

The Lost Art

McKinney High School

2013 - 2014
Volume I

The Lost Art

2014

In October, a group of students began meeting in my classroom every week to share their writing. We called ourselves the Literary Club. Our goal was simple: to create an anthology of student writing and art to share with the world. Over the course of many months, we spread the word that we would be publishing original work, and students from all grades stepped up to contribute. McKinney High School is filled with immensely talented writers and artists, and we planned to share this talent, a tradition that will hopefully last for years to come.

When we were brainstorming names for this anthology, we kept coming back to “The Lost Art.” It represents the words and stories and drawings which students have tucked away in notebooks and sketchbooks that stay hidden without a means to share them. It stands for the increasing trend toward standardization and away from creativity in education, which we at MHS are working to fight against. The students who shared their work in this collection each have their own unique voice and view of the world. Within these pages, they have shared their reality, their vision, their dreams and nightmares, and together it is a powerful chorus of authentic voices. How lucky we are to have found them!

This publication would not have been possible without an army of supporters. Special thanks to Dr. Faris, Kelly Armbruster, Kristen Spain, Gail Erger, Amanda Gavin, and the English department, who helped us collect student work, gather the funds, and encouraged us to make this dream a reality.

And to the students who joined the Literary Club and showed up every week to help put this book together, I cannot put into words how much your dedication to this project means to me! You sacrificed your time and energy week in and week out, and Volume 1 is only the beginning. You are each unbelievably gifted, and I have enjoyed every minute we worked together this year. I am honored to start this tradition with you and build the legacy of The Lost Art.

Sincerely,
Kaitlin Allen

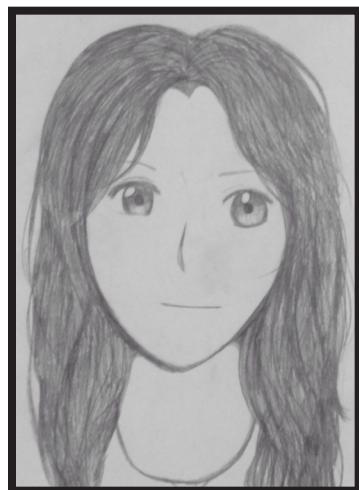


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Macilynn Avary

The Editors of *The Lost Art*



Vi Co



Julia Haberkern



Amy Huynh



Juan Mendez



Alex Mendoza



Teyah Murillo



Austin Reyes



Daniel Windham

Introduction

The world is not colorful; it's black and white.
This is what people would tell me, that there is only right and wrong.
No one had something to stand on to explain him or herself.
No one had a place to say what they want.
Well this time that will not be the case.
This time everybody will be heard.
Everyone will speak their minds; everyone will say what they have kept hidden from others.
These stories may be lost, but they will never be forgotten.

I never really thought this would become a big thing. We just worked little by little, and it became this big masterpiece.

It started with a thought.
A thought that inspired many.
Who knew a thought could be so powerful?

We had a small idea. A small desire. A small wish. Though with our determination and a bunch of inspiration, we were able to make what we have now. Our resolve was to make the first, of hopefully many, volumes of the anthology for McKinney High School! We had the ambition, the drive, and the dedication.

Please enjoy Volume 1 of *The Lost Art*.

Sincerely,
The Editors of *The Lost Art*

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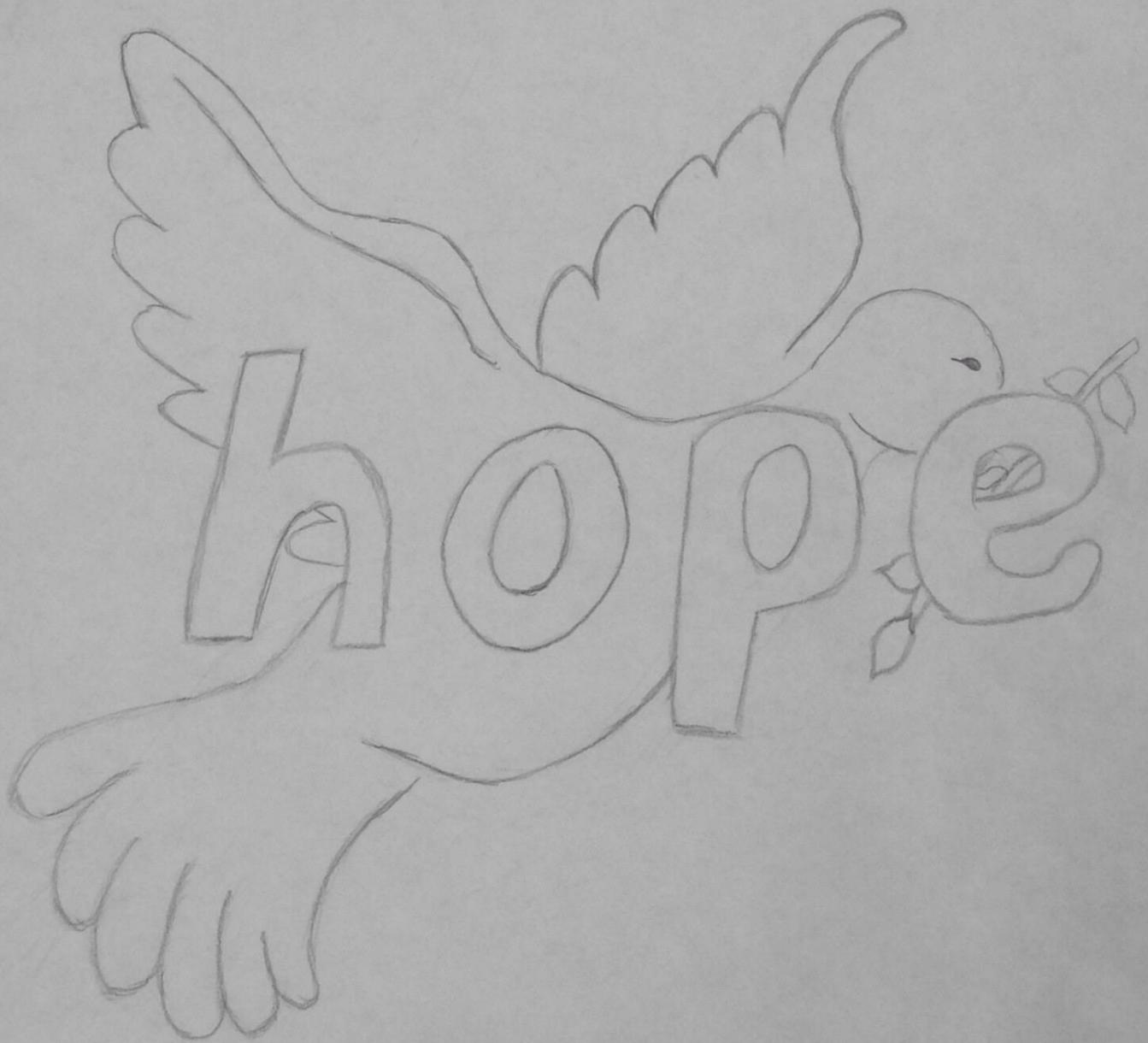
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Freedom

Lili Coto

Freedom is an everlasting hope
That once reached
Cannot be taken away.

A light breeze
Lightly caressing my face
The sun's rays
Illuminating my soul.

Freedom
I will not stop striving for you.

Wake Up

John Medina

If there was an answer, he'd find it there.

Your destination is your mind
because your answer is what you are trying to find.
If you seek an answer which you can't find in books or notes,
then the answer will be in your head.
You just have to figure it out yourself.

John is trying to find the answer he's been waiting for, which he would have to see in himself to get to his destination. John has been looking too closely into books and facts and stories. But he couldn't realize that the answer was in his head all along. He just has to look for it. To reach for it into his inner mind. John has to go through the obstacles in his mind to realize that he is in a coma. Overcoming these obstacles will make John strong-minded.

It's been 2 weeks that he's been in a coma, but in his mind it feels like he's been in a dream for years. All this started because John was at a school dance and decided to take pills with friends. The next thing John knew, he was lying on the floor face down. He passed out again, but this time he didn't wake up. He was in a coma.

John's heart was pounding really quickly because he is scared of not waking up, and he tries opening his eyes and can't. It is like there are weights on them. John doesn't know that he's in the hospital, but he knows he messed up taking those pills. He regrets ever doing it and ending up where he is now.

Then John finally wakes up.



Condolences

Teyah Murillo

Send my condolences to the queen. Sympathy is all I can give.

For I have not learned how to love, but learned how to live.

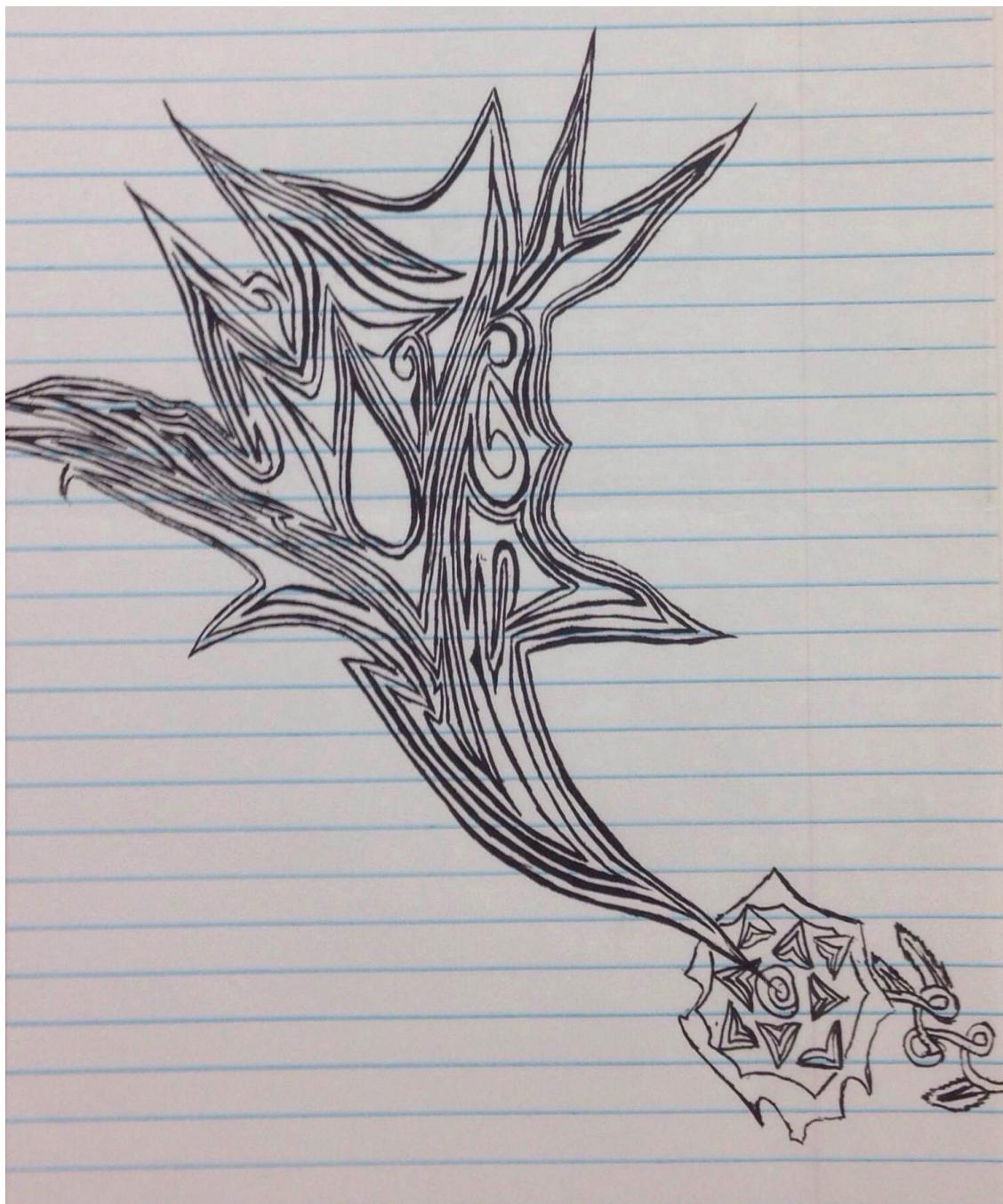
For them I will pray. Help them succeed to find a drive. Help them set a goal and strive.

Give them my hope. Tell them no worries, the duties have been paid. But then you realize, these people for their whole lives, they have been slaved.

I know these words are not enough. In fact, these words are so little. Voices can't fix bones but they can help souls from going brittle. I will hold onto my faith. Let us vanish the pain.

And may all the stress sink away like water down drains. Serve them their freedom on gold plates. They're not done. No! Give them a right. For them they will not back down without a fair fight. Tell the world they have arrived.

One day you all be friends, but right now I assure you this not the end.



The World Progresses, You're Frozen

Noah Schnelle

Problems? Are you drowning? Is the regret too much? The mistakes cut deep. You can't go back and fix them. You just have to live with the regret. No one made you feel the way those people did. Now you're always in constant thought. Thinking: what if?

Hopefully if I close my eyes long enough I'll be back with you guys. I wish this was a dream, possibly I could sleep at night. The people that said they would keep in touch didn't, but why not? Why did you have to go and lie to me? The days go by, you live with the problems. When people say they understand, they really don't. You can explain all you want, but they will never know the real origin of your problem. The friends start to fade. If you don't talk to people for a bit, you will figure out who is really there for you.

The time is coming. You are in complete shock. All you have done is put off your problem. You say bye; all of a sudden your problems are here to stay. You get something to remember her with, to remember home with. Everything is put into perspective. It feels as if the world progresses. You're frozen. You start to slowly fade out of the picture. Keeping in touch is getting harder. We don't have as much in common as we used to. Did you forget about me? Certain things I see or do remind me of what used to be. The pain drifts away. My mind isn't as foggy anymore. I stopped thinking about my problems drifted away.

As I lay in my bed, I get to thinking about what used to be. Two weeks passed, and it happened again. I say hey to you. I put my heart into this simple hello. Your reply makes me feel like we share the same problems.

Is the regret too much? Are you drowning like I am? Problems? Talk to me. Maybe you're just what I was needing, your missing puzzle piece. We're the same people. Maybe I'm the only one who sees it. Are you just oblivious to what I'm talking about. Problems? Are you drowning? Is the regret too much?

The Trickery of Sight

Justin Wollscheid

The sun and the moon. Always at constant ends of a varying timeline. The moon, with all its friends that shine so bright, but still dwell in being dwarfed in the beauty of itself. The sun, with his head always in the clouds, lives a more lonely life. He chooses to travel the sky alone. The moon has become so arrogant these days. Once per month it decides that we are not worthy of its pale beauty. It doesn't even show up to its own party. The sun, however, keeps himself forever humble, not willing to succumb to the pressures that come with fame. While the moon basks itself with glory, the sun provides the light necessary for others to grow.

You don't know anything.

Maybe the moon tries to surround herself with "friends" to ease a pain, to forget her suffering of a past trouble. Maybe the moon tries to seem so arrogant, so that you can't see how scared she is that she might be noticed. Maybe the reason the moon doesn't reveal herself once a month is because she stays to herself staring at her uncovered body, searching for something, anything, any reason why anyone would love her. Maybe the moon puts on a front so you can't see how weak and vulnerable she is.

Maybe the reason the sun travels alone is because it was exiled to a place where its light would be regularly doused to remind it that maybe not everything is about him. Maybe the sun was too proud of itself that is selfishly hoarded his light. Maybe there was a small curse placed on its head, so that the beings of the Earth could draw its heat and light and use it to help ourselves. Maybe, the sun was never humble until humbled.

The Meadow Caterpillar

Sydney Johns

This is the story of a little girl named Harriet Rose. She was only ten years old, and she lived in a small town near London, England called Flytea, which only had 200 people living there. Anyway, back to Harriet: she lived with her mum, her older brother Liam, and her little sister Zoe.

When Harriet was little before her dad died, she and he would do everything together. Her favorite place her dad took her was a little meadow by the swimming hole near her house. This meadow had a lot of caterpillars and butterflies. In fact, she met her best friend Chloe there. She and Chloe loved going horseback-riding and having a tea party at Chloe's house. One day, after her dad died, Harriet was going swimming at the watering hole and having a doll tea party with Chloe. Then she noticed a new sign in front of the meadow that said, "Coming soon: Hotel Classy." "Oh Chloe, I love this meadow. I have been coming here since I was two years old," cried Harriet. She had sweat all down her face, and her heart was beating like a cheetah running after her prey.

"I know, Harriet. I have always had my outdoor tea parties out here too. I really don't want the hotel here," said Chloe. "Harriet, it's tea time. Come home," yelled her mummy. "Coming, Mummy!" replied Harriet. In a bad mood, she said, "Mummy, they are building a hotel where the meadow is." "I don't care. Get in the tub and wash up, Harriet. Go now," said her mum. In her bed, talking to her stuffed animals, Harriet said, "Oh, Miss Kitty, Boobear, and Tambie, what am I going to do? I love that meadow. Oh, who am I kidding? You're toys. Oh, what am I going to do about the poor caterpillars and butterflies?" Just then, she saw a shooting star, and she closed her eyes, thinking of what to say. She said, "Star bright, star light, how I do wish tonight, I wish I could see how the caterpillars and butterflies feel about the new hotel. Good night."

Then Harriet fell asleep. The next morning, she awoke and screamed, "What the heck! Why am I in a lot of grass?" She got up and walked around, trying to see what was happening. Then she exclaimed, "Ahhh, oh my gosh, who are you? And what are you?" "I'm Joseph, and this is my sister, Ella, and we are caterpillars," he said. "I'm Harriet, Harriet Rose. I shouldn't be here. Where am I?" she said. "You are in Leaftown, the small village in the United Kingdom," said Joseph. "You need to run away from here. It's going to be destroyed tomorrow because they are building a fancy hotel in this place," said Harriet. "Oh my goodness, we need to tell the queen of the Butterflies and Caterpillars, Queen Isabella the First," said Ella. "Wait here, the castle is on the other side of the kingdom. It will take 5 or 6 hours to get there," said Joseph. "Well, how about taking the train to get there?" said Harriet. "OK," said Joseph and Ella at the same time.

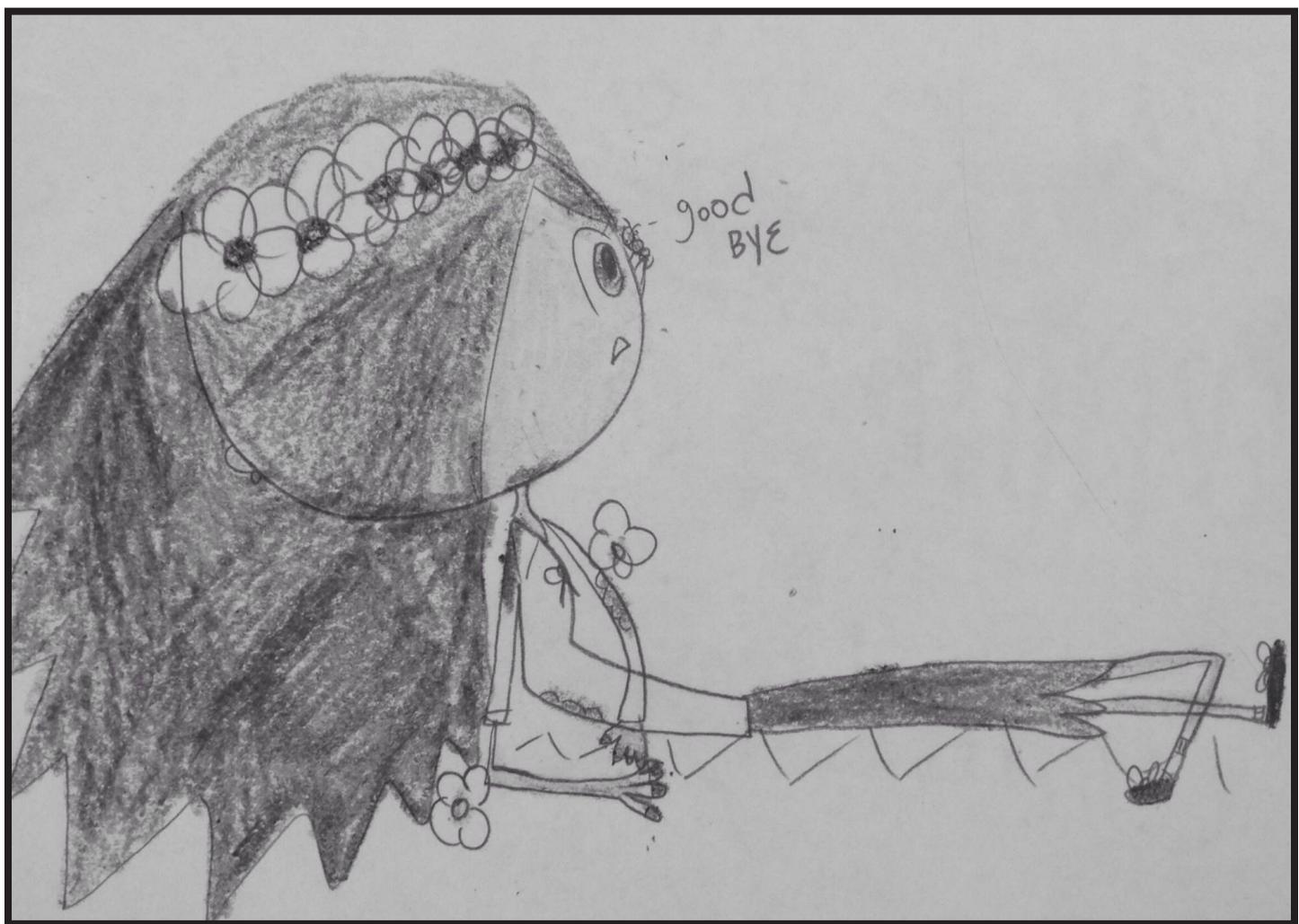
After 5 hours on the train, they finally got to Queen Isabella's castle. The only problem was the castle door had guards in front of it. "Halt! Who goes there?" asked the first guard. "It's Joseph and Ella Apples, and we need to talk to the queen," announced Joseph. "Oh fine, go ahead. Wait. Who is your friend?" said the second guard. Whispering in Harriet's ear, Ella said, "We need to disguise you so you can get in." After disguising Harriet as a butterfly, Ellas asked, "Harriet, what can be your fake name?" "What about Sophie Butterfly?" asked Joseph. "Ok, I guess," said Harriet.

So Harriet, Joseph, and Ella got past the guards and into the castle. "She may be in her bedroom having tea," said Ella. After looking for her room, they finally found it. "I'm sorry to bother you, Queen, but our kingdom is going to be destroyed," said Harriet. "Who are you, sweetie? I've never seen you before," asked the queen, drinking tea. "I'm Harriet Rose. I'm not a butterfly. I'm a human," she said. "Oh my, a real life human. Oh my gosh!" said the queen. "We need to save the meadow, your city, from being destroyed! What should we do?" asked Harriet.

"I know what to do about this. Come with me," said the queen. She whispered the plan to them quietly. "Ok, we got that. Thanks Queen Isabella," said Harriet. "No problem, lovelies, and you can call me Izzie from now on," said Queen Izzie.

It was a few weeks later, the day of the building of the new hotel. "OK, I'm ready to fight to save the meadow and your kingdom," shouted Harriet. "Yeah!" yelled Ella, Joseph, and all of the other butterflies and caterpillars in the kingdom. "1-2-3, let's go!" yelled Harriet. Then all of them swarmed as hard and fast as they can with swords, knives, and spears in their hands. "Ow ow ow, oh my gosh, that hurts!" said the construction workers. "We can give up! No hotel! Goodbye." "Yay!!!" shouted everyone.

The next day, the queen awarded them with medals. "For Ella for best costuming and helpfulness," said the queen, "For Joseph: for brains and kindness. And last but not least, Harriet Rose: for bravery and a great idea." "Thank you, Your Majesty," said the three. After the party was over, it was time for Harriet to return to her regular size. They shook fairy dust all over her, and she found herself in the grass of the meadow, surrounded by flowers, with a caterpillar in her hand. "Oh my, I'm back to normal. It was all just a dream," said Harriet. After running all the way to her house, she found her mother feeding Zoe and Liam doing homework. "Mum, Liam, I saved the meadow from turning into a dumb, fancy hotel," she said. "Harriet, there you are! We've been looking for you for a week! Look at you, you're all dirty! You need a bath. Then you can tell us what happened to you," said her mum. After her bath, she told them all about her day with in the Butterfly and Caterpillar Kingdom.



Sydney Johns

The Tattoo

Camille Trevino

This date is very important to me. This date changed my life forever. Not only is it a blessing, it's God's gift. The name is so beautiful. My aunt helped me pick it. I think of the singer every time I hear it. Her name just fits with her personality. The picture, the dragon, symbolizes strength. The dragon is used cause strength is needed to make it another day, make the impossible possible.



Camille Trevino

Game Day

Josue Aguilar

When I step on the football field, I can smell the turf. I get really pumped; it's game day. When I step on the field, all the stress and problems I have are gone. All I care about is my teammates, my family. I strap up my helmet and get in this mode. I see my opponent from the snap of the ball. All I have in my head is FIGHT! FIGHT! FIGHT! I don't care how big they are. I go by the motto, "The bigger they are, the harder they fall." I'm ready for my next opponent.

The Hero

Julia Haberkern

The loud bang that still renovated the walls had finally dimmed to a low hum, but had left scratches in the paint of the campus. A police officer had appeared at the end of the hallway and was practically screaming for caution. Many people were pushing and rushing to get out of the glass-plated doors, so much that there might have been an elephant among the mass. Yells and whispers of panic and rumor were already spreading amongst the students assembled on the cement.

Many were senseless observations that the bang was a bomb, or perhaps a shooting was occurring. They leaned in towards each other and hissed onto their skin, their breaths leaving a white vapor in the blue sky. Friends grouped together for comfort and refused to leave their circle, even when some people were left out of the equation.

Police cars, ambulances, and fire trucks were streaming into the parking lot; their tires left a loud screech on the red paint. When they emerged their faces were grim, and some were already gripping their guns. They raced across and entered the front building using their useless ages of training.

The sight did not ease the students. They grouped tighter, their colorless eyes fixed on the window pane which could very well have blood as its curtain. They could feel their hearts beat in the sun, and their pulses joined as one under the colorless sky. But these people were unborn, and so had yet to open their eyes.

When he had first pulled it out, the murderer, people scrambled out of their seats and took off much like cheetahs take after their prey; but they weren't the hunter. Those trapped between the rows of books and him, were forced to duck under their tables or cower behind the tiny bookshelves.

The girl was among them. She was hidden in the history section, so the many titles such as The American Civil War and It Happened in Italy were staring at her. She still had The Holocaust Explained in her hands. The library that had once been full of reading and joking students is a silent graveyard whose beckoning hand was gesturing towards them. Many were grinding their teeth, and some clenching their fist in promised revenge,

Then a long, slow moment passed. The girl, unaware of what was happening, gingerly sat her book back on the shelf, quietly as a hare. She then tiptoed across the aisle and peaked out from behind non-fiction. She could see her friends and yet-to-be friends shivering in the shadows of themselves, praying to their god for protection. She was unable to see him

After biting her lip, she leaned out from behind the wooden shelf. It was not a murderer. Shock paralyzed her to the point of her feet going numb, and she began to shiver violently, much like the other cowards in the room. But she did not go back to her cave. She stood, much to the bewilderment of others, and crossed the room in a few short strides.

She came face to face with him; she gripped his wrist, the one holding his means of escape. She pressed her face against his chest, sucked in her tears. His strong rhythm echoed in her ears, and her breaths beseeched his arm. Slowly ever so slowly, he lowered it. A small smile crept across her lips, accompanied by the relief of him. He let the bullet strike the carpet.

HEURT



Betrayal

Gabi Ramirez

Thank you, reader, for getting to know Rebecca as I know her—as a hero, a villain, a perpetrator... and especially... as a human. Rebecca was having a good life with no worries at all, until there was a new girl in school.

Rebecca and her best friend, Jessica, were walking to their classroom. Rebecca saw a new girl, and she wanted to make friends with her. She sat next to her and introduced herself, “Hi, my name is Rebecca, but you can call me Becky.” “Hi, I am Chachi.” They became friends. That same day, Rebecca introduced Chachi to Jessica. They got along so well that the three girls were having a fun life with each other.

Then one day, Rebecca wasn’t herself anymore. She was always sad, and she always seemed to find a way to push away her loved ones. She wasn’t sure what she was feeling, until one day she went to the mall, and the first thing she saw were her two best friends hanging out without her. She was hurt. She wanted to go home and just wished she never saw them, but Rebecca knew that would not make her feel any better; she decided to face them. She went toward them and said, “Wow, thanks for including me.” Jessica’s response to Rebecca was, “Rebecca, I am so sorry for not telling you, but it’s just, you’ve changed in these couple of days...”

“Just because I’ve changed, that doesn’t mean it’s the chance to move on. True friends stay together and always find ways to work on the situation, not replace her. If it wasn’t for me, you two wouldn’t have had become such great friends, as you are now.” The two girls didn’t say anything. Then Rebecca finally said, “Your silence says it all, you know what? I don’t need you in my life to be happy. I have too many fake friends.”

“..Don’t be like that—Don’t you see that your words are hurting us?”

“And you don’t think that your betrayal isn’t hurting me? Seeing that my two best friends betrayed me this way, when I’ve been NOTHING but nice to you two. I am done here.”

Rebecca started walking away because she couldn’t face them. She left to her car. She was all torn up from crying; she didn’t look where she was going, but a car was passing by and didn’t see her. The only thing she remembered was seeing a bright light. The next day, Rebecca’s parents got a devastating phone call saying, “Your daughter got in an accident last night. She’s currently in a coma right now and is in a hospital nearby.” The nurse gave the parents the address where they would go to meet Rebecca. When they got there, they saw Jessica and Chachi in the waiting room. Rebecca’s mom was asking them a lot of questions, “What happened? How did this happen? Did you see anything?” Jessica told her the whole story. Right about then, the doctor came toward them, and explained, “I’m extremely sorry to have to tell you this... But she lost her memories and we aren’t completely sure if she’ll be able to recover them.” Her mother started crying, and her father was trying to calm her down while he was asking the doctor, “Can we see her? We really need to see her.”

“Yes, of course you can, follow me.” They went to the room, and they saw a beautiful girl with some bruises. Her mother tried speaking to her and said, “Honey, can you hear me? Doctor, can she hear what I’m saying?”

“Yes she can” he replied. And at that moment, she was opening her eyes slowly waking up, and stated, “Where am I, and what are you people doing here?” Her mom responded back, “Honey, you’re at the hospital, you had an accident, but you’ll be okay!” Rebecca blinked a few times and bluntly stated, “Who are you? Are you my nurse?” Her mom was shocked.

“No, I’m your mother! Don’t you remember me?!” She exclaimed, as her voice was hushed up as she was nearly about to cry.

The doctor pulled them out and said to them, “Don’t pressure her. She will get her memory back, but slowly.”

She got out of the hospital the next day, and when she got home, she didn’t remember a thing. She tried so hard to remember her family, but she didn’t have any clue of who they were. She was so stressed out. “Why can’t I remember anything?! I wish I could have all of our memories we went through—I don’t want those to go to waste!” The minute she said that she started to remember everything; she also remembered everything that happened on the day of the accident. “I know you, and I remember all of this. I’m so happy that I can at least remember the ones that I love.” They all celebrated, and on that same day, Jessica and Chachi came to her house.

“Hi, can we see Rebecca?”



Gabi Kamirez

"Please come in, she's in her room." They went to her room, and the first thing they told her was, "Hi Rebecca... Do you remember us? Your best friends?" They said those words with smiles on their faces, as if nothing even happened, as if everything was okay. Rebecca's response back to them was, "Yes I do, but I wished I never did. It's easier to forgive a memory than to forgive a friend. So stop wasting your time apologizing to me because I don't have anything to say to you guys anymore. Our memories just flushed down the drain. So please leave. I don't want to be hurt anymore." They left her sight, and she never saw them again. In that moment, Rebecca laid down on her bed. She closed her eyes and dreamed away for the rest of her life. Her mother came in her room calling her name, but she never responded. Her mother was worried, so she called the ambulance. They took her to the hospital where the doctor told her parents the most grieving thing that they could have ever heard. The doctor told her parents that she had a tumor, and there was nothing that could have been done to save her. "I'm sorry, but your daughter has passed on."

In that bed was a girl who had a story that no one ever knew. People assumed she was a joyful girl with no worries in the world. A girl that had a smile bright enough to bring happiness into anyone's life. But behind that bright smile, was a crying girl, hurting inside, who couldn't wait to get home, so she could lie in bed and cry herself to sleep every night. She cried every night after the accident, crying over the cruel betrayal acted upon her by her friends. She loved those who never even loved her the same way. The last thing she remembered hearing was the doctor saying, "We're losing her!" And when she closed her eyes, she dreamed of herself, walking on top of the clouds, wearing a beautiful white dress with a flower crown on her head. She once told her friends, "It was a mistake, you said. But the cruel thing was, it felt like the mistake was mine. The mistake of trusting you." She knew it was time to send them back, the caterpillars safely wiggled in her hand, spelling out "good bye."

Beautiful Island, Dark Wasteland

Tyre Brown

My happy place was a beautiful island with a big tree in the middle. Now it's corrupted by these dark thoughts that turn my beautiful island into a dark wasteland with only one big tree in the middle. Now when I go, I'm not the only person there. There's a demon sitting on the tree taunting me, telling me to die.

When I see him, everything goes black, and all I can see is this big black monster with bat wings, red eyes, sharp teeth. And every time it opens its mouth, black smoke comes spewing out like lava in a volcano. He screams at me telling me I'm nothing, that I have nothing to live for. Just jump off a cliff and die.

As I scream for help, no one comes. I feel like I'm looking up in a cage with no comfort. My body is freezing, shivering, calling out for help, but still no answer. When I finally awake realizing it was only a dream, crying out to my mom for help, but no answer. My life is coming to an end.

Untitled

Sarah Lipscomb

Please don't ever say goodbye,
Because saying goodbye
Means going away
And going away means
Forgetting you

I Wish I Was Invisible

Magi Ye

As I lay in bed confused,
That I wish numbness is leaving me

Around with breaking wall.
I feel once again—slowly.

Memories have come back to me
I wish I was invisible.

It's like an echo repeating in my mind
Over and over again.

All I want is to walk away.
My muscles are shut down.

Asking, “Why?” as it’s been answered.
I have learned time has been my best teacher.

As I lay in bed confused,
I wish things could take me away.

Around with broken memories
I feel once again—slowly.
I wish I was invisible.

You Don't Know Pain

Gabrielle Orozco

You don't know pain
not until you've spent your nights crying yourself to sleep,
not until you're crying and you can't breathe anymore,
you're on the floor,
gasping for air,
but who's there?
No one.
you don't know pain until you can't cry anymore,
you just sit with no emotion,
and finally you give up,
you struggle for that last breath and finally,
it's all over.
The worst part about it,
is it wasn't your last breath,
you don't pain until you realize that it isn't even over.

Regretful Memories

Ryan Hollis

“Drip
Drop”
The liquid
of sorrow
and
memories
drips from my
cold
sore eyes.

I wonder
“Why do I care?”
It was me who ended it,
But now
She has someone else.

Every time I am
in need
of her,
missing her,
the sun of
availability
goes down.

My life,
swept away
by the
darkness of regret
and I cannot
escape.

To the Girl with a Broken Heart

Ellie Muetzel

When he tells you, "Things just aren't the same anymore"- do not cry and beg.

You do not want a second chance with someone who believes love can fade like the colors on an old worn t-shirt. Do not try to make him love you again by using your body as an influence. He will only use you until he has used you up.

When he tells you he's in love with another woman - do not break.

Smile, say "I'm happy for you," and stride away from the life you were sure was yours to keep. Go home, and cleanse your house of him. Rid yourself of the virus of love that had taken over your things. Change what you can, accept what you must.

And sleeping alone is hard, I know. But wrap all that newly found, extra blanket around you like a cocoon - and now you're a butterfly undergoing metamorphosis because in the end you'll come out more beautiful than before.

And, when he calls you months later once he is single again and he has the nerve to say "I love you" through the telephone and into your ear - do not say it back.

No matter how much you feel you do. Laugh, wish him a goodnight, and hang up. Because you know better now. You know that love is not an uproarious cry held back by jealousy and envy, but rather it's a gentle whisper in the wind saying "I'll always want you." And it's true. You'll always want him.

But with the quiet, steady beat of your heart you have to remember -

He's gone. I'm strong. I am.

He's gone. I'm strong. I am.

He

Camille Trevino

does he understand
the pain I go through
how much I've lost
because of the choices
we made?
even though it was a blessing
why don't I get a break?
why doesn't help out?
if only he knew how I felt
only wishing things change
doesn't help no more
I need more...
a sign that shows me he cares
a sign that says
I'm here let me help
but the little effort he shows
just makes me sad and
he doesn't care.

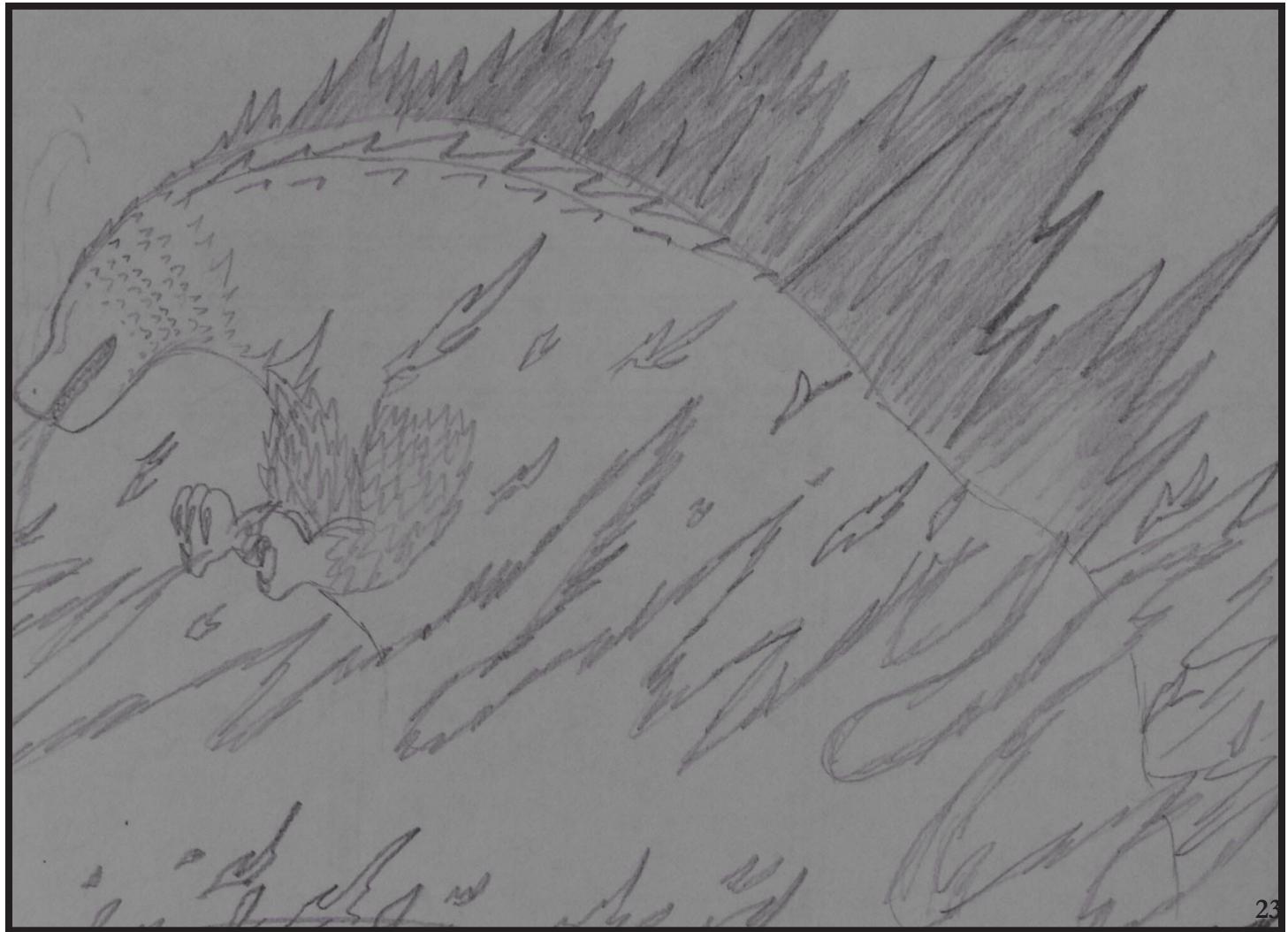
Untitled

Macilynn Avary

Upon the pages I write is just ink
wasted on you, the ink I have
wasted can never be erased but
only to leave scars upon the
lines of hell you put me through.

The ink is just memories that could have been wasted on lines
of heaven, to hit rock bottom
as I burn the memories even deeper
than the lines I have written above.

Blaine Allen



Glass

Ellie Muetzel

If my heart was in a room, I would construct around it.
Skillfully and carefully creating walls of gleaming glass.
Many could see in, I could see out,
But we
Could never
Touch.

These walls were fragile; a poetic mistake.
Only so much pressure could be allowed before a subtle
Fracture
Appeared.

I never realized the weight you exerted until after the fall;
Too late.

When I first met you, I was stable.

I thought I was strong.

No force of wind nor rain could have shattered me.

I thought I had control.

I imagined a door within the glass that only I could open to allow the souls - whom I deemed worthy - into my tranquility.

But most importantly, I thought that the permanent cracks you left on me could be fixed with just a bit of Glue.

But after all is said and done, it all comes down to the fact that I shattered my walls - all for you, using my own two bare, innocent feet and before the storm I now call your twisted sense of love even hit
I was already bleeding out on the floor.

My first mistake was trusting you.

And now even after all this time, I'm still picking out the shards of broken promises you left embedded in my heart.

I'm still gathering the fragments of the life I built with you.

I can barely stand to walk.

And now, my walls are built of stone.

HORROR

Believe It or Not, I'm Real

Jose Rodriguez III

I heard a door open. I nervously got out of bed and ran downstairs. I saw muddy footprints leading from the front door to the kitchen. I then saw my wife's dead body. I picked her up, not knowing how this happened. Blood was everywhere. My pajamas were covered in red. I sat there holding her head, thinking, "Who could do such a thing?" It's been 7 years since the murder of my wife, and investigators still have not found the perpetrator. How hard can it be to find this person, especially with all the advanced technology we have these days? Recently, the FBI told me they hired a new investigator named Xavier Wiesemen. They say he is a rookie detective but has a lot of experience in the homicide field as a cop. Honesty, I do not care who he is or how good he is. I just hope he finds the filthy, wicked-minded criminal who committed this crime.

One day, I received a call from Mr. Wisemen. He told me he found a mark on my wife's body. He told me the mark was located on the bottom of her foot. He described it as a triangle with an eye in the middle. He then told me he researched the symbol on the bottom of her foot and said the symbol was a sign of the devil. I sat there in awe, in shock at the fact that the death of my wife may not have come from a human being or even an animal, but it may have come from the devil himself. He then told me he found a trace of DNA on the window screen. He told me to give him a few weeks to let the DNA results come in. I hung up the phone, sat on the couch, and read the Bible. Why did he take her away from me? I went to my bedroom and rested my cheek on the pillow. To be honest, I was scared. I lay there crying. Tears were streaming down my face like a waterfall. I literally cried myself to sleep.

Three weeks went by, and I received a letter from Mr. Wisemen that read, "Dear Manuel Adame, the DNA results were very surprising. I do not understand how this could be, but the DNA matches you." My heart stopped. Goosebumps were up and down my body. My eyes enlarged. I thought, "What? Me? My DNA?! That's not possible! I would never kill my wife! How?! How could this be?!" I kept on reading the letter: "I know you may not think they are your fingerprints, but they are. I do not know how, but my theory is that maybe the devil wanted you to do this and possessed you. You will be on trials for the amount of jail time you receive. I am very sorry, Mr. Adame. Please be at Oak Wood Courthouse on July 10th. Thank you. -Dr. Xavier Wisemen." I sat down on the edge of my bed in shock, not knowing how this could be. I felt guilty, I felt disgusted. Could Mr. Wisemen's story be true? I don't know. Maybe. Possibly. But, what does the devil want with me? Why me? Why ME?!

Three weeks and four days passed since I got that letter from Dr. Wisemen. I sat in the courtroom in silence. Three hours passed before the jury came to a decision. "We, the jury, find Manuel Adame guilty of murder in the first degree. Therefore, we recommend life in prison." And life in prison was what I got. When I arrived at the prison, it smelled like blood and smoke. I was escorted to my cell. It was bad enough being in prison for life, and not I am stuck with "Hopsin" as my cellmate. The first two weeks of prison were the worst two weeks of my life. I was in the cafeteria when Hopsin and two of his friends walked in. "You think you're tough? Huh?" Hopsin asked. One of his friends grabbed my left arm, and the other guy grabbed my right arm. Hopsin punched me in my arms, stomach, neck, and chest. I was coughing up blood. He smiled at me evilly. "Good night, Man-Whale," he said. I fell over on my back. My vision was black. I saw nothing. I died in prison.

Suddenly, I saw gates in front of me. I opened the gates, and I saw a sea of fire with people's souls burning. I knew where I was. I just refused to believe it. I started praying to my God and Jesus. I was praying as if my soul was on the line. And it was. Suddenly, a bright light appeared in the distance. I ran to it as fast as I could. As soon as I touched the gates of Heaven, I woke up. I realized it was just a dream. A bad nightmare. I looked to the right of my bed, and my wife was next to me sleeping. She never died, and neither did I. At least now I know there are real demons out there.

The Son I Thought I Had

Erin Mansur

I wanted to start my life over. I wanted the best for my son because he's my world. I smiled every time he called me mommy, and I wanted him to be happy, but I didn't want him to remember his father. How one day he just walked out on us and left us with nothing. The only answer was to start our lives over and move to a new place.

There was this perfect house that I fell in love with. It had a beautiful view, and it was in a good area. The only problem was there were rumors that the house was haunted. That every family that moved into the house disappeared, but, I mean, it's not like if my son and I move in we would just disappear. So I bought the house, and we moved in as soon as we could.

Three months after we moved in my son was still afraid to sleep in his room.

"Mommy, the monster came and saw me again last night," he said.

"James, stop with the monster story. It's only your imagination," I told him.

"But mommy, it's not a story."

"James, stop. Go get ready for school."

I kept blowing it off like it was nothing. I mean he's six. I thought it was just his imagination.

One night I was in my room watching TV, and he was in his room sleeping. I heard the most piercing scream come from his room. I jumped out of my bed and ran to his room. I opened the door, and he was crying.

"Mother, I'm scared," he told me.

"Oh, honey. It's okay. It was just a dream," I said.

"No, mother, it wasn't. It was real, and it was coming to get me."

"Okay, well go back to bed. We will worry about it in the morning."

As I was tucking him in he asked me to check under his bed. I got down on the floor, pulled up the covers, and looked under his bed. I saw my son staring at me.

"Mommy, there's something on my bed."

I just stood there with my mind blank, not knowing what to think. I looked back up on the bed, and I saw what I thought was my son, sitting there staring at me.

"What's wrong, mother?" it said.

I grabbed my son from under the bed and tried to make a run for it. As soon as I was about to run out of the front door, the monster appeared. It came closer and closer and closer to us. This horrid thing looked into my eyes. I will never forget what I saw. Then I passed out.

I don't remember what happened after that. All I remember is waking up in this place with my son next to me.

"Alright, James, it's time to go see the big guy."

"Mommy, what's that bright light?"

EVE



Sullivan Maravilla

She Screamed

Sullivan Maravilla

Upon the sight of the book, curiosity would end the lives of many.

Eve was the daughter of a religious family. She had short black hair, of which a long streak covered her right eye. Eve spent her days reading books of horror and of adventure never leaving her room. Days were spent without her leaving. One cold autumn day, Eve was reading a book of adventure when she heard a rumbling noise. As she rose from her bed to see what had happened, her shelf had fallen to the ground. Her books fell across her room. Eve had noticed something attached to her bookshelf. It was a piece of paper. It was old, tattered, and scorched. She ripped it from her fallen bookshelf and began to read it:

“Dear Isaac,

Our comrades have fallen. We must use the sacred book. Please come before she—
I shall be behind the church of — ”

The rest of the note was torn off. For quite some time, Eve spent thinking about whether or not she should tell her father. In the end, she decided not to and to claim the book as her own. As the moon had risen, she climbed out of her window dressed in a cloak of pure black. As she walked to the old church, it dawned on her how the note had come to be there. She ignored the thought and approached the back of the church. Leaning against the wall was a man holding a book in his hands. She shrieked, but the man did not respond. He simply looked down at the book. Eve treaded through foul piles of defecation towards the man. When she was but a single step closer to him, she realized the man was dead, nothing but a corpse holding a book. Eve was petrified, and for one moment she was silent and unmoving. As the silence had passed, she took the book and ran home as fast her legs would let her. She climbed through the window still holding the book. The book was old, scratched, and there was a dried-up blood stain on the cover. The book was labeled with a single number 7.

Her curiosity was vexed: what untold secrets lie in this book? How had the man died? These thoughts filled her head. She rubbed her hand down the cover of the book. “Pray tell, what secrets do your pages hold?” She opened the book, and for a single second, she was blinded by pure darkness. The first page had names of people: Samson, Cain, Judas, Magdilah, and ??? She flipped the page and read, “Take the nail and pierce thy finger and let the blood, how onto the book.” This passage confused her, and she flipped the pages. Nothing was on any other page but a rusted nail caught in between pages.

She took the nail and thought to herself, “What could happen?” She pricked her finger and let the blood drip onto the cover. With the first drop of blood, her skin turned black as coal. Her clothes burned to ashes. Her teeth became sharp and cracked. Blood seeped out of her head as she grew horns. She cried as she transformed, and the book raced up its pages. It spoke, “7 sins, 4 horsemen, the sacrifice!” “What do you mean?” she cried. The book said, “Isaac, Cain, Judas, Samson, Magdilah, and Blue have fallen. They opened the book of sins to become the sacrifice, and now the girl named Eve has opened once more.” She pleaded, “You don’t understand. My father is well and alive.” The book said, “You are wrong. Your father Isaac has fallen to pestilence. The four horsemen will bring upon your doom. Famine, pestilence, war, and death shall bring the end.” She fell back onto her bed, and her eyes went black. Black shadows surrounded her, and the world around her became void. The book fell to the ground, and her name was singed into it.

She read the pages, once blank and now filled with blasphemy and the word “sacrifice” written over and over. She heard it: horses, the sound of horses heading her way. She looked up, and she saw four horsemen heading her way. “Bring me war, pestilence, famine, and death.” The horsemen one by one surrounded the girl. Her life was ended by the horseman named Death.

The Open Window

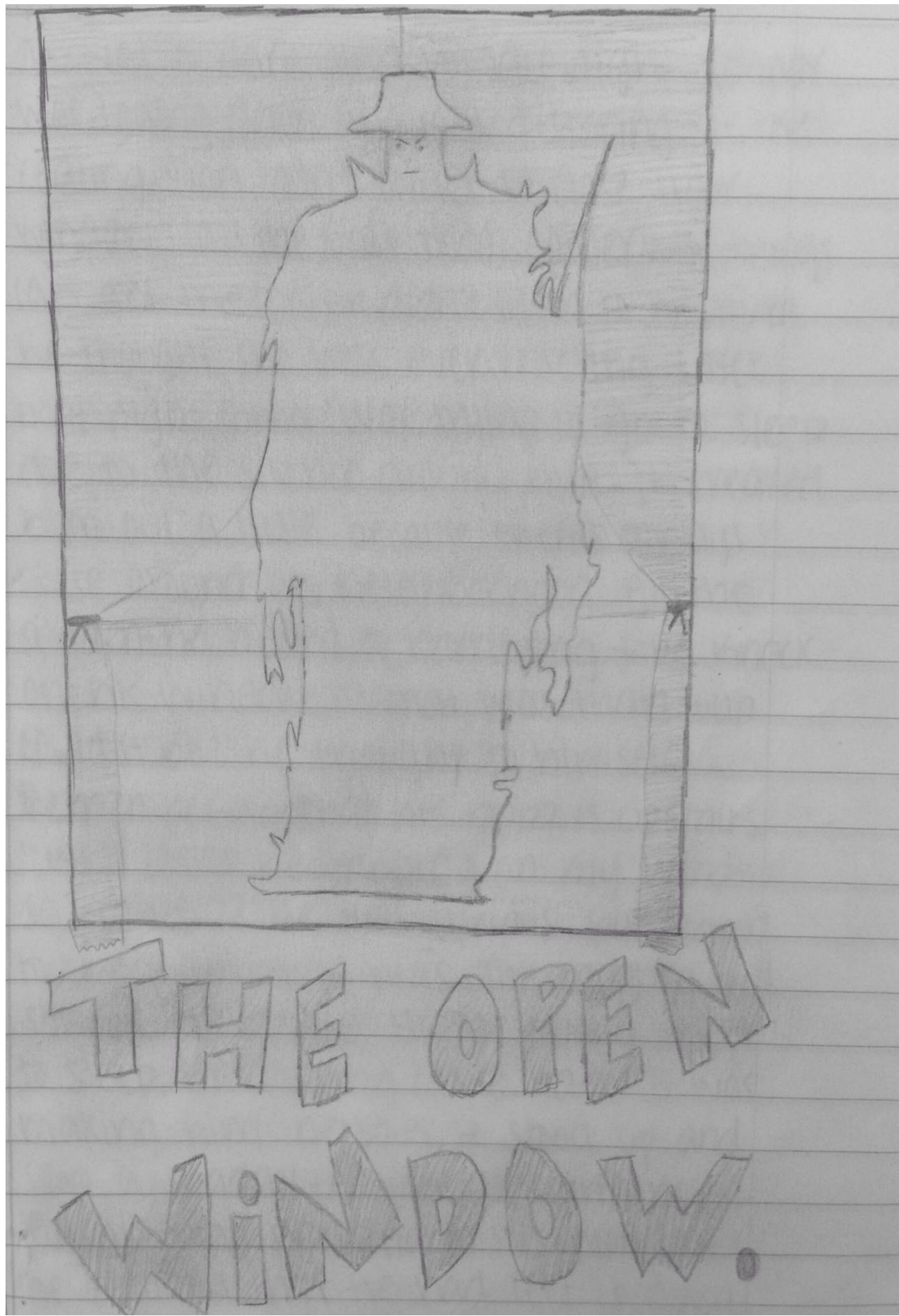
Idalia Juarez

It was a dark and windy night. Connor was lying on his bed, staring at the ceiling. "Jon, Connor, don't forget to close your window," said the boys' mom, "Otherwise, things could get in." Connor didn't listen to his mom. He thought she was overreacting. Later that night, Connor was having trouble going to sleep due to the silence around him. It freaked him out a little because there was always noise in his neighborhood. All of a sudden he heard a horrifyingly loud knock on his window. "What was that? Who could it be?" he thought to himself, remembering that his room is upstairs. "Who could be tapping on my window so high up? He was curious but scared to check what it was. The tapping had stopped for a while. As he slowly tried to fall asleep, the tapping came back! It was making him nervous. He stood up and saw a shadow through the curtains. On his way walking to his window, he realized that he had left it open. He grew even more scared wishing he had listened to his mom.

It started to get chilly outside. Connor could hear the howling of the wind through his window, moving the curtains. He was so scared he could hear the pounding of his heart. He didn't know why he looked through the curtains, but when he did he saw a man in black. He could see nothing but his face. The man stood against Connor's window. His forehead rested against the glass, and his big gray eyes were looking straight into his. He couldn't move. He was just watching the man through the window. The man put his hand up and slid it down the glass. Connor stayed there, feet still on the ground, not being able to do anything. He couldn't scream, and he couldn't run. He was frozen. For a second, he thought he was just imagining all of this. The boy looked away and closed his eyes. He kept them closed hoping that when he opened them, the man would be gone.

Seconds later, he opened his eyes. He turned to the window, and it was empty. The man was no longer there. Connor turned around and walked towards his bed. As soon as he got there, he heard a loud crash. The man had broken the window and gotten into Connor's room. He had a knife in his right hand. The boy screamed in shock, "No!! Please don't do anything to me, please!!!" His heart was pounding even more than it was before. Connor's parents ran up the stairs as soon as they heard their son scream. But they were too late. They found his body covered in blood. The man had strangled him to death then slowly chopped his head off with the knife. Minutes later, police and ambulances arrived at Connor's house. The ambulance took Connor's body over to the morgue to examine his cause of death. The police closed the area around Connor's house, so no one could come onto the property. They started to investigate, but there was no evidence, only the broken glass and the knife.

Days passed by, and still no one knew what caused the boy's death. There were no fingerprints on the knife. Weeks passed by, and no new information was given to the parents. They were exhausted. There was nothing they could do. They hadn't seen anything that night. They only heard their son scream, beginning to not do anything to him. As months and years passed by, the police gave up. No one knew the real story but the man and the boy. It has remained a mystery.



Idalia Juarez

Beware of Burdick Hill

Kyra Brooks

I never knew what I would go through when I moved into the house on the top of Burdick Hill, but I can't waste a single minute. I have to tell you before it's too late.

The sun blazed against the back of my neck as I moved the boxes from the moving truck to the foyer. Sweat fell off of my face and onto the marble floor as I set down the last box. "Ew! You're all gross!" I heard Lilly yell from the top of the stairs. I laughed at my grinning little sister. "Well you didn't have to carry loads of heavy boxes!" I yelled back at her. She stuck her tongue out and yelled, "Well make sure you don't get any of your smelly sweat on me!" she teased. I laughed and started chasing her up the stairs.

"Jacob? Don't you have boxes to move?" I heard my father call from the front door. I turned around and stuck my tongue at him. He chuckled and started moving some of the boxes to the kitchen. I glanced at Lilly, who was now on the top stair, jumping up and down as if she had just won a marathon. "I beat you! I win!" she called to me. "I'll get you later!" I called back with a smile as I started walking back down the stairs.

I had a good feeling about this house. After our mother died, it was really difficult to get back on our feet. Dad was so torn he quit his job, and we had to live with his parents for two years. Eventually, he got a new job and bought this house. He seemed happier now.

"Stop daydreaming, Jacob. We need to these boxes to be unpacked before the end of the day," my dad demanded as he grabbed more boxes to take to the kitchen.

I looked at everything that was left. Besides the boxes for the bedrooms, there was nothing left for me to do, so I trudged up the stairs, carrying my sister's things up to her room. While I climbed up the small flight of stairs, I started thinking about how big this house was. It was bigger than any house we had ever lived in. How did my father pay for a house this ginormous?

Suddenly, I heard a tiny whisper. It was so faint I almost thought it was my imagination, but as soon I dismissed it from my mind, I heard it again. It sounded like a deep rumble, as if they were gargling thumbtacks. I could have sworn it had said, "Did he hear us?"

I bolted straight up the stairs and right into Lilly's room, where she was sitting on her bed playing with her dolls. "I already won, Jacob. You don't have to run up the stairs anymore," she teased. "You didn't hear that?" I asked, setting her boxes down on the soft carpet. "I didn't hear what?" she asked with a confused look. I shook my head as if I was shaking away the echoing voice in my head. "Nothing. It's nothing," I told her with a fake smile as I walked out of her room.

The afternoon slowly turned into night, and the voice didn't cross my mind again until late at night, before I fell asleep. "Is he the one?" a rough, scratchy voice whispered. "Yes, I'm sure of it. He is the one who can hear us," a different voice whispered in response. There was a pause before the first voice spoke again, "So what should we do?" "We kill him and his family. No one can know about us," the second voice responded without hesitation. My heart started pounding, and beads of sweat started forming on my forehead. I had to do something.

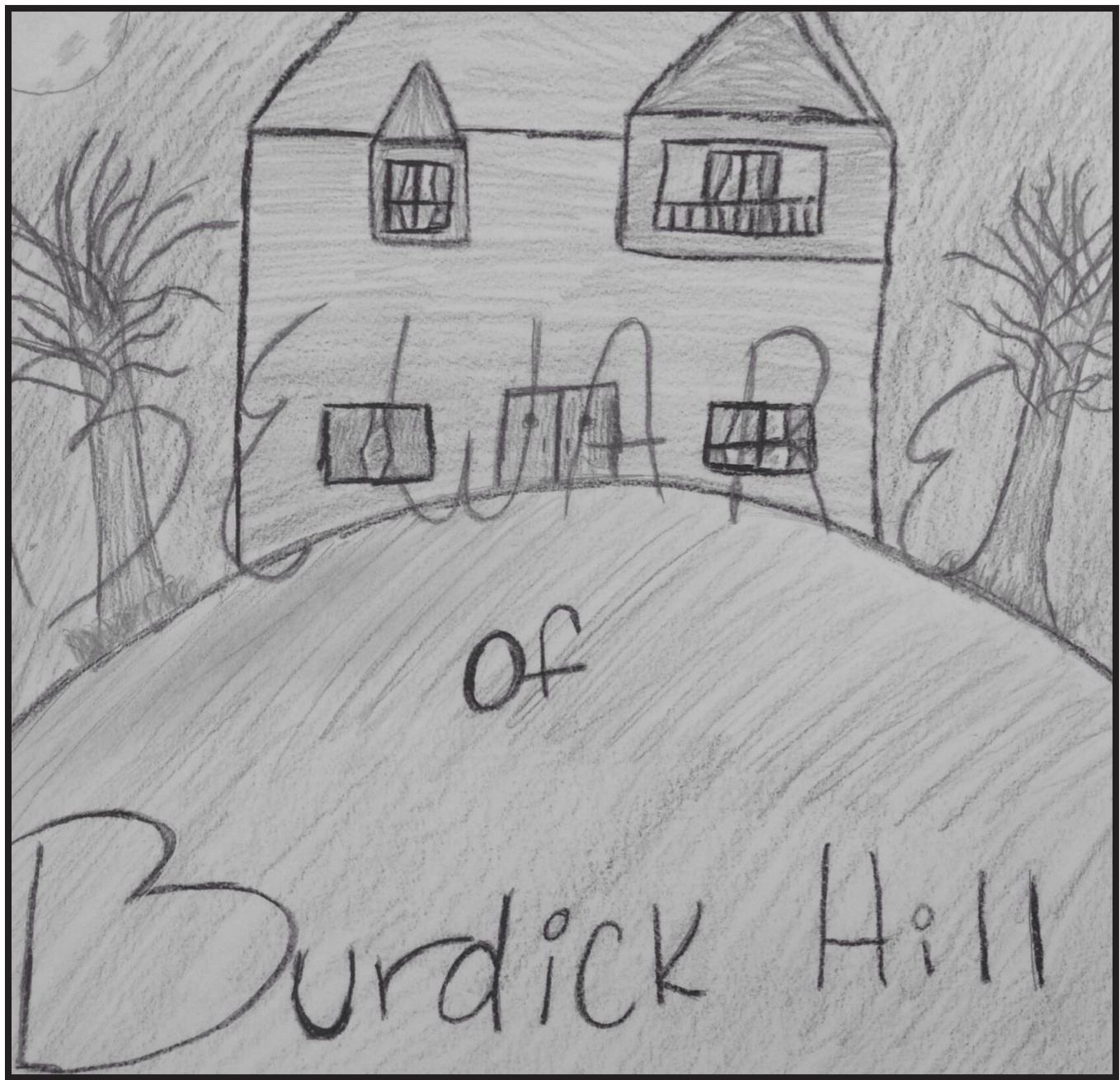
When I knew for sure they were gone, I jumped out of my bed and searched my nightstand for a flashlight. I quickly found it and hurried down the hall to my sister's room. I was almost to Lilly's room when I heard a slow thumping on the stairs. I peeked over the railing to see my father clumsily stomping up the stairs. As I got a closer look, I realized that it wasn't my father. It was a monster that had possessed and taken over my father. I could just barely see his lifeless eyes staring at me as the creature picked up his pace. I ran the rest of the way to my sister's room and started shaking her awake. "Lilly! Wake up!" I whispered loudly. "What?" she mumbled drowsily.

"We have to get out of here! Now!" I told her. The thumps grew louder and louder as the monster approached the bedroom. I couldn't wait any longer. I picked Lilly and ran into the bathroom and locked the door behind me.

"Come out, small child!" the monster called out. I held my breath. The clomping grew closer as he approached the bathroom door then grew fainter as he left the room. "Come on," I whispered to my tired and confused sister, "We need to get out of here." We hurriedly tiptoed out of the bedroom and into the hallway. We started down the stairs and towards the door, but before we could reach it, we found something on the floor that was blocking our way. "Daddy?" Lilly whimpered as she leaned towards the unconscious man on the floor. I tried to stop her, but it was too late. A dark, shadowy beast jumped out of the body on the floor and started devouring my sister. I reached out to grab her hand, but she was gone. The last I saw of her was her wide, terrified eyes and her lips calling out her last word, "JACOB!"

It only took me a second to recover from what happened. I needed to get out. I immediately tried the front door while the beast was distracted. It was locked. I then sprinted towards the basement, which is where I am now. I am writing this so I can tell somebody how I am going to leave this world, because the basement door is locked from the outside. I am trapped. I'm so sorry, Lilly...I'm so sorry.

Jacob was later found strangled and torn to shreds in his basement. His sister and father were never found. There was a folded note tucked in his pocket. It said, "Beware of Burdick Hill..."



I Snapped

Daniel Windham

"Case number 6091, please come forward," called the judge. "Coming," replied a small voice. The voice was none other than Cassandra. "My name is Cassandra, and this is my story," confessed Cassandra. She then went into a deep flashback.

"I had to get away. I told myself, 'Don't stop running; if you do, it could be the end of you.' My heart pounded like the thunder in the distance, fast and loud. I heard a snicker behind me. 'Run, run, as fast as you can, but no matter what, you can't get away. You are trapped in a web of lies, little girl,' a voice said in the distance. The message booming in my ears, I instantly reached for my pocket and found a revolver with two bullets left. 'Dang it,' I said. I instantly took aim, I pulled the trigger, and you could hear the gears turning a bullet, resuming the place of the last. The bullet launched out of the barrel like a tiger pouncing for the kill. The bullet pierced the police officer's skin going right through his heart, obliterating his ribcage with a bone-crushing sound that echoed throughout the forest. In the blink of an eye, I'd eliminated my fifth target of the day. 'You'll never catch me,' I said with newfound charisma. The police officer coughed up blood. 'We'll find you and bring you to justice,' the police officer said his dying words. Sadly, they were short-lived. 'Shut up and die already,' I screamed, bringing down my knife on his head. It grew a bright crimson red light, instantly bringing an end to the man. A crooked smile broke across my face, and a snicker echoed in my throat, rising to the surface. 'Where is the dang exit to this forest?' I howled. It shook the forest, leaves falling to the ground.

"Ma'am, is this exaggerated?" the judge interrupted her speech obnoxiously. "Can I just tell my story already?" I screamed, my hand slamming down on the table, spilling my cup of water; fear filled the judge's eyes. "Alright, continue," the judge said.

"A light grew in the distance. 'An exit, finally,' I proclaimed, running towards the warm light, blood dripping down the knife, leaving a bloody trail. Leaving the police officer's corpse to rot and decompose due to the elements. The light led me to the scene of the crime: my own house.

"Hi Cassandra, how was your day?" my sister asked, anticipating the answer. "My day was good, but yours won't be," I exclaimed, watching my sister's face contort with question, a smile growing on my face. I pulled a revolver out of my coat pocket and pulled the trigger immediately at point blank range, shattering every bone in my sister's face, a crunching sound emitted like someone eating potato chips with their mouth open. "Why did you do that?" my sister howled in pain, her cries echoing across the hall, alerting my brother, who ran to my sister's aid. "Cassandra, what happened?" my brother questioned, his voice full of panic. "You'll never find out!" I proclaimed to my brother holding our dying sister, his eyes full of fear. I shot him point blank. Now my two siblings lay dying on the floor. Staining the floor a crimson red. The last thing they did was cry a single tear that glistened full of purity and dreams that will never be fulfilled. "What did we ever do to you?" they questioned me, the tears dipping down their faces. They then turned a pale white, eyes frozen. Their last memory their own murder. "You came into my life; you are only an obstacle that I have to clear to flourish in life." I stabbed their hearts, almost as if I was obliterating the painful memories the world had caused me. My parents barged in. Seeing the carnage, they ran toward their dead babies, cradling them in their hands and kissing their cheeks. "Why did they never give me a kiss on the cheek?" I asked, my eyes full of question. I found a chance to bear no witness or prisoners. I stabbed and shot both my own mother and father, who had no chance of retaliating and hindering their psycho daughter's ruthless rage. When I lowered the blade, it gleamed and radiated a deep crimson, denigrating my whole family."

The Sidekick

Jose Leyva

“Hey, hand me the remote. I don’t want to watch this.”

“But it’s my favorite show,” Kevin whined, but he handed over the remote to Kai like he always did.

Kai and Kevin were best friends, and Kai was supposed to babysit, but Kevin took care of Kai’s nephews without pay. Kai’s nephews, Eli and Henry, like every 6-year-old, ran around without a care in the world. But of course, Kai thought they were loud, obnoxious, and immature. Luckily, since it was late, they already went to sleep. “Hey, get out! My parents don’t know you’re helping me,” Kai said arrogantly. “What am I? The sidekick?” Kevin said, with an emphasis on the “sidekick.” “Well yeah, I’m Batman, and you’re Robin,” said Kai. “Before I go, I need to finish this omelet. It’s almost done,” said Kevin. He took an awfully long time, until suddenly the fire alarm went off.

Kai hurried to check what was going on but was stopped because the door wouldn’t budge until Kai pushed it with so much force he fell to the wet floor. Kai wondered why the floor was wet, until he opened his eyes and saw red. There were red stains everywhere. Kevin was on the floor, lifeless, a puddle of scarlet around him. It was all in slow motion as a drop of blood fell from his hair. The alarm was still pounding in the background. Kai slowly got up and turned off the alarm. There was shock in his eyes as if he himself had gotten shot. Kai slowly went upstairs, blood dripping from his articles of clothing. Finally, he reached the top of the stairs, opened the door, and saw his nephews asleep. He sighed in relief. Until he saw Eli’s mouth was wide open in a scream that never happened. It was the same with Henry.

His heart was pounding. He was sure he had seen the doorknob turn. The door opened slowly, slowly. The creaking sounded like nails on a chalkboard. Kai tried to shut the door, but he was paralyzed. The door finally opened. The only light was coming from a nightlight. A silhouette of a darkened figure went up to Kai, grabbed him around the neck, took out a knife, and slowly cut Kai’s neck, making sure Kai lost blood but not enough to pass out. The silhouette took out Kai’s phone and dialed 911. His voice was revealed.

It sounded like a frightened Kevin.

“Who’s the sidekick now?”

Kai lay on the floor, barely hanging on. Not long after, sirens could be heard. Kai rolled out on a stroller until he saw Kevin had the eyes of a demon. Sometime later, Kai was locked in an asylum being accused of the murder of his nephews and attempted suicide.

The only visitor Kai gets is Kevin.

The Bloody Beast of the Shadows

Nicholas Morgani

Greg's arm was brutally torn open by the keen claws of the blood-lusted evil spirit. He swiveled in place immediately turning towards the two glistening, green eyes that shown through the dark room. The emerald glares made another lash at him now going for Greg's face. He managed to jut his large body out of the way in time, but he needed a weapon. He grabbed the nearest rigid object, a broom, as the battled waged on his kitchen. Taking the broom and thrashing at the ivy-enlightened silhouette, he launched it through a doorway, sending it flying as a crash could be heard emitting from inside the front room.

The lamp shattered on impact with the ground! As the savage animal scurried around, it knocked into the wall. Greg lumbered around the corner, stumbling into the room, blood trickling down his left arm. He was tightly gripping the broom with his good hand. His blood was boiling as it violently pumped through his veins. Almost instinctively, he began flailing the broom in an arch towards the direction of the homicidal vermin. Greg's voice began to boom, "Die! Die! Die, you filthy creature!" The beast's beady eyes flickered in the dimly lit room. The foul critter darted around the room. At that moment, Greg felt the elusive monster brush against his stocky legs. He was sent back in shock knocking his glasses free from his face.

Greg anxiously searched for his spectacles when a sudden gash opened along his calf like an un-weaving stream. He sharply winced as he reached for his bloody leg. Greg quickly scampered for the light only to find the lamp in pieces. Another flash of demon briefly illuminated Greg's face a brilliant, unique red!

Police lights frantically danced across the walls of Greg's house. Greg was deceased. Official report read mauled by a wild animal. A passing coroner closed the van doors while muttering, "I don't know of any animal that can do this." With an exasperated sigh he climbed into the van's driver seat. As the rest of the police finished packing up, one extraneous police officer spotted a curiously colored cat shrouded in the shadows. It lay in the alley next to Greg's house. The officer walked over to what he could now make out as a little underweight, black-coated, white-pawed house cat. As he pet the cat, it purred softly. The officer continued to pet the cat for a few moments and proceeded to his car, marooning the cat on that cold night.

Two weeks passed and it happened again, when the officer opened his door, it was to that same black cat. Its eyes wide open, they gleamed a deathly green. That's when the demon struck.

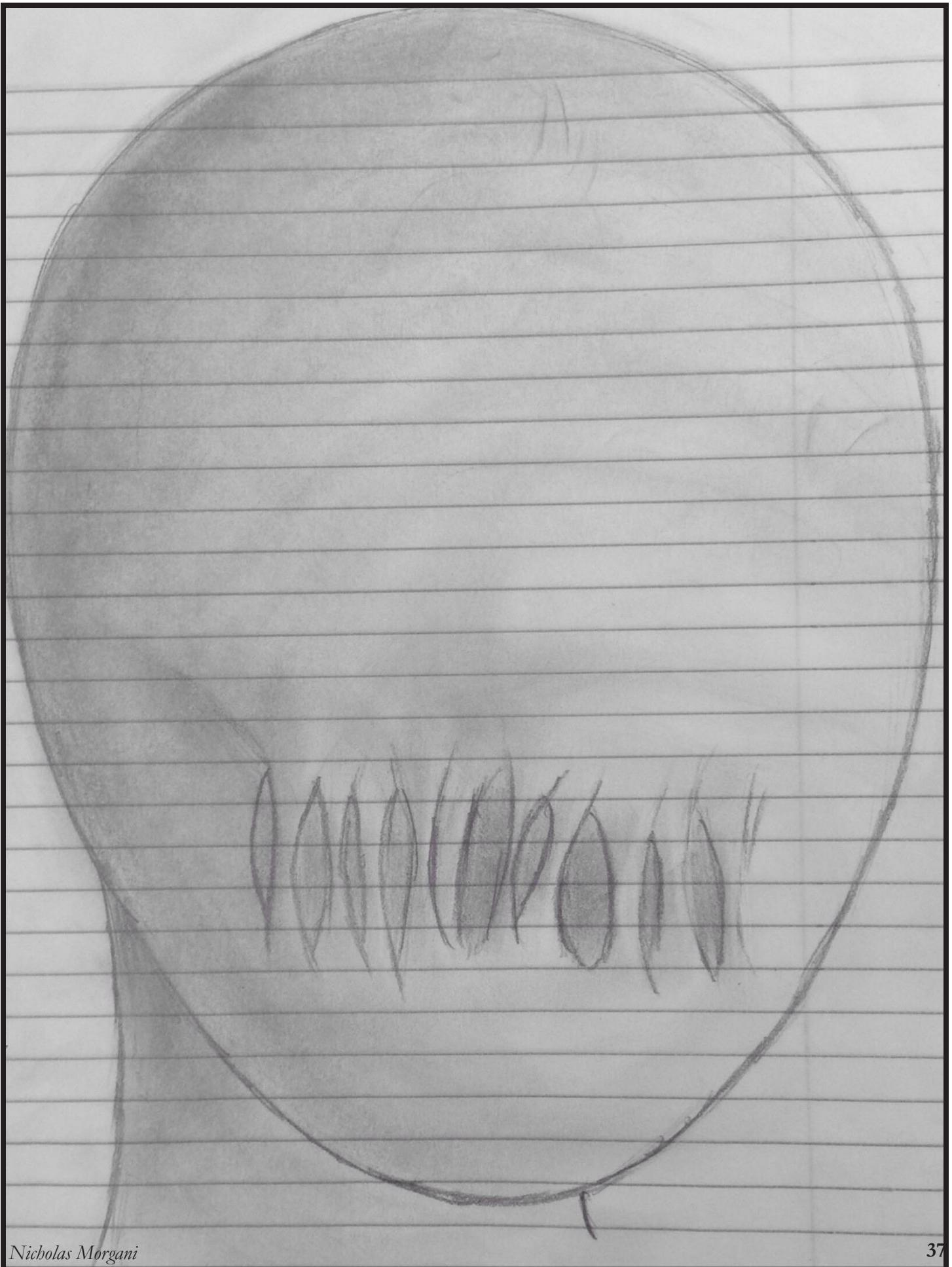
Caught Between Good and Evil

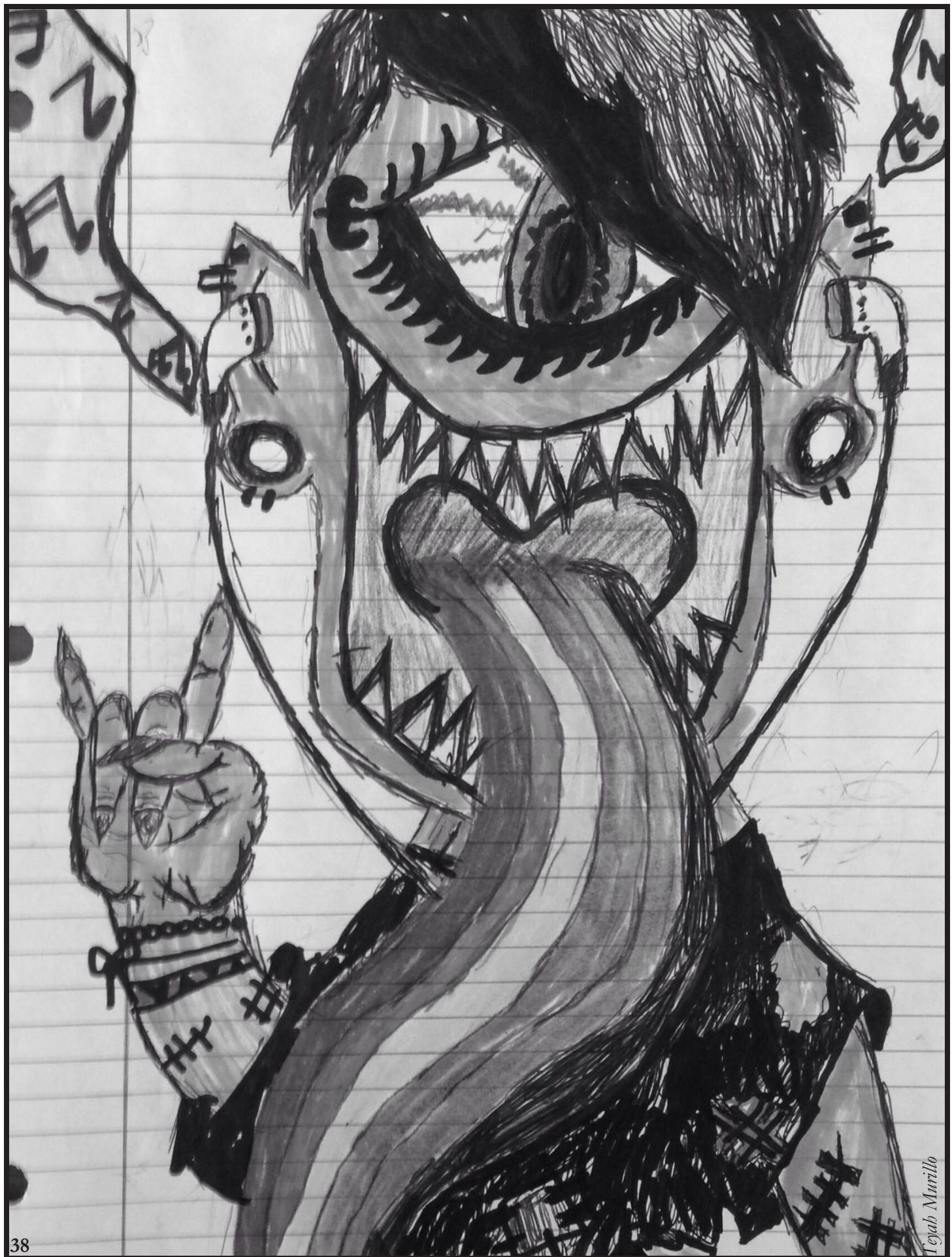
Jose Navarro

There is a boy caught between good and evil. Sometimes he does not know what he is. He is a good kid, but when he opens his true self, he does not know what he is. Good and evil fight to get inside of him and control him. The evil is telling him to steal and the good is telling him not to, and so he is in between not knowing who he is.

The boy's life is in a room, and it is protected by good, where evil cannot come in. The only thing that is holding it back now is a window. If he opens that window, he turns evil. The evil is like a bullet because it goes straight into you, and it will not stay inside until someone takes it out.

But there is still hope of getting rid of evil. There is a joyful shrub. Once you touch it, all of your worries will go away. Evil will disappear and stay out of your life. Now that he has gone through his nightmare, worries, and evil, he can live his life and play like other children. He is now not only happy, but also proud of his newfound bravery. He is now living his dreams and wishes.





The Reflection

Karmyn Magdelino

“What’s happening to me?!” he screams as he rips the hair from his scalp. He is lost. He is frightened. He doesn’t realize it’s getting worse. It is taking over.

James Trent is a writer and a book publisher. He travels around the world publishing people’s stories and working on his own stories. He grew up with his grandmother. He has always had a creative mind. A more creative and stranger mind than all the other kids in his class.

He is now 33. He is a very intelligent but strange man. He believes he can communicate with the afterlife. He always had positive experiences with this “gift” of his. But one night...in October in his basement at about 3:30 in the morning...he was awake working. The sweat dripping from his chin onto his paper distracted him. All of a sudden, he felt as if he was being shocked. He struggled to breathe, and tried to take whatever was on his neck off of him. Finally, after rolling on the ground a few minutes, he got up startled and looked around. His eyes locked on the mirror on the wall opposite from where he was standing. He couldn’t believe his eyes. What he saw was unreal. It was frightening.

He looked closely. He finally made it out. It was himself. Standing there. But then, he saw himself by the reflection. There were two of him in the mirror. But one had no face, just skin and bones. He didn’t know what was happening. Standing in the middle of his cold basement staring in the mirror, he touched his face feeling all his features. His unshaven cheek and chin, his large nose, his cracked lips. But he also noticed both of the reflections were doing the same exact thing. He knew it was him. He couldn’t take it anymore. He quickly looked away. Once he looked back, the reflection of him with no face wasn’t there. “I’m going insane, I have to be,” he whispered to himself. He had been off his meds for a week by then. This event caused him to be paranoid ever since.

He avoided mirrors or anything with a reflection. Two weeks passed, and it happened again. He was in his car about to go home after meeting with a customer. He felt his heart drop as he looked in the mirror. He saw the same thing he saw two weeks ago: his reflection and his other reflection with no face. But there was something different this time. The one in the driver’s seat was doing the same thing James was doing, but his normal reflection was sitting smiling a demonic smile at him. Just as he was about to let out a scream and run away, he felt his foot slam the pedal to the floor. Before he knew it, he was thrown through the windshield onto the pavement. He blacked out.

Next thing he knew, he woke up in the hospital bed. The faces of doctors stared over him. “What happened? Why am I here?!” James screamed. The nurse softly said back to him, “You don’t remember trying to commit suicide, dear?” He replied in shock, “What? No! It wasn’t me! It was my reflections! I didn’t do anything! I would never try to kill myself!” “Sir, there was no one else in the car with you, and there was no one else on the road. You ran right off the road and tumbled down the mountain. It was an obvious suicide attempt,” the nurse argued. In disbelief, James cried as he ripped his hair from his scalp, “No! No! This can’t be happening! What’s happening to me?” He was lost. He was frightened. He finally realized he hadn’t been taking his medication that kept him sane. He realized it was all in his head. There really was no one else in the car with him.

A year later, James Trent is now a famous writer living in Italy with his fiancée. He is back on his medication and no longer hallucinates. Until one night, his fiancée notices something in the mirror.

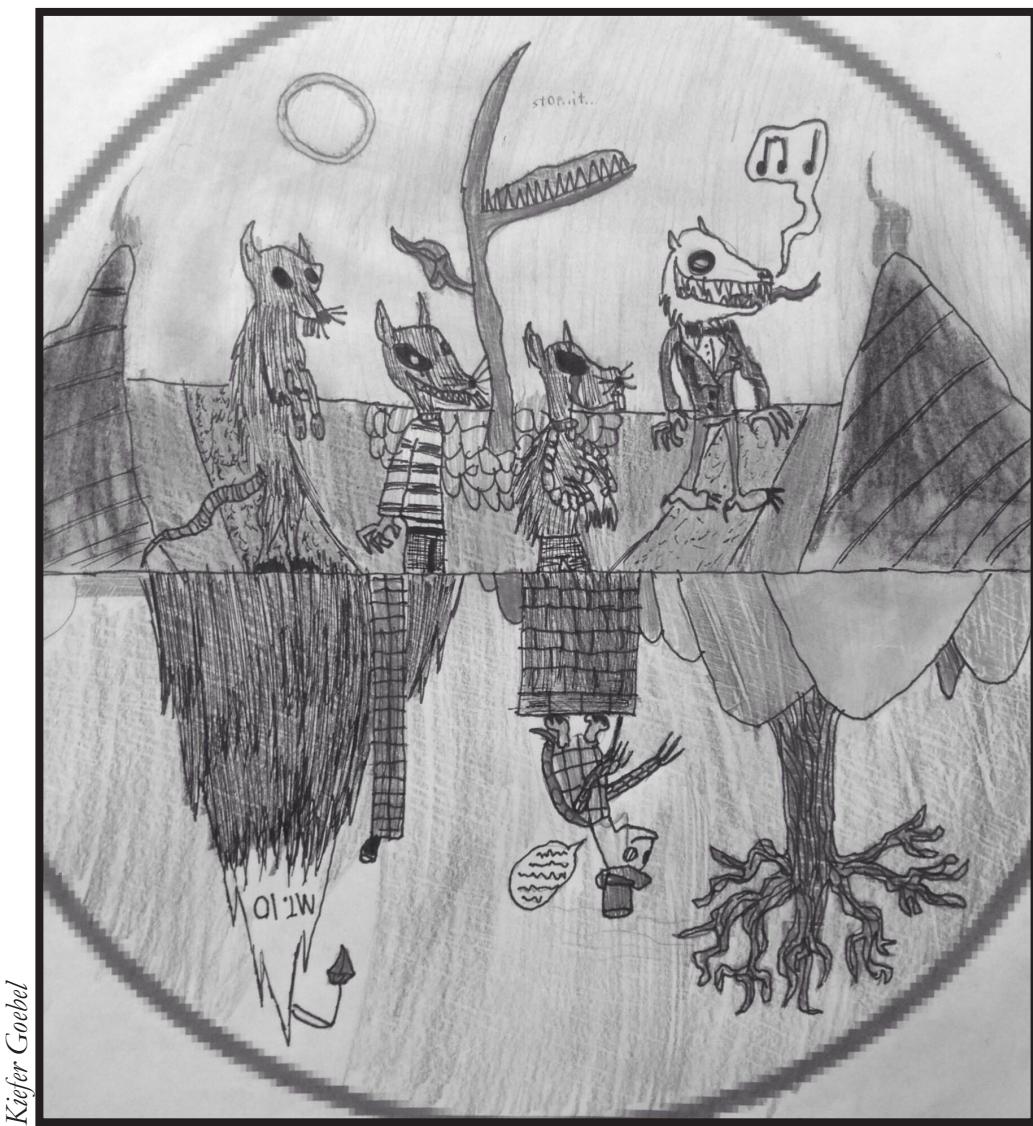
I Flew and I Flew

Blaine Allen

I was fast asleep. I was flying. Soaring through the shining clouds. White, blue, and beautiful. The sky began to darken; my blood started to boil. My stomach was turning. Then I began to see the red, red clouds, red atmosphere, screams of terror. Everything went to hell. Bodies began falling from the sky. Dead, faces of the innocent. Then a hellish figure flew towards me, nothing but black. It reached out to me.

I awoke to the sound of wind coming from my window. It was as cold as ice. I began to feel more awake. A good night's sleep is all I wanted. I went downstairs to get milk to make me feel drowsier. As I grabbed the milk, I heard glass break in the other room. I froze in fear. I thought to myself, "No one is home..." I tiptoed quietly towards the sound. The room temperature began dropping. Something felt off about this. The lights were on, and my only thought was to turn them off. As I walked towards them, I was thrown against the wall. My body was on fire with lines of scratches. I tried to scream, but I couldn't. I began to cry. Tears ran down my face.

I began saying a prayer. I finished, saying, "Amen." I was released. I lifted my shirt to find deep scratches. I ran towards the living room in shock. The world was spinning. I heard a loud thump. I ran upstairs to find my family dead. Everything went black...

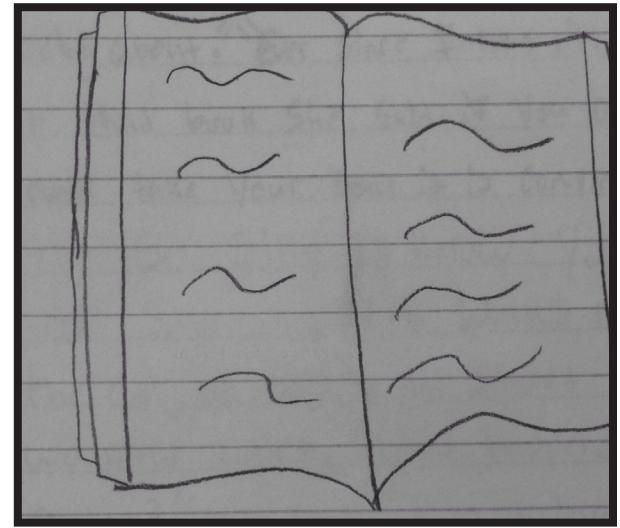


The Book

Brandon McCurry

"Susy, no, don't touch that book," Nick said. "Why not? Please, it's not gonna hurt me," Susy said. Susy stood staring at Nick, and Nick slowly walked backwards with the book in his hand. "Where did you even get that book? I thought it was a myth," Nick said. "What are you talking about?" "Ever since I was little my mom told me about that book. She said if you open it, you will glow and it will take your soul. It is complete darkness." "Stop acting so silly. I know you're playing around," Susy said. Nick walked out of the house to the car. He tried to start the engine, but it wouldn't work. "What happened? Where are you going?" Susy said. "I'm going somewhere to get rid of this evil, possessed book." "Wait it's not evil! You're crazy!" Susy stormed in the house like a stampede. "What is wrong with this stupid car?" Nick said. "Hahaha foolish Nick, you can't get rid of me," the book said. "Wait what you're just pure evil. Stop it, I'm not scared of you," Nick replied.

The car started, and then Nick drove off with the evil book. They came across a building and its recycling. He drove up to the building and parked. "I'm about to get rid of you once and for all," Nick said. Nick walked inside the building and asked the manager, "Can you shred this book please?" he asked. The manager said, "Ok." Nick walked out of the building and drove home. The manager on the other hand threw the book into the shredder. "You will pay for this," the book said. The book flew into the shredder, and green dust rained down like a river. The eyes popped like it was a campfire. A week later, Susy was still mad, and the book was back. It grew stronger than before. Just as Nick thought that the book was dead, the book grew legs and ran off.



Brandon McCurry

"Lalala," Susy sang. While Susy was dancing and singing, a knock sounded at the door. "Boom, boom," the door roared. Susy ran to the door and opened it. All that was there was the book. She picked it up and took it inside. "MMMM...I wonder why Nick doesn't want me to read it," Susy said. Susy opened the book up. "Surprise," the book said. Roots and vines started growing from the book, through Susy's body, crushing her heart until it popped green ooze, dripping down her mouth and eyes. Nick arrived back home opening the door, Nick walked in, and vines were everywhere. "What the..." Nick walked in the living room. "Susy, noooooo!" It was too late. The vines rose from her body and slung its way to Nick's throat, squeezing it until it snapped like a twig.

A week later, the landlord cleaned up the mess. He set the book on the table and walked out. A new family moved in. "Strange. What's that?" the mother of the family said. "I don't know. Check it out," the father said.

January 3, 2025, the spirits of the house, Susy and Nick, still live in that house.

I'm Not a Monster

Tyre Brown

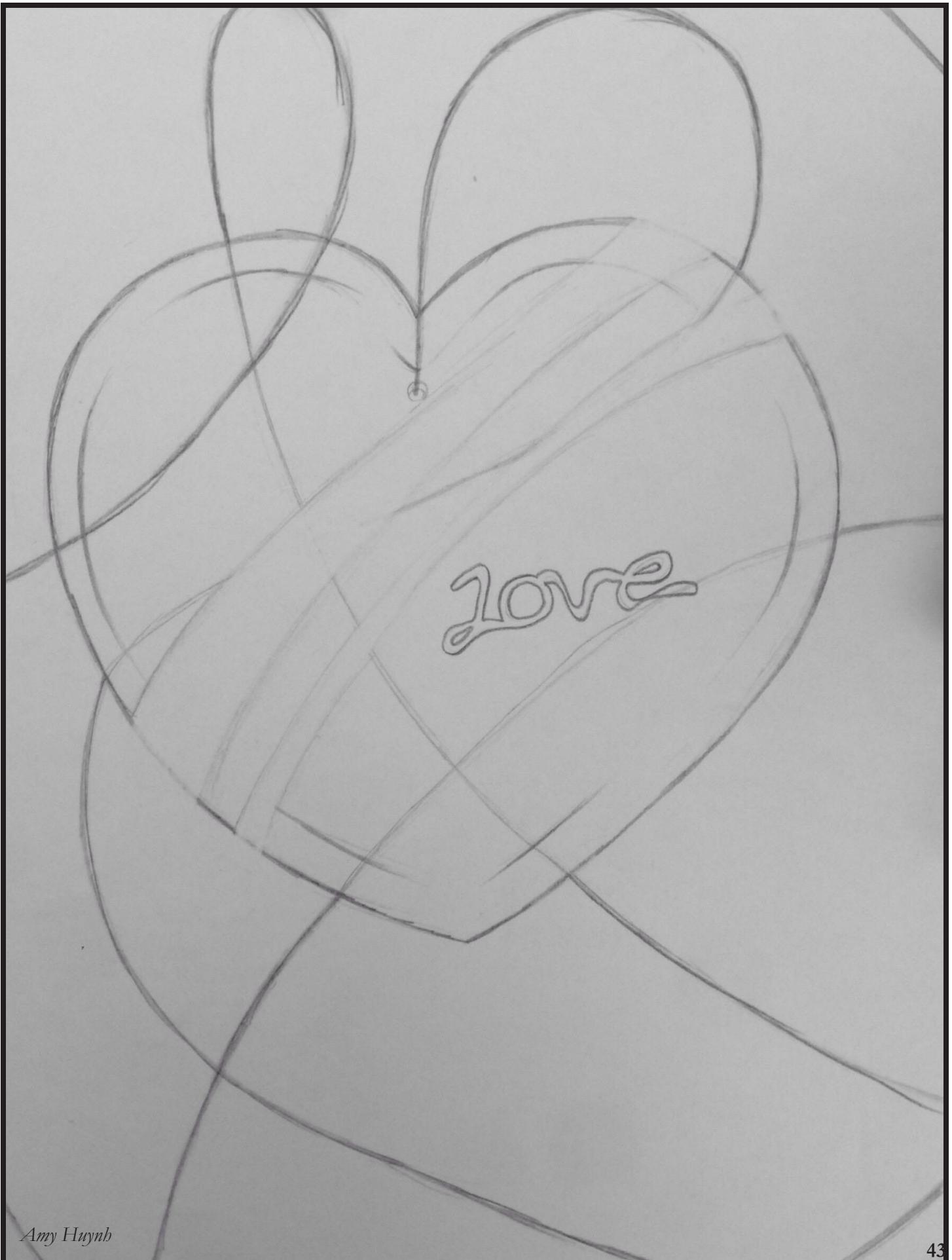
Before I tell my bad life story, you must know that I love all the power I had before I died. I was only twelve when it all started. My foster parents and I would always get into fights, yelling at each other. So one day, I ran away into the forest. It was really hard to see with all the fog and tall trees. I couldn't even see the sky. As I was running, I heard a scream, but not that of a person. It must have been an animal. The scream was filled with anger and fear, and I ran faster to get away. I saw a beast. It looked somewhat like a wolf and a human with red eyes. My heart was beating with terror as the monster came closer to me. I ran, but it wasn't fast enough. The monster scratched my back and ran away as I lay on the ground screaming for help. My body felt ready to kill itself. The pain got worse as my body started growing hair all over. I was deformed, transforming into a monster. I blacked out.

I woke up to a new morning. I had no idea what had happened the night before. Realizing I was covered in blood, I looked around and all I could see were dead bodies all over the floor. I felt like I was going to throw up, and I ran towards my home. A man approached me and said he knew what I had done. He could help me control it. I was so confused. I asked him what I was. He gave me a blank stare and said that I was a werewolf. He was too. He offered his help, and I took it.

It took four years to control it, but I learned how. When I returned home, I saw my whole family on the floor covered in blood. As my master came around the corner in his werewolf form, I saw my family's hearts in his hand. My body raged out, and I transformed. He was stronger than me, and his hand stabbed right through my chest. I fell to the floor, paralyzed. When I thought it was over, he told me how to get stronger. He said I had to kill other werewolves like me. I passed out and woke up later that night. As I got to my feet, I prayed that it was all a dream. I was crushed by the truth. I felt as though I was all alone. Filled with anger, I ran to the forest, looking for my master. There was no way I was going to let him get away with what he did to my family. I decided to follow his advice to get stronger.

After five years, I had only killed nine werewolves from all over the world. I could feel my body getting stronger. In the rainforest, I found an alpha wolf, which is stronger than a regular wolf like me. He overpowered me, and I thought I was going to die. As he charged me, I stabbed him and killed him. As I felt his power coursing through my veins, I knew I was ready for the fight with that murdering fiend from hell. When I found him, I took my chance and ripped his heart out and tore him to pieces with my fangs. I was so overcome with power I knew that no one could stop me, no matter what I did. I saw a camp full of people and killed all but one. There was one woman too beautiful to kill. I transformed back into a human and walked back to see her. She was crying, and I acted like I didn't know what happened. My heart was racing so fast I almost passed out as she explained what had happened. She asked for my help, and I asked myself, "Why would I do this? Where will we go? I can't bring her home, or she will find out who I am."

I took her to the home where my family had been murdered. As we entered the house, she looked at me with such fear in her face. She cried out, "Why do wretched monsters like that have to be real?" I looked at her with such anger. I screamed, "Not all of us like being made a monster!" She looked surprised and asked, "How did a man like you end up like this?" I explained, "A monster got me when I was twelve years old." I told her my whole story. As I finished, she gave me a big hug. "Sorry, I didn't know what happened," she said, just as a big howl came from just outside the front door. "What was that?" she whispered. "Stay here. I have to take care of this," I told her and approached the door, just as a hand smashed through and stabbed me in the chest. I felt my body exploding in rage. I turned into my werewolf form and ripped him to pieces, screaming, "Die! Die! Die! Just die!" As she ran to help me, I demanded, "Get away from me!" "No," she said, "I'm trying to help." But I wasn't listening to her. As I pleaded with her to get away, she just moved closer and closer. I saw the look on her face, the fear in her eyes. "No more," I said, ripping my own heart out, "Bye. I can't take it anymore, my....my...love."



Death Do Us Part

Melissa Lira

Love dies when it is worn out.

Just like everything else. But if it never lasts,

Why do we force ourselves to believe that we belong somewhere,
next to someone?

When at the end,
we just grow old and
die. die. die.

And nobody will remember you unless you're pretty or famous.

The Drive

Ellie Muetzel

September 14, 2013 Today was the day you asked me out a year back into the past. Crazy how much things have changed.

October 23, 2013 I saw you in your car today. As I drove past you, I looked over. We made eye contact. I'm not sure if I'll ever feel okay again.

November 16, 2013 I thought about the first time you told me you loved me today. You were so high off your own pain you didn't even know what you were saying. I love you too.

December 25, 2013 Today is Christmas, and it's true all I wanted was you. But, you didn't want me back. What's her name?

January 15, 2014 A boy tried flirting with me today in class, but his eyes hinted at innocence and after you I am far from it.

February 14, 2014 This holiday was created for happy couples. If I had stayed home and avoided you, maybe my heart wouldn't ache like this.

February 28, 2014 I drove past you again today. I sped up and blew past you, smiling from ear to ear. You don't control my happiness anymore.

Endless Affection

Ryan Schick

I love thou with a passionate love that started as an ember, a spark, then turned into a wildfire. As it grew and grew, my heart was engulfed in flames of love. Every time I saw you, it grew because of thy beauty and passionate touch...But it was all put out with my sorrowful cries. Oh how I cried when I saw thou with another guy...and I couldn't bare the scene, so I walked back to 1469 Anchor Lane, Waterson, WI, 63605 where I planned to end it all on February 15, 1963. The day after my heart was crushed under the weight of disappointment and aching cries. At home I snatched up the long, black-barreled beast that had ended lives quickly in the past...I pointed the end at my heart and took a deep breath. I counted 1, 2, 3, and started to pull the sweaty trigger from the palms of my hands. But it was not the end, for the ember of love, that lint-sized spark was still there, and had given me a reason to live again. While I was forever silenced beyond what any comprehensive substance could, something gave me inspiration to go on. I smiled to know that my babe was next to me. My Nutella had finally found me and chose me instead of the macho piece of bread.

Music

Noah Hernandez

Music is the greatest thing God has given. It's the only thing that's not controlled by rules or laws. Music is one thing we all relate to. It's a thing that has no end, no stop to how creative it becomes.

The fact is everyone likes different types of music; it allows us to be ourselves. There is no such thing as bad music. Music changes with time along with the people it grew up with. This is why we don't appreciate all the same sounds.

Music has no end and no control. Creating music is one of the greatest things. It allows us to be creative in a way that art, dance, or theater would not. It allows us to be ourselves, and let's us make it as powerful as it will become.

“One good thing about music, when it hits you, you feel no pain.” –Bob Marley

Never Ending Love

Kaela McKim

It was December 13th, 1763. The day that the prince of Kingcross, named Nathaniel, was killed. The one he loved, who is named Katherine, was thought of as a peasant in the royalty's eyes. But they saw no boundaries when dealing with love. So, they ran away in the darkness of the wilderness, having no idea what the future would hold for them. No time, strength, or courage could save them from what fate was about to throw into their arms. They've been running, panting, and tripping for what seemed like hours. Every corner they turned was a mystery. That was until they turned the last corner past a huge, wide oak tree that just lost its fire-colored leaves. It was Katherine's father who they saw, but he spotted them, too. He charged at them with such madness in his eyes only a bull could possess, running straight past Katherine and straight to Nathaniel as he stuck a knife through his heart. This is the story of their never-ending love.

November 17th, 1759. A gorgeous girl who had just woken up at dawn was preparing for what she usually did. She first tended the chickens, never missing to feed them. She then washed her chocolate brown hair in the crystal clear river that was down the hill from her house although it was hard to see over the thick, golden grasses. But this morning was much different. This was the day that the Prince of Kingcross would make his annual visit to the village. Every girl swooned over him, but not Katherine. She did not understand why the girls screamed when they heard his name.

As people were getting the village prepared for his arrival, Katherine was forced by her angry father to gather gifts to offer to the prince, even though he despised the royal family with a hate greater than any other. Time was ticking though, and before anyone had realized it, the time had finally come. Katherine was rushing and tripping over her long, red dress as she tried to find something to give to the prince. All she came up with was eggs from her chickens. She hopped over to the pen they were enclosed in and opened the gate. After only a second of the gate being opened, a chicken escaped, running right past her. She slammed the gate closed only to see it run to the right side of the tiny house. By the time Katherine made it over there, it was nowhere to be seen. That was until a man came from under a tree, holding the chicken.

She was shocked by his bright, round eyes that were the color of the ocean itself. His brown, curly hair bounced up and down as he got up from under that tree and proceeded to walk toward Katherine. The man was taller than she perceived when he was sitting, and his muscles were showing through his shirt.

"Hello, I am Nathaniel," he happily greeted, "and I believe this might be your chicken." His smile was marvelous, and all he could do was stand there in silence. "Hello?" he asked.

"Um—oh—um—hi. I'm Katherine. And yes, that is my chicken," she shyly answered. "Aren't you the Prince?"

"Sadly," Nathaniel bluntly said, "it does not feel that way, though. My father usually takes every responsibility, while I am left to do nothing. So I usually just stay hidden, walking around the village every now and then. Except for occasions like these of course, I get to do as I please!"

"Well, that sounds interesting," Katherine sarcastically said.

"Indeed it is, love."

She never once thought that she would drown in his words like other girls did, but she wasn't able to swim this time.

"So, what are you doing over here?"

Katherine remained in silence, no words pooling out.

"Alright, well I am going to go."

Finally snapping back to reality, she whipped around and grabbed the Prince's arm. He stumbled from shock and fell, dragging Katherine down with him.

They fell down a large hill, closer to the river than they realized. The slanted fall finally came to an end, She never once thought that she would drown in his words like other girls did, but she wasn't able to swim this time.

Seconds later, he jumped out from the cold water. Katherine was uncontrollably laughing, trying to regain her breath.

"You think this is funny?"

As the last word slipped out, he reached for her hand and pulled her in closer, but she caught herself from falling in. Nathaniel finally pulled himself out of the water and sat next to her.

They talked for hours, forgetting that the Prince had to be somewhere. As she smiled, he sat there in awe. "What?" she questioned.

"Nothing. It's just that you have a gorgeous smile and a beautiful laugh."

Before she could reply back to him, her father came marching down the hill in a furious state.

"Katherine, where have you been all day?" he harshly asked. With only a second to talk, her father waited no longer. He grabbed her wrist with such strength that she whimpered in pain.

Katherine looked back at Nathaniel with worry written on her face. With no second thought, he leaped up and began to run after her, yet it was too late. That was the last time they both believed they would see each other, but fate was just beginning to take its first toll on their new love.

Four years passed, and they both evolved into strong, independent people. Nathaniel was still the prince, and Katherine was still a normal girl in the village. But they were stronger. That was until December 10th, 1763. Nathaniel was strolling through the small village he loved so much. He could see children laughing and playing and could smell bakers baking fresh bread as they did every day. He felt free and happy, until he saw her.

"Katherine," he whispered to himself.

Running to her faster than he'd ever run, he picked her up and twirled her around in circles. Setting her back down, he looked into her deep hazel eyes. "So, it's true," he thought, "it's really true."

"Nathaniel?"

"Yes, love," he replied with joy.

They were with each other hour after hour, falling for one another all over again.

It's now December 13th, 1763. They were sitting next to a warm, peaceful fire while the wind was lightly blowing against their pale skin. It seemed as if nothing could separate them, except for anger.

"Katherine, what did I tell you? Four years ago I told you that you would not fall into the royalty's selfish hands. Yet here you are, refusing to listen." The dark voice was none other than her father's. He slowly walked closer to the dim light of the fire, where he could be seen. In one hand he held a knife and in the other he held a large cloth.

"Katherine, get out of here right now," Nathaniel said as calmly as he could.

So she did. She ran as fast as her legs would move. Running past many people and occasionally tripping over her long, red dress, she didn't stop. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Nathaniel catching up to her, but her father was right behind. He grabbed her hand, and they sprinted into a dark forest.

They ran past tree after tree and bush after bush until coming to a halt.

"You have to promise me that no matter what, you'll always love me," Nathaniel said short on breath.

"I..." Katherine couldn't reply. She was trying to get rid of the tears streaming down her face. They sat there not talking until they both began to run again. Every corner was a mystery, until one last sharp corner was finally reached. There he was, standing there, listening for every noise. Katherine let out a small cry, immediately regretting it. Her father quickly looked up to see them in the little daylight that there was left. He came storming towards them, but he ran right past Katherine and straight to the one she loved. Nathaniel tried to fight his way out of her father's tight grip on his neck, but it was no use. That's when she heard a sharp scream. She whipped around to see Nathaniel on the ground, not moving. Jumping toward him, she found that he wasn't breathing and her father could no longer be found in sight.

Laying there for hours, she wept silently to herself. She looked at him, one last time, before gathering the breath and strength to say what she meant earlier. "I promise..."

December 13th, 1763 was the day that Nathaniel died, and Kingscross was no more.

But never-ending love was still hidden in the cracks of the dark forest.

Poetry

Violina Blonk

Poetry is nothing

It is a feeling from the heart.

Poetry is nothing

It depends on a situation or fact.

Poetry is nothing

It is an art.

Poetry is nothing

It is the state of poets mind.

Poetry is nothing

It is an imagination of any kind.

Poetry is nothing

It's like clouds in the sky.

Poetry is nothing

It is a song of love & joy.

Poetry is nothing

It is chirps of bird.

Poetry is nothing

It is the blessings of God.

Poetry is nothing

It is mummers of river.

Poetry is nothing

It is perfume of the flower.

Poetry is nothing

It is description of woman's beauty.

Poetry is nothing

It is like full moon-light.

Poetry is nothing

It is based on a subject.

Poetry is nothing

It is creation of the poet.



An Unbreakable Bond

Tyler Harrison

There was a man by the name of Vic Harris, Jr., and he and his brother Mike Harris had a strong brotherly bond that couldn't be broken. They had this bond since they were kids, and it went up to when they were teens and into their adulthood because their father, Vic Harris, Sr., told them to stay together no matter what happened. He had this same bond with his brother, Rick Harris. One day, Vic, Jr. was in his man cave nursing a work injury, and he had been resting, playing his game, relaxing, and relieving his stress like the doctor ordered him to do. He was talking to his brother Mike on the phone discussing business, and they talked about out who had tried to hit their business. They were number one, and the best thing there was and would ever be. Mike warned Vic about the rivals because they were out to get them.

A few weeks later, there was a robbery, and it was right across from where Vic lived. When Vic heard someone open his door, he grabbed his phone and texted Mike, who came through the door into Vic's man cave. They waited for the men to come, and when two rival businessmen entered, they were shot by the brothers. Their hearts were pounding, and they thought it was the end. Both of them were sweating and looking at the doorknob turning without blinking. Two more men came down and hid behind some of the furniture. They started shooting, and both of the brothers were hit on the right side of their bodies. They were bleeding. Mike shot a bullet through the head of the one of the men, and blood gushed out of the dark hole. Vic was on the floor, and his flesh was stinging. The other man pulled the trigger on Mike, but he fell and landed on the ground bloody and pink.

Vic crawled over to Mike, and he was crying because he thought he lost his brother, who wasn't saying anything. Vic called the ambulance, all the while talking to Mike saying, "Big Mike, stay with me. Our bond isn't broken, and it never will be broken. I'm your keeper, man, and you're mine. So stay with me. Stay strong for the both of us." Mike responded, "Junior, be strong. You're my keeper. And you're right, I'm your keeper. I want you to know that I love you. And tell Little Mike he's the man now, and tell Melinda I love her." Vic said, "Stay with me, Big Mike."

Mike had lost a lot of blood, and he died. Vic's heart shattered like the world's thinnest glass, and he went numb crying. It killed Vic to see his brother like that. The ambulance rushed them both to the hospital. They tried to bring Mike back once. It didn't work, so they tried a second time. It didn't work, and they tried a third time. Nothing happened. Vic broke down in tears when the doctors covered Mike's body. They left the room, and his body started moving. Nobody noticed it because they were outside the room talking. Mike stood up and started walking. Vic was so relieved to see his brother walking, and so was Mike's wife, Melinda. This brotherly bond never ended. It grew stronger, and the business was a success. These brothers never did let anything break them apart.

Good abolished death, and these brothers have been through joyful times and crying times. But through all of this, they knew they would have to look death in the face. Death would try to put them in the ground to sleep for the eternal days before their time, just like when they saw the doorknob turn. When they retired and gave up their business to friends, they turned their lives around to the right direction. They were set for life, and some people might say, "What does love have to do with it?" When Mike got up from that death bed, he had another chance at life from the creator, and this was because of love and brotherly bonds.

Toilet Time

Ben Gordon

Once upon a time, there was a toilet named Potty John, and he was a very stinky toilet. Every time he lied, he would flush. So one day, Potty John decided, "I want to be a real boy."

Potty John took off to the craziest parts of town to find his father, or the person who made him. The first place he went was Plummy's Workshop. Potty John walked into the shop and saw a terrible sight. He paused and screamed like a little girl as he saw toilet parts on every wall. Then Plummy the Plumber stood up and was surprised by what had walked into his shop. He grabbed a plunger and started plunging the lights out of Potty John. Potty John couldn't do anything but sit there, paralyzed by what he had seen. As Potty John was sitting there, he suddenly had a flashback when he heard the sound of Plummy the Plumber laughing.

"Hey, Plummy," said a mysterious voice.

"Oh, hi, Bob. How's everything going?" asked a younger version of Plummy.

Then the mysterious man said, "Plummy, I have to show you something CRAZY. It's my new invention. It's...a...living...toilet!!!"

"What? You have to let me have it!" Plummy said. Then Potty John's flashback faded away. Potty John realized what was happening to him. He sprang into action and grabbed the plunger with his toilet hands and started plunging the daylights out of Plummy's head. Potty John then tackled Plummy and yelled, "Where is my father?"

Plummy then said, "I don't know. After I stole you from him, I never saw him again."

"What? Why would you steal me from him? Take me back and turn me into a real boy."

"Why would you want that? You are the coolest thing known to man."

"No, I am not! I want to be a man and do what other men do," said Potty John.

Plummy burst out in a rage and screamed, "I didn't steal you so that you could go back and be turned into a human!" Plummy grabbed the nearest pipe and smacked Potty John over the head so hard that he passed out.

One hour passed. "Uhhh...Where am I?" Potty John asked himself as he woke up chained to a wall.

"You're in my dungeon. I made it so that if I ever found you again, I would lock you up and never, ever let you out."

Potty John said, "Why would you do that? I never did anything to you. I don't even know you!"

"You don't remember, do you?" Plummy questioned.

"No, I don't. Who are you? All I remember of you is you talking to my creator."

"Hahahaha, this is crazy. So you don't even remember running away?"

"No."

"This is amazing! Well, it won't matter because tomorrow I am going to destroy you. Mwahahaha!" Plummy said in a creepy voice that terrified Potty John.

A day passed by. "Wakey wakey, eggs and bakey!" Plummy said as Potty John woke up to see Plummy getting his death machine ready. The death machine was as black as night. It was shaped like a box with a sign over one of the openings that read ENTER. The sign was spelled in blood.

"Are you ready to die?" Plummy asked as he turned the machine. The machine made a loud noise that sounded like an old diesel pickup truck that was being started for the first time in fifty years.

"I never thought I would go this way," said Potty John in a shaky voice.

"You're not!" said a mysterious voice, just as a blurred figure burst through Plummy's window.

"Bob! How did you find me?" Plummy asked with a surprised look on his face.

"I looked you up on the internet. It never lies. Now let Potty John go!" Bob screamed and sprinted toward Plummy with the speed of a cheetah, tackling Plummy as if he were his prey.

Plummy and Bob fell toward the death machine, tumbling and fighting into the entrance.

"Father, no!" Potty John screamed, trying to save his father from certain death. As Bob was grasping the entrance to the machine, he looked at Potty John and said, "Go, Potty John! Save yourself! You don't need to be a real boy. You are amazing just as you are." Bob let go of the entrance, and he and Plummy fell into the death machine.

"I will miss you, Father. Goodbye forever," Potty John said as he walked away from the terrible scene.

This Time It Was Forever

Ylsed Rivera

Two weeks passed, and it happened again, but this time it was forever. Emily was so confused why she lived in a home with parents who didn't love each other. Not a day passed where they didn't fight. All she heard at night was her parents yelling at each other. She would turn her TV volume all the way up to avoid the yelling. No matter what she did to try to block out the noise, nothing seemed to work.

One day, her parents were arguing in the car, and things got really bad. Emily's dad lost control of the car and hit a tree. They almost lost their lives. When her parents got out of the hospital, nothing changed. They hated each other more.

Two weeks later, they were driving to the grocery store, and they started arguing. Emily's dad crossed to the next lane, not knowing than an eighteen-wheeler was passing, and it hit them. Emily was just getting home from school and decided to turn the TV on. A news report was on about a crash. They showed a picture of the bodies.

It was her parents.

She blamed it all on herself for the next year. One day she decided that she was going to visit the graves for the first time. When she got there, her parents' graves were next to each other. There was a note for Emily saying, "We love you and always will. None of this was your fault. We stayed together for you until death do us part. Love, your parents."

In that very moment, she felt happy and cried tears of joy. One day she would be reunited with her family again.

Cowgirl Indian (Chapter 1)

Violina Blonk

This is the story of how I became known to people as the "Cowgirl Indian." When I was about 4 years old, my Ma was shot and killed. "Who killed her?" you might ask. Well, sadly, I don't know. And my Pa, well, I wouldn't exactly refer to him as that. Yes, he was Ma's husband, which makes me his "daughter," but he doesn't treat me like a daughter. He treats me more as if I was a stranger he lives with. Pa is a strong man with hatred in his dark brown eyes.

Well he and I live in Hell Town. It's a nice little town. And I do love it. My dog Rowdy is my best friend. And probably my only friend along with Tom, who is my only human friend. He is a strong, loyal dog. You know the saying, "A dog's bark is worse than his bite." Well, it's the other way around for Rowdy. He is a protective dog, sometimes a little too protective. But he is always there for me. Many people, including my Pa, don't exactly think I'm a normal girl. I was 5 when I lassoed my first grown bull. I know how to hunt, but what really throws people off the saddle is that I carry a gun with me everywhere I go. And it's always loaded. This gun belonged to Ma. After I found out she was killed, I kept her gun. It's the only thing I have left of her.

The only reason Pa wants me to have a gun is so I can shoot Indians. But I don't want to. I don't understand what's so bad about them. I actually find them very interesting. I don't understand why we can't all be friends. But if I told Pa that, he would be madder than a bull with a needle in its rump. I loved adventure, I loved to explore, but one thing I didn't know about was that I was going on an adventure, an adventure I will never forget, an adventure that gave me my name, "The Cowgirl Indian."

Growing Up As an Impoverished Child

Andrell Harrison

Growing up I didn't really have a father figure, but then again my black Queen played a role a father should act. She showed me the do's and don'ts of this chess game, but at the moment life was as blurry as a kid who has a 3/20 vision looking at a 12 point font from 30 yards away. My dad was too busy entertaining the boys, too busy worried about other things other than his little boy.

At the age of 5, I found myself sitting in my grandmother's living room, reminiscing why I was there when all of a sudden a loud outbreak in the garage startled me. I was drawn to the noise like a bee to smelling pollen. My father ran out and jolted me into his arms, as he bolted down the halls. He unloaded me into the closet and kissed my forehead. I didn't get a chance to ask what was going on. Crunk emerged from the back room to assure me everything was okay. Even though I was a baby, you couldn't lie to me. I seen it in his eyes. He noticed the tears at the end of my chin. Just so happens, I seen them in the corner of his. I knew Crunk's hot temper was going to boil over, and it was that very moment I had put the puzzle together. But I just lay harmlessly in his arms as my dad snatched me away from him. I noticed my dad giving him a look. Crunk slowly floated to the garage with towels and scrubbing bubbles. 15 minutes went by, and Uncle Crunk returned to the back room and said his goodbyes. My dad didn't even look at him, as if he was a stranger waving in the distance.

Two days went by, and I was back at my grandmother's house, playing with my new car toy. It was a '98 Impala with candy red flacks. All at the once, the door is bombarded by a stampede of men in black, armed with rifles and shotguns. I dropped the toy, rattled. They burst into my grandmother's room. "Bust it down" were the words spoken by the team leader. My dad was in the back yard at the time and didn't know what was going on. Before long, they had broken the door off its hinges by using the foot of what seemed to be a 300 lb. officer. Tears ran down my face like a car down an Indianapolis speedway. Not because I was scared, but because they had my father pent up against the wall with guns to his face as if he had massacred a town full of people.

At this point, I was 5 years old, wondering if they were going to end his life, if they were going to take him away from me like a mother does to a child who wanders away in search of a flock of candy. Time flew by, and they had my pops in cuffs surrounded by the men in black. One walked up to me and asked if I knew what was going on. I didn't speak. I kept my head buried between my knees.

Last Goodbye

Josue Aguilar

Dear Tio Rey,

I've been on this trip for hours now, and I really wanted to be there with you right now. But God has taken you from us. I wish he would have given you more time to be here with us. You don't know how bad it hurts me to know that you were on your death bed. I can't believe you're not here with us anymore. But don't worry, I will never forget you. I know you don't want us to cry, but how can we hold back our tears? I never had the chance to tell you this, but I love you. You have been there for us through good times and bad times. You are one of my best uncles, always made me laugh. Don't worry about Grandma and Grandpa. I'll take care of them. Gosh it's been almost 9 months since you left this wonderful place. Every time we hear your songs, we start to cry. I always wanted to tell you goodbye. It's sad that this is how I have to say goodbye. You don't know how bad it was seeing you in your casket. I never imagined you like that, but it happened. Well this is my final goodbye. I love you.

Sincerely,

Picheches

A Girl Who Lost

Ericka Mosley-Sealey

Once upon a time there was a girl who lost her mother in 2013. She never thought that it would end up being so hard to believe, but she also had a father that died 10 years ago in 2004. He had the same heart condition that her mother had, and that condition is called congestive heart failure. Her father caught the disease from a virus. Her mother developed it when she delivered a baby at 39 years old. The girl's father bled internally to death because his LVAD was going out of whack, and it was not controllable. He needed a heart transplant.

It is ironic that the girl's parents had similar health issues, as well as untimely deaths. Her mother needed a heart transplant, and her heart couldn't take the weakness. Her ejection fraction was 5%, which she maintained ever since she had her daughter, but it also increased to 20%. You always wonder why God is ready for something when you're asking him to help you and you have more things to do in life, being young and wanting to live for as long as you can so that you can see your kids and grandchildren succeed in life.

The characters in this story are Sharon Gail Mosley-Sealey, Erick Wayne Sealey, and Ericka Irene Mosley-Sealey. Erick Wayne Sealey is the father of Erica. A handsome man with teasing brown eyes, Erick was an awesome father with a sweet personality and had great musical Jazzy trombone talent. Sharon Gail Mosley-Sealey is the beautiful mother of Ericka. She was also a very sweet, kind-hearted person. Everything she did was for others. People loved her like a second mom. She was an LPN and RN nurse who worked for the home health facility for many years. She was blessed and a blessing to others.

Ericka Irene Mosley-Sealey, the daughter of Erick Wayne and Sharon Gail Sealey, inherited every piece of their kindness and loving, talented ways. She is very smart, really experienced in dancing, and loves to run. Ericka Mosley-Sealey has had a really tough life, but she has found a way to get through her losses. Most people can't control their feelings of bitterness and allow grief to anger them, but not Ericka...

So it's me who's writing this story, the one who lost both her parents. But I guess it was time for them to go. It was a perfect lift-off, a lift-off to Heaven, a place where hearts are whole.

The Door

Dylan Atkins

As her heart pounded, she could have sworn she saw the knob turn slightly. The door had been silenced. And now it was just her, the blackness, and the door. Wiping her clammy hands against her jeans, she slid her hand into her pocket and clicked a single button. Now the whirlpool had been tamed. But her nerves were still as wild as a horse, and no lead in the world could tame them.

Seconds turned to minutes, and minutes turned to sleep. She dreamed of the door. The door opened, and she opened her mouth to scream, and silence rolled out like the high tide. No matter how she extended her arm, the torch would not light where the door had been.

When she had awoken, the door was open and the flashlight was gone. Opening her mouth and cringing, her eyes only the sound of a fading dog whistle squeaking out. She stood up and unloaded seven shots into the doorway. What she heard next made her drop to her knees. After those seven shots, she heard something fall down to a silent thud. She once again felt faint. And this time she did not resist.

All she could see was the flickering of the glowing flashlight across the room, casting a shadow onto the door resulting in a gallery-worthy silhouette. She felt as though she could not move, and what she read on the floor only made her heavier. "Help me," she silently read. As she spoke the words, the torch was gloved by the returning whirlpool of darkness which swallowed the room. Drowning in the blackness, it was now just Taylor, the dark ocean...and the growling.

For the first time, Taylor wished she was alone, and now the thing she always wanted was now the thing she feared the most.

Raising her gun.

Ping, Ping, Ping.

Trying to peer through the darkness and her watery eyes, her lower lip began to tremble. Now she was just adding to the sea. Taylor no longer felt fear or ridicule. But only sadness.

The flashlight started to flicker, slowly unclogging the sea of blindness. The room was empty, and the silhouette was gone. And in the door's place was her father. She heard in her father's rhythmic tone, "I love you, but I am gone. You need to move on." And all Taylor could do was stand up, walk up the golden step, and open the pretty white door. The door that she was once afraid of is now part of her beautiful home. And sitting on the couch was her sister. Taylor rushed, shouting her name with tears rolling down her face. In her sister's lap were old pictures of their family. Taylor smiled and leaned into her ear and whispered, "He loves you, he's gone, but we need to move."

Beyond the Moon

Teyah Murillo

I have always been fascinated by stories. Especially the ones Father used to tell. Like the one about Madam Le'von who lived in the lake, or the one about the minotaur. Even though these were just fairytales, I like to believe they were real.

My father used to call my name for me to come into the den. Then he would pick me up and sit me on his lap. He would always start with, "Once upon a time..." Then the magic and imagination would flow out of his mouth like the sweet tune of a hummingbird.

I would dress up in Mama's fancy gowns and dresses. After dressing up in these clothes, I would crawl in my bed under the sheets pretending I was Madam Le'von swimming with the tadpoles. Then, after my swim, I would rest in the tall grass listening to the cicadas.

I loved using my imagination and thinking about these stories. I remember one early morning I was brushing my doll's hair. Father wasn't feeling well. He had been in bed all day. Mama took care of him and tried to keep me away. "Mama! Father hasn't told me my story yet!" I complained.

"Annabelle! Your father isn't feeling too well. He is sick. Let him relax. Why don't you go play with your toys," she told me. Father poked his head out from the fluffy pillow. "Sick?! I ain't sick. I'm better than ever! Now, Annabelle, why don't you crawl up next to me?" So I did. I crawled up next to my father. "No Annabelle," he began, "this story is gonna be different. This is not gonna be about any Madam Le'von or a minotaur. Just a simple story." Father didn't start with, "Once upon a time." He cleared his throat. He had this look I had never seen before. "Annabelle, you're seventeen now, so you're old enough to hear a story like this. There's a place beyond the stars, beyond the moon. It's a much nicer place. Everyone gets along. There's no fighting, no pain. You never get sick. It's a great place." He paused for a while.

"Well, then there's another place that's deep down in the ocean. Under the rock. The place is horrific: nothing but evil and chaos. Just sadness, and everyone feels awful all the time. The worst kind of people go here. The ones that will hurt you. It depends on your decisions and choices you make in life where you will go." I could tell he was holding back tears.

I reached for his hand. "It's okay, Daddy. I'll be good, so I can have a happy ending," I said. He jerked away. "No, Annabelle, listen! These tall tales I've been telling you always have happy endings, but that's not how life works. None of it's real. You have to make your happy ending, and sometimes dreams don't come true. You can't be naïve your whole life. Dreams are hard to achieve. I know you like hearing my stories. Trust me, I like when you listen to them. Just remember, Annabelle, you're gonna have to grow up. There are no happy endings. There is no fairy tale." He looked at me for a long while. It was silent. I was so confused. He had lied to me my whole life. No happy ending? No fairy tale? What does he mean?

"Get along now. I need some rest." He pushed me away. I couldn't go to sleep that night. Father's stories had always been so delightful. I couldn't get myself to like that one.

The next morning Father didn't call me to come into the den. Mama wasn't cooking breakfast. There wasn't any noise. I walked out of my room slowly and approached the master bedroom. I twisted the door open.

Then I saw what my father meant about no happy endings. My father lay cold and bluish in Mama's arms. She was sobbing and begging God to take her instead. My father died. He was gone. There was no happy ending.

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN FASCINATED BY STORIES.
ESPECIALLY THE ONES FATHER WOULD TELL.

HE WOULD ALWAYS CALL ME
OUT TO THE DEN TO TELL A
NEW STORY.

THERE WOULD ALWAYS
BE A HUMMINGBIRD

ONCE UPON A TIME

Levon swimming with

the tadpoles. just keep swimming

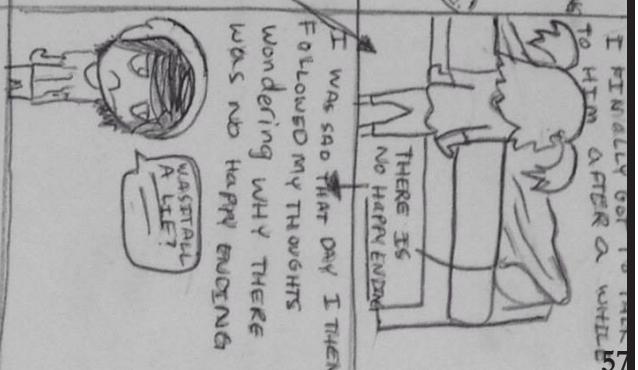
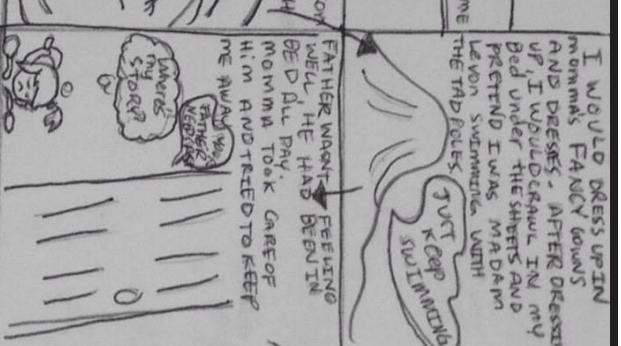
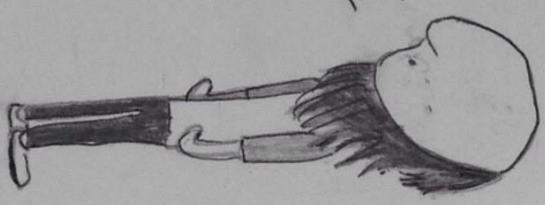


Dad then told me there
was never a happy ending...

I had to make my own.

After what happened...

I don't think I'll ever
have a happy ending



**GOD
JUST TAKE
ME INSTEAD!**

Mom wouldn't stop
crying...

Dad was gone.

She's Gone

Alex Mendoza

I remember when she left. The day was July 8, 1984. I sat there, sweating, shirtless. Beer cans and bottles of booze riddled the brown, rotten coffee table. Another bad dream. I was on the couch. Our once big, beautiful house was trashed with our sorrowful tears. It has been 20 years now.

Azeus walked into the room, his blond hair a mess, tired. You could tell he had a long night. He sat down next to me. We looked at each other, and then I stood with smile, telling him good morning. He frowned, knocked all the cans off the table, flipped it, and stiffly rose to his feet.

With nearly unbearable intensity he yelled into my face, his father's face, "She's gone, Dad! Every day you sit around, doing nothing! You sit here and drink your life away! You're nothing now, Dad! If I should even call you that."

I was shocked by his reaction. Maybe he was right. Tears rushed down my face.

"You shut up! Every night you come home drunk! Who do you think you are, talking to your father like that! You will treat me with resp--"

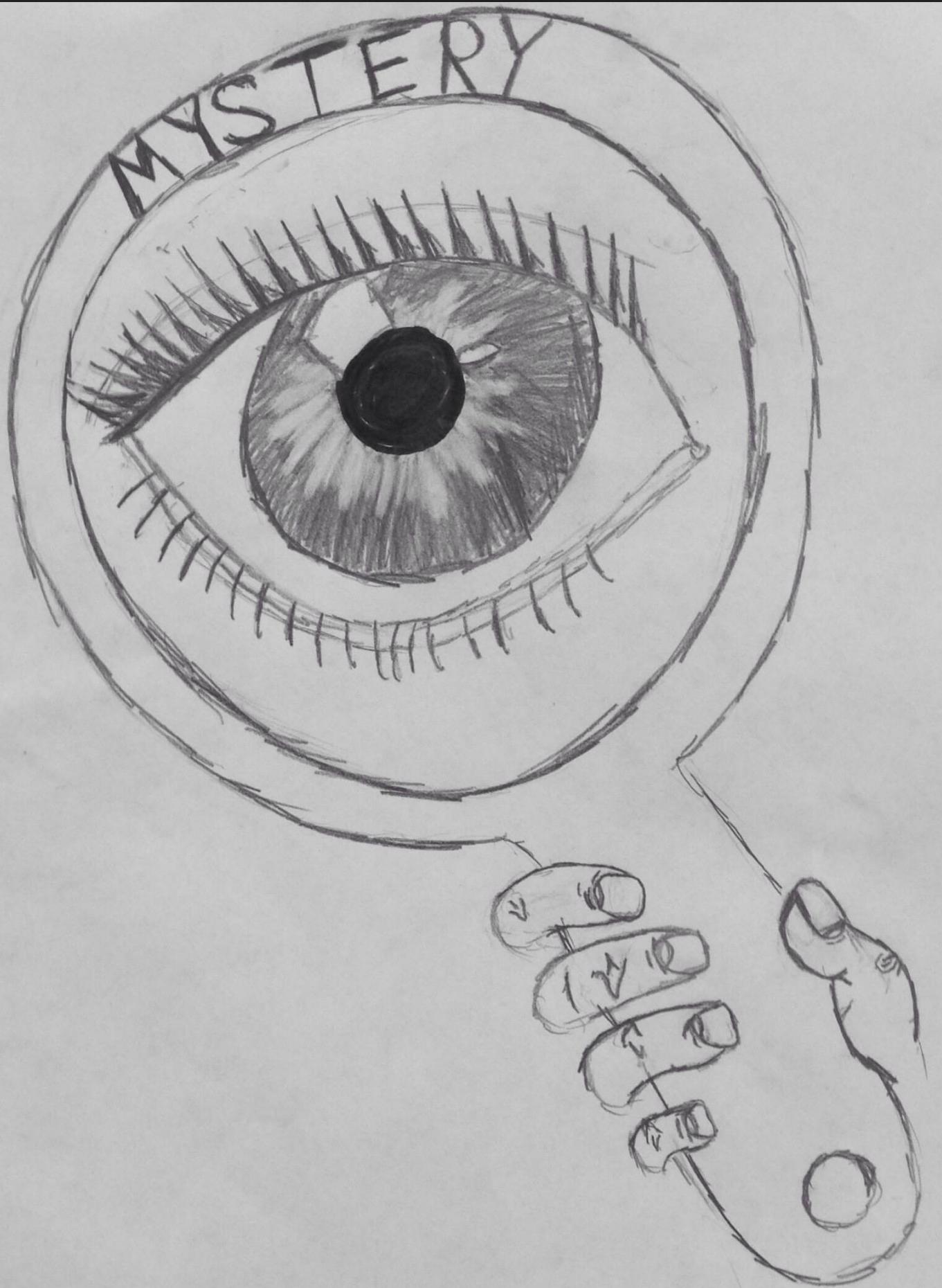
He cut me off, "A father?! Is that what you are? Fathers provide for the family, not sit there and rot. A father is a man, a man who will protect what he loves, and is always there for them!"

He looked at me with a fire in his eyes, his hands wrapped in a fist.

Then he swung.



Macilynn Avary



Zen

Camille Trevino

I remember this day like it was yesterday. It was the middle of the summer, and it was pouring down rain. The trees blew from east to west, and the lights flickered throughout the house. My name is Junior, and I am 27 years old. I am raising my little sister, Aliyah, since my parents passed away a few months ago. We have been staying in my grandmother's house for these few months until everything calmed down with our family. My grandmother passed away five years ago and left us with her house from the 40's. The Victorian house had stained wall and old, creaky floors. Everything possibly scary was stored in this house, not to mention my great-grandmother's mother played a role in the Salem Witch Trials, which she then passed on to the next generation. This house held spirits, demonic books, candles, and what looked like fairy dust. A room was dedicated to what my grandmother called her "zen."

This day, Aliyah and I were lighting all her old candles in the living room. We grabbed our sleeping bags and lay in the room, staring at the ceiling and making our own puppet show until our eyes got heavy. Then boom! The loudest bang came from the attic upstairs. I grabbed my flashlight and held Aliyah's hand as we tiptoed to see what happened. Aliyah stayed at the bottom of the stairs at the attic, holding her flashlight, as I was holding my breath being the brave one to scope out the sound. The coast was clear, and I made my way down. I didn't see my sister standing there anymore, but I could hear her giggles echoing across the hallway. I figured it was her way of telling me, "Let's play hide and seek." So I yelled, "Come out, come out, wherever you are!" I followed her giggling voice, and there she was lying in the middle of the floor, levitating over what looked like the Star of David. Her body was motionless; her eyes were rolled back in her head.. The giggle came from a dark spirit sitting in the corner of the room. The words that came from Aliyah's mouth were unexplainable.

I kept blinking like it was a dream. I then screamed for it to stop. For whatever it was, to please go away. The rain poured down harder. The room started to spin. The force of nature had pushed me out of the room. I banged on the door with heavy hands until it swung open. There she was, lying there like nothing ever happened. I picked her up like a little baby, carried her down the stairs, and held her like it was the last time I would ever see her. She very slowly opened her eyes and said, "Let's go to bed." I let her sleep as I watched her breath. The next morning, the sun shined in the room. Everything was calm and soothing. The fear was gone. The air seemed lighter, and the day was new. I didn't tell Aliyah what had happened the night before. I called over our priest who blessed the house and informed me that whatever was there had left. With the few dollars in my pocket, it was hard to pack up and leave.

Nothing has happened since that day. Aliyah has been the same joyful little girl she has always been. I always wonder what was sitting there that night laughing and what did it want to do with us. We attended our regular church Sundays with the community and prayed every night before bed. The room is now kept as an updated library, which no one ever enters. This day will always leave me speechless, and I will always keep the story to myself.

Maelstrom

Dylan Demetrios

Even with her mighty engines in reverse, the ocean liner was pulled further into the canal. The captain stood at the helm of the ship, clutching the wooden wheel, in the midst of blinking lights and complicated dials that were spinning millions of times per second.

He yelled into the speaker that connects the engine room to the bridge, “We need more engine power!”

The gargled reply came from the speakers, and the mechanic shouted, “I’m givin’ her all she’s got Cap’n!”

But it was too late, for the Queen’s mighty vessel was pulled into the flooding water of the canal and out to sea.

“The ship wasn’t scheduled to be put at sea for at least another month,” the captain said exasperatedly to his first mate, Nolan.

Nolan responded, “She has several leaks in her hull, but all can be managed.”

Captain Ellis confided, “It wasn’t the leaks I was worried about; it’s the storms.”

The clouds were whipping across the sky, and the winds were picking up.

“It’s going to be the storm of the century,” said Nolan, “This ship isn’t ready for the sea, and we blew the engines in the canal.”

“Aye,” said the captain, “And she’s being pulled further out to sea by the current. The rescue ships can’t sail with the storm so close, so we are on our own.”

Down in the dark boiler room, only being illuminated by a flickering emergency light, the mechanic was hard at work, fixing the blown pipes. Even in the dark, humid, and near-deafening room, the mechanic could sense the weather changing. He took a break from the pipes and called up to the Captain to ask for a status report about the weather.

The captain responded, “There’s a monster storm heading our way, and we need to get those engines up and running ASAP.”

“Aye, aye, Sir.” The mechanic, despite the blistering heat and the humidity, worked with a renewed sense of urgency.

Topside on the bow of the ship was a cartographer, the same cartographer who was going to be assigned to the ship. He was studying the skies as the wind started to kick up mighty waves and send spray over the sides of the deck. The crashing of the waves against the hull became more frequent, and the boat started to rock from side to side. The cartographer quickly ducked under the deck just before the deafening winds threatened to brush anyone topside overboard.

When the rain hit, it was in massive sheets, and it was as cold as ice. The captain surveyed the rippling ocean, and then turned pale white with fear at what he saw.

He yelled, “MAELSTROM!”

Outside the Wall

Austin Reyes

My name is Austin. I live in a world that is dull and boring. Nothing really happens in this world. There is no conflict, and that's ok. But sometimes I wish I could have an adventure somewhere. I live alone. My parents left me a long time ago, but I've lived a fine life without them, so it's fine. I really wish I was out in the world, not surrounded by this wall. The fifty meter tall walls were built a long time ago. No one leaves the walls, but...

"Austin!"

Oh what could that be?

"What do you want? Oh, hi, Angela."

"Austin, have you seen Blake? I can't find him anywhere."

"No, I have not. Try looking around the wall. He might be trying to climb it again."

"Ok, I will. Thanks, Austin."

That was Angela. She is a childhood friend of mine. She was taken in by Blake's family after her parents were killed. She's very protective of Blake. Blake is also a childhood friend, and it's our dream of leaving these walls, these walls that have trapped us in this city. But I'm done thinking about these unforgiving walls. I might as well head home, sweet hole. It's so blank and plain. 3 chairs and a round table, an oven, sink, a bed, and it's only 3 rooms: my small bedroom, a bathroom, and a living room. But it's what I call home.

Well I might as well...Wait. What is that? A rug? When did that get there? I don't have a rug. Might as well see what's under it—"Knock knock." Who could that be at the door?

"Hey, Austin, open up."

That sounds like Blake. What could he want?

"What do you want, Blake?"

"You said that you would show us what's under the rug."

What? But I just saw that rug. How