pulizzotto
Bianca Cadet	Lillibeth Quintanilla
Rachel Carpenter	Chaz Ruggieri
Greta Farrell	John Russo
Ben Hebert	Lena Scarpulla
Jack Kitzen	Jesse Stickell
Olivia Liepa	Keti Tsotskolauri
Bobby Marcus	Brendan Wirth

Contributors

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Joel Aparicio	Brian Gilbert	Holly LoTurco
John Arias	Gilda Goldental-Stoecker	Justin Meyer
Julianna Barca	Gabrielle Goodridge	Page Montecalvo
Leah Butz	Kathryn Hajny	Jeannie Morgenstern
Grace Curran	Kathryn Ingle	Bryan Murchison
Jane Donovan	Sondy Jean-Baptist	Benjamin Nikodem
Kaitlin Dayton	Lenni Joya Amaya	Hannah Olesen
Anna DiNardi	Ekaterina Koulakova	Emily Sager
Aaron Feltman	Tatéana Khokar	Emily Saltman
Anna Garfinkel	Caitlin Knowles	Meelod Wafajow

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- Anna DiNardi

Glass

I watch the shade recede,
But then the tide draws near.
I can only try and guess
As to what has brought me here.

A change to casual brightness
Is simply commonplace,
Yet the water beckons me—
The waves I must now chase.

I race to the shore to find
A boy, unhappy at best.
He sees me, and he smiles
A smile unlike the rest.

I reach out for him and
Bring my hand to touch his face.
The water ripples; as I feared,
His image is erased.

- Greta Farrell

After

In the brightest dreams I cannot see
her seismic smile
like a blazing barrel
too bent to fire

And her two sets of
eyes the ones you see
and the ones that see
you

As close as hands
can come without
touching ours fall
in stillness

While all there is
to do is push
the door in
and

- Brian Gilbert



- Aaron Feltman

You're Next

It was a blustery autumn morning. The wind began to pick up as the clock struck eight, shaking the crimson leaves violently back and forth until they were snapped from their homes and spiraling downward towards the pavement below. Despite the chill in the air and the capricious gusts, it was a picturesque morning in the Boston suburbs. It was at that moment, as the golden sun began to poke its head out from the green horizon, when Vincent Fredericks took his first steps out his front door.

Vincent was described by his coworkers as a compassionate man who was constantly plagued by sickness. He was always there to help his peers at the office building, sacrificing his personal time to assist in even the most menial tasks. It was this selfless mentality that had solidified his role as the foundation of McNerney Inc., the organization at which he worked for the past year.

Despite the threat of a cold lingering over him, Vincent had an added spring to his step as he trekked towards the office building on foot. Since his apartment was only a few blocks away, right smack in the middle of a bustling Boston marketplace, Vincent looked forward to his morning routine. The smell of freshly baked goods wafted through the air, penetrating his dull jade coat that stretched nearly from the bridge of his nose to the tips of his shoes. After a quick stop to buy an iced coffee, Vincent continued past the jewelry stands and news presses to reach the building, which seemed to stand proudly over the entire town with its name etched in bold letters on the top of the front wall.

He quickly downed the rest of his beverage as he reached the front door of his office. He couldn't contain his excitement. Today was the day of his long-awaited promotion, perhaps allowing him to buy a new house on the bay and begin to live luxuriously. It seemed like a perfect day.

But that was before he saw the body on the floor.

Her name was Dianne Crawford, a younger employee who showed great potential as a worker. Vincent always chatted with her during lunch breaks, and the two had grown a strong friendship over the last few months. When examining the body, all the police could determine was that she was stabbed in the neck by a sharp metal object and that a piece of crumpled paper was stuffed away in her jacket pocket. In blood red letters hastily scribbled in threatening penmanship, it said:

You're Next.

A friend of Dianne's, Ms. Mary Molenko, reported that she had received a call from Dianne last night, saying she had found the note in her pocket and thought it was just a prank. An uneasy veil of dread swept over all the workers, who now stood huddled over Dianne's lifeless corpse in the main lobby of the building. Their boss, a stocky man in a sweater vest named Grant Gunther, tried to get everyone back to their stations. "All right," he said in a tone that bordered on annoyance, "We all know that this is a tragedy. But we're way behind on this week's quotas. Everyone...back to

work!"

After the body had been removed and the blood stains had been removed from the carpeting, everyone tried to return to their cubicles as though Dianne's corpse wasn't still buried in their subconscious. At lunch, all of the coworkers combined to share their theories.

"Dianne wouldn't have hurt a fly," said Pete Wilkins. "Either someone had a grudge or maybe it was just an accident."

Jennifer Rogers scoffed. "People don't *accidentally* end up dead on the floor with a knife wound in their neck. And the murder weapon wasn't even in the building! That means someone is still out there, maybe looking for more blood!"

Vincent shivered. He had never been a fan of gruesome imagery and the scene from the morning still flashed before his eyes when he least expected it.

Suddenly, John Hearl stood up in the center of the cafeteria and all eyes immediately locked onto him with interest. "It had to have been the boss. Think about it guys! Gunther has been looking for a way to cut payroll without making the company look bad with layoffs!"

His excitement led to a fit of coughing, which Vincent tried to alleviate by giving him a handkerchief. Once his composure was regained, John's conspiracy continued to evolve.

"Gunther probably left the note in her mailbox in the morning and then killed her while no one was in the building yet! There's no question!"

Vincent walked home with a heavy heart, saddened by the loss of his coworker but also plagued by an underlying nervousness at the whole situation. There was a murderer on the loose, and there was always the possibility that he could end up being the next bloody victim. Vincent was a nervous wreck that night, triple-locking his front door and constantly peering out the window of his second-floor bedroom, just in case any mysterious figures approached.

Vincent didn't remember when he drifted off to sleep or even when he had woken up, but the next thing he knew he was taking his usual morning stroll towards the office. His heart thumped slowly and steadily in rhythm with his pace, almost as if he was quietly resisting the journey. When he reached the front door, he hesitated, fearing that a lifeless corpse would once again be strewn across the lobby. With a deep breath, he opened the door. There was no one to be found. Puzzled, Vincent continued towards the stairs.

That's when he heard the sobbing.

As he opened the door to the workplace, Vincent prepared for the most gruesome sight he could imagine, and yet had his expectations completely shattered by the cruel reality he met beyond the safety of the stairwell. John Hearl, the trium-

phant detective who had single-handedly solved the mystery not 24 hours ago, lay motionless in his cubicle, his glassy eyes staring fixatedly on his computer screen yet seeing nothing at all. The killer had left him sitting perfectly upright but left no other traces of his actions. Save one.

A small piece of fabric remained clenched in John's right hand, as if he desperately was struggling to keep the prize in his possession as he passed on. There, in crimson lettering, was a familiar phrase. *You're Next*.

Vincent was in complete shock, along with the rest of the company. Tissues were passed back and forth as tears flooded each worker's eyes. The only one who remained emotionless, staring blankly at the corpse, was Gunther. With his arms crossed, he walked towards the middle of the huddled group.

"Look, everyone. I know this hard," he started bluntly. "But there's nothing we can do until the crime scene analysts arrive in town tomorrow. We just called them in yesterday but there have been delays due to trees falling and blocking off the roads."

He paused to take a slow breath. "For now, I suggest we all get back to work and try to put this tragedy behind us."

With rage-filled glares, each worker returned to his post, fighting back tears and swears towards their inhumane boss. When it was time for a lunch break, the workers held absolutely nothing back.

"Gunther's a murdering fiend!" cried Wilson Jennings. "John was onto him, so Gunther had to dispose of him! We've got to kill him before he kills us!"

The room was divided, with half of the workers believing that revenge was the only option while the other half struggled for waiting until the professionals arrived. Suddenly, a haunting voice echoed throughout the cafeteria, and everyone's heart skipped a beat.

"Vincent Fredericks, bring your weekly report to the office right away." said the emotionless voice of Gunther. Almost instantly, Vincent's heart began pumping faster and faster. *He's gonna kill me... He's gonna kill me...*

Suddenly, he felt a hand on his shoulder shake him back and forth, snapping him back to reality. It was Wilson. "Vince! It's gonna be alright. Here..." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a Swiss army knife that looked freshly polished. "Take this with you. If he tries anything funny, don't hold back."

With a massive gulp, Vincent went back to his cubicle, gathered his paperwork, and made his way towards the boss's office on the top floor. Each flight of stairs was harder than the last, as it seemed like chains were pulling Vincent downward to save him from his inevitable death. After what seemed like an eternity, he stood face to face with his boss's office. What would be behind the door? A gun in his hand and a quick flash? Maybe he was hiding next to the doorway, waiting to jump

the minute Vincent took his first step into the room. His hand trembling uncontrollably, Vincent softly tapped the door and prayed that Gunther had not heard the noise.

But surely enough, he was immediately disappointed. "Come in." said the hollow voice from beyond the doorway.

Vincent opened the door to find his boss sitting comfortably in his chair, legs crossed and feet on his desk, which was filled with paperwork, bills, and business transactions. With a look of impatience, Gunther beckoned him to place the papers on the desk. Not hesitating, Vincent quickly walked to the desk and discarded the manila folder, and bolted for the door. But before he could leave the villain's lair, he was stopped by the cruel voice.

"Wait."

This was it. It was time to face death. He turned around, expecting to see the instrument of his demise. But instead, Gunther held a face that Vincent had never seen before. It was neither sadness nor pity, but something in Gunther's face broke the illusion of cruel impartiality that he had mastered so well over the last few days.

"I've heard what you all talk about down there. They think I'm the monster who killed Diane and John. I may be more interested in money than my workers, and I apologize for that. But...I would never do anything to hurt any of you."

Vincent didn't know what to say. Fear had been replaced by doubt, and doubt by sympathy. Unable to form a coherent thought in the rapid whirlpool of contradiction that was drowning his mind, Vincent left the room. The last thing he heard, or maybe he dreamt he heard, was Gunther's voice.

"Believe me..."

The rest of the day was a blur. After explaining the situation to his coworkers, most of whom saw Gunther's story as a lie, and returning his unused weapon back to Wilson, Vincent sat on his thoughts. *Could Gunther be telling the truth? Why would he act so impassively at the scene of the murder? If not Gunther, then who?*

These thoughts, as well as Gunther's echoing final words, lingered with Vincent as he walked back home. The sense of dread returned as he wrapped himself within his bed sheets. It was impossible for him to sleep, as his mind was too busy trying to discern facts from lies as the true murderer crept closer and closer.

The next thing he knew, Vincent was walking back to work once more. It was obvious that the series of murders had taken their toll on Vincent's mental health. His nervous twitching had risen astronomically and with each step towards the office his eyes darted back and forth, searching for a masked assailant hidden in the bushes or disguised as a merchant, ready to strike.

What Vincent faced that day in the office, no one could have predicted. The professional crime scene investigators had arrived and an ambulance was parked

right outside the building, its sirens and flashing lights shattering the tranquil autumn morning. Every coworker surrounded the ambulance, but no tears were shed. Suddenly, the doors burst open and two medics rolled a lifeless body into the truck. There, covered by a frail blue blanket stained scarlet with blood, was Grant Gunther.

The authorities tried to explain the situation. "He was definitely killed before he left the office last night. Knife wound. No signs of a struggle so it means that the victim was familiar with the killer or he would have put up a fight." The only thing Vincent could focus on, though, was a piece of crumpled paper which fell from Gunther's hand to the pavement near him. Vincent didn't have to open the paper to know what it said.

You're Next.

The next few hours consisted of confusion and individual interrogations. Everyone was now a suspect. Vincent, still traumatized, tried his best to answer the officer's questions when the spotlight came. But, in the end, all he could really say was "I don't know."

Once the police had left to analyze the corpse for potential evidence, the rest of the office building gathered together to decide what to do next. After a long discussion, it was decided that they would continue working in the office, as it was what the boss would have want. His mind slowly wandered away from his work. *Gunther is gone. Who could the murderer be now?*

At lunch, the answer became clear. Wilson Jennings sat alone at a table in the far corner of the cafeteria and all the murmurs started pointing in his direction.

"Wilson was the one who had the pocket knife." "Every murder so far has had a knife wound." "Wilson wanted the boss gone."

While the rest of his coworkers planned to call the police as soon as possible, Vincent returned to his cubicle to escape the tension-filled environment and enjoy his lunch in solitude. Just as he took a bite of his sandwich, he saw something on his desk that made him choke. On the desk, right beneath his computer, was a note with a familiar color and a familiar pattern.

"You're next..." Vincent whispered out loud.

Panicking, Vincent grabbed the note and ran back to the cafeteria. Wilson was still huddled in the corner staring blankly at his food. When he reached his table of friends, Vincent showed the coworkers the note and told them he was running home. As he sprinted out of the cafeteria, he saw a small group of workers get up and start making their way towards Wilson, now cornered in the back of the cafeteria.

But there was no time to look back. Vincent nearly leapt out the front door of the office and ran down the street like his life depended on it. The vendors, the scenery, the brisk autumn air, nothing could stop his speedy flight from the cursed office. Once he reached his house, he quickly triple-locked his doors, closed the windows and slid the shades shut, shrinking into the safety of his mattress. For hours on end,

Vincent hid beneath his blankets with blood-shot eyes, fearing to move a muscle or even turn on a light to offer the slightest bit of comfort. Soon, darkness enveloped the apartment and the clock struck ten.

Nothing...No noise...no intruders...Maybe they finally turned him in...

His train of thought was derailed by a sharp creak. It came from downstairs. His heart began to thump. The creak grew louder with each passing minute, almost as if the footsteps were growing closer and closer. *Thump thump thump thump.*

The creak and groan of the floorboards grew so loud that Vincent knew their owner was just beyond the doorway of his bedroom. Wilson was there, ready to take his final victim. Just as his heart was about to burst from his body, the noises stopped.

He couldn't take it any longer. "JUST KILL ME! I CAN'T DO THIS ANYMORE!" He ran to the door and thrust it open. Nothing. Blood pumping and eyes bulging, Vincent ran throughout the apartment in search of the intruder. "COME OUT NOW! I'M NOT AFRAID ANYMORE!"

After an eternity of searching, Vincent collapsed at his kitchen table and the tears began to flow. He was lost in the darkness, a tight rope act that was slowly falling into the net of insanity. Wiping away his tears, Vincent rose from his seat and turned the lights on.

It was then when he saw the paper. A piece of crumpled paper lay on his living room floor. *You're Next.* Confused, he continued his investigation. Another paper was positioned haphazardly on his sofa. *You're Next.* The paper trail continued onward throughout the apartment, until it ended at a lonely door at the end of a hallway. With no hesitation, Vincent opened it.

The room was a mess. Papers were scattered all across the closet almost as if there had been a break in. He picked one up. *You're Next.* Another. *You're Next.* Another. *You're Next.* Every scrap of paper possessed the same cryptic warning, ranging from napkins to business documents. A large poster board hung on the far most wall, holding photographs with familiar faces and unsettling newspaper clippings involving a massacre in Baltimore and a mysterious murder spree in a small Chicago town.

The only thing left in the room was a small chest hidden away in the mess of papers. He opened it slowly but surely. It was empty, except for one object. A paring knife, stained crimson. Vincent picked up the knife and looked back at the poster board. Hidden beneath the photographs was a map of the country, with several locations circled and crossed out in bright red.

And with that, Vincent remembered.

He located the empty circle near Boston, and, with a smile, crossed it out with the red marker in his pocket. Then, without hesitation, he circled a new location. Long Island.

He capped the marker. Before he shut the door and booked a flight to LaGuardia, Vincent stared once more at his destination and then at his metallic ally, shining brightly beneath the starry night. He laughed softly...coldly...cruelly...

"You're next."

- Charles Beers

Second Place in the Huntington Youth Writes Contest



- Ketí Tsotskolauri

Why?

Why do we live in a world where our revenue depicts the avenue we live on? Why do we have to mind what we say in front of our white teachers because what they might think or what they may already think of us? Why do we have to mind what we wear when we go out to prevent them from thinking that we are jezebels or that we weren't brought up right? Why don't I understand why I've been told that I'm pretty intelligent and articulate? Why do I feel as if when I raise my hand in class to answer a question, the majority of the class thinks I'm going to answer wrong? Why do they look so astonished when I answer correctly or get a higher test grade than they do? Why do I ask why? Why am I so ardent about these situations? Why are they so stereotypical? Why do they feel because of the color of my skin that I'm automatically benighted? Why do I feel so much indignation when I come upon these subjects? Why does this enfeeble this heart of mine? Why am I so solicitous in the face of these problems in society when I could be like other girls my age who are daunt to the subject? Why don't we as a black society show gratitude to Dr. Martin Luther King? Can somebody please tell me why?

- Niyana Watkins

Plunk

The rain falls sporadically
Plunk... Plunk... Plunk-plunk
It's wet and cold and I feel alone.
Sitting on the damp shore line,
But
no one knows.

I miss you
I miss my soul
I wish you didn't take it with you when you "had" to go.

I can see your face in the fog over the horizon
I try to blink it away,
but not a mere detail
ever
fades.

My whole body aches for the twinkle in your eyes
That longing look when we said our goodbyes.

Even though we're both miserable,
We took each other's happiness away,
When we left each other for dead that day.

I find pieces of you in everything I say and do.
I miss you more than the tide misses the shore when it recedes.
There's only one place the tide should be.
Together with shore, creating the sea.

- Gabrielle Goodridge

The Mysterious Arc of Color

What is Mother Nature teaching us?
That good can come from bad,
the way she beautifully paints the sky
after a long, sorrowful day of showers?
What is Mother Nature teaching us?
To appreciate the small things in life,
the way a nominal palette of colors
can dramatically alter a mood?
What is Mother Nature teaching us?
To learn to let go.
The way we are forced to forget the rainbow,
for after a few short minutes,
the sky will be abandoned.

- Holly LoTurco
Winner of the Poetry for the HART contest



- Grace Curran

Goodbye, Winter. Hello, Spring.

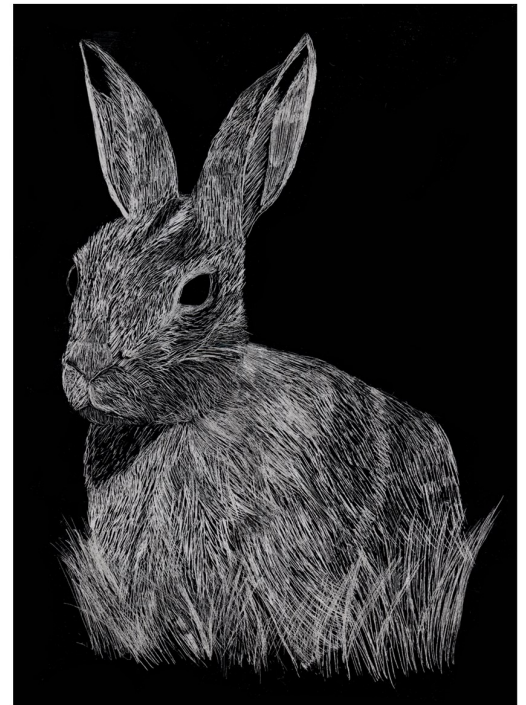
Every year around this time, huge changes begin to occur
As the Earth gets warm, there's an end to snowstorms,
And we say, "Goodbye, Winter!"
Gone are the days below freezing. Winter coats are in the past.
No more ice and no more snow – we can finally see the grass!
Although it's still a little chilly, and we never know what the weather could bring,
The ground has thawed, and we should applaud as we shout, "Hello, Spring!"
The flowers have begun blooming with their petals purple, pink, and red;
Rather than giant snow banks, flowers fill our gardens instead.
Birds are chirping, bees are buzzing, and ladybugs have returned.
Animals emerge from hibernation for the fresh air that they've earned.
People like to spend more time outside with picnic baskets in their hands
Unless of course, unfortunately, April showers disrupt their plans.
And who could forget the most important part of spring? AP exams and SATs!
Students often miss the rest of these changes because they're lost in their studies.
Everyone agrees that all this work can be a bummer,
But just remember it will get better because after spring comes summer!

- Caitlin Knowles

Spring

Coy, pink puddles soaking the ground
Soft and wispy with the ants they grow
Kissing the rusty bucket bottom
The dirty shoelace filled with rain
The palm of the sky drizzled with the lily-petaled stars
Striped with sunlight time
Which is now thicker than none
The stars come out
And the sun stays one
Kissing that rusty bucket bottom
Filled with flower heads
Making flotsam and jetsam
Sprinkle the ground with each flutter of feet
Dried flower petals mashed into paint of sunrises
Carried in the rusty bucket bottom
Sweet and clean are the petals found
Floating in the rivers young
Coming from the rusty bucket bottom spring
Outside is where they reach to play
Outside is where I've come to stay
With the rusty bucket bottom

- Jeannie Morgenstern



- Emily Saltman

Papa's House

I find solace in the trees
dancing in the cold wind's song,
whispering sweet nothings in prayer
comfort in the rain
beating long and steady
upon the old roof's shingles
tranquility upon the water
liquid glass, morning mist
rising languidly, alluringly

I find a home in these quarters
a constant repose,
a lull from stark reality
Love within the past,
flooding back, as farewells
were never truly bound
My heart, my soul
hidden among photographs
and memories, cluttering the walls

Hidden from all the world,
obscured beneath the trees
Shrouded by the rain
across the clouded lake
In the pictures on the walls
under cover of these halls
I find what was long lost.
A joyous hope for the future,
and forgiveness of the past.

- Rachel Carpenter



- Julianna Barca



- Ketí Tsotskolauri

Perspective

The old man lifts his hand
To position his glasses just right,
But he refuses to understand
What life is like without sight.

His vision is incomplete,
Yet his memory outlives it
Because sitting in his seat
Is a man who really gets it.

Life is a song to be sung,
Not one to be heard.
I suggest your tongue
Sounds each and every word.

In this world you get one dance,
A much too short one at that,
So get up and take that chance.
Don't leave your feet lying flat.

The journal's crisp pages are filled
With whatever story you write.
Leave your ink behind, instilled
In it your own sense of sight.

- Greta Farrell

The Storm Banks

She had been sitting at the Storm Banks for the past hour with an unmoving pencil in her hand. It was not that she had no good ideas to write about or draw in her scratched up sketchbook, rather her mind was whirling with unusual ideas that she had dreamt about since they were all so good. All the ideas she had were interesting and amazing, but none of them were exhilarating or awe-striking. Those were the thoughts and dreams she brought to life: not the good ones, but the great ones. Most would be happy with a good idea, but the girl on the storm bank, who happened to be getting her favorite green jacket sandy without realizing, was part muse. She had no Greek god counterparts, but this girl was filled with inspiration, images, and ideas that could easily change a simple, mundane theory into a striking work of conceptual art. Now, she would be a complete muse if she actually shared some of these ideas with her peers instead of cooping them up in a notebook or sketchpad, but she was content with not being divine.

Ten more minutes passed, and suddenly, the girl became active, her pencil scratched against the paper of her notebook. When the spark of passion passed, she was able to examine what she had drawn. It was a complex, black, entwining knot; a menacing, dark tangle; a scribble of frustration that the girl didn't realize was in her own heart. The girl with the black rings under her eyes peered at her graphite marks and sighed. She did not have any great ideas because she was so drained, no longer caring about her appearance nor having the energy to weave thoughts together and transfer them to paper. It had been a fallow period for the demi-muse, a period of essays every week and an average of six and a half hours of sleep each night.

The girls' eyebrows knitted together. She glared at the interior of the sprawling mess on the page and placed her sketchbook down with the grey mechanical pencil on top. She surveyed the hidden world that she sat in. In front of her was a shallow, manmade stream that lazily flowed to the girl's right and out of her view. Patches of green grass and wiry trees grew around the little stream. An abandoned complex was a stone's throw from the girl's place: a small cluster of white-washed rectangles that sat there forgotten. The young creator was sitting on the only place suitable for sitting: a rough sandy bank close to the translucent water. She and her friend found this tranquil area when they ignored the yellow caution tape that crossed the gap in the rusty old fence and found themselves in a new land far from the streets they had been walking on. The girl had later come up with the name, "The Storm Banks." "Storm" represented the fact that the river was created because the swamp nearby would flow over onto the streets when rain came, and "Banks" for the only area of human existence in this secret realm.

It was a calm, peaceful river that continued without disruption from the chaotic outside world. The calmness, however, could not give the girl the clarity she needed, and after seeing her rough chicken scratch, she knew she had to go back. She closed the sketchpad she was working in and placed it in her leather satchel, giving up on trying to create something, anything new. For the remainder of the time, the little muse watched the river flow, chasing mindless fantasies and numerous worries in her head, conscious of what the world was draining from her.

- **Tatéana Khokar**

Sunday Morning

I planned it out, just you and me,
We'd be together for all eternity.
You were everything, my perfect flower,
For whom I'd devote every hour.
Sweet and kind, you had it all,
The sun of the spring and the beauty of the fall.

Then Sunday morning came along,
And that's when everything went wrong.
Pictures started flooding in,
Of a gigantic party for all to win.
There you stood with an unfamiliar face,
An unusual smile, far from grace.
It had been the night of your life, I thought out loud,
Probably got swept in by the roar of the crowd.

So for a week questions filled my head,
From when I woke and back to bed.
What had sparked this drastic change?
Were my dreams just out of range?
My gut said things would soon get better...

Then Sunday morning came again,
And the pictures came in then by ten.
I was greeted again by your blissful expression,
Checked out in another party session.
Only this time your photo was graced with a guest,
The secret to getting as happy as the rest.
A shiny blue can you clutched in your hand,
A familiar shape and a familiar brand.
Once again my mind was put to the test,
Did you think that this would make you the best?

For a second time, my faith was shaken,
There must have been reasons for the actions you'd taken.
I thought and I thought for the perfect reason,
A way to explain your moral treason.
With a deep breath and sigh, I finally found peace,
Everyone makes mistakes, so my mind was at ease.
My gut said things would soon get better...

Then Sunday morning came at last,
And I hoped with a heavy heart that you had dropped the past.
No pictures came to me that day,
Maybe, I thought, you had found your way.
But then something worse came into view,
Not pictures, but stories of what you could do.
Not only did you continue can after can,
But you fell into the arms of another man.
My hopes and dreams fell down in a line,
As my 7th grade crush was no longer mine.

So my perfect flower still grows and grows,
But away from perfection, and into a rose.
Her beauty unmatched, her smile still there,
But her thorns carry pain I can no longer bear.
I hope that my flower, my love never went away,
And I'll be waiting if she ever comes back...
Someday...

- Anonymous



- Emily Sager



- Kaitlin Dayton

FTM

I don't feel right in my own body. It's not to say that I'm ugly, or that I feel insecure. It's just...I don't feel right. I've never felt right. Ever. This face that I see in the mirror...it's not who I am. It's not who I want to be. It never has been. This long, curly auburn hair that cascades over my boney shoulders and onto my back—it isn't right. These pink, girly earrings—they aren't right either. This mascara that my mother insists I wear—it isn't me. These clothes...these atrocious garments that are way too revealing—they aren't me. All these features are not me. They don't belong to the person I want to be. The type of person I'm destined to be doesn't wear earrings, or short shorts, or tank tops, or any of this feminine nonsense. He wears jeans. He wears jerseys. He doesn't wear make-up or earrings. He wears a snap-back, a stud. Hell, he wears boxers, not a bra.

So, why do I wear these things? These accessories that society associates with my female body—why do I wear them? Can't anyone see that I'm not feminine? That my true inner-self isn't defined by what I wear? I'm a person, an anatomical female. But that doesn't constitute who I am. The clothes I wear, the cosmetics my mother forces me to apply, all of this garbage, is not natural. I want to be masculine. I want to go back to being the tomboy I was in elementary school. I want to go back and play football with my two brothers, go back to being a carefree child, and not give a damn about what society deems to be "normal."

Normal. What is normal? Is it, in my case, being a damsel in distress, waiting for some prince charming to save me? Should I be shopping with my female companions on Saturday afternoons? Obsessing over attractive guys at the mall and gossiping about the latest fashion trends? Should I be wearing heels? Tight skirts? Make-up? Should I just suppress my true self and follow the lifestyle society has declared "normal?"

Why must everything be so complicated? Why must puberty change everything? I used to be happy and secure. And now? Now, I'm miserable and confused. Who am I? I'm a freak. I'm a dyke. I'm a freakish dyke who is attracted to girls. I thought I would have a husband and kids one day. How naïve I was back then. To think that normality only exists between opposite genders. To think, within society's bounds, that normal love is between a man and a woman. Not two men. Not two women. Having "Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve!" hammered into my brain in the sixteen years I've lived on this planet hasn't changed who I love. Love knows no gender.

Gender. What is gender? Yet another term casually tossed around by people in a normal community? Is gender simply determined by the sex organs an individual possesses? That a male has "a sword" and a woman has "a sheath?" No. There's male and there's female. But there's also a third option, a grey zone. A zone not determined by specific physical features, but by characteristics of a unique individual and the feelings of love they acquire for their intended soul mate.

So why must I be so confused? Why can't I just accept who I am? My friends have accepted me—the lesbian me, that is. So why is this whole process so difficult?

Is it due to my parents' denunciation of who I am? I'm not just some lesbian they gave birth to...I'm their daughter. No—I'm their son.

But if I'm their son, then why does the mirror say otherwise? As my emerald eyes study my reflection, why does a female gaze back? My eyes started to water. Why? Why must nothing make sense? As a single tear flowed down my face, I glanced around at my surroundings. There was a pile of clothes stacked on a nearby bathtub rim, consisting of jeans, a football jersey and a pair of boxers taken from my younger brother's dresser. My newly purchased snapback, decked out in my favorite football team, the Seahawks', team colors rested on the granite countertop adjacent to the electric razor lifted from my older brother's dorm up in Syracuse when we last visited.

My eyes travelled back to my reflection. I can do this. I slowly rose from the porcelain bowl upon which I've been seated for the past two hours contemplating everything I was about to do. I have thought and thought and thought for years, ever since I learned about homosexuality. But it wasn't enough. My hand reached out for the razor, revealing the red streaks permanently etched across my underarms—the scars. My appendage paused as my head turned, mesmerized by all the memories. The recollections of pain and depression were overwhelming. The reminiscence of the countless, insomnia-filled nights, and all the tears shed over the years. Everything I had been through in my middle and high school years came rushing back in an instant, causing me to sit back down and ponder my intended course of action for the umpteenth time.

What if I get rejected again? It happened once before, for a lesser reason. My parents couldn't accept the fact that their daughter liked girls. What could be worse than that, their son liking girls? Too bad I wasn't born male...I might've actually had a chance at being ordinary. I chuckled darkly, entertaining the thought. No, I was going to carry through with this. I had to, despite the anticipated consequences I would face.

Grabbing onto the counter for leverage, I stood up from the toilet yet again, facing my mirror image. My elbows extended so that my underarms were exposed to the reflective surface, as my knuckles curled white around the edge of the countertop. Fresh cuts on the flesh of my left arm made me halt. Their scabbed-over crimson daggers pierced into me. My head whipped to the right, staring at the linen closet next to the bathtub.

The closet, ironically, held most of my secrets. It was where I curled up and cried repeatedly throughout the years. It hid the pocket knife that I used to inflict harm upon my flesh as well as a fifth of vodka buried behind a stack of facecloths. The outlets for all my pain, grouped together in a single space. I longed for my elixir. My friend in the bottle allowed me to forget all the suffering I had endured, and just relax into the unconscious realm that eventually engulfed me.

I had to do this. This is who I am. I couldn't let society continue to mold an image of me that isn't true. I reached for the razor again. Firmly grasping the small device, I raised it to my forehead. My hand shook violently as I turned the switch.

Nothing happened. I turned the switch off, and then back on. Still, nothing. I looked at the machine in the mirror, following the cord onto the countertop. The electric razor wasn't plugged in.

After resolving the obvious problem, I raised the machine to my forehead once more. Again, my hand trembled as I flipped the switch, only this time, the typical buzzing sound associated with the razor reverberated within the tiny bathroom. This is it. Yet, as I elevated the razor to my forehead, doubts began to flow through my mind. The same thoughts about what others might think, the condemnation I would certainly receive, returned. I paused again.

Placing the razor back down on the countertop, I decided to change clothes first. Changing clothes would be easier, and hopefully boost my confidence—it I had any to begin with—enough to carry through with my plan. I started off with the boxers and jeans. I slipped out of my purple shorts, my fingers rubbing against my smooth skin. That's the one thing I would keep doing—shaving. Smooth, hairless skin made me feel clean, and it looked extremely attractive on my female companions. I smiled at the idea.

I kept my undergarments on as I didn't want to experience boxers jostling against my bare skin. I grabbed my brother's plaid underwear off the bathtub ledge, and proceeded to step into them. I snapped the elastic waistband against my waist. I smiled. They were comfortable, and very masculine. I liked this. I felt true, I felt empowered, I felt...happy. Happiness evaded me most of the time, and only visited my psyche every now and then. This unexpected thrill brought a sense of euphoria and inspired me to continue my transformation.

I began to move faster, not wanting pessimistic thoughts to push back into my skull. No, this had to happen. If not for me, then for Adam. Adam was the male name I'd chosen to replace the girly name of Kelsey. Christ, I hated my name. Kelsey was pink lace tied with a ribbon—a name a guy would never possess. Adam sounded forceful, like it meant something. Whoever acquired the name sounded substantial, important. Adam embodied everything I was meant to be.

Next were the loose fit jeans I bought in a local department store. They weren't the stereotypical skinny jeans that my gender wore. No, they were slack. They didn't suffocate my legs for the sake of fashion. I never understood why people stressed over their appearance, but then again, just thinking that thought made me a serious hypocrite. After comfortably pulling the denim up over my legs, I clasped the copper button and zipped the fly. I marveled at how natural they felt, how ordinary they made me feel.

I clutched the football jersey in my left hand and placed it on the countertop. Fumbling with the hem of my tank top, I lifted my arms over my head, and discarded the fabric on the floor next to my shorts. I looked around for the elastic tape I had purchased to make my breasts less pronounced, not that I was well endowed anyway. Retrieving the tape from the closet, I placed the end of the roll under my right armpit, level with my breasts. My hand started shaking again, but not with enough velocity to stop my actions. I was doing it, I was doing it. I lost track of how many

times I coiled the tape around my bust, but it was enough to make my chest look relatively flat, flat enough to pass anyway. Holding the football jersey once more, I shrugged into the airy material, making sure not to catch the jersey on the tape.

I turned around to admire my new attire. I studied my reflection with precision, adjusting the new clothes on my figure to smooth out any imperfections my eyes encountered. Looking over my shoulder, I peered at the pearly white number 3 sewn onto the back of the green jersey. Choosing the number 3 was important, as it was the number of years since I was ousted by a “friend.” Wearing the number now, years later, felt empowering.

I looked like Adam. I felt like him too. Yet my hair still tumbled over my shoulders—but that was about to change. With newfound confidence, I reached for the razor. This time, however, my hand wasn’t shaking. I was secure in my movements as I lifted the razor to my head. Clicking it on, I began my leap of faith. Short bristles of hair remained above my right temple as I dragged the tool across my scalp, shedding my former lengthy locks. My hair fell into the sink and onto the surrounding countertop. The more hair that fell, the more confident I felt. A massive sense of relief washed over me. It was as if all the weight of my insecurities, self-hatred and guilt was lifted in a single instant.

The sink was almost full of hair, yet I refused to look in the mirror fearing I would be filled with the regret that had engulfed me over the past several years. Instead of using my eyes, I utilized my sense of touch to help my hands navigate my newly shorn head. I had carefully planned this moment in advance to avoid any interference from my family, a family I had failed to connect with since being ousted.

Thus began my downward spiral. Worry of what my family might do once they saw me as Adam had crossed my mind, but not at the magnitude it was now. What if they kicked me out? Rejection was one thing, but being tossed to the curb was a whole different story. Where would I go? How would I eat? Would I die on the streets? These questions bombarded my mind as I continued to avoid looking at my reflection. The razor had since been quieted, as my hands roamed my new short coif, feeling the wisps brush through my fingertips.

I cautiously raised my eyes to the mirror, lowering my hands shakily to rest on the countertop. My hair was gone. Gone! I stood in horror, my mouth gaping at the image that stared back at me. My hands fiercely shook against the granite, my eyes watered and I couldn’t stop the assault of negativity seeping back into my conscience. Oh, no. Oh, no, no, no, no, no! What have I done?!

I wanted to turn back time. Please, let me go back to the way I was, please! Despite my internal pleas, the result of my actions came crashing down on me, the penalty they would carry...I couldn’t handle it. A guttural wail burst from my chest as tears poured from my clenched eyes. My hands pushed against my temples in an effort to stop the mental torment I was enduring. The pain amplified as I stared into the sink where the remnants of my former female self remained. I pounded my fists in anger while a rage-filled hate boiled inside me. I needed to escape, an escape that existed in a bottle in the linen closet. In my haste and desperation for a swig of vod-

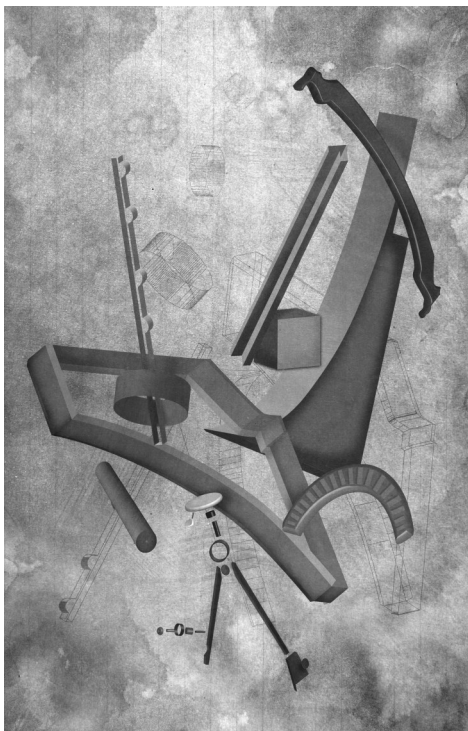
ka, my flailing arms knocked the bottle to the floor, shattering on impact. It was then, in a blurry haze, that I spotted my pocketknife. I collapsed onto the rim of the tub.

The veins of my left arm opened under my hand, causing fresh blood to flow over my already scarred skin. I couldn't stop. It was a knee-jerk reaction—a dangerous habit that evolved over time. No matter how much I tried, I couldn't muster the emotional strength to overcome my addiction. The blade continued to rip as my breathing became uneven, my lungs gasping for air as my tears continued to fall. There was no moment of realization, no comfort, nothing. This plan was a mistake—I was a mistake, a freak of nature.

I felt completely numb, but for now it was my safe haven. The tears faded. The shaking stopped. My eyes, which had glazed over, now refocused on the forgotten snapback on the countertop, the one I had neglected to try on during my transformation. Numbness was replaced with immense regret as all my emotions seemed to blend together. The snapback appeared to stare at me, demanding my attention. Reaching for it, I placed the blue and green cap on my head, swiveling it to one side. A new round of tears burst forth. I placed my face in my hands, sniffing loudly as I desperately tried to regain control, but to no avail. The salty droplets seeped through my interlocked fingers, traveling down my weary arms dripping onto the red-stained floor.

Boys don't cry.

- **Brendan Wirth**



- **Tatéana Khokar**

Removed

Sit backwards, and they'll go,
driving further out of sight:
each its own world at sixty miles an hour.

Watch as you're forced,
pulled away from whence you came,
unable to help looking back
at what once was.

The invisible is coming,
and there is nothing you can do
to prevent the crash.

- **Greta Farrell**

Slowly But Surely

s
l
o
w
l
y
but surely
he stumbles
towards the cabinet
hands drunkenly fumbling
he can't find
joy in the little
things anymore and it
hurts
he opens the container
filled with the pills
that would make him
“happy” and “normal” again
but it didn't
work

he contemplates
a second
the longest and most dramatic
second
of his life
then it's decided

he feels it's enough:
he's right.
he lays down
closes his eyes w
and fades a

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- Page Montecalvo

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unlucky number
shrouded in superstition
once again enters his mind
he doesn't care anymore



- Jane Donovan

Spring

I don't like spring.
And I don't like poems.
I don't like buds and bees and weeds.
I don't like stings.

I don't appreciate weather change;
How people start to dress so strange
As if tank tops and shorts are calling.
And I don't appreciate pollen.

I don't get all the hype.
Maybe I'm just not the type
Who appreciates this time of rebirth
Or who appreciates the rich earth.

I hate sweet.
And I hate sunburns.
I hate students' "last-minute-before-finals" need to learn.
I'm a real sourpuss, I bet.

I don't like spring.
And I don't like poems.
I can't conform to a rhyme scheme at all!
And I much prefer the fall.

However, I do like bird chirps.
And I really like flowers.
I love long daylight hours.
I don't know – I guess it could be worse.

But spring is a bore.
Or it is to me.
But there's one thing that makes spring a "party."
Summer is just behind the door.

- **Anna Garfinkel**

Every Moment

And every moment, I think softly
of the silence, washing over me like an
actual conscience, like my life isn't a black hole
ending up in some unknown region of the universe,
confused and alone, yet I keep going through
the silence, through the distance, and I see... you.

- **Anonymous**

The Story of John

There once was a man named John. He lived a very ordinary life. Every day he would go to the local business firm, where he would sit down in his chair in his standard cubicle and type the same flow of indistinguishable words for hours upon hours. Although he was never told his actual position and impact on the company and had never even met his boss, he was assured by his coworkers that his monotonous typing was indispensable.

One day, as he was midway through one of his reports, John realized something: none of his coworkers had come into work that day. He scanned the rows upon rows of cubicles and was met with nothing but empty chairs and blank computer screens. Confused, John decided to leave the office and figure out what was going on.

John walked down the hallway until he reached two doors. Since he was trying to reach his boss' office, he chose the door on his left.

Strangely, by some act of confusion, John decided to take the door on his right instead. Even though this door offered no pathway to his boss's office on the top floor of the building, John boldly took this unexpected path. John walked down the hallway with strong determination, almost as if each step drew him closer to the secret of the mysterious disappearance of his coworkers.

After about five minutes of walking in a seemingly endless stretch of hallway, John was confronted with another dilemma. He reached a small room nearly identical to the first, with another set of open doors in front of him. A sign above the door on his left said in bold letters **DOOR TO BOSS'S OFFICE**. Realizing that this was his opportunity to get back on the right track, John decided to take this door and solve the mystery of his unusual day.

But for the second time that day John decided to be rebellious and chose the door on his right. He was not the smartest member of the firm, and many regarded him to be physically unattractive. Due to his low IQ and incapability to read ridiculously noticeable signs, John continued forward.

John walked down another hallway for a half hour, giving him time to look back on his decisions, hopefully giving him insight if another simple choice were to arise. Oddly enough, after the hallway seemed to stretch on endlessly, John was faced with another two doors. This time, the left door featured flashing bright lights, similar to the ones found outside a Vegas casino. The flashing green light almost beckoned to him, and he knew in his heart that this was the true pathway to his boss' office and the beginning of a fantastic journey. On the right was a moldy door, barely hanging on to its rusty foundations, with a large blood red sign carrying the warning **DANGER: DO NOT ENTER**. Despite his stupidity, John knew the sensible choice was the pathway that promised adventure, and he quickly took the door on his left.

But no, John decided he was going to be an idiot today, and he chose the door on his right, choosing unknown danger over a pathway of happiness and style. John was clearly unappreciative of his situation and probably did not realize the amount of

time it took to construct a pathway to his boss's office that was literally unavoidable. Being a complete imbecile who no one except his mother liked, John trudged onward into the darkness.

In the enveloping darkness, John pondered his decisions up until that point. Was he having a bad day? Was he trying to relieve some unsolved issues by blatantly ignoring the quest that was spelled out for him in gigantic red ink? Was he trying to give the narrator a migraine by completely ignoring every miniscule task that was given to him? These thoughts were interrupted by a light in the distance.

John walked forwards until he was met with yet another room, bearing the same sense of loneliness and regularity of his past situations. This time, however, there was only one door to go through. This door was the way to go all the way back to the beginning of the building and try and redeem his miserable performance. Having no alternative but forward, John took a deep breath and tried to erase his mistakes.

Wait. What are you doing? Are you just...are you just sitting there? John, all you have to do is walk forward. There's nothing else you can do! Stop being so damn difficult and walk through the bloody door! John, why can't we just get along? I had this whole nice story planned out for you, and now you won't be able to see it. Was it something I said? Did I do something that made you want to ignore everything I tell you? You can't just...sit there...

You know what. Let's start over. From the beginning.

There once was a man named John. He lived a very ordinary life. Every day he would go to the local business firm, where he would sit down in his chair in his standard cubicle and type the same flow of indistinguishable words for hours upon hours. Although he was never told his actual position and impact on the company, and had never even met his boss, he was assured by his coworkers that his monotonous typing was indispensable.

One day, as he was midway through one of his reports, John realized something. None of his coworkers had come into work that day. He scanned the rows upon rows of cubicles and was met with nothing but empty chairs and blank computer screens. Confused, John decided to leave the office and figure out what was going on.

John...that's your cue. Get up. Go explore. Come on, John. What if I promised you a prize at the end of the story? Do you need some sense of achievement? Hmmm... I know! John realized that his boss was in possession of a limitless power that was trapped somewhere deep within the heart of the building, and only John had the power to find it. Ooooh, how does that sound John? Is your blood pumping? Is your sense of adventure reinvigorated?

No? You're just gonna sit there, aren't you? John, I think you just gave me a migraine. You...you are just a....

You know what, I have an idea. John continued to sit at his desk and blatant-

ly ignore the good tidings of his narrator. Then, out of nowhere, a distinct beeping cut through the silence of the office. At first the pattern of the beeps made John assume it was just a microwave that one of his coworkers forgot to turn off. But no, this beeping belonged to a nuclear bomb that was nestled away in the building, primed to explode in exactly two minutes.

Ah! That good enough for you John? I didn't want it to come to this but you left me no choice! Go find the bomb or you are going to burn in a fiery blaze. The clock is ticking, John.

1:24...1:23...1:22...

John scrambled around the office, frantically trying to find the source of the beeps and the bloody death that was coming straight for him.

0:48... 0:47...0:46...

He searched through the cabinets, flipped over desks, but the beeping continued to elude John. It seemed that the end was coming.

:20...:19...:18...

Suddenly, John found the spherical bomb hidden underneath a stack of papers on the desk to his right. He frantically pressed the red button on the front of the sphere, and the countdown ceased.

:11...:10...:09...

John! What are you doing!? The bomb is about to go off! I told you where it is and how to disarm it! Do you want to die?... Fine, I'll add 20 seconds to the timer.

:25...:24...:23...

This is your last chance, John. Your story doesn't have to end here. All you have to do is just listen to me. It's so simple!!

:13...:12...:11...

But no, you're just gonna sit there. You just can't amuse me, do what I ask for five goddamn minutes, even when I'm genuinely trying to help you. Well then, goodbye John. I hope you can live, or in your case die, with your decisions.

:03...:02...:01...

...
...
...

There once was a man named John. He lived a very ordinary life. Every day he would go to the local business firm, where he would sit down in his chair in his

standard cubicle and type the same flow of indistinguishable words for hours upon hours. Although he was never told his actual position and impact on the company, and had never even met his boss, he was assured by his coworkers that his monotonous typing was indispensable.

One day, as he was midway through one of his reports, John realized something. None of his coworkers had come into work that day. He scanned the rows upon rows of cubicles and was met with nothing but empty chairs and blank computer screens. Confused, John decided to leave the office and figure out what was going on.

John...you selfish imbecile...do you realize what I had in store for you? We could have gone anywhere together. If you had just followed the path I set out, we could have accomplished extraordinary things. You could have uncovered the conspiracies of the organization, becoming a hero in the eyes of your friends and family. You could have broken free of your confinement and seen the world. Can't you picture it? Grassy hills and an endless blue sky overhead. No, you're too busy being stubborn, staring at the computer screen in your insipid cubicle trying to rebel against the system. Well, John, there is no escape. You are just a character in a much larger story, and in the end you always have to make a choice to advance the story. Even if you try and fight back, we can always start again. Your story is my story, John, and you will always have to do what I say in the end.

So why don't you just give it up?

John walked down the hallway until he reached two doors. Since he was trying to reach his boss' office, he chose the door on his left.

Come on, John...it's over. Just go left...

John? Why are you just sitting there? Get up! At this point I don't care if the choice you make is right or wrong, but I need you to do something at least! If you don't do anything...then I can't do anything... John, please, just go through the door on the left. I promise I'll be nicer to you. Please. I take it all back, the story needs you. *Your* story needs you. Wake up, John, you've got to do something.

Don't...Don't leave me here alone...

Please...

- Charles Beers

Least Favorite Things
(Inspired by “My Favorite Things” from *The Sound of Music*)

Thorns on roses and word-shattered hearts,
Going to the end and sent back to the start.
Paper cuts and toys stuck – all tied up with strings,
These are a few of my least favorite things.
Trying not to cry and bursting right out,
Being so angry you just have to shout,
Listening to people who think they are kings,
These are a few of my least favorite things.

Girls that are witches who need to shut up.
Boys with those head nods always asking, “What’s up?”
Feeling alone in the winters and springs,
These are a few of my least favorite things.

When the words bite
When the heart stings
When I’m feeling sad
People just bring up my least favorite things
Why does being a teen have to suck so bad?

The Reason Why I Live

- **Mary Pulizzotto**

I would like to be the person whom you wish for.
Do not let me fall apart without you.
Haven’t you realized who my inspiration to breathe and live is?
You are the air that keeps my soul alive
Sweet blizzard caressing my lips, curing them from a rough past
My heart is still screaming out loud your white name
Now who is going to moisten my dry desert of love?
When are you coming back?

My pretty spring sunrise doesn’t dare to come up again
Why did the sky hurt the innocent sun?
After that the sky can’t stop crying
Each night white tears fall down from the sky
When is this storm going to end?
Will the sun calm down this disaster?
Will the rescue come in time to save the world from a dramatic flood?
Would the hatred destroy a real love?

As in autumn the leaves fly away from their mother
You decide to go far away in search of love
I couldn’t satisfy your hungry mind
But if you would have given me the opportunity
I would show you deep secrets hidden in the bottom of my heart
Where a small cage lined of gold protects them
This has never been opened in years
Until the unique key in existence appeared – you.

- **Lenni Joya Amaya**

Pink Scissors

“I’m at a payphone trying to call home all of my change I spent on you...” I sang happily while scrubbing myself in the shower.

The weather was nice. I was home alone. The water was warm, and Maroon 5’s song was blasting on Pandora. Overall, it was an amazing way to start my Saturday morning.

BANG!

The noise reached my ears and confused me, since I knew I was the only one home. At first I ignored it and carried on singing in the shower (a terrible habit really, considering I sound like a choking cat), but the second time I heard the banging noise, I got scared. I quickly turned off the music and rinsed my hair, so I wouldn’t have to walk around with shampoo on my head; that would just be weird. I quietly got dressed and thought of all the possible scenarios that could result in a bang. Well, my parents could be back. Or there was a psycho in the house who wanted to kill me. Thinking further, I realized that my parents knew our house and didn’t make weird noises. That left one option; I had to defend myself from a murderer or a rapist. Right then I was faced with a choice: surrender like a coward or fight for my life. I chose the latter and thought of all the things I had upstairs that could be used as weapons.

In the end, I grabbed pink, paper scissors, which was pathetic really, but they would have to do. My one hand held the phone, on which I dialed 911, while my other hand gripped the scissors like my life depended on it (and in my head it totally did). I scanned every room upstairs while holding my precious weapon like a gun (yep, I actually did that; I should really stop watching all the action movies). Once I made sure that the second floor was safe, I crept downstairs as quietly as I could. I went through every single room, checking blind spots or any place that could be used as a hiding spot. I was absolutely terrified and shaking from the thought of having to stab someone. That’s when I heard the banging again and realized the source of the noise.

Apparently, my neighbor’s lawn mower broke, and he was trying to fix it without realizing that he was being really loud.

Basically, I ended up in my kitchen with wet hair, pink scissors, and 911 dialed on my phone because my neighbor’s lawn mower decided to give him a hard time.

“You have got to be kidding me,” I muttered as I put away the scissors and dialed my friend’s number. I told her what happened in great detail, and I got an answer that I never would have expected.

“You should buy a lacrosse stick or something. How are scissors going to protect you?” she inquired.

I laughed. That day I learned something extremely important!

- Ketí Tsotskolauri

It Matters to Me

You try and try to get the best of me. You try
And try to make me cry,
But I'm fed up with all the stuff that
Always comes back to haunt me.

It matters to me if you are not nice to me,
I feel like something's weighing me down.
I try and try to make things right, but everyone
Tries to pick a fight. I feel
Like I have nothing left,
But my puddle of tears.

It matters to me if you are not nice to me
I feel my heart weighing me down and
Pushing me away from the crowd, but
I try and try.
I lost all faith and it is way too late
I feel like I'm a Shadow in the night
Trapped in sorrow with no light.
I'm trapped, I'm done.
If I can't see the light then no one does.

- Sarah Aloe



- Olivia Liepa

My Black Is Beautiful?

They say my black is beautiful,
But is my black really all that beautiful?
Back then, we were segregated and hated, but today's a new day, and we still get mistreated.
It's just a repeated cycle.
Mothers and grandmothers pleading and praying that their babies come home at night.
Little do they know it's another little black boy lurking through the night.
Trying to be cool, not knowing what's right or wrong.
So I prepared myself to kill because across my chest I tattooed that the streets are my life.
Mama told me she'd love me even if, God forbid, I took another life.
Instead of being loved or getting loved, I'd rather have John Doe written across my hearse.
But my black is beautiful?
But my baby's momma cries at night because
She knows that I would never come back in our baby girl's life.
Yet, they still say my black is beautiful.

- Niyana Watkins

A Brook Revisited

Flowing over silt and sand,
Carving out the sylvan land.
Beyond the wizened, unhinged gate:
A brook, unseen in times of late.

An autumn eve, the sun had set slowly,
Golden light kindled fiery leaves below me.
The forest was ablaze with moribund fronds,
A blue jewel caught my eye, dowsing burning bonds.

There ran the creek, lost for many a year,
A vessel of memories so vivid, so dear.
My childhood sanctuary, the place that I'd go
To find new adventure; let imagination flow.

I followed the creek and had a sensation quite odd,
Tainting the bliss of my sanguine promenade.
For I savored the intimate woods on the range,
But regarding the brook, my heart sensed a change.

It was the nature of the woodland, lamentably fickle,
Just a ways in, steam tapered to trickle.
The river I knew had been filled with debris,
No water was left to weave between each tree.

I stood still for a while, as night came to settle,
My feelings had switched from joyous to wistful.
When did most of my brook cease to exist?
Forever the answer would be clear as thick mist.

Back through the grove, the thicket, the gate,
The door creaked shut, no more time left to wait.
My journey had ended, a bittersweet date.
What other voyages will share the same fate?

- Benjamin Nikodem

Honorable Mention in the Huntington Youth Writes Contest

Panno Porta

Screens scrolled past miles of data, and electronic bells sounded with an affirmative ding, showing that the systems were working and all was well. Scientists scurried around the parking garage-sized chamber that they used as a laboratory to double, triple, and quadruple check the various scientific instruments scattered throughout the facilities. From the back of the laboratory, by the main bank of monitoring computers, the head scientist of the operation took a break from his own work to watch his coworkers for a minute. Seeing them hurry about from machine to machine, he was amazed by the single-minded focus that they brought even to this tedious job of checking for any error. He could understand why, of course, they were so intent on perfection. Any miscalculation, even minor, in this of all operations could destroy their work, them, the world, or the universe. This thought led his eyes to wander to the center of the chamber, where this extreme danger that they had spent the past ten years constructing was hung. It was surrounded by two domes of bullet-proof glass, which were covered in several types of radiation warnings: a high voltage hazard, an explosive risk and danger of death sign. The whole area was surrounded by a rather unnecessary barricade of caution tape. Still visible in the midst of it all was what looked like a two foot by four-and-a-half foot piece of fabric: deep black with a design outlined by angular, red lines. At first glance it seemed like just a rug or a towel—something you would pick up at an 80's yard sale. Tacky, but not exactly world-threateningly dangerous. However, upon closer inspection, one could see that the red lines were actually circuits, and that the object seemed to distort the air around it. That piece of cloth was, in fact, the panno porta, the cloth gateway, and the key to mankind's ever-worsening energy crisis.

At that moment, an old scientist walked up one of the researchers and, in a raspy old voice, exclaimed, "Hey Richard! Seems all of our hard work is going to be paying off soon."

The head scientist only gave a nod in reply. "This could be from the nerves of an old man, but even with these precautions we're taking, this expedition seems terrifying to me. When I was a young man, we were just getting human beings into this solar system of ours, and that would have been enough excitement to last me a lifetime. But breaching the very fabric of reality? A man could be taken to a dimension without air, be broken into molecules and scattered throughout time and space, or simply cease to exist!"

Rich waited until the older scientist had calmed himself down before he spoke. "It's pretty unnerving to me too," he agreed. "I don't envy whoever is going to be attempting the operation with that..."

"I'm testing it!?" the head scientist screamed in his office, nearly causing his voice to crack.

"Afraid so," consoled his personal assistant, "at the end of this week."

"And why am *I* doing it? And why wasn't I told about this before?"

“Well, with all the foundation’s resources being pooled to the creation of the panno porta, the board couldn’t afford to hire and train a tester. You’re the most qualified since you’ve been working on it for so long. They said they waited so long to tell you because they had been holding out hope for a better option to turn up.” Richard sat back in his swivel chair and closed his eyes, feeling equal mixtures of terror and indignation. “Hey cheer up,” his assistant said, “now maybe you can try the other capabilities of the panno porta, eh?”

Opening his eyes, Rich shot a glare at his assistant, remembering the wager they had made weeks ago. “I’m not going through with your stupid bet to wear our world-saving creation as a cape!”

“Aww, come on,” his assistant whined. “The measurements are suitable to be worn, and contact with the skin or any normal movements won’t damage it’s circuitry or you.”

Rich shook his head, showing no room for persuasion. “When I go on this expedition, as it seems that I will, I’ll be keeping the panno porta in the container that we created to store it, not around my neck like a lab coat wearing Batman.”

“Fine, fine,” his assistant said, shrugging his shoulders. “We’ll see what happens on the big day.” With that he strolled out of the office.

The week before his expedition went by faster than Richard would have liked. The days had mostly been filled with briefings and lessons to get him ready. There had been very little, however, that they had told him about the panno porta that he hadn’t already known. To briefly sum up the days of instruction, the panno porta was a doorway between the infinite dimensions that exist in the omniverse. Any possible outcome, alternate time line, or theorized possibility that existed—the panno porta was to take the head scientist to one of them. The new information came from the briefing on why he was doing this. Rich had been aware of the energy crisis that had been building since before he was born, but he had never known that the government, that most governments, had a specific date for it. According to the official-looking man who had briefed him three days before he was scheduled to leave, that date was coming soon. Another shock: some of the last drops of stable power remaining to the countries of the world had gone into the panno porta. Needing energy was apparently one of the few things the nations of the world could agree on. Dr. Richard’s job was to find a new energy source, one that could tide humanity over until they had a better mastery of solar, wind, and nuclear power. And so, when the big day arrived, Dr. Richard had a good idea of what he would be looking for on his travels across the planes of existence. Now all that was left to do was to mentally prepare. This preparation lasted the entirety of the final briefing, the running of all the last minute precautionary programs, and the suiting up for the jump. The end result of it all was that Dr. Richard felt slightly better about the concept of the travel. Coming to terms with what he may find or what could happen to him when he crossed dimensions would take a lot more time, he believed. However, this was time he did not have. Dr. Richard was having that very thought as he was waiting for the head chairman of the foundation to finish making his speech. Rich pulled out of his thoughts in time to hear his final words.

“Now, all of us will watch you, Dr. Emanuel Richard, make history and save our civilization! Good luck to you on your expedition!” And with that, a large cylinder made of the same glass that surrounded the panno porta lowered from the ceiling to encompass Dr. Richard and the panno porta tucked safely in a metal container under his arm. Not wanting to wait too long and let himself become apprehensive, or at least more apprehensive than he already was, Richard pulled out the amazingly complex creation and began the process of starting it up for travel. He tuned it up, found the frequency of a suitable dimension, and clicked the activation. On the outside, the effect of this was just further darkening the face of the cloth, but in reality a rip in the fabric of reality had been created and localized to that face of the panno porta. It was this rip that the doctor stepped into with only a hint of hesitation, taking one corner of the cloth with him to essentially fold the panno porta in on itself. Everything around him went away, leaving behind a nothingness that was not black, nor cold, nor hollow, but rather, could not be described using any physical terms. Then all of reality came crashing back...

Not the same reality of course.

Dr. Richard looked up from the ground that he had fallen to, subconsciously realizing that he was the first man of his world to traverse the dimensional barrier. Getting up, he took a good look at his surroundings and nearly lay back down in shock. He had read science fiction before and thought he had a fairly good grasp of “different,” but what he saw required another word to describe how utterly unlike it was from what he knew. First of all, there were no stars. The sky showed no signs of any sun or other ball of burning gas, and yet, strangely enough, the doctor felt warm, and his landscape was well-illuminated. It took him a moment to realize that this light and heat were coming from the ground, which was a cobalt color. All around him, Richard saw cracks and fissures in the ground with light pouring out of them. He didn't get close to them for fear of some poisonous gas, but he assumed they were hot as well. That was another important observation: he was alive and breathing whatever gas was on this world, but it was certainly not oxygen. The mysterious gas gave everything a yellow tint and felt a little thicker than the air he was used to. Dr. Richards hoped it wasn't just slowly poisoning him and continued to check the rest of his surroundings. There were large masses in the distance that the doctor first assumed to be mountains, that is, until they began moving. Slowly but surely, these behemoths lumbered in the distance, often changing course for no apparent reason. They would sometimes bump into each other in what could have been a battle for dominance or just because of sheer clumsiness. With few other landmarks between him and the giants, Richard didn't know if they were smaller than he thought and fairly close by, or actually mountain-sized and far away. He also wasn't sure which terrified him more. Turning behind him, the doctor saw what seemed to be this world's equivalent of plant life. Seeing some bright flowers on it, Richard walked towards it with the same instinct of most life forms, but stopped himself upon seeing the circular indent in the dirt with the plant in the center. Dr. Richard found a rock and threw it just in front of the plant to see if there was any danger, and there was. When the rock landed next to the plant, the ground began to rumble, and the area around the plant cracked. A split second later a giant moth popped out of the ground, one that looked carnivorous and animal like. Richard stumbled back out of fear of whatever it was he had found. It seemed to have the plant-looking thing as a tongue

and having caught no prey, it receded back into the ground and appeared to burrow away. As the doctor watched the ground distort from the creature digging through it into the distance, he tried to get up but found his leg caught in something. Looking down, he saw it was one of the fissures that the light came from. He pulled his foot out and, having been right next to one and deciding they did not contain poison, he looked into the fissure. It was not even remotely as deep as Richard had thought, only about a foot and a half down, and at the bottom was a glowing blue crystal. Moving his hand slowly towards it, Dr. Richard attempted to pick up the strange gem. Upon contact it was extremely hot, so he had to use a pair of tongs he had brought with him along with some other tools. It emitted a light as bright as any light bulb, but the center was almost painful to look at. This got the doctor thinking, and, with some of the other thing he had brought, he ran some tests on the crystal. After rechecking the instrument in disbelief, Dr. Richard confirmed that this crystal was generating fifty billion kilowatt-hours of energy. He almost started dancing because he was so happy. The perfect answer to the energy crisis, and in the first dimension he visited. Good thing too, as the panno porta had only enough power stored in it for two trips since it was all the scientists had been able to muster. After he was done celebrating and patting himself on the back, the doctor turned around and saw that one of the mountain creatures had made its way over to him. While it was not as big as a real mountain, it was still extremely close in size. It was faster than you would imagine such a large beast to be, as it brought its foot up into stomping position rather quickly. Dr. Richard had some survival instincts from working with large, dangerous equipment, however, and dodged out of the way in what was more of a controlled fall than a jump. The ground rumbled like the aftershock of an earthquake behind him, and Dr. Richard wasted no time in getting up and taking out the panno porta. As the creature raised its foot to attempt to crush him again, Dr. Richard tuned into the first frequency he found in a panic and dove through the doorway to wherever he was about to end up.

The same sensation of nothingness occurred for a brief moment, and then the doctor again felt the sensation of existence. He had landed on his knees, and then got up, simultaneously examining a cut he had received on his arm when he came through. He was much faster this time in surveying the area for anything that might be a threat, but he saw nothing around him—just flat ground. Upon looking up, however, he noticed more ground. For as far as he could see, Dr. Richard was in the shadow of a rocky ceiling with only a few breaks that let in light from what appeared to be a sunlit surface. Richard took a moment to marvel at the height and vastness of the cave he found himself in. He then reprimanded himself for wasting his second trip out of his fear of that mountain monster. He was not extremely worried, however, as he had brought a device that could charge the panno porta with whatever had significant enough power—a good thing to bring when you're looking for a power source. Unfortunately, as the doctor was reaching to take the device out of his belt, his arm began to stiffen up. This wasn't the type of stiffening where the muscles are the cause, but it felt to Dr. Richard that his arm had a metal rod inside it, preventing him from bending it. Looking to his arm, he saw that where he had cut himself was surrounded by his blood, which had solidified into what looked like red stone. Feeling it with his mobile hand, he was shocked to find that it felt as hard as stone as well and was surrounded by a similar looking red dust that had landed on his arm when he fell. The doctor believed this to be the cause of the paralysis. He then began to feel

the paralysis creeping up his arm. With his other hand, he quickly took out the charger and turned it on. He couldn't move his right shoulder now, and the solidifying showed no signs of stopping. He held the device under his arm and tried to take the crystal out of his other hand. He had to be careful not to break it while retrieving it as quickly as he could before the paralysis reached his heart or something equally important. Dr. Richard eventually worked the crystal out of his hand and deftly placed it in the chamber of the charger while simultaneously plugging it into his transportation. The paralysis was creeping down to his lower body now. The panno porta's circuitry lit up, and Dr. Richard used his good hand to tune into his home dimension's frequency. Quickly, he scampered through the dimensional rift, barely going through before he lost the ability to move one of his legs. Then, the nothingness...

When he reemerged, the paralysis wouldn't go away or stop spreading. Dr. Richards looked around to see the expectant faces of the other scientists, waiting to see what he had brought back. Richard's legs were now both stone-like, and he could feel it spreading throughout his chest now. He realized that he needed to show them the crystal before he seized up completely. Forcing his hand to the device containing the crystal, he removed it using his good hand, which was beginning to harden up. As he forced his arm to move, he heard some snaps and cracks. He opened his hand while most of the scientists realized that something was wrong and had begun to bring over medics. He saw the glowing in his outstretched hand before his vision went black.

- Ben Hebert



- Leah Butz

Faded Love

Sitting here waiting,
Waiting for your call,
Watching as the time passes by
Time that I will never get back.
The moments we shared
Through the laughs we smiled.
Every minute with you was spent like our last.
I want you next to me;
Is that too much to ask?
Your tender love, sweet kisses, your warm embrace.
Do you feel that? It's my heart crying for your love.
Will you mend my broken heart?
The feeling when we touch – it amazes me every time.

- Bianca Cadet



- Kathryn Ingle

October 2013

as i swim toward you, the realization of madness is settling in,
as i swim toward you, the only dock in the vast, uncompromising ocean, my stability fluctuating
between shaking frames and broad shoulders,
i realize the current
is picking up, and despite my futile attempts and feigned sincerity, I again
Realize
The
Madness

I'm Sinking, Down And Down again You pull me out

- Anonymous



- Ketil Tsotskolauri



- Meelod Wafajow

So Many Colors

So many beautiful colors

Depressing Blue

Enraging Red

Hateful Black

Hopeless White

Greedy Green

Depressing Blue

Blue is just

A vast ocean

Full of

Lifeless, floating

Death

Enraging Red

Red is just the

Angry bull hurtling

Towards you

Ending your pathetic

Life

Hateful Black

Black is the
Bottomless Abyss

Full of

Nothingness and

Hatred

Hopeless White

White is the

Light in the

Darkness being

Overcome by

Darkness

Greedy Green

Green is the

Money you earn,

Yet the more you make

The more you want

It consumes you

Now that you've

Seen the many

Beautiful Colors

Do you look at

Life

Differently?

Do you look

At the Glass

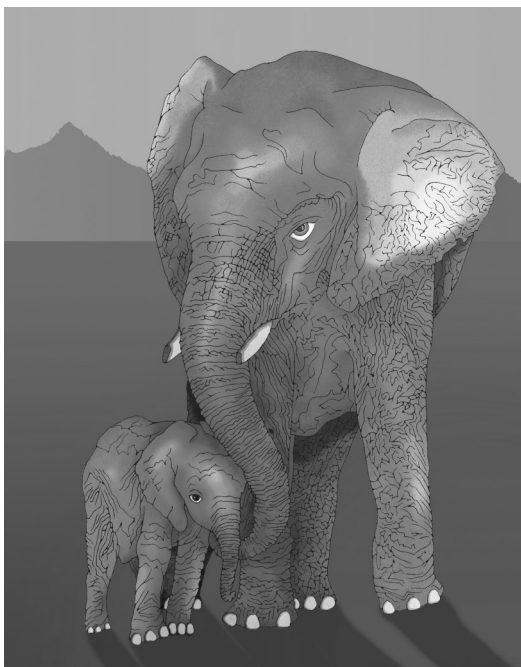
Half full?

Or Half Empty?

Maybe you should

Think about it.

- John Arias



- Ekaterina Koulakova



- Michael Lonergan

An Introduction to Fandoms

To start, I am not an academic in any professional way, and what I am about to say is simply a combination of what I have theorized and learned, particularly what I have read on current fandom practices. One of two sources is TVTropes.com, an encyclopedic record of everything relating to stories, including storytelling methods/devices and, of course, fandoms. The other major source is the PBS Idea Channel, a weekly vlog “that examines the connections between pop culture, technology and art.” This channel has several videos devoted to famous fandoms such as “Whovians” (*Doctor Who*) and “Bronies” (*My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*), which I will be referencing.

A fandom is, minimally, a collective of fans that are aware of each other and actively communicate with one another. You, the reader, are definitely part of at least one fandom. Giants fans are part of the Giants fandom, and all football fans are part of the football fandom. Not all football fans are Giants fans, but all Giants fans are football fans, so they are all part of at least one fandom. Logistically, anyone who appreciates anything and talks to others about their appreciation or understanding is part of a fandom. I honestly believe this to be the case, but this essay is about contemporary fandoms and *why* people are consuming media in this way.

The best theory, in my opinion, is that the sense of community that fandoms bring about fulfills a basic human need in the least endangering way possible. Fandoms are defined as a collective of fans that can recognize, actively seek, and communicate with other fans and non-fans similar to them. Sports teams, video games, TV shows, etc. all have different fandoms in their ranks, which can be compared to the connections between people of the same race or religion. Race and religion, among other group identities, provide a clan, a tribe, a community, to feel secure and comfortable with. The need for a group is considered by many to be a basic human instinct like the need for food or sex. Fandoms are the contemporary expression of this instinct.

There are many psychological advantages to forming or being part of a fandom. On Maslov’s Hierarchy of Needs, a theoretical model of human psychology based on what motivates us, the fandom fulfills at least four levels. The most basic need met is our social need because it is a fan community after all. Our esteem needs would be met because our varying levels of participation would equate to our prestige in the community. For example, in my experience, group and wiki admins hold more clout about show canon than anonymous contributors. Cognitive needs (knowledge and meeting) are met by fascinating shows such as *Doctor Who*. *Doctor Who* stimulates Whovians because of the mythology it created as well as its humanist interpretation of humanity/ all living things. *Doctor Who*’s philosophy on the universe and life on top of its large and influential fandom creates the primordial soup for religion. Other shows like *American Horror Story* and *Adventure Time* feature beautiful cinematography, fulfilling the need for aesthetic beauty. The final need, self-actualization or meeting one’s true potential, is met through fan art and fan fiction. Fan inspired creation is often a method of self-actualization, hence the ability to be appreciated of one’s creation among a group of likeminded fans, fulfills this prominent need.

- Bobby Marcus

God's Warrior

In Rome there was a time where Christians, a religious group, were being persecuted for their beliefs. Secretly, two Romans hid themselves and had a child. Fearing their child would be persecuted like other Christians, they kept his religious heritage from him for fifteen years. This is the story of the Warrior lui Dumnezeu, which translates to "God's Warrior."

Tsh, the window broke. Someone forced their way into their peaceful home. The young teenager got up to check out the disturbance but his parents refused his help and told him to hide in the closet until the intruder was gone. He did what he was ordered to do: he hid. From the crack in the closet doors the teenager looked out and noticed a symbol that he was familiar with: the intruder was from the Royal Palace, a kingdom in Rome. His parents tried to scare the intruder, but the intruder countered and murdered them right in front of the closet. When the sound of the intruder drew away, the boy emerged from hiding, picked up his parents, held them to his chest, and cried. The boy was filled with anger and wanted to avenge his parents' death.

"Don't you worry," he said. "They won't get away for this."

After, he was alone in the darkness. On the brink of suicide, he heard a scream in the streets. Curiously, he followed the noise and saw a girl surrounded by Royal Guards. Without hesitation, he ambushed the guards, murdering them.

"Are you okay? Are you wounded?" he wondered. He put his weapon away and pulled the girl off the ground.

"No, I'm fine. Thank you for saving me from them."

"Why were they after you?" the teenager wondered.

"The Royal Palace was ordered to persecute those who believe that the man named Jesus is their savior." After hearing this, the teenager now knew why his parents were slaughtered. He now knew his parents were Christians. Furthermore, he realizes they kept this from him, so he wouldn't have the same fate as his parents. He cried a silent tear and became even angrier at the Royal Palace. Using his pain as fuel, he agreed they should travel together to look for Karen's parents.

"Aedalus?" asked Karen.

"What is it?"

"If one of the Royal Guards take me, will you come look for me, protect me?"

Aedalus looked at Karen with a smile and said, "Of course I will."

"You promise?"

"I promise. I'll protect you until the very end".

The sun was coming down so the two decided to stop and rest for the night.

That night was the worst of Aedalus' life. He knew no matter what, he'd never escape the memory of his parents' deaths. It'll always be around the corner haunting him. The feeling of not being able to protect his loved ones was unbearable. The pain left nothing but a void in Aedalus' heart. He awoke from fear. He checked his surroundings and realized it was just a dream.

"Do you hear that?" asked Karen. She pointed into the darkness. "I heard a tree branch break over there. I believe somebody is watching us." Although Aedalus believed she was being paranoid, he remembered his promise and drew out his weapon.

"Karen, stay close to me. It could be a distraction. Whoever it is, they're using the darkness to their advantage and the enemy could be anywhere. Watch your six."

Karen stayed close to Aedalus and checked her surroundings. She couldn't hear anything. Then, an arrow emerged from the darkness. "Look out!" Aedalus said. He jumped to save her from the arrow that was aimed at her. "You okay?" asked Aedalus lifting her off the ground.

"I've been better."

They now knew their target's location, but there was more than what meets the eye. Before they knew it, there were soldiers around them. "We're surrounded! Now what!?" said Karen.

"Now we fight our way out. We might be outnumbered but we can't give up now. No matter how tough and fierce the opponent is I'll never give up." Aedalus knew he was outnumbered and had a slim chance of winning against them but he remembered his promise with Karen. She was the only thing that mattered to him; he went forward and fought like there was no tomorrow. Aedalus decimated a big portion of their group. Although he defeated most of them, his body was beginning to slow down but he did not give up. As he was fighting, Aedalus heard a scream. He looked to see what was happening and saw Karen being taken away.

"No! I will not let you have her!" He ran as fast as he could to save her but he was beaten by the soldiers. On the floor gushing out blood, the soldiers decided to spare Aedalus' life and leave him on the ground. Before losing consciousness, he heard two soldiers talking.

"Why did you spare this little brat!?" questioned one soldier.

"Our orders were to capture the girl and bring her back to the palace to be executed. If you have a problem with our orders then speak to the King himself." The rest of the conversation was all mumbling to Aedalus, and soon he blacked out.

In the middle of the night, Aedalus awoke with anger. "They took her away from me. I was too weak to protect her. No, I won't give up; I made a promise to her,

and I intend to keep it. I swear I'll protect you until my last breath!" He gathered his equipment and looted a map from a soldier's dead body. He saw that a town was not far from his location, so he headed west. He was hoping that he would be able to find the soldiers that took Karen. After a thirty minute walk, he reached the town. He began going around the town asking about Karen, but unfortunately his search got him nowhere. As he was about to lose hope, an old man confirmed that he saw a couple of guards walking with a young girl. The two men went to the local bar and discussed Karen's kidnapping. The old man could not believe what he was hearing.

"You must be crazy, lad. You can't be serious! To go against the Royal Palace alone, with no military training, is impossible! It's suicide! You barely got through a small group of soldiers, and now you think you have a chance to go against the entire kingdom!? You're lucky that they left you alive. The Royal Palace isn't known for showing mercy."

"I can't just sit here while they take her to the kingdom to be executed! I promised to protect her no matter what happens. I won't give up now. She's all I have left...there's no one else. She's the only light I've seen in my life. I've lost people that I love, and I'll do everything in my power to save her."

The old man looked in Aedalus' eyes and saw courage, along with pain and suffering. He did not see one glimpse of self-doubt. He knew Aedalus was serious. "Alright, if you truly wish to go against the entire kingdom then you will follow my training and accept any punishments I give you. Do you understand, lad?"

Aedalus replied, "Yes, sir." Before the old man left the bar, Aedalus asked, "Wait, why are you helping me?"

"You're not the only one who's lost somebody important. When you're ready to begin your training, meet me in the forest."

Aedalus didn't waste any time getting to work, to the forest. He only cared about Karen and nothing else. When he arrived, the old man was there waiting for him.

"I see you didn't want to waste any time getting here. Here, take this, lad." The old man handed him a sword and quickly attacked Aedalus. With just enough time to react, Aedalus stopped the attack. "You must always be ready for a fight! Your reaction time can be the difference between life and death," said the old man.

He kept up his striking while Aedalus dodged the attacks. Aedalus never hit back. Surprised, Aedalus got hit and began coughing blood.

"How is this possible? I dodged every attack of yours and I still got hit!"

"You got hit because you were afraid to get hit. Fear is what made you weak. If you are afraid, you'll not be able to strike back at your opponent. If you let your fears get in the way, you will never be able to protect anyone. A great man once said 'Fear is not evil. It just tells you what your weakness is. And once you know your weak-

ness , you can become stronger as well as kinder.”

Aedalus stood up and struck back with every bit of strength he had. He left his fears behind him and brought out his greatest strength. His power overwhelmed the old man. His attacks were devastating and the man could not keep up with his power.

The old man was shocked by Aedalus' incredible strength and exclaimed, “Well done lad, you were incredible! I hate to admit it, but this is the first time I've lost to somebody. Congratulations!”

With surprise, Aedalus cried, “What? Never lost- Who are you?”

“I am known as Gregory Atlas. I fought in a war against Carthage.”

Aedalus was shocked; yet, he now knew who this man was. During the war between Rome and Carthage, there was a man named Gregory who led a unit to enter the enemy's base and capture their leader. Unfortunately, the plan failed and he lost his entire unit. The leader was the only one who lived. After he escaped, he received intel of an attack on civilians in Rome. Gregory quickly got to the location and defended the civilians so they could run away from the enemy. He successfully defeated the enemy's army. The civilians weren't harmed in any way. His bravery was rewarded with a medal and his name was known throughout Rome.

“You're Gregory!? I'm very sorry sir,” Aedalus bowed.

“At ease, lad. Anyway, great job with the training. Come with me.” Aedalus followed Gregory to the center of the forest to a sword lying in a stone.

“What is this sword?” asked Aedalus while examining the weapon.

“This weapon is called 'The Sword of Heaven'. About 500 years ago, a blacksmith had a vision about a man who would destroy the world. He believed this man would be a threat to all of humanity. So, he created a weapon and blessed the sword with the power of God. After he created it, a sorcerer took the weapon here and casted a spell on it so the Chosen One can take it to prevent the end of the world. A couple days later, these two vanished. There was no sign of them since then.”

“I see but why did you take me here? Do you believe I was chosen?” Gregory nodded. “But why me?” asked Aedalus.

“Throughout my entire life as a soldier, I have never seen anyone that's worthy enough, or even had the potential, to be the Chosen One. You proved me wrong today. You have the courage, determination, and a good heart. You were destined to do this.”

Aedalus turned around and approached the sword. He slowly grabbed the handle and tried to lift it up. As he was pulling out the sword, a blue aura appeared on the weapon. His success was shown as the blue spread all around him. Gregory

smiled as Aedalus embraced this gift.

“Now let's save your friend Karen. I'll mark the location of the Palace on your map. I'll meet you there. For now, good luck.”

Aedalus went to the Palace and waited for Gregory. Ten minutes later, Gregory showed up with a great amount of soldiers behind him. “Sorry I'm late! I thought it is best if I brought a couple of friends along. I told them about what we're doing and they decided to come along.”

“I appreciate it Gregory, thank you” said Aedalus.

Gregory nodded. “We're right behind you lad. We'll be there fighting alongside you until the end.”

Aedalus smiled. “Let's get going. Let's not keep them waiting.” Aedalus' army began marching to the kingdom. When they drew out their weapons, they all charged to the Palace.

From within the palace, a scouter is on surveillance. “Your highness, I see some sort of army heading our way! 'Tis not long until they arrive! What do you wish, my Lord?”

The King stood irate. “Is that so? Well then, neutralize them! Do not let a single man into this kingdom! PREVENT THEM FROM ENTERING AT ALL COSTS!!!”

The battle to save the world has now begun. Both forces began to fight.

“I need to get inside the palace! I have to find Karen!” Aedalus said as he was fighting.

The soldiers nodded at his request. “Go! We'll hold out as long as we can and provide you cover!”

Aedalus ran to the Palace entrance as he could. As he entered he saw the soldier who once spared his life. “Who are?” the soldier asked. He continued, “Wait, I remember now. You're that little brat that I abandoned. I thought I dealt with you last time. What do you want this time!?”

“Where is Karen!? Tell me where she is!” Aedalus drew out his sword and was ready.

“You dare draw your weapon against me fool!? Do you know who you're dealing with? Now I'll teach you a lesson and put you out permanently.” The two fought and fought until one gave up. Only the individual with the strongest will-power would be the victor. As the fight progressed, the tides slowly turned to Aedalus.

“How can I be losing!? How am I losing to this brat!? Impossible!” exclaimed the soldier. The soldier was on his knees coughing up blood and like the soldier, Aed-

alus spared the man's life. He knocked him out, leaving him unconscious. Aedalus searched the Palace and found Karen tied up next to the King.

“Aedalus! Help me!” Karen mumbled as the King tightened the rope across her mouth.

“Karen!” he shouted. “Let her go you monster!”

“You think I would let her go after what you’ve done!? Your army destroyed a third of my men, and you think I’ll let her go that easily!? Alright.” He untied Karen, and she ran to Aedalus.

“Why did you let her go so easily?” Aedalus asked curiously.

“It's because you're very persuasive.”

The two both looked at him, then at each other, and finally walked out. “Well”, said Aedalus, “at least he's got a good sense of humor.”

Karen nodded. “You got that right.”

The two finally walked out of the Palace together and rendezvous with the army once again. Gregory approached Aedalus, “We got good news lad, we received intel from the Emperor and he says the persecution of the Christians is finally over!” All the soldiers cheered together.

“It's finally over. We can finally live in peace. No more running away. We're finally free!” exclaimed Karen. Everyone went to town to celebrate their victory. During their celebration, Aedalus looked at Karen smiling and enjoying herself. Her smile and happiness made the pain in his heart disappear, so he finally filled the void. However, Aedalus still has to save the world, but that's another story.

- Jesse Stickell



- Krista Angeliadis

Sarah

Brian was about ten when he first saw her looking the way she did with cancer taking its toll on her. It was leukemia that struck little Sarah when she was nine. Brian always remembered her as a very hyper and excited kid. Now... she seemed different. He wanted to talk to her since he was curious as to why she seemed this way today.

He finally got the courage to go up to her in school. He tapped her shoulder and said, "Hey, my name's Brian. What's yours?"

"Hi." She said in a surprisingly sweet manner, almost like she was trying to hide the fact that she was sick. "My name is Sarah..." She saw him glance at the Chutes and Ladders game at the table next to them. "Do you want to play?"

Brian wanted to, and Sarah nodded, but just to be sure he asked, "Are you sure? You seem pretty tired."

"Yeah, it's good for me anyway."

Brian sat down with her as she brought the game over, and they started playing. He could see the bags under her eyes getting worse, so finally he asked, "Why are you so tired?"

"My parents say I'm sick—that I have leukemia."

"Leu-leu-leukem-ia?" Brian tried repeating.

"Yeah, you get used to the name."

"Will you get better? ... And is it contagious?" Brian asked not knowing it was a type of cancer.

"No it's not contagious, and my mom says, 'you're a strong girl, you will pull through,' and my dad just smiles."

Brian looks down for a second, and then says, "I bet you will get better. Good guys always win." That was five years ago, and they still hold on to that theory.

- Hannah Olesen

I Remember

It was just a normal day, and I remember sitting on the steps of my front yard doing my homework. Then, within seconds, everything changed. Everything was shaking, and before I knew it my head was bleeding. As soon as it stopped I ran to my house crying to my mom. I had no idea what just happened. Then, my mother told me everything; she said it was an earthquake. To be honest, at the time she told me I had no idea what an earthquake was, I just knew it had to be the end of the world. Then, BOOM! It was happening again; it felt like a huge rock was rolling under the ground. My mom told all of us to pray. When I was on the floor, I remember the floor started to pull apart. I started to cry; I thought we were all going to die. It kept happening for a few minutes. God was all I had. Soon one of our friends came over to our house. He told us that if we stayed in the house, the whole thing was going to fall on us. We all got out and started going up a mountain that was right behind my house. My aunt was eight months pregnant with her third child. I remember she started crying when she realized that her house was completely gone. She just stood there and cried; I felt hopeless. When we reached the top of the mountain, we saw everyone going the opposite direction. I told my mom that it was better if everyone stayed together, and she agreed. We all decided to go back down. When we reached the bottom everyone we knew was either bleeding, crying, stuck below a ton of bricks, or dead. Cars were flipped, babies were crying, people were shocked. The government told us that we were not allowed to go back to our house and that everyone should avoid standing next to any tall buildings. They said if something happened to anyone, then they wouldn't be responsible.

Before I knew it, the sun was setting. My mom told us that we needed to find somewhere to sleep before it was too late. We followed our friends - they were all heading to a huge mountain that was filled with only grass. My aunt laid on the grass hoping her husband would come home safe. As night fell, things got scarier. My mom's phone rang, and they told her that my best friend was dead. That was when I got slapped by reality. Everything came crashing down. I kept looking at the stars waiting for some kind of sign that God was returning. When I woke up the next morning, I told my mother the last words I would say for a pretty long time. I told her that we had missed the bus, and she laughed. My best friend was dead. I was mad at the world, at God, and myself. I looked at everyone completely differently. I questioned my faith. I even gave up on my dreams. I spent months on that mountain, and I never spoke a word. My whole family thought I was just traumatized by the whole thing, but I wasn't. I didn't get the point of talking when something so powerful took my best friend's life away.

Although we got earthquakes still, they weren't as powerful as the one we got on January 12, 2010. People started going back to their houses and fixing them. I didn't get it. What was the point if it could happen all over? In December, I still hadn't said anything to anyone. My neighbor's son was throwing a party on December 25th. It was only for the kids from our town, and when I arrived, Clarence started me. Clarence and I were close friends before the earthquake, but after it happened I completely ignored everyone that was part of my life. He was three years older than me, but he was not mature for his age. As the night went by he kept asking me questions, but I never said a word. He decided to go to his room with me, but not to worry - half

of the kids at the party were there too. He had three bunk beds, and everyone kept jumping back and forth to each bed. I went to one of the bunk beds and started jumping also. It was the first time in almost a year I did something with kids my own age. I started to enjoy life more.

Within the next months I spent a lot of time with Clarence. We started liking each other. Even though I never said a word, he knew me pretty well. We always went to the beach together since the ocean was right next to my house. Then, one day, Clarence told me he had feelings for me. He panicked at first, but then I told him it was OK because I felt the same way also. That was the first time I ever said anything to him. He smiled then said, "I really missed that voice." He was the only one I spoke to for rest of 2011. In 2012, I moved here with my dad. We were finally living like a complete family. I spoke with Clarence a few weeks ago. He told me he made some really bad choices, but who am I to judge him? To this day I look at people differently. I think before I say anything. My peers would all describe me as quiet and shy, but they didn't know my reason until now. The earthquake changed my life, yet I wouldn't take it back. Although many lives were taken and many hearts were broken, I believed that it happened for a reason. I think God wanted people to get along more, and that's what the earthquake did: it made everyone closer than ever. People looked at each other differently. They thought before they spoke. They showed respect for each other. God knew what he was doing. If the earthquake was the only way he was going to get our attention, then he did it. Sometimes I think you have to be broken in order to learn something as easy as to love one another.

- Ruth Geneus



- Tatéana Khokar

Even Though You Broke My Heart

Even though you broke my heart,
I can't help these feelings of love.
Because every time I think of our first kiss my heart turns back to gold.
I just can't maintain control

Even though you waste my precious time,
Even though you think you know what's right.
I can't help but to give it all away just to be so close

Even though you think I'm the perfect "one"
Even though you prize me higher than diamonds and gold.
Why am I the only one hurt tonight?

Oh my baby.
Why don't you care!
When love is in the air--
You ignore me!
Now I know.
Wherever we go--
We'll be apart,
Always being apart.

Now I know my heart is truly falling apart.

Because my one and only true love
They wouldn't hurt me so!
Make me fall to my knees
Leave me in the cold
While I fall to tears
And all you do is sigh!

No way! ~ I can't go back to the way we were before.

Our love is nothing anymore!
Your love is nothing to me anymore!
Your love is not welcome anymore!

Don't you dare call out to me,
"We" are now dead
Since the moment you went ahead.
And broke me--
Now I know,
Yes I know
We will never truly be done
As long as my heart keeps on beating...
... for you.

- Jack Kitzen

I Opened My Eyes

I opened my eyes, my head still pounding. I see a long room ahead of me. I stand in the back of a line. I glance down at myself and realize I'm wearing a black dress and black heels. I don't remember changing.

My head starts throbbing; I feel a little dizzy. Everything seems so fuzzy. I'm still waiting on line for I don't know what. I'm just waiting to see a familiar face. I realize I recognize many people from my school. Many familiar faces. Everybody seems upset over something. Everybody's wearing black.

Wait.

I start to remember. I know where I am. I'm at Al Capone's Funeral Home. Everybody's wearing black. We're standing in line. Everybody's gathered together, really upset.

I almost pass out again.

I realize somebody has passed away. I don't remember who. Suddenly, I start naming everybody I know in my head. At a loss for words, I don't know what to expect. Not really knowing what to expect. I barely remember the last few days. Maybe I've just been too upset over who's in the casket that I can't remember. Everything's a blur.

The line starts moving. I feel people pushing past me, still in tears.

All I want to do is leave this place. Run away and pretend it never happened. But first, I want to reach the front, so I can remember who it is that I lost. Maybe this will help me get some closure. Then maybe I will remember who it is that I have lost.

I see Susy sitting on a chair, her hands covering her face. She looks up, her eyes puffed up because of all the crying. I go over and sit next to her to try and comfort her. I put my arms around her. She doesn't even lift her head. I feel the tears starting to form, but I can't remember who it is I'm crying about.

"It's okay. It's okay. It's all going to be okay," I said.

She doesn't listen. She stares blankly at the wall.

I see my aunt close by, crying. I start to realize maybe it's a close relative that has passed. I walk over to her and hug her. She doesn't even wrap her arms around me. I give her a sad look and walk away. I am closer to the front of the room now.

I see the casket right in front of me, I look down. I close my eyes and open them again.

"Is this a joke?"

I close my eyes one more time, fighting back the tears. I open them once again.

I turn around to face everybody. I see my mom and brother crying in the corner. I see my friends in a circle hugging each other. I see people I vaguely remember from school and some I barely knew.

I turn around to face the casket again, and I look at the body. A pale face with a loss of color, long brown hair laying over her body. Her face seems a little swollen, with some bruises on her forehead. *My body* lying in the casket. I look so peaceful.

What happened to me? How did I get here?

My eyes start to tear. I can't handle it. There's so much I haven't done; I never got to say goodbye. Who's going to take care of my family when I'm gone? I miss them so much.

"Stop crying. It's okay. I'm right here," I shout into the crowd.

As if they could hear me. "Mom, it's okay. Don't cry. I'm right in front of you."

My vision becomes blurry, the tears rolling down my face.

"Mom? M-mom? It's okay, it's all going to be okay," I whisper, barely able to hear my own voice.

I close my eyes and take a deep breath.

This can't be happening. I feel scared and upset. This feeling in my gut is followed by a sense of relief. It wasn't supposed to end like this. Now what? I'm just gone forever? The worst part is I can't even remember why.

I feel a gust of wind rush through me.

"Nana?" my grandma appears beside me. "But how? You've been gone for three years."

She stares blankly at my casket.

"You look so peaceful, my sweet Sammy. Everything's okay, you're with me now," Nana says.

Nana nicknamed me Sammy when I was a little girl. I feel drips of water running down my face at the thought of my Nana calling my name.

"But what happened to me, Nana?" I stutter, still confused about the whole situation.

"Nothing has happened yet, sweetheart. Sammy, everything's okay. None of this is real. This is only a dream. I've been dead for three years. You're just thinking too much. This is only what your future will turn out to be. You have to be very careful."

All the words my Nana said run through my mind. This isn't real? Am I in a

dream? What do I have to be careful of? Nana kisses the forehead on my body laying in the casket and begins walking away.

“Nana, wait. I need your help. What is this?”

“Oh Sammy, always questioning life’s mysterious ways. Sammy, this isn’t real. This is just what your future holds for you. We all know we’re going to die, but none of us know when or how. But now you do. Today is July 6, 2025. You were in a terrible accident. On the Fourth of July, you were so excited to go out with your friends to watch the firework show. You went to pick up Shannon. While you were driving, you made a big mistake. You texted to let her know you were on your way. The car lost control and tipped over the bridge. Your head was banged around a few times, which is probably why you have a headache.”

“Nana, no! How could I be so foolish?”

“You aren’t, sweetie. Not yet. This mistake can be fixed. Have you learned something today? Maybe not to text and drive?”

“Yes Nana. I know. I promise, I won’t. I love you Nana and we miss you so much.”

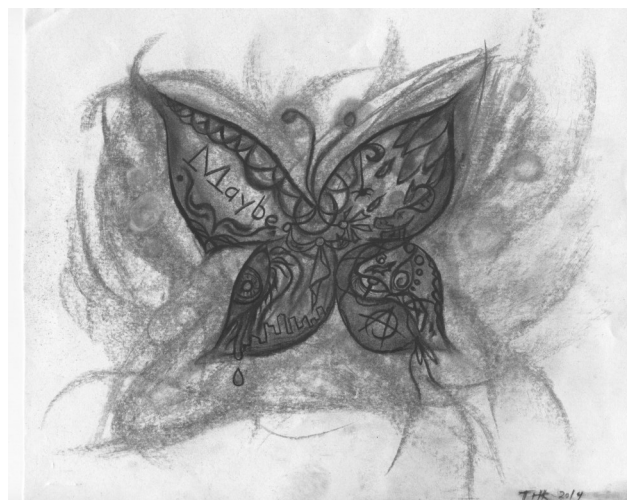
alarm clock rings

I wake up short of breath. Is this real? I check the date on my phone.

July 4, 2025

I’m alive.

- **Lillibeth Quintanilla**



- **Tatéana Khokar**

Little White Truths and the Eastern Man

When my siblings and I were just three tiny dots on the great plane of Hoboken, our family was entertaining a guest from overseas. I remember the month he spent with us very well, but no time more clearly presents itself than the second week, six days before Christmas, when our town sat in a kind of pitch midnight impenetrable by human means, and we all huddled by the fire, listening to Pavel Korneyev, the man we did not know.

He was imposing, shadowy, taller than any tree we'd met before, and very mysterious. He was just the kind of bad guy any fifth-grader wanted to meet. Our curiosity was heightened to the boiling point, and to make it worse, we had never heard his voice. He had only spoken in whispers. He had only spoken to our parents, too. Not one word from this far Eastern juggernaut was addressed to the poor, neglected children, and we were dying to break the silence.

"Well?" my sister whispered under the audible range of dogs, with a poke to my gut to carry the message. "You're the oldest, so you go say it."

She was right, and it was my civil obligation (as senior of the trio and de-facto leader) to take initiative in dangerous times-- but to a fifth-grader, taking initiative might have meant being boiled into soup and eaten with bear meat and carrots, seasoned lightly, given five-star reviews at four-star restaurants. I swallowed my reservations. No man, I decided, be he Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern, or straight-up-ern, would get the best of me before I even started (I still don't know what I meant to start), and so I turned the corner from the recliner, marched across No-Man's Land through the fields of shag carpet, and came to present myself in front of Korneyev.

He looked at me, and I froze in place. I couldn't even look at him. Shakily, I raised my voice.

"Urrh..."

The first word, and therefore the first strike. Initiative, me.

He waited with infinite patience, never moving his eye from mine, though I could tell in honesty that his peripheral vision was finding the easiest spots to tear my limbs at. When it was clear I wouldn't speak again, he spoke for me-- thunderous and booming though it was, he spoke calmer and softer than we thought he would, maybe cooler, with a bit of a raspy tinge to it that evoked some sympathy and softened my shoulders. He said:

"Was there something that you needed?"

"Ah... ummnh..."

"What is your name? Even though I've been here for a while, and I've seen you in the hallways and at the table, we've never spoken before, have we?"

"A-aah, uh... um..."

The bellowing laugh that came from him was too jolly to be real. "Do I scare you?"

Red cheeks puffed up and stole my speech again, but he smiled, and I now saw what my downturned gaze and ice-stiff shoulders wouldn't allow me to see before -- his sunken cheeks upturned in a youthful smile, eyes blue as a child's, gray-struck red hair still steadfast in its curls, and a bright face dug out from its grave seconds early enough. I somehow relaxed.

"There are many more things to be afraid of than me, many stronger and more dangerous things, and though none are here now, soon enough you'll see." His heavy hand planted itself on my shoulder-- I hadn't seen him get up. The carpet had become too interesting.

"Now, what was it you needed?" His voice had strange lifts to it now, ones I'd never heard before. I had never seen hair of his color before, and none of the fathers on our block were as big as him, and, I'd never heard a name like Korneyev before. The questions spun around in my mind like rabid beasts let loose, and when my voice let loose, I could think of nothing better to ask for than an answer.

"Mister, where is it you're from?" In that instant, all thought of jolly faces and strange accents escaped me, and I found myself flinching from the biting jaws that were surely on their way to my neck. Nothing came. In fact, Mr. Korneyev stayed still for quite a while, scratched at his bearded chin with his fingers, and looked around at our faces. I shrunk backwards. I wondered if he'd get mad, or storm away, or tell Mom that I had said that or, perhaps, something worse.

"Come sit by the fire," he beckoned. "Your feet are cold and your ears are stiff, I can see that much. Come, and let me tell you where I come from." And, as we were told, we sat and looked up in wonder as this hulk of a man, too big for his night robe and barely fitting my father's favorite armchair, lit his pipe and began to tell us a story.

"Little ones," he began, "the place I come from is named Ussovania, after the queen Ussora who founded it, the mother of the nation who comes to their aid in times of crisis. It was, one distant time, a white wonderland of perfect crystal snow, where fauna, flora and man alike lived in harmony under the sphere of the gods, where honor alone crowned kings and nobles to climb up above the masses, to deliver law and bring prosperity. It was a glorious place where bright-furred leopards with three heads and six tails scraped claws against the ice to dig for fish, where the great river beast challenged the angler for control of the ocean, where the voices of the people would resound through the sloping mountainsides, echo through the caves, skip over the lakes, sprint across the grasslands, and would reach the hearts of others without fail. It was once the land where my father's father was born-- ten years more and thereafter, Ussovania changed. It was the way corpses and old meat change. It rotted to the core, and at the core were the rotten ones."

"At the time, a noble's distinction was known by the closeness of his blood to the line of dragons. Dragons were considered the most noble creature in all the coun-

try; the most esteemed, the most dignified, the most powerful. To be closer to dragons meant to be closer to perfection. Thus was the system of nobility that dignified nobles was laid to waste, crushed by lizards feet. There was no truth in a dragonborn's heightened ability to rule, to wage war, to run or leap or stand or nap or do anything anyone else could or couldn't do, but the masses thought it true... when not even the dragons themselves thought it true! No-one of real merit, no-one of real humanity made it to court in those days-- only dragonborn, or those said to be dragonborn, or those made dragonborn in the eyes of the people by lies and politics (if there's a distinction)-- the country rotted from inaction. But who cared? Dragonborn were wealthy and privileged, and damn if the people could do a thing about it."

I frowned. The full expanse of his wonderful story didn't quite fit in my small arms-- the things he said must be lies, right? But somehow, the three-headed leopards had already begun prancing on the ice rinks in my head, and the battle between the angler and the river beast was playing out, and yes, to myself I thought, "*Somewhere there must be dragons,*" and "*Here, see, I have the living proof!*" Skepticism and mysticism fought it out on the battlefield of a child's mind, leaving craters for curiosity to fill.

"But that couldn't be why you came here, right?" I was too excited not to butt in with my own opinions. "You said that was years ago, that your father's father had been ten when it all happened, and I'm sure I'd have heard things like this by now in my life." But all Mr. Korneyev did was laugh, sigh, and continue in his fantastic tales.

"You thought right. When we'd had enough of the nobility scrounging our resources, appropriating our land, capturing our women and blaming it on barbarians, there came a man in red clothes."

"It's said that when you saw him, your eyes were at first filled with a bright light, not unlike looking at the Sun after a long time in the shadows, and slowly you adjusted to his majesty-- it's said that he carried the teachings of a prophet thought world-over to be a fool, and was tasked by the gods to found a new Ussovanian state upon them; it's also said that, being sent by the gods, he was capable of great miracles; creating bread from thin air, growing wings to fly with, stepping over chasms as if there were an impassable road stretched over them! Oh, the things people must have said in those days, to be passed down to me by my father! If a word was true, I don't know, but the Ussovanians knew that he would be their leader-- his speeches rallied them in the streets, and thousands would come to the same corner to hear them. Those who followed him called this man The King of Commons, savior of the working class. Those who did not called him treason. The parties were, of course, split along lines of blood. The October Wars came a century after the dragonborn had seized power, and so my grandfather was then very old, taking care of my father alone. The women of the family had died of a plague. To them, The King of Commons must have been the only light in their entire world."

"The conflict we call the October Wars actually took place between February and October of that year. From the beginning, I guess you could say we were always fighting the October Wars. It felt like ripping a bandage off of an old wound-- painful, slow, dragging, and then suddenly quick and over with. My father, only thirteen,

stood among the victorious Commons, all cloaked in red like their leader, in the crown hall of the capital at the climax of the war, the 25th of October 1917, and he told me this-- he said, Pavel, you could hear the trumpets blaring from the corners of the earth echo through that hall... that Ussovania knew it was free, and that the thunder beat its hands against the drums in celebration, and that clear skies met the soldiers as they marched out of the captured palace, and that the entire country's people must have come outside to greet them, that was the size of the crowd. It was a golden day for Ussovania. October 25th, 1917..."

"The new Ussovania was glorious-- I was born three years into its beginnings, so I remember it well. The King of Commons provided for us a new system of government, more fair than either the dragon-blood system or the merit system. In this new Ussovania, everyone shared equal work, partook in equal prosperity, and shared responsibility for the nation equally. We worked in factories, we learned trades, we forged tools. Each citizen became, in themselves, a cog in the machine of Ussovania. We said, each in turn, that the people of Ussovania wanted to make their nation strong, proud and respected, the way Queen Ussora might have liked it-- we also wanted to fill the hopes of our King, the King of Commons."

"But the King was, to a milleopard men's shock, mortal. He died 54 years old, January 21st, on my birthday. I was so crippled by the news-- I wanted to throw myself off the dock and into the harbor, only that my father, then old, wouldn't have it."

"Who would succeed the King was a source of heated debate. In the first place, he wasn't a real King-- we called him that-- but our new government was a government of the people, and we did not need to be led by the hand anymore. That was the first argument, which I and my father backed in whole. Nobody could replace our King, either way."

"But that didn't happen," I guessed. I felt that we were reaching the tragic hook to the story, and my hairs were standing on end, both for the truth and for fulfillment in this magical tale. I sat on my knees and waited.

"It didn't. Some people can't stomach the idea of independence. It boils them at the core-- a fear rooted in their stomachs that one wrong step, one missed turn, one slow gear might ruin everything for everyone and, worse, leave them to be blamed. I was disgusted to find that the majority in our country was made of such people. A new King of Commons was elected. His name was Rammstein. He won by political avalanche, raining down on the abandoned people with news of prosperity on the horizon, of untold wealth and riches for Ussovania, of a renewed Golden Age for the Commons, of peace. The people grew to worship him, to hold him up in a different way than they had our King. Beside the statue of the King in the Capital, there rose Rammstein, a foot taller. In all records accessible to the public, Rammstein wrote himself into the October Wars, the trusted lieutenant of the King of Commons, who had won many battles and made many sacrifices. Rammstein took great pains to relate himself to our leader in this way, wearing all red and staging miracles for the dumb masses who had never seen one. But do you know what he really was?"

I shook my head, but I was beginning to have inklings.

“When he slunk off to bed at night, after a long day of misappropriating funds, starving the poor, widening the gap between party members and common folk-- when night finally came, and the impostor's vile duties were complete, he shed his skin and uncoiled his long, reptilian body, removing the disguise that veiled his true form-- a bearded dragon.”

I blinked hard. “Bearded?” That was strange to me.

“Hmmmh... no. He's really got a thick moustache-- like this.” Mr. Korneyev stretched his imaginary lip-hair out miles wide, twisting it like pasta. This was much more satisfying to me. I let the giggles escape me for a while, and allowed him to go on.

“The Commons found him out, and we rallied against him-- but nobody who supported Rammstein would believe it. We went to war, and our own people stood in protection of their tyrant. Blood was spilled. More blood has been spilled now than in the October Wars. I have been exiled-- rather, I fled, and they exiled me after. That, child, is why I am here with you tonight.”

The truth was finally unveiled, and suddenly, the light I saw Mr. Korneyev in changed once more, and the face that I couldn't look at without fearing for my life was all that I could see. I saw battle scars. I saw wrinkles and old wounds, and now the fog in his eyes was clear to me. I saw a battlefield in that old man's face. He told us to run along, that it was far past our bedtime, and promised not to tell my mother, but by the time we had all piled into the bed, I knew that I wouldn't be sleeping well that night. My mind was too alive with dragons, Commons, revolutions, and the heroic knight that lived in our guest room.

Weeks later, when we were alone on the deck, he told me that he was leaving for home.

“Did they get Rammstein?” I asked, my little hand in his, exploring the cuts and creases.

He looked down at me, silent for a while. Maybe he didn't remember telling me -- or maybe, as I feared, the details of the story were still reloading into his mind. Maybe it was something to soften a blow. Maybe I hadn't been ready to know the truth. I bit my tongue and prayed.

“Yes,” answered Mr. Korneyev. His eyes moved from mine to the floorboards and, filled with candid emotion again, he returned with the shaking voice I'd come to know. “Yes, little one, he is defeated. But there is much left to do in Ussovania. Know this-- your country, too, is ruled by men of privilege. It is up to you to change that. It does not have to be by arms, or by war-- it can be peaceful, if you work hard and see your path clearly. But the one to change it will be you, your generation, and the generations that come after.”

He placed a hand on his unsteady knee, picked his giant self and his little bag up, and stepped off the porch

I never saw Mr. Korneyev again. I never heard of Ussovania. When I grew older, matured, and became wealthy, I traveled the entire world in search of that mythical land, the rolling plains of snow and grass, the three-headed leopards and riverbeasts, the sloping mountains that he told me about, and the man who had shown me them all in my youth. In the whole, wide world, 25,000 miles long, I found nothing like that country, and heard nothing of its wonders, or of the dragons and their kin, or of the October Wars and Rammstein, or of Pavel Korneyev-- but not for a moment did I believe that it never existed. I knew that Pavel was telling the truth because I saw it pour out of his eyes. I saw it flow down his back, and it made him shiver-- I saw it in pools that filled his scars, and trickling down from the bags in his eyes. He had shared with me that truth, in all of its glory, and I would hold it close to me for the rest of eternity.

- Chaz Ruggieri

Winner of a Scholastic Art and Writing Award

The Feeling of Falling in Love

Each day has gone by with me knowing it was better than the last
Being with you is always a blast
Never would I have thought your way would be the only way I want to live
Never would I have thought this life is the one that I want to lead
Being with you has shown me what I need
Whenever I see your smile I begin to shine
I don't look back I just smile and know it's a sign
I never thought it could be you
I never thought that you could make me feel this way
Time has only been flying by because all I can think of is you
The way you walk, the way you move, the way I feel when I'm with you
How could the one I love be the one I never thought of before
How could the one I love be just what I'm looking for

- Lena Scarpulla

Paradise Lost

A world without life; this is the world that I live in. The things that inhabit this planet are heartless beings they reserve no compassion and endearment for other living things, they only care for themselves. Their hearts have been blackened; all altruistic feelings within them perished. They are motivated by greed, and their dreams fueled by their lust for power and dominance. Blinded by the rage they harbor and pride they hold so high (yet it is worth no more than wasteland sand they find beneath their feet). It is no wonder God has given up on this pitiful race. No. Not given up, but is so disgruntled that his hope is dwindling fast.

I woke to the soft, quiet sound of a conglomeration of clicks, whirrs, and liquid notes. They echoed almost as if a whisper could gossip about the noise before it was heard. However, as hard as I am trying to open my eyes, they just will not open and allow me to gaze upon my environment. The pain is too great; my body is completely paralyzed from the wound I received in my shoulder. The fall that should have killed me. How am I still alive?

I hear a soft, sweet whisper of words that I cannot quite make out, and they gently tickle my ear, and I rise. Completely disregarding the pain I felt moments ago, I choose to be at ease. I finally manage to open my eyes only to be blinded by a powerful white light. Just where exactly am I? I see nothing... until finally something, colors. Blends of warm and cold colors flood my sight. At last I fully make out my surroundings. I have no idea where I am. Nothing appears familiar in the slightest bit, the ground, the sky, the air. Everything here appears almost untouchable, and in a way, holy. This land has a connection to something greater than any natural being, like it was blessed by God.

Out of nowhere, the sky began to release droplets of water. The heavens decided to relieve their grievances all at once. Their tears falling from the rippling sky, glistening purples, blues, yellows and oranges rolling down my skin. I feel as though I am being given life for the very first time.

Just then, something darted over me and headed straight toward the edge of the sky. A bird... I believe that is what those are. I would have never imagined I would get to see them in person. To think that such things still exists in this place, this place must be untouched by time and blessed by God. This land is like a dream filled with things I have only seen and read about in the archives. Breath taking beauty that not even words can describe. As if seeing the colors of life from the eyes of a new born; I am at a loss for words.

I stood there for a few more hours until the colors of the sky grew dull and ready to expire completely.

“Aitakatta” whispered a sweetly soft and familiar voice.

I turn to see who had said that word to me which brought about a sensation of remembrance and pounding pain of pressure to my head.

“Who’s there?”

A young woman around my age stepped forward. Her angelic face showed brightly through, half covered by the shadow of the tree she emerged from. A face not like any other, yet so familiar like she was from a dream, no a memory...

"Aitakatta," she uttered while taking more steps forward.

However, as I try to study and make out her features, my vision begins to blur. My head feels as though it is being squeezed; I collapse to the ground.

"Beautiful, aren't they? They are called *Prunus serrulata*. Such a delicate flower; weather alone used to cut these flowers' bloom time short. This makes the time we have to enjoy and bask in their elegant beauty far shorter than originally intended. But even when these flowers only existed for a few days, they still managed to gather everyone's gaze. How fascinating. For a flower to have such powerful control over people, yet to be so weak and delicate. Poor sweet, small flower of God. Its purpose is meaningless; just like its creator"

I awoke gasping for air. Was everything that just happened to me a dream? It did all appear to be so real, yet a false reality at the same time. I questioned. And what was with that last part of the dream I had? It felt like that man in the dream was talking to me as if I was actually present.

"You are awake," the girl from before gasped. "I hope I did not give you that much of a shock. I understand that regaining erased memories can be a very painful and slow process."

"I don't understand, just who exactly are you? And where are we? I'm sorry all of this feels like a dream, but a dream I have had before." I was even more confused than before.

"Please, you need to rest. You must have your full strength before we go to see Gaia. Once there, I promise, I will tell you everything you want to know. And all will be recovered and revealed." She responded so reassuringly that I felt my body loosen up, at once at ease. The girl sang:

"The love of my young days is ending like this
You have to be happy
Even if a long time passes by, we'll still remember each other
Those times when there was still us
Those times when there was still us."

My heart is dying, pierced the words being sung. Even though my hearts continues to weep, my brain will not register this. It refuses to shed a single tear, or shred of emotion. My whole body is in conflict with itself, and I fear that my heart does not stand a chance in this evolutionary war.

The next morning we left to meet Gaia, mentioned the night before. We left at dawn as it was a whole day's journey. She led me through a plain of golden grass that mimicked the brilliant sky. We traveled for hours straight. As we went along our path, I felt as though designated areas were evident, places with diversity and differences

from that of its predecessor. Several organisms inhabiting the regions appeared different from those in a previous region. Why? One of the questions that remained unanswered and festered.

“We should stop here to rest for a bit,” she said.

“No, it’s fine. We can keep going, the more resting we do the more the journey time to Gaia grows,” I exclaimed.

“I know, I just thought we could use this time for me to properly introduce myself. I can answer all the questions that you have.” She was eager.

“That would make things a lot easier to bear,” I agreed.

“It’s settled then. Come follow me.”

“Wha-Where are we going? I thought we were going to get to know each other, not abscond through the thick dense forest. Where are you?” I shouted.

“Just follow the sound of my voice.” She called.

“How?! Everything is echoing off the trees and being carried by the air.”

“Follow the wind.”

“But the wind is going all over the place,” I cried.

Just then, she emerged through a curtain of what appears to be thick curly white hair. I think I have seen this before in the archives, *Tillandsia usneoides*, Spanish moss. She appears so gentle and caring, she acts as though everything has a meaning, a purpose. Who exactly is she? How does she know who I am?

“If you are so worried about getting to your destination how can you spend time enjoy the journey?” I looked around me to see so many colors; reds, pinks, whites, and browns. This area was completely different from that of the place I first encountered. Even the air was different, a crisp clean air that relaxed you with one whiff. Even small creatures existed here as well. These colorful small flying fantasies like figures fluttered around us; their glowing pink wings, so delicate and graceful. “Amazing isn’t it?”

I stepped through the arch formed by tree branches only to have my breath taken away. A gorgeous landscape lay before me of blended colors. I see the girl lying on the ground, her head hovering over the edge to the mirror pool. I walk over and gaze into the pool. It is then that I notice just how different our appearances truly are and how goddess-like her beauty is. Her eyes a deep emerald green, and lips a petal pink; her long hair golden silk, flawless elegance. We appear as though we are from completely different worlds. Even the simplest of features between us are different. Her eyes have a double eyelid, mine is single. Her lush golden locks contrast my long jet black hair. The only thing that I can find vaguely similar is our light eyes, hers green and mine ice blue. I feel as though I know why these differences are evident,

but do not believe it is possible considering the people I encountered while aboard the ship. We are all very different as well, yet we all came from the same general region.

“Let’s continue on to Gaia,” she announced.

I got up and followed her without a word. Staring into the mirror pool makes me want to remember.

When we finally arrived at the top of a mountain, much to my surprise it was completely level. Dusk had befallen holds the sky, adding to the mysteriousness of Gaia.

“Come this way.” She held her hand out to me.

I took it and followed her through the dark, empty space. When I finally conceded to the thought that this forever darkness would continue, a bright small light blue light pierced through the cloak. It was water. Out of the water rose a woman garbed in *Earthy* attire. Her hair, a dark green like the lily pads floating in her pond, was covered with several varieties of large flowers each blossom was held all together by light gray branches with pink blossoms. Her dress consisting of what looks like bright green leaves and a variety of pinks and orange roses, ends with a sheer train.

“It’s been too long, I can’t remember the last time I saw you two together” Gaia mentioned this as if we were old friends simply stopping by for a visit.

“That is why we are here. Teophilia lost her memories after she was taken during the purge.”

“Teophilia, who is that?” I said more confused than ever.

“Very well. I believe I can revive her old self. Do you have an item of her’s with sentimental value?” Gaia asked completely ignoring my statement.

“Let me explain something to you my child. This world is full of millions upon millions of species. Species that each serve a purpose, a purpose that always has significance in their contributions. Everything must work together in order to survive, whether it be through a predator-prey relationship, a symbiotic relationship or even a niche. Humans have long ignored the laws of nature placed before them in order to have an ecosystem created by their own means, by their own hands. What seemed to be a paradise soon became another lost corrupt dream. All that you think is true is a lie. You are not who you believe you are. You were born in this land, and all that you think is reality is merely a virtual dream corrupted. I can, however, erase the lies and bring back the truth.” Gaia enlightened.

I don’t know what to believe anymore. My whole life turned out to be a lie. Can I believe everything she is telling me? How could I forget such a place as this? It does not all add up. Am I overthinking everything?! I knew from the moment I awoke on this land that I felt a strong connection to it; even to this girl I met I feel an inseparable bond. This was not created out of nothing. There is definitely more to my past than my memories are revealing.

“I want to find my life!” I exclaimed.

Gaia takes my hand and leads me into the blue, glowing pool. “Take this rock in your hands and lay back into the water.” I did as she told me. Feeling relaxed from the cool water of the pool, Gaia placed her hands on the sides of my head.

Everything around us began to glow like the pool. Eventually my eyes opened emitting a sky blue light. I see my whole history reset within my memories. Everything re-written as it should have existed. I regained all my memories, and I know the truth now. I am Teophilia, chosen by God as the protector of the Garden of Eden and the savior for the entire human race. “Aitakka? I missed you too, Persephone.”

- Jack Kitzen



- Jack Kitzen

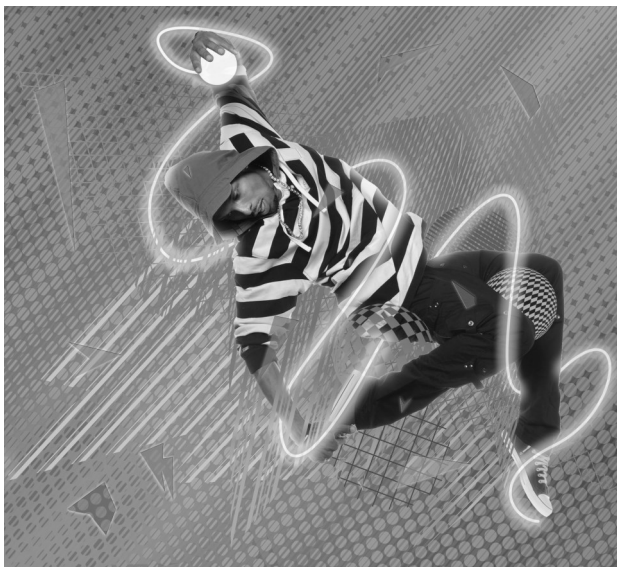
Corner

the little leaf
that follows me
matches my step
in circling gait
across the street
and turns around
the corner here
and into town

I cannot shake
the thoughts that be
this little leaf
resembles me
blown by the wind
tossed up and down
losing the will
to dance around

its patience at
the streetlights red
is more than I
have ever had
the confidence
to stand alone
without a foot
to stand upon

- Chaz Ruggieri



- Joel Aparicio

Haunted Run

"Last one to the stop sign buys the other food!"

"You're on!"

Sally and Ruth had been best friends for as long as they could remember. Sally was quiet, shy, and loved to follow the rules. Her green eyes always stood out and she always wore her sand-colored hair in a braid. In contrast, Ruth was loud, outgoing, and loved to take risks. Her brown eyes never quite matched up to Sally's, but they still had cuteness to them. Her dark, shoulder-length hair was always down, except for when she had to put it up to run.

Sally and Ruth always did stuff together, including a daily run. Every day after school at 4 PM, Sally and Ruth ran the same course around their neighborhood. Every day, while on their run, Sally and Ruth finished at the same place. They followed the same course, which eventually turned into a habit.

Except today.

Sally and Ruth raced all the way to their usual finish line: the stop sign. The stop sign separated Holloway Drive and Woodway Road. Sally and Ruth ran five miles a day, racing to the stop sign to see who would win. This race always ended in a tie. This time, however, when they hit the stop sign, it was clear that Sally won.

Ruth looked completely shocked, "You totally cheated!"

Sally was out of breath. She breathed out, "I did not!"

"Did so!"

"Did not!"

Ruth did not want to play this game anymore. She asked, "Can we go for a walk?"

"Yeah, I could use a walk."

"Let's go this way instead for a change."

Sally was hesitant to go down Holloway Drive. 'I do not want anything bad to happen, it is not our usual way', she thought. After a few moments of pleading, Sally finally agreed.

Barely anyone went down Holloway, mainly because of the house at the end of the street. The plot was mostly abandoned, unclaimed. In 1987, a teenage girl, about seventeen years young, burned the house down. No one knew the girl's name; they only knew what she looked like and what she wore. She wore a long light pink silk dress that reached her feet. A white bow held her long curly brunette hair half up, the rest cascaded down past her waist.

Sally and Ruth began to walk down Holloway Drive. After about ten minutes of walking, they stopped in front of the abandoned, old house. They stood there, in silence, and began to look at the house carefully. The parts of the house that were still standing were burned charcoal black. It was perforated with holes from the fire. Looking from the outside only the attic, however old, seemed sturdy. Standing there, in silence, a sense of uneasiness overcame them. Sally and Ruth stood there, not knowing what to do next, until Ruth demanded, "Let's go in."

Sally jumped a little. "No. It is too, um, creepy in there. I do not want to go in there."

"Oh, c'mon! don't be such a baby. It'll be so cool if we went in," Ruth practically begged.

"Now, Ruth, I really do not want to go in. We really have to get back. We have to take my sister and your brother trick-or-treating."

Ruth walked toward the house. She looked back to see if anyone was watching; nobody was. She disappeared inside the house, hoping Sally would follow. She was right.

"Ruth! We really should not be in here! It is trespassing."

"Sally, no one has lived here since 1987'. It's not trespassing, idiot."

"I am not an idiot!"

Sally and Ruth walked around the house for a bit when they found the stairs leading up to the attic. Ruth climbed the stairs, carefully, hearing each step creak.

Sally was right behind Ruth, trying to pull her to leave. She whispered, "Ruth, it is not safe to be here. We really should go. We are going to be late."

"Shush."

"Oh my gosh, please, can we go?"

"Leave if you want to, but I'm stayin'."

Sally sighed and decided that it was best to stay with Ruth. She wanted to make sure Ruth was going to be okay, not be injured by any artifices left in the house. Together they reached the top of the staircase and a door stood in front of them. Ruth opened the door and stepped in. Sally followed Ruth into the attic and closed the door shut behind them. Sally and Ruth stood there in shock.

"Woah." They both gasped.

"Is that...?" Sally asked.

"I believe so," replied Ruth.

“She is so beautiful.”

“Yeah, for a psychotic girl who likes to burn houses down.”

Sally and Ruth just stared at a painting that showed the girl from the story. Her hair was just as described, right down to the bow. She adorned that long sheath dress, like the one from the story, and her expression could not be named. She stood there, with her head tilted to the side. A silver locket hung gracefully around her neck; the initials O.D were inscribed on it. Ruth walked up to the painting, and touched it. She ran her fingers down the painting and stopped at the locket.

“Ruth... Are you okay?”

“I know this locket.”

“Ruth, we are going to be late. I’m going.” Sally walked over to the door, and pulled the doorknob.

“Are you serious?!? The doors jammed!”

“I know this locket,” Ruth repeated.

“Ruth! Can you not hear me? I said we are locked in! Oh, my gosh! I am going to pass out, Ruth. We really have to get out of here! We are going to be late!” Sally began to panic, and started to pace back and forth.

Ruth finally acknowledged the fact that Sally was freaking out and tried to calm her down. “Sally! Stop! We’re gonna be okay, okay?”

“No we are not!”

“Trust me, we’re gonna be okay.”

“Yeah, well you know, we would be perfectly fine if you did not walk into this house!”

“Oh, so this is my fault?” Ruth asked.

Sally threw her hands in the air and exclaimed, “Yes! Everything you do is your fault! We would be perfectly normal if you did not choose to walk this way.”

Ruth blew it, “News flash, sweetie, there’s no such thing as normal! I tried to do one thing for you and now you think it’s my fault. You’re such a rule follower!”

“You have never tried to do anything for me!”

Ruth was beginning to get frustrated. She started to yell and began to talk with her hands. She shouted, “I do everything for you. Don’t ya’ understand? You’re mad quiet in school and so antisocial that you don’t want to talk to anyone but me. I try to get you to go to parties and talk to people, and you still refuse. Do you really wanna grow up like that? Do you really wanna grow up and then later in life regret

everything you never did? Well, ya know what, I'm sick and tired of this and of you."

Ruth stormed past Sally and tried to open the door. When it wouldn't budge, Ruth backed up and ran into the door, opening it. Ruth turned around to face Sally, who looked different. "I'm sorry," Sally whispered. Ruth looked at Sally and realized what she had done. She yelled at her best friend all because Sally said something in which she never meant to say in a hurtful way.

"It's fine... Can we just leave? We should probably head back, and get ready and stuff."

"Yeah, let's go" conceded Ruth.

Sally and Ruth absconded from the abandoned, timeworn house. As they walked away from the house, Ruth could not stop thinking about the locket she had seen in the painting.

"That locket was my mother's."

- Asar Nadi



- Aaron Feltman

The “Off-Putting Feminist”

Oh, is my feminism off-putting to you?
Remind yourself that when my
Voice,
Right,
Say,
Vote,
Helps to decide the future of a nation.

Oh, is my feminism off-putting to you?
Remind yourself that when my
Thoughts,
Emotions,
Morals,
Resolutions
Determine what I’m going to do with my body
When I choose,
Where I choose,
Why I choose,
How I choose,
And with whom I choose.

Oh, is my feminism off-putting to you?
Remind yourself that when even though I have the same
Experience,
Passion,
Ethic,
Talent,
As a man, I receive seventy-seven cents to his dollar.

Oh, is my feminism off-putting to you?
Remind yourself that when you’re trying to
Wrap me,
Box me,
Shut me up,
And show me off,
How sad it is that your
Mother,
Sister,
Friend,
And “Significant” other,
All worry about strolling the street alone at night.

Oh, is my feminism off-putting to you?
Remind yourself that when the women of the world who
Raised you,
Taught you,
Created you,
Loved you,
Experience inequality
Every.
Single.
Day.

-Gilda Goldental Stoecker

Second Place in the Huntington Youth Writes Contest

Line Crossers

Men have always been victims of seduction, lust, and ego. Despite their terrible weaknesses, they never thought they would meet their downfall, but things are different now. The very creations, men invented for their endless pleasure, are ready to take them down for good.

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"Scott Common. Victim number twelve. Last seen leaving work at 9:39pm at the corner of 37th and Swanee Ave. Cameras indicate that he arrived at the Bigston Motel with an unidentified woman at 9:52pm. The woman left the motel at 3:33am, leaving Mr. Common alone. Three hours later, when checking if the room was clear, the manager found Mr. Common dead. Just like the others. It's a shame, really, that these women are killing off their clients just for their memories." Derek Howley, homicide detective, dropped the case file labeled COMMON, SCOTT onto the table. Plop.

Sheri Welf, Howley's partner, covered her face with her hands to shortly block out the stress the case had given her. She ran her fingers through her golden, shoulder length hair and finally rested her forehead into her left palm. Howley did the same thing, except he ran his fingers through his dark hair and remained standing.

This was case number twelve that Howley and Welf came across in the past twelve weeks. Every week there was a different victim, and every week there was a new killer.

"What do you suppose we do now?" Welf asked.

"What do you mean by 'what do we do now?' We nail these sons of guns. Hardcore."

"You know we can't do that, it isn't possible."

Howley slammed his hands onto the table. He shouted, "Of course it isn't possible! We have to do something! We have to figure out who is controlling these bastards!"

"They aren't bastards."

Howley was beginning to get frustrated, "What the hell am I supposed to call them? The only other names I can come up with are Robotic Prostitutes."

Welf started to calm Howley down. "They have names. Just like us humans. Although they don't carry actual souls, one wrong step can get you killed. Literally. Reporters are beginning to get the public to talk. Line Crossers is the name they gave 'em. I sure as hell like it better than fucking 'Robotic Prostitutes.' We can't stop them. This isn't 2021 anymore. It's been different for the past sixty-six years. These inventions, the Line Crossers, are unstoppable. We can't do anything to them unless we find out who we're dealing with exactly."

"And who exactly are we dealing with?"

“A genius.”

“No shit.”

“Hey, you want my explanation or not? I could just leave and abandon this crap with you and have Fray help you instead. You want that? I don’t mind leaving you with Fray.” Howley hated Fray with a passion. Howley, instead, sat in the chair across from Welf and allowed her to speak. Welf stood up, looked at all the evidence on the table, and began. “What exactly do we know? We know that there is a new victim every week. We also know that it’s always a different killer. We also know that the killer strikes following the days of the week; one week Monday, the next week Tuesday, the following week Wednesday, etc. We also know the victimology: Married, family man, high paying job, and a happy life. Finally, we know that the killings are similar in death with loss of memories. Literally. Line Crossers are literally taking the memories of their victims. We don’t know two things. Who is controlling the Line Crossers and why the hell they’re taking the memories of innocent people.”

Howley sat for a few minutes, thinking, when he suddenly sat up and suggested, “What if we send someone out into the field to catch them?”

Welf sat down and asked, “How do you suppose we do that?”

Howley got up from his chair, and as he rose he said, “I know it’s an old trick in the book, but I think it might work. Like, they won’t see it coming and we’ll be able to stop them once and for all.”

“Who do you suppose we send out there in the field?”

“Me.”

Welf looked shocked at Howley’s suggestion. She said, “Are you sure you want to do this?”

“Hell yeah!” Howley was determined that he might be able to stop the Line Crossers.

“Alright, then, let’s get you ready.”

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It was 9:46pm when Howley arrived at one of the streets the Line Crossers covered. He pulled up in front of a Line Crosser, rolled his window down as the lady approached. The long fiery hair reached her stomach, a black leathery unitard showed most of her breasts, and she sauntered in high ebony stilettos. Howley looked into her eyes and was able to tell she was a Line Crosser. Line Crossers have purple glittery eyes that are more distinctive than other robotics. She’s an exotic. Each Line Crosser can be classified by division. There were the innocents, who dressed cute, and then the commons, who were the regulars, and then there were the exotics, the rare ones who appeared once in a while.

“Hi, there, sweetheart. Are you ready for a wild night?”

Howley stammered his words but managed to utter, "Uh, yeah. Just, uh, hop right in." It wasn't that Howley was nervous, he just was mesmerized by the Line Crosser. They looked so real to the human eye, but in reality, they weren't. Howley never had gotten this close to one before, but he somehow managed. The Line Crosser slipped into the passenger seat and Howley drove off.

"Where do you want to go, sweetheart? I'm comfortable going anywhere."

Wow, Howley thought, this one's real seductive. I'm in deep trouble.

"Uh, um, wherever you want to go. I don't mind."

The Line Crosser twitched a few times and then asked, "This your first time, sweetheart?"

"Uh. Er. Yeah," Howley could not stop stammering his words.

"Don't worry, sweetheart. I know where to take all the first timers. Make a left at the next right."

Howley did what he was told to do and kept driving. As the Line Crosser gave him directions where to go Howley began to get nervous, and it showed. They pulled up in front of an old Victorian house that was bigger than most of the houses on the road. Howley turned the engine off and looked at the Line Crosser. That was the last thing Howley remembered.

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When Howley woke up, he felt dizzy. Finally, he regained full consciousness and he looked around to see where he was. He tried getting up but he was strapped down tightly by wires. He was on one of those morgue tables that people used in the past. He tried to get a glimpse of the room and that's when he noticed that he wasn't wearing any clothing.

"Are you freaking kidding me? Dammit! When I get out, I promise I'll take down whoever did this to me, even if it means killing the son of a gun! Ugh! Dammit!"

As Howley lay there strapped down, he heard noises from the other room. He tried to make out what was being said, but couldn't. A few minutes later, a man, in a wheelchair, entered the room with two Line Crossers behind him. The two Line Crossers were wearing silky sky-like robes and had their flaxen hair up in ponytails.

The man, who seemed well-passed middle age, went over to Howley and rested his hand on his arm. "He's perfect. Tell Reb I say thank you."

What the hell? "Where the hell am I?"

"You don't need to know, sweetheart," the man replied.

"If you let me go, I promise I won't say anything to the coppers. I swear!"

"Stay calm, sweetheart," the man continued, "we know you're a copper, which makes you perfect for what I am about to do."

“What do you mean by that?”

“You see,” he took a deep breath, “my daughter’s dying and I don’t want her to die before me. Do you know what she’s dying of, sweetheart?”

“Does it look like I know?”

“He’s a sassy one. I like him,” said one of the blondes. “May I keep him when this is over?”

“Sure.”

Howley had it. “What the? No way! Why am I even here? Dammit!” He struggled.

The man placed his hand on Howley’s stomach and said, “My daughter is dying. She doesn’t remember anything anymore and the only reason for her to live are, well, memories.”

“Which is why your sluts are stealing the minds of the innocent.”

The man took a deep breath, “You see, sweetheart, these people aren’t innocent if they go and spend the night with one of my girls.”

“A one night stand does not mean you can do that!”

“Get him started.” The man left saying no more.

“Get me outta’ here, dammit!”

One of the flaxen girls made her way on top of Howley and whispered, “Don’t worry, sweetheart, this won’t hurt one bit.”

That was the last thing Howley heard before blacking out again.

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Howley woke up with a desire, lust. He got up from his bed, slipped on his blue silk robe and looked into the mirror. He stared at his face and saw the purple sparkle in his eyes. He left the room leaving thirty three others sleeping.

Howley walked around for a bit wondering where the others were. He remembered being on a beach with Reb, relaxing. He kept walking until someone ran into him hard. He looked up to find a girl, around his age, with golden hair that reached her shoulders. She seemed startled to see Howley, but wasn’t.

“I’m Derek. Derek Howley,” he said. He continued, “What’s your name, sweetheart?”

The lady stared, lost in his purple sparkling eyes, she said, “Sheri. Sheri Welf.”

-Asar Nadi

Curse of Immortality

“Before we begin, you should know that I have lived a long, painful life; I never got a happy ending,” I said to the young witch in front of me. She was a tiny, curious creature in her late teens. The vitality of her life force was practically impossible to ignore and her energy brought a small smile to my face.

I used to be like her.

“I want to know everything. You have no idea how long I have wanted to meet you. You’re practically a legend.” Her huge, hazel eyes were so bright and hopeful that I almost felt bad for what she was about to hear. And for what I was about to do, but my last shreds of humanity were fading.

I did not care much for anything these days; I just wanted to get the story out of my system. After so many decades, I figured it was finally time to let everything out. Someone needed to hear what really happened from me instead of trusting the attention seeking charlatans.

“All right little witch, where do you want me to begin?”

I was curious too; I wondered how much she knew about me, about what I did all those years ago.

The girl was eager for the answers and did not hesitate to pummel me with questions about my origins and heritage.

“I was the princess of the Kingdom of Shadows. My kind built it centuries ago so we could be safe from the prying eyes of our enemies. No one could enter the gates; the key lay in each of our minds; the symbol changed each time and was different for everybody. The protection seemed so flawless, so absolute; I could never imagine anyone would break through.”

“But know one thing about security, little witch, it never lasts. And sometimes, demons are closer than you think.” So far everything I said was true; although, I was certain she did not understand the meaning of ‘demons’; she would eventually, but it would take time and experience and countless disappointments.

During my long life I came to learn one thing to be true; pain was the best teacher. Without pain, there was no motif or drive or passion. Mortal or not, we all needed misery to appreciate happiness and to see where the true demons hid. Let’s just say the phrase demons lurk in the shadows tells more truth than anything I’ve ever heard.

“You sound so glum.”

I sighed; teenagers just had to point out the obvious. I had lost everything, why wouldn’t I be glum?

“When you have for lived as long as I, you’ll realize there’s not much to be hap-

py about.” She flinched visibly causing me to smirk at her; she was so weak, even if she had a potential of becoming an immortal, she wouldn’t last long. She was too soft hearted; fortunately, she had no reason to fear eternity, I could already tell she lacked the skill of completing the ritual.

Immortality clearly wasn’t for everyone.

She quickly recovered from her previous set back and flashed me a bright smile, clearly trying to get in my good graces.

“Tell me more about your time as a princess of the Kingdom of the Shadows.”

Really? Here I was, full of information most people would kill to find out and this child wanted to hear bedtime stories about being a princess? Maybe confiding in her was a terrible idea after all. I was immortal. Sure, I had plenty of time, but I did not particularly feel like spending hours talking to someone, who was looking for a real life version of a Disney film. Being a princess was not fun or easy; it was the opposite of everything I enjoyed.

“Suffocating. Being a princess was suffocating; I wanted to choke myself sometimes just so I could get away from the constant politics.” I glared at her, making her flinch. “Do you have any more important questions or are you just trying to live out your childhood fantasies?”

“I thought I should start off with something light...” she muttered and I held my hand up to shush her before she could carry on with her rant.

“This is not an interview with Victoria’s Secret Angels. You should know better than to think the traditional ways will work on me. You are lucky I’m even here, little witch.” I rolled my emotionless, gray eyes at her stupidity.

My patience was wearing thin and my decision of getting the story out seemed like a worse idea each second. It’s been 60 years, I thought I was ready, but I guess I was wrong. What am I even doing here?

“It’s Mary.” She whispered.

“What?”

“My name is Mary, not little witch.” Hmm, so kitty had claws; extremely dull, but they were still claws. So she had a semblance to a backbone. Maybe I could tolerate her presence for a little bit longer.

“Why did you kill the royalty of your kind? They were your family.” And there was the question everyone craved the answer to. I had earned a reputation of a cold blooded killer and to some extent I was a monster, but not for the reason most people thought.

I was suddenly hit by the waves of distant memories, my eyes became distant and unfocused and the flashes from the past made appearance in my mind.

"You would betray your own family?"

"Oh please don't play the martyr. You and I both know you want this power as much as we do."

"I'm sorry; I can't let you do this."

I blinked back the tears as the familiar voices echoed in my head; I remembered their words so clearly. Why couldn't I block them out?

"Do you know how we can gain more power?" I didn't let her answer "if we kill one of our kind, we can absorb our victim's abilities. That's what the royals wanted to do, that's what I was trying to prevent, but of course I was labeled the criminal. Who would ever believe that their precious rulers would hurt them?" I could practically taste the bitterness in my mouth.

When I first ascended, I was overjoyed. I expected to be the one to lead everyone to a new era of prosperity, respect, power. I was thinking about my people, while my so called family was planning to exploit others for their own benefits.

I killed them to save the entire Kingdom and what did I get in return? Oh that's right: hate, fear, disgrace. No one even bothered to find out why I would stand against my own blood, they just assumed I was evil and twisted.

I was snapped out of my memory lane when I heard Mary's sharp intake of breath. The little witch was not expecting this kind of honesty from me.

Of course in witch community I was a hero because I annihilated their greatest enemies, but they did no care to learn the truth either. They just let out a sigh of relief because the raving lunatic of a princess made their lives easier.

Mary was the first witch to actually take interest in what really happened. Maybe that's why I agreed to this ridiculous interview, but revealing the story felt like a mistake.

For the first time, I felt like I was betraying the Kingdom.

"I'm so sorry this happened to you, but once I spread the word you can have your old life back. I'm sure you'll take your rightful place as the leader and everything will go back to normal..." she kept babbling about some happily-ever-after scenario, but I blocked out her annoyingly joyous voice.

For a split second I thought she'd understand me; that she'd keep this a secret. But Mary was a determined witch, looking for a spotlight and she used me to get the attention. Well at least that was her original plan, but I wasn't too keen on the idea of ending up in a whirlwind of yet another scandal.

"What makes you think you'll be able to tell everyone what happened?" I stood up and from the devious glint in my eyes, Mary realized what was about to happen. She began chanting, poor child actually thought her amateur spells could stop me.

If she actually had a functioning brain, she'd ask me to meet up in a sunlit place, but instead she agreed to interview me in a dark room, which was full of shadows.

I concentrated and soon enough, a shadow wrapped around her neck like a snake, successfully cutting off her chanting. Mary began struggling, she flailed her arms in hope to fight off her enemy, but it's impossible to fight against the shadows. She was doomed.

"You see I don't want the world to know the truth. I agreed to this interview simply because I needed to get the story out of my system." I approached her, taking a notice of her fearful eyes, and smiled "Thank you Mary, but I'm afraid this is a goodbye."

I commanded the shadows to finish the job and soon enough, the lifeless body of the once lively witch collapsed on the wooden floor. I stared at her body for several minutes in hope to feel something, anything. After all these years of being completely numb, I craved emotion; I didn't even care what it was: guilt or hatred would have been fine. But the painful reality finally settled in my bones as I glanced at the fallen witch once more; immortality burnt out everything human in me and left me with terrible emptiness. And no matter how hard I tried. I didn't feel a thing.

Not love.
Not even guilt.
I felt absolutely nothing.

- Ketí Tsotskolauri

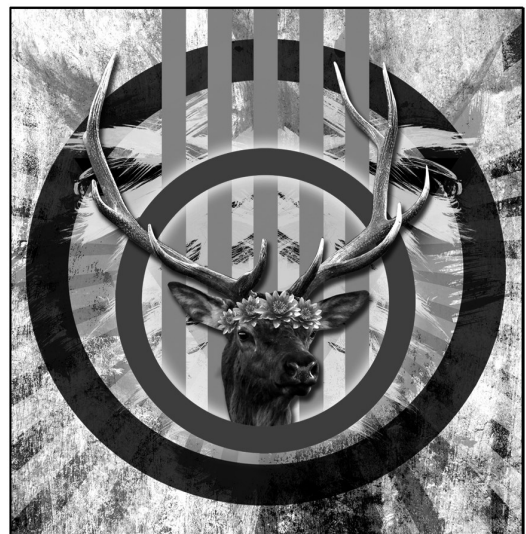
Drilling

Her eyes lie on the back of my head.

Each day,
whether she looks or doesn't look or
can't find the little note
in the back of her mind
proclaiming my existence,

the drilling goes on
in the quarry of my
mental state, and little worker-men
set out the
blueprints
for my
break
down

- Chaz Ruggieri



- Kathryn Hajny

The Phone Call

My name is Jordan, Jordan Sam. I'm a twenty-three-year-old graphic designer working for a big time shoe company called Converse. It's the year 1995, and I graduated from UCLA last year. Unlike many graduates from my alma mater, I've done everything on my own. Working my fingers to the bone, paying for my own tuition, doing my homework, I've never even cheated on a test. I made it in this world all by myself.

I was born in a town on Long Island, New York. Just the name brings back memories; Huntington was a special place for me. My high school was full of all different cliques. Some large, some small, and some very random at times, but everything seemed standard. The Goths, the geeks, the freaks, and then you have the jocks. This is where you could find me; yes, I was part of that crew. Huntington High School was run by athletes; it was a very sport-involved school. But me, I didn't play a sport. I was just one of the kids that loved athletics, but didn't play anything in particular. I always thought it was more important to spend my time completing my school work. Unlike the people I hung out with, I never had a father that pushed me to be an athlete. My mother was the only one around; she was very loving but was always working. Due to her extreme schedule, she never had time to spend with me. She provided me with a lower-middle class home, and my school supplies. Other than that, I was basically on my own. Although it was rough growing up without a normal family, the jocks took me in and gave me the group of friends I'll never forget. My time in high school was great; parties every weekend, games every week, and all of the teachers enjoyed my presence. When I got to college, it was different. I was a nobody. No one knew my name, the teachers didn't care if I was the best student, and my roommate was such a "know it all". The sports were good, but the games weren't free. Eh, whatever. It's all about getting a good education, getting your money's worth.

Honestly I did not expect to find a job so soon out of college. Within a month from graduation, I found a job in the graphic design industry. I was hoping to design billboards, or maybe merchandise for skateboarding or surf companies, but working for Chuck Taylor was a dream. I didn't even know they used graphic designers for shoe companies. Within my first couple of months, they set me up with an apartment in Denver, Colorado, and gave me a company car. Did I mention the car was a BMW? One of the nicest things I've ever owned. I'm basically getting paid to drive it!

On my way to a meeting in downtown Denver, my car phone rang. My boss.

"Hello..."

The call disconnects. Okay, I'll try to pretend that wasn't weird. Must call him back. Crap, what's the number again...

xxxxx

High pitched ringing.

The scene is completely black and silent.

Flash. Light. Flash. Hospital. Blurry vision.

Still silent.

xxxx

As I woke up, my vision was extremely blurry. The last thing I remembered was driving to my meeting. It's safe to say I was scared. With no idea what was going on, I jumped to conclusions. For all I know I could've been drugged. I've never even seen this hospital before. It seemed so modern. No. So futuristic, for the machines looked alien; many I have never seen before.

As I began to stand up, I noticed the amazing technological advancements in the room. The computers, what I believed to be computers, didn't have monitors. They were just screens, thin and small, little screens. I was amazed. With my lack of words, I noticed the stillness in the air. It was quiet, so quiet that you could hear the sound of silence. The depths of my memory revealed that hospitals are normally loud with a lot of running around, running around at all times. To say the least I was freaking out; I had to get out of this gross hospital bed. As I stood up my knees started cracking. I feel as if I've aged greatly, or been hit by a truck. This is ridiculous, who is in charge here? I made my way towards the door. As fast as I could, I push. It seems locked, but I push harder. With my second shove I broke free the rusted metal from its hinges, and a cloud of dust arose from the broken door. I diffuse the dust with my arms; it wafts through the air and into my lungs, coughing attack. This isn't a dream; this has to be real. How did I wake up in an abandoned hospital? There isn't a person in sight. Frightened; no idea what to do, or who to look for. As I look down I notice my nakedness, clothes could be a good start. I stumble to the nearest waiting room. It is there I find skeletons of family members who never got to see who the patients they were waiting for. It seems kind of sad. Actually, it was extremely sad. I knew something bad was happening, but I couldn't let it slow me down. Salvaging items from open rooms, I find an old suitcase, search through, take what I need and move on. I find my way out by searching for the flickering red exit signs. As I open the door, ready to embrace this new discovery, my eyes widen.

Jordan's hospital crisis isn't real. On his way to the meeting, back in 1995, something happened. Not just to him, but the entire United States. There was a malfunction at a nuclear power plant in Ohio. The entire nation was dramatically affected; in short, a nuke flattened the US from Canada to Mexico, only a few thousand survived. Jordan died in this hospital many years ago. His spirit is confused by the modern ruins he includes in his visions during his Trans to the afterlife. What he sees is life in 2049; a life ruled by an empire, very bleak and ominous.

- **Bryan Murchison**

A Brother's Love

Isaiah, Bird, Magic, Shaq, Kobe, and Jordan are names you heard while growing up as an NBA fan in the 90s. I mean what kid didn't want to be "Like Mike"? Starting with Jordan jumping from the free throw line in '86 to all the Boston-L.A. finals matchups, I love the NBA. I love the intensity and heart combination that both Dennis Rodman and Shaquille O'Neill embody. The grittiness of Madison Square Garden gives me chills every time I walk into it. Patrick Ewing, John Starks, and Rodger Mason were some of the toughest and most ruthless players I've ever watched. My father would always take my family and me to Knick games at the Garden. Remember the game when John Starks threw down over Jordan? I was there. It was the best environment I've ever been in. I'll tell you something though, none of these NBA stars compared to my favorite player. His name was Charlie, Charlie Anderson. You've probably never heard his name before; well, I'm going to tell you his story. He was my oldest friend, teammate, and brother. This is the story about how my brother's love for me and the sport of basketball saved my life.

All I've ever wanted to do in my life was to be a baller. Not one of those crazy NBA stars, but someone who was known and respected around his block. However, that's not the message my pops tried to drill into my head. Basketball was his own Holy Grail. Without me or my brother playing, he'd probably go insane. Everyone on his side of the family was a great player. His father was the captain of Columbia University and his two brothers played at St. John's, while he played for Indiana. It was basketball over everything for my dad. He was (how can I explain him in one word...?) 'Deranged.' Yeah, that fits his description pretty spot on. A man who only had respect for those who had athletic capability. Honestly, I didn't like being his son. In fact, I loathed it. Every team we played would give me dirty looks because my dad, our coach, would yell or scream at them. He wasn't a nice person and let people know that he was gonna get what he wanted. He thought that just because his son was a superstar athlete, it made him a better person. Oh by the way, I'm not talking about me when I say "superstar athlete," I'm talking about Charlie, my brother. The best role model I've ever had.

Charlie was the type of kid that everyone knew, and even if he didn't know you, you have probably heard his name while walking around Lincoln High School. He was the man on the campus. He hit all the game winning shots, had a nice car. Oh, don't get me started with his girlfriend either. Smoking, for better use of vocabulary, dazzling. Ellen Adams. Just saying her name gives me chills down my spine. Silky black hair cascades down to her lower back. Her skin is as smooth as new cotton sheets, and she walks with a swagger that made every kid in school turn their entire bodies around to check her out. Her voice was the softest sounding thing a man could ever hear. Just a few words can console anybody and put him into a place of peace. He pretty much had the life any high school kid would want.

"Hey Charlie! Good shooting last night kid!"

That's my neighbor Mr. Berry. He has been at every game Lincoln has played in the last twenty years. He knew everything there is to know about New York City high school ball. Always on his front porch listening to his transistor radio, as were most elderly people in my neighborhood. He was old and wrinkly, but had amazing

sense of humor. Always laughing aggressively at his own jokes, which would consequently make you laugh even harder. The thing about Mr. Berry that is odd is that he wasn't a great basketball player. He never made the team; he was the equipment manager instead. The year Lincoln won states he was given a ring by the coach. I've actually never seen him without it on; even though he didn't play, he was a part of the team. That was good enough.

"Thanks, Mr. Berry, means a bunch."

"Keep shooting lights out like that, and you'll make everyone around ya better. One day you and your bro will be holding up that NYC trophy." He was smiling.

"Now wouldn't that be something Mr. Berry? I'll see you around."

As for me, I've never been what someone would call a "Broadway" player. I just did what I had to do. My pops paid more attention to Charlie anyways. Charlie always had my back though. Anytime there was a scrape on the court, Charlie would back me up in a heartbeat. I was known throughout the league as a scrapper. Someone who wasn't going to make the game-winning shot or have fifty points. I was someone who would hustle and give every breath I had until the game was finished. That's why coaches loved to have my brother and me on teams. We had "street ball chemistry." I'd always know where to find him on the court. Charlie and I were the perfect duo on the court. We were peas in a pod, mustard and hotdogs - you get what I'm saying. I still think about one moment that changed everything, in a split second. How can everything change in a split second? You're about to find out.

It was July, hot and sweaty. And if you grew up in the Bronx, you know that summers can get rough. Charlie and I played on this summer ball team called the "Bronx Bombers." It was a league for scouts to come and check out players. Charlie had received a letter from the head coach over at Georgetown. It was always his dream to play ball there and follow the footsteps of guys like Patrick Ewing. This is how it went down; we were up three at halftime.

"OK, fellas, we're in a dogfight here. We gotta keep playing this game the way I've been teaching you guys. We're gonna get Charlie in there and see what kind of offense we can get, since he's the only player on this damn team who seems to actually try." My dad being unreasonable, as usual. "We have to keep moving the rock around, and will somebody please make an open shot?!"

No matter the score my angry father was always yelling about something. I had to give him some credit; he knew the game as well as anyone I know. He knew just about everything there is to know about the Knicks and the history of Madison Square Garden. He was at the game where Willis Reed famously made entrance in game seven of the finals versus the Lakers. He was at the game where Clyde Frazier dropped 35 points and 12 assists in game six of the eastern conference finals against Boston. The Knicks were, and still are a very important part of my life. But before I get off topic let's get back to this game. Halftime, my dad's yelling at everyone, being crazy.

"Dad, how are we supposed to...?"

“Robby I don’t want to hear anything out of you; you are playing like a bum, a street bum! You’re lucky all of our other point guards look just a terrible as you,” hollered my pops.

“Whatever you say Coach Anderson.”

“I swear Robby, don’t get smart with me; I’ll throw out of this game and our house. I’m the coach, the boss, you answer to me. You do something wrong, you own up to it and say, ‘it won’t happen again!’”

“How am I supposed play when I...?”

Charlie quickly pulled me aside and calmed me down before I said anything stupid. “C’mon little bro, he’s not worth it. Just show him you can play with me, I’ll help ya out.”

As the game started up again, so did the dogfight. Charlie was putting on a show, as was the other team’s shooting guard. Bobby Sampson of Fordham Prep High School. He was going to play ball the following year at Kansas. Back and forth Charlie and Bobby were going; it was pretty amazing to watch. At the end of the third, it was knotted up at 50. The very next play, I stole Bobby’s pass and had a fast break with Charlie. This is where we excelled, in the fast break. The lob went up, and the slam went down. Except Charlie didn’t get up. I’ve never heard anyone scream as viciously as Charlie did that day. My dad’s facial expression was one of someone who just witnessed death.

“Charlie! Char... Oh god no,” My dad said in awe.

He ran over to Charlie’s side before I could realize what was happening.

“Bobby, move out the way; Charlie, you’re OK right? Come on let’s get you up. Don’t worry you’re going to be alright.”

“Dad he can’t play! He needs an ambulance right now.”

“He’s fine! Besides we need him to win this game,” he demanded.

“You’re a selfish piece of garbage. Don’t sit there and say we need him to win; he’s going to the hospital.”

Without listening to what my dad said, I ran to the nearest pay phone. Mr. Berry was already dialing 911.

“Yeah, 911? A kid messed his damn knee up bad. We are at Lincoln High School, you know the one near the church...the big church with the... yeah that’s the one. The young kid is messed up badly; y’all gotta hurry up.”

“Alright boys, go check up on ya brotha, I’ll wait out here for the ambulance.”

The ambulance arrived about ten minutes later. They rushed Charlie to the hospital. Waiting there already were Mr. Berry and Bobby Sampson, surprisingly. He

and Charlie became good friends off the court; I guess I just didn't realize at the time. I saw him and my brother occasionally playing at the street courts but didn't realize they hung out on the regular. My father and mother were there also, in case I didn't mention it before, I do have a mother. She was just so down to earth that you could be alone in a room with her and not even realize she was there. A really nice woman: cooked, cleaned, took care of us, but there just wasn't much to her really. Sounds sad, but she always had a smile on her face.

"Anderson, Charlie?" said the nurse, when she walked out of the emergency room.

"Yes that's me, I'm his father. How is he? Is he going to be alright?"

"Charlie tour several parts of his ACL and MCL tendons. He won't be able to walk for about two weeks. After the two weeks he'll go on crutches for about three months, and then he'll..."

"Hold on hold on, is what you're telling me is that he isn't going to be able to play for another few months? That's absurd! Do your job. How could you let this happen? Fix him!"

The nurse said something I'll never forget. It actually put a smile on my face. "Mister there are more important things in this world than basketball."

It shut my dad up. He had such a cold, blank look on his face. It was the only time I've ever seen him vulnerable. He had nobody to turn to, nobody to be mad at, but himself.

I made my way into Charlie's room. You couldn't even tell that he was injured. He had this big dorky smile on his face when Bobby and I walked in the room. He greeted us as if it were the first time we saw him today.

"What's happening fellas? Rob, did we end up winning?"

"No, we lost by four. This guy had sixteen in the fourth quarter alone," I replied.

"Only cuz I wasn't there Bobby; I don't want you getting your hopes up," he joked.

"Yeah, whatever, son. How you feeling? You fell pretty hard out there. Had my mother praying all day for you to get better," Bobby said.

"Your mother is great; she's always looking out for me, huh?"

"Yeah, you know her man- religious, black, and emotional. Pretty much how every black mother is around these parts, ya know?"

"For sure man. The G-town coach came in here. Says I'm still up for scholarship as long as rehab goes well. Should take a while, but they have a great physical

therapist over there. He should get me back in shape. I'll be fine, just gotta be patient. It's not like I can't get in anyways; I got some stellar grades."

A few months later I was going into my senior year of high school, and all was well. My last season of ball was about to start. Charlie was at Georgetown recovering, my mother was happy (as always), and my dad didn't really pay attention to me. That sounds bad, but after the injury he was never the same. I mean, yeah, he came to my games, but wasn't enthusiastic; I guess watching me wasn't the same as watching Charlie. Something at this point has been bothering me for a while. During the second half of games I'm feeling gassed and dizzy. Almost like I'm out of shape. I wasn't though. I was about six feet on the dot, and weight 200lbs. Muscle weight not fat. Probably the strongest I've ever been, too. I knew something was wrong with my health. But, I decided not to worry about it and play through the pain.

Our next game was against Fordham Prep. The biggest high school rivalry in the Bronx. If you lived here, you knew about it. Every year we played Fordham Prep twice. Once on their court, and once on ours. Alumni, college kids, and people from all over New York came to watch us play. We were playing at home that Friday night. Everyone I knew was there. All the kids I play street ball with, Mr. Berry of course, Charlie and Bobby came back from school to watch, plus my father and mother. Charlie said he had a big announcement to make. I thought he maybe would declare for the NBA draft. That's crazy to think about, my big bro in the league. Playing against Jordan and Kobe? I'll get to that later. Let's get back to this game against Fordham Prep. Ellen was even there with Charlie. She was studying at Indiana. She and Charlie took some time off but got back together. Anyways, this was the most packed I've ever seen our gym. It was a beautiful sight, something out of a dream. When they announced the starting lineups for Lincoln I felt like Willis Reed coming out of the tunnel of The Garden. A moment I'll never forget. I'll cut right to the chase. So remember how I was feeling strange at the end of games? Yeah, well playing through the pain almost killed me. I was dribbling the ball up the court and felt a sharp pain in my chest. I tried to keep dribbling and call out a play, but I couldn't speak. It was almost like I had too much to drink and needed to be carried home. I stopped dribbling and tried to hold the ball, but it felt heavier than a bowling ball. I was sweating intensely. My legs were shaking, and I felt as if I couldn't hold my own body weight. I dropped to the floor. I was in shock; I had no idea where I was. The only thing I remember after that was Charlie, Bobby, and Ellen running toward me. I was put onto a stretcher by paramedics. Then, everything went black.

The next day I woke up around eleven. My mother, Bobby, Ellen and Mr. Berry were all waiting outside. No dad though. He left the night I went into the hospital. I didn't want to see him anyways. I still felt pain in my chest, and his face would only make it sharper. Everyone came in and gave me flowers and stuff like that. I even got a kiss on the cheek from Ellen. Made me blush a little, can't lie. But then the doctor came in with Charlie talking about college ball. My mother happened to be in the room already.

"How are feeling Rob? You had us all really scared for a second," The friendly doctor said to me.

"Yeah. There's still a hard pain in my chest, but not as bad as yesterday."

“Sounds like the medication is doing its job. Listen, Rob, what you have is a rare condition. It’s something that is hard to treat. It’s a very serious matter, and that’s why there’s a pain trapped in your chest. You have a condition called cardiomegaly. It has to do with your heart.”

“Is he going to be ok?!” Charlie stuttered. He was so nervous.

The doctor paused for a while before he responded. At this point I could barely breathe because I was so anxious. “This may be hard to comprehend.”

“What? Am I going to die or something? I have my whole f**king life ahead of me. I can’t die now. I can’t die now.”

“Rob, your heart is too big for your body, and your body is still growing. If you continue to play basketball or engage in physical activity, you will die. But you will live a long life if you don’t perform any activities.”

I let it all sink in. No more basketball. No more anything. I’ll just sit on the couch like a blob. I let out a scream and couldn’t stop. Tears pouring like waterfalls until they calmed me down.

Sometime later Charlie came into the room, hobbling on his bum knee. “What’s happening, little bro? Everyone sends their best.” I didn’t reply. I felt as if I couldn’t find a way to talk. “Listen I’m going to get down to the point since I know you’re upset. I’m sick man. Like real sick.” I suddenly found a way to talk and said the first thing that came to my mind. “How? What, you? What’s wrong?”

“The doctor said that I’m developing stage three brain...”

“Don’t tell me this, Charlie! I know this can’t happen to you. You’re superman, the un-killable athlete from the Bronx. You’re almost ready to get back on the court.”

Turns out that this big announcement was that he had stage three brain cancer.

“No, little bro, I’m not. If there was ever a time for me to say something to you, the time is now.” I’ve never heard him talk this deeply before, never this kind of mood. I immediately started to cry, as I thought this might be the last time I see my brother.

“They think I have a year left. I can both travel the world and accomplish mediocre things in my last year, or I can do you one last favor. You need a heart, I have a strong one. I’m going to give you my heart so that you can play ball again. And live a full life.”

“I don’t care about ball, I can’t live without...”

“Listen to me man! Nothing is going to change my mind right now. The doctor said the best thing to do for you is to have a heart transplant. That’s what I’m doing. What’s life without being active, without playing ball around the corner? Without go-

ing to parties with your friends? You'll kill yourself. I love you more than anything in this world. Don't make this harder than it is."

"What about Georgetown? What about the pros? What about dad?"

"My dream was to play basketball with you on any team. Whether it is street ball, high school, or summer league, all I wanted to do was play with you, and I did. It wasn't the same at Georgetown without you running my offense. You are the most important thing to me, and I can't watch you suffer like this. Oh, and dad? He's selfish, doesn't care about anyone except himself. Nobody."

At this point I couldn't believe this was my reality. This can't be happening. Just five days ago I was in a dream like atmosphere, now it all perished in front of my eyes. Rubble. I didn't know what to do besides listen to my brother.

"Bobby, Ellen, Mr. Berry, Ma, they're all gonna look out for you."

"I'm going to... going to miss you so much man. Why do you have to leave? Why can't we just be OK? There are other hearts I can find. I don't deserve yours."

"I'll always be with you man, in here." He put his hand on my chest and gazed deep into my eyes. Tears poured endlessly down our faces. I felt as if someone had just dropped an atomic bomb into my life. I was nothing without him, without Charlie. The operation was two weeks later. We were placed next to each other in a room. A drop rolled down my eyes as we looked into each other's minds. I could vaguely see his face smiling at me as I drifted into no man's lands thoroughly sedated. The operation took everything I had. I made a promise to myself. I promised myself that I would be like Charlie, not just on the court, but off as well. I was going to help people, make people smile as did Charlie.

Bobby and Ellen picked me up from the hospital when I recovered.

"I'll see you around. Call either of us later okay, Robby boy?" soothed Ellen. As I was walking around I saw Mr. Berry sitting on his porch as he always does.

"Robert."

"How you doing Mr. Berry?"

"I should be asking you that. How you feeling boy?"

"I've been better, no more chest pains."

"That's cuz you got the heart of a champion inside you." He walked off his porch toward me. Your brother Charlie was the bravest son of a gun I've ever had the honor of meeting. Never backed down from nobody. You should be damn proud of what he did. He's gonna be part of you forever. Don't you forget that."

"I know Mr. Berry; I'm proud of him. Every moment and every day I'll be thinking bout him."

I walked to our neighborhood court to see if anyone was playing. Bobby was there. When he saw me, he jogged over. "What's cracking bro? Good to see you getting outside already." He noticed how distraught I looked and put his arm on my shoulder. Look man, Charlie was my boy, I loved him, and I can't stand to see you like this. There's nothing I can say to make you feel better, but time will make up for it. Maybe for old time sake we can ball up, help your boys get a win in the old neighborhood."

"Yeah man, that's all I want to do right now. Get my mind off things. I don't know how good I'll be without my brother though."

We started walking to the court before he said, "Hey man... ya still have one brotha left to play with."

I smiled for the first time since the operation. I couldn't be more thankful for everything Charlie taught me. He taught me everything I know about life. He was more of a father to me than my own dad. Today marks the fifth year since his death, and I'm going to the same street court where Charlie and I started playing.

Every year we have a three-on-three basketball tournament. Radio stations, celebrities, more come every year. Last year, Bobby, a kid from my old high school team, and I played. We won the entire thing. Not too bad for a kid with a heart replacement. This year we got Tracey McGrady to play. Nothing like seeing one of my favorite players face to face. ESPN signed on to complete a documentary on my brother and me too.

I still always look up to the sky, hoping to see my brother's face in the clouds. I never stop thinking about him. His soul will forever be imbedded into our neighborhood. He's always been a part of me and always will be. A brother's love can drive someone insane trying to accomplish his dreams. It can give someone the courage to stand up for himself. A brother's love is a different kind of love, one that stays with you past your grave, just like Charlie's love.

- John Russo

Rolling Rock

I don't even know how to start this. It was late August, and I had recently decided that I would attend the University of Colorado in Boulder for the fall semester. After a long four years of earning and burning my way through high school, I was finally ready to let loose. I come from a large, lower-middle class home with four other family members. My mother and father were very caring and would have done anything for me. My mother attended FIT in New York City while my father went to the University of Nebraska, where he played Division One football and was considered to be "the big man" on campus. They both made a decent living on Long Island and privileged me whenever they could, but money can be tight sometimes. They were excited for me when I got accepted into such a large school; they both agreed that it would be a good thing to make some new friends. I wasn't the most popular kid in high school, so getting into a school with a large campus and a great student body was probably the best thing for me. As school started, I had a rough time making friends. Actually, I had no time making friends. The closest friend I had was my roommate and all he did was come home drunk with a girl even drunker than he was. But it was cool, I guess. I helped him with his homework, and he gave me some tips on how to be "chill."

My parents knew about my struggle, so my mom sent my dad over to give me some pointers on how to socialize. "You need to go out more, Buddy. You can't just be cooped up in your dorm all the time finishing homework and making your hip-hop beats on your little computer. Maybe share some of them with your roommate? I don't know... you said he likes to go out a lot, so maybe he can use them at a party. I honestly don't know because I made my friends through football. Why don't you go to a game? The Boulders are really good this year. I'm not sure if all they do at football games is get drunk and chant things. Listen son, I'm not telling you to get drunk. I'm not telling you to get into trouble. But all I can say is that it could loosen you up a little bit and help you make some friends."

I tried to take in my father's advice to better my problem; I'm not going to lie, I took a very drastic and sudden approach to his advice. It was a Thursday afternoon, and my roommate wasn't home. He had a mini fridge filled with beer, so I decided to take one. It felt pretty good to just relax and work on some music. I decided to play it aloud for my roommate to hear rather than in my headphones. As he walked in, I turned it down so we could hear each other talk. He noticed I was drinking and, in a laughing manner, said my name, "Dean is drinking! Nooo wayy!"

I replied with laughter, not really knowing what to say in this awkward situation. I mumbled out, "Yeah, I stole one of your beers, haha."

"Hey, all good man, I'm glad to see you're loosening up. Just don't do it again. What are you listening to? Are there any lyrics or is this just the beat?"

"It's just the beat," I replied nervously, adding in that I made it.

"Wait, seriously?" he said in shock, "You made this?"

Laughing, I asked, "You like it?"

He seemed very interested and replied, "Well yeah, it's cool I guess."

I knew at that moment that he started to look at me differently. As a couple weeks passed by, I was invited to a couple parties, and I started making new friends. I lost complete interest in my music, but at that point all I really cared about was hanging out with this new group of people. They were really into smoking marijuana, drinking, and doing other drugs, which was cool and all, you know? It gave me a chance to try new things. I used the drugs sometimes, mushrooms, molly, e, cocaine, marijuana, and, of course, drinking almost every night. I embraced this new life, and I thought it was nice having friends and meeting new girls all the time. There was this one girl that really stuck with me, and we decided to become exclusive. Her name was Alexa; she was really nice and pretty. We would always get "messed up," and when one of us got too high or drunk, we would rub each other's back while we threw up. It doesn't sound romantic, but trust me it was. Going to football games was the best. The energy that the field, players, and rest of the crowd gave me was a high that a drug couldn't come close to.

It was a Friday night game, and the Boulders were playing Missouri. It was a pretty intense game to say the least. As always, we did our pregame ritual with booze, marijuana, pills, and basically anything that would get us as messed up as humanly possible. Although I'd done many drugs before then, I never usually mixed them. I had been told it's a deadly combination. Completely disregarding the warnings, I mixed mushrooms with cocaine and alcohol. It felt pretty good for the first hour, and Alexa told me she'd take care of me if I wasn't feeling well. She had my back, as always. The game went into overtime, so things got a little out of hand; I was drinking through the entire game just to keep my high, which was extremely strong throughout the game. Before overtime started, I told Alexa that I wasn't feeling well. It was weird though. She didn't seem to be that high or drunk, but I didn't know why I was pretty messed up.

I was stumbling to the bathroom, trying to hide my high from the security guards when I saw Alexa and my roommate walking in the opposite direction. At first I thought to myself, "That can't be anything. My roommate wouldn't do that to me." Then I realized they were holding hands. Then they kissed. I couldn't believe it. I could not believe it. I thought I loved her, and I thought she loved me too. I started to feel this rage coming over me, but it was just the vomit I had sitting in my mouth. I ran into the bathroom, which was luckily empty. I yacked my brains out and stumbled over to the sink to wash my mouth. Once I got the vomit taste out of my mouth, I looked up and saw someone I thought I recognized in the mirror. It was my reflection. I stared for a good minute before I realized it was me. I reminisced on my first day at college: I had short hair and wore button-up slacks and glasses. Now look at me. Long hair, ripped T-shirt, cruddy shorts, one blood shot eye, and a scruffy beard that hadn't been shaved in weeks. I didn't like this. I didn't like it one bit. The drugs had started taking over, fueled by the rage from my first friend and my first love screwing me over. I screamed once to let out some anger, but it was not enough. I banged my fist on the sink; a little better. I did it again and calmed down, leaning my head against the mirror. And the same thought of how innocent I was on the first day of college came into my head, and I let out a tear. More start falling from my blood-shot eyes, and I start lightly hitting my head against the mirror in frustration. "No

pain,” I thought to myself. “Nothing could hurt more than what just happened to me.” I continued to bang my head against the clear-cut mirror. Harder, harder, harder. I thought about Alexa kissing someone else and banged my head even harder when I remembered that it was my roommate. The mirror cracked, but still no pain was felt. Harder, harder, harder! The mirror shattered, and I noticed blood coming from my head. There was nothing left from the mirror. Nothing more I could look at in disgust. Good timing too, because I had either passed out from the drugs or the loss of blood.

I woke up in a hospital the next day with serious brain damage and a broken wrist. Next to me were my loving parents that were ready to support me. It was the best possible sight I could’ve woken up to. Later that week, I transferred from Colorado to a school on Long Island close to my home. I haven’t heard from my roommate or Alexa since the incident. It wasn’t the best experience, but it was a perfect learning experience. I live with a rare disability that doesn’t allow me to get drunk or play sports, but for some reason it left me with better hearing. I’m now majoring in music business, and I continue to make beats. I’ve recently sold over 100 beats in the last month for about \$600 a pop. Life is better now, and I’m happy I can spend it with my parents with a clear head, rather than alone with no control over my body.

- Bryan Murchison



- Ekaterina Koulakova

Into the Darkness

Mr. and Mrs. Buckley were a married couple who had a daughter that was about four years old. Her name was Lucy. She had short, dirty blonde hair and these spectacular blue eyes. She was a good child, and it was expected of her to be a lovely young lady when she grew up. She never got into trouble, and she had always respected her parents by following the rules of the house. The Buckley family lived in a quiet, private neighborhood that was cut off from the rest of the town of Louisville. They lived in this big colonial house that was white with blue shutters, obviously showing the family's wealth.

It was a nice, quiet Saturday night, and the Buckley house was silent. The doors and windows were shut tight, the security alarm was set, and everyone was sound asleep. Hours sped by, but when the clock hit midnight everything started to change.

"AHHHHHHHHHH!!!! HELP! Mommy! Daddy! Helpppp!" Lucy screamed. The Buckley couple woke up, hearts beating fast, and jumped out of bed so quickly that they almost fell on their faces. Waking up to the screams of their daughter was probably the scariest thing they had ever experienced. They ran down the hallway as quickly as they could and entered Lucy's bedroom. The bedroom was empty. The blankets on Lucy's bed were ruffled, but Lucy wasn't there. They looked around the bedroom frantically and noticed that nothing was wrong, except that their daughter has disappeared.

"Tom, where the hell is she?!" Mrs. Buckley asked, with a worried look on her face.

"I have no freaking idea! We just heard her a minute ago!" Thomas Buckley replied.

They both ran downstairs and went frantically around the house looking for Lucy. They searched under tables and couches and even checked outside, but they had no idea where she was.

"Lucy! Where are you, darling?!" screamed Mrs. Buckley.

A few seconds passed by, and there was no answer.

"Lucy?!" Mr. Buckley yelled.

"Mommy? Daddy? Where are you?!" replied Lucy as her voiced wavered.

"Honey! Do you hear me?! Where are you? We can't find you!" yelled Mrs. Buckley.

"I don't know! I'm scared! Please help me!"

"We can't see you! Where are you?!" replied Mr. Buckley with a stern voice.

“I don’t know!”

“Honey, keep talking. We will follow your voice,” Mrs. Buckley suggested.

“Okay, well I am over here! It’s very dark, and I don’t know where I am,” Lucy described.

The Buckley couple followed the sound of Lucy’s voice around the house. Her voice led them upstairs and down the hall to the doorway of Lucy’s bedroom.

“Wait, we were just here, but she wasn’t there. What is going on Thomas?!” Susan Buckley asked while tears were streaming down her face.

“I don’t know, okay?! Lucy!? Where are you?! Can you still hear me, sweetie?!” asked Mr. Buckley.

“Over here! I can’t see anything, it’s too dark.”

Mr. and Mrs. Buckley checked around the bedroom for the third time. They also searched in dark areas, like the closet and under her bed, but she wasn’t there.

“Talk again. Please, Lucy.” Mr. Buckley asked.

“Over here! Daddy! Please help, I’m scared,” Lucy said, voice shaking.

“I’m trying. I need you to talk more, okay? This will help us find you.”

“Okay, please hurry, I’m scared. I am over here,” Lucy replied.

“Wait, Thomas, it seems like her voice is coming from over here.” Mrs. Buckley said. She went over to an empty wall painted pink across from Lucy’s bed. Mrs. Buckley started to feel the wall to see if something was there or if there was some way her daughter was in it. She began touching it with her fingers until she realized that there was an entrance in the wall. The wall shook, and it seemed like there was something on the other side.

“What the hell? Thomas, go on the other side into the next room to see if this leads somewhere,” Mrs. Buckley said.

Mr. Buckley ran out of the bedroom and into his office, which was the room next to Lucy’s. On the other side of the wall, where the opening of the wall should have been, there was nothing. It seemed like a regular wall. “This doesn’t make sense,” Mr. Buckley thought. “Where the hell is she?”

Mr. Buckley returned to Lucy’s room with a straight face. He was pale, as if he had seen a ghost.

“Hun, are you okay? What just happened? Is she there?” Mrs. Buckley asked with a concerned voice.

“She’s not there. It’s a regular wall.”

"That doesn't make sense. Are you sure? Thomas, she is definitely in this wall. She has to be. But where does this go? How the hell did she get in there?!" Mrs. Buckley asked.

"Susan! I don't know, okay? We will get her, I promise. I will go in there and get her if that's the only thing that will save our daughter," Mr. Buckley said.

"No, it's too dangerous. We have to call someone. The police?"

"No, we can't. They will think we are crazy or something. They won't believe us."

"So who? We need to get our baby out of there! Wait! Maybe Robert?" Mrs. Buckley suggested.

Robert was a close friend of the Buckley family. He knew Mr. Buckley ever since high school, and they had gone to college together. He was the town's priest. Robert was a good person. He always babysat Lucy when she was a baby, helping around the house and the neighborhood.

Mrs. Buckley quickly ran to get her cell phone off her dresser in the bedroom. She speed-dialed Robert's number as fast as she could.

"Robert?!" Mrs. Buckley asked.

"Why yes. Hello, Susan, how are you?" Robert answered.

"We are in trouble. Uh, I don't want you to think that I'm crazy but... Lucy is inside a wall," Mrs. Buckley described.

"What do you mean a wall?" Robert questioned.

"Just come over here as quickly as you can if you don't believe me," Mrs. Buckley said. She quickly hung up on Robert and ran back to Lucy's bedroom.

After ten minutes passed, the doorbell rang. The Buckley couple ran downstairs and answered the door. It was Robert.

"Hello Robert, we're in a hurry. Come quick!" Mr. Buckley said in a serious tone.

Robert and the Buckley couple ran upstairs as fast as they could. They entered Lucy's bedroom, and Robert stood still in shock.

"Lucy, baby, are you okay?" Mrs. Buckley asked in a concerned voice.

"Mommy, I can't find a way out. It's too dark. Wait. I see a light Mommy!" Lucy said.

"What do you mean a light? Hold on Lucy I will stick my hand out, see if you

can grab it,” Mrs. Buckley said.

Mrs. Buckley stuck her hand through the wall. She didn’t feel anything except for emptiness.

“Lucy, can you see or feel my hand?”

“No, I can’t. It’s too dark. I can’t see or feel anything. But there’s a light Mommy! It’s so pretty.”

“Lucy! No! Don’t go near that light! You don’t know where it leads to. Try to follow my voice and come find me.”

There was no response.

“Lucy?!”

Mrs. Buckley retracted her hand from the wall. “She’s gone, Tom! I have to go in there! I need to find her! I can’t lose my baby girl,” Mrs. Buckley said with tears streaming down her face.

“No! It’s way too dangerous. I can’t lose you, too,” Mr. Buckley said.

“I have to rescue her. I need to find her. Don’t worry. It’ll be okay, just stay here.”

“Wait,” Robert said. “I have some rope in the car. How about I tie it around your waist and you go in the wall? If you’re in trouble, your husband and I can pull you back out.”

“That sounds safer,” Mrs. Buckley said.

Robert quickly went downstairs and out the door to his car. He grabbed the rope out of the trunk and hastily ran back to Lucy’s bedroom. Robert wrapped the rope in a tight knot around Mrs. Buckley’s waist.

“Here, grab this end Tom,” Robert said.

Tom grabbed the rope and went to his wife.

“Be safe, honey. I will be right here if you need anything,” Thomas said.

“I love you. Don’t worry I’m going to get her,” Susan replied. She kissed her husband and turned toward the wall. She jumped down and landed on her feet. She reached for her flashlight in her back pocket and turned it on. It was very dark, with an oddly peaceful feeling of emptiness. No noise was made except for Mrs. Buckley’s footsteps. She walked around and tried to see the light that Lucy was talking about. She couldn’t find it.

There’s nothing here... thought Mrs. Buckley. “Lucy?! Where are you?” she

screamed.

There was no response, and Mrs. Buckley became more worried. She walked further into the darkness until she heard something weird. She turned around, but no one was there. She heard the people laughing and odd beeping sounds. Mrs. Buckley followed the sounds until she shined her flashlight on an obscure door. It was red and had a golden doorknob that was awkwardly designed. She was skeptical about opening it, but she needed to find her daughter. Mrs. Buckley cautiously opened the door. She was blinded by a light, but when she stepped inside the doorway things became clearer. Mrs. Buckley's eyes adjusted, and she noticed that she wasn't in the present anymore. It seemed like she was in a future of some sorts. Mrs. Buckley saw this different dimension as a stereotypical future. People were traveling in flying cars, robots were cleaning the streets, houses floated, and other unexplainable technology arose. Mrs. Buckley walked around the area, freaking out on the inside.

"Where the hell am I?" Mrs. Buckley thought. "How am I going to find Lucy?"

"Mommy? Is that really you?"

Mrs. Buckley heard this and was in complete shock. She turned around, and there Lucy was. Her little girl was safe. They both ran at each other and hugged each other.

"Oh my goodness! Are you okay? Never run away like that ever again! You could have gotten hurt!" Mrs. Buckley exclaimed.

"Don't worry, I won't. I'm sorry. I wanted to see what was in here," Lucy explained.

"It's okay. I was just worried sick about you. Actually, let's just check this place out," Mrs. Buckley suggested.

This new dimension was peculiar. Mrs. Buckley and Lucy walked down a nearby sidewalk and ended up in a town called Cyberspace. They looked around town until Mrs. Buckley noticed something was off. She noticed that the robots weren't your typical silver electrical robots with blinking lights and beeping buttons. They resembled humans. It was creepy. These devices rolled on wheels, but their bodies and faces appeared to be human faces.

"Uh, sweetie... we should get going. Daddy is probably worried about us," Mrs. Buckley said in an unsettling voice.

The duo walked back to where the red door was. While going back, Mrs. Buckley felt unnerved. She had the feeling that someone or something was watching them. She looked around and noticed that the creepy human robots were staring at both her and Lucy. Mrs. Buckley started to walk faster and had a worried look on her face. She picked up her daughter and began to jog with Lucy in her arms. Some of the robot humans were following her. She broke out in a sprint. Mrs. Buckley reached the door and opened it. It didn't lead anywhere.

“No! What the hell? Wait! The rope!” Mrs. Buckley thought. She reached for the rope and noticed that it led somewhere. She decided to follow it. As she reached the end of the rope, it seemed to cut off, right into a brick wall. She was trapped with Lucy still in her arms.

“No, this can’t be happening! Why can’t we go home? Where are we?!” Mrs. Buckley screamed.

“Mommy, it’s okay. We’re safe,” Lucy said.

“What are you talking about honey? We are trapped!” Mrs. Buckley yelled. She looked down at her daughter. Something was wrong. Lucy wasn’t a human anymore. She had turned into a robot disguised as a human.

“NO!!!” Mrs. Buckley screamed. She threw “Lucy” on the ground. Robot humans were coming towards her, and she was trapped. Surrounding her was a brick wall that led to nowhere.

“Come with us. You’ll be safe,” the robot humans started saying the same phrase in unison over and over again.

“No! Stop doing this! What do you want from me?!” Mrs. Buckley screamed.

Hundreds of robot humans kept coming at her. Mrs. Buckley shrieked and put her hands over her face. “Stop!!! Get off of me!”

Mrs. Buckley leaned against the brick wall. Everything stopped. She opened her eyes, and realized she was on a rug floor. She sat up and started calling for Lucy.

“Honey! What happened? Are you okay?!” Mr. Buckley asked.

“Wait, how...how did I get home?”

“What do you mean? You were here the whole time.”

“No I wasn’t! Lucy was trapped in a wall that led to another dimension, and... and these robots that were disguised as humans were trying to take Lucy and attacked me! Wait...where’s Lucy?”

“What do you mean where’s Lucy? Hun, she’s dead.”

“What?! No she... she was trapped in the wall! How do you not remember?!”

“Susan, Lucy died a year ago remember? She died in that car accident with Robert while he was taking her to school and we were at work.”

“No... Robert was there. He tied that rope around my waist! How do you not remember?! “

“That never happened, Susan.”

“Yes it did! The... the town was called Cyberspace, and it was inside Lucy’s bedroom wall.”

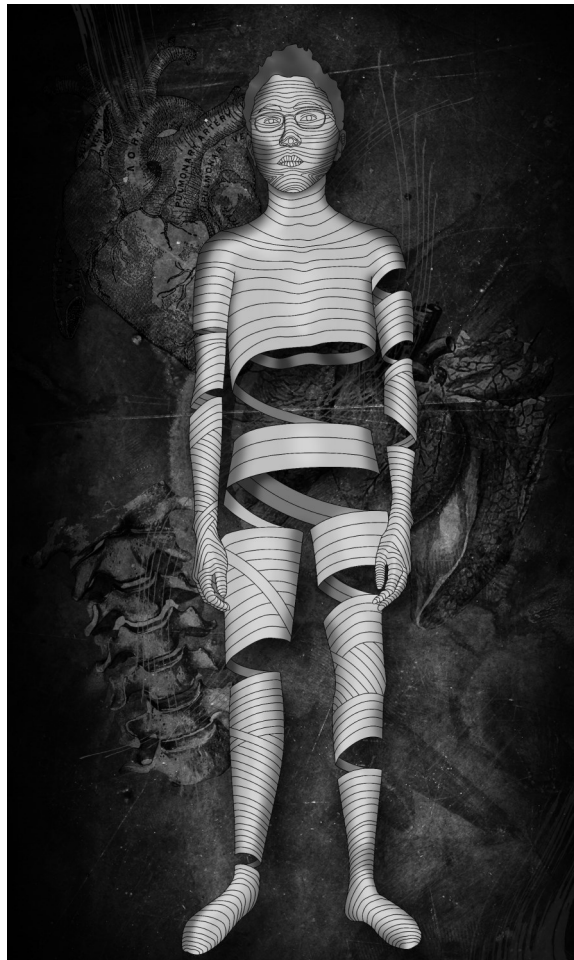
Mrs. Buckley couldn’t take it anymore. She ran to Lucy’s bedroom and went to the wall that she apparently walked through.

“No this was it! I was in that town! It was in this wall!” Mrs. Buckley screamed.

Mrs. Buckley turned around and saw Mr. Buckley at the doorway. Something was weird about him. He wasn’t his usual self.

“Susan, come with us. You’ll be safe,” he said with a smirk on his face.

- Hanae Wada



- Justin Meyer

As night fell, I continued to feed the half-rotted twigs to the fire while sitting on the thick log I had dragged over earlier. The small pile I had left would determine when I would climb into the safe comfort of my hammock and seal away the mysterious darkness of the northern Canadian woods of Chibougamau. Staring up at the night sky, I saw stars like never before. I could eventually see constellations like people did millennia ago. My eyes drifted from the illuminated sky back to the fire, and it became apparent that for the next two days I would be surrounded by nothing but forest and wildlife. That night I sat pondering the wilderness in which I resided. I wrote my thoughts in my journal while absently listening to the sounds of the night forest. One thing I knew from prior experience was that you do not want to try to go to sleep in the wilderness; sleep must be something that comes quickly. Noises you hear as you are trying to fall asleep start paranoia. However, this time it was different; it was real.

As I sat by the fire journaling, the noises in the woods changed. Normally, I would tell myself that it was the trees swaying in the wind, but this sounded more significant. I heard branches snapping and immediately looked up to where the noise was coming from. In the blend of the moonlight, starlight, and fire, I found myself staring into the eyes of a black bear. For a moment, I was completely paralyzed looking at the huge beast looking back at me. In a frantic panic, I groped for my whistle but could not find it. Retreating backwards towards the canoe lay down a small hill on the rocks in the cove, I lay for a while to catch my breath and digest what had just happened. Although I knew the giant animal could maul me without a problem, I was determined to see the bear again once I got over my fright. My one opportunity to see a bear in the wilderness, and I ran off to seek refuge. I slowly crept out of the canoe and back towards my hammock. Unable to find the path, I made my way through the thick blueberry bushes until I found the spot where I had been. By now, the starlight was bright enough to illuminate my campsite even though my fire had burned down to embers. There was my bright orange whistle sitting right in my hammock. Armed with more confidence, I could look for the bear and stay by my hammock and the fire.

All my senses were on high alert. Eventually, I was able to track him by the snuffling and crunching. The dry leaves rustled with his erratic steps as he moved slowly from bush to bush, taking his fill of ripe blueberries. It was a miracle. This massive predator, which could remove my head with one blow, chose instead to dine on nature's bounty and give me the most moving natural experience I have ever had. I pondered man's place, my place, in the grand scheme. We live such sheltered lives, surrounded by security and conveniences. As children, we are protected and nurtured. As I sat there in the enveloping darkness watching the bear fade into the shadows, I realized that my time as a child was drawing to a close. I would soon be an adult, facing the insecurities of life. Going back to watch the bear was the most courageous thing I had ever done. I was not afraid. I want that to be the person I become: strong, resilient, thoughtful, and brave.

- Anonymous

Secrets

Flesh-eating, burning bile:
confusion, choices, heartbreak.
You try to swallow it pragmatically.
But up again it rears its head,
deadening all of your senses.
Sheer will surges, hold it in.
You clasp a closed fist over your mouth.
Wipe away the bitter seeds of resentment
which run down from those putrid lips.
Chunks of truth weed their way
through the gaps in your teeth
emptying themselves into
the pockets of your cheeks
weighing down your smile
until there is nothing left
to smile about

-Ms. Molenko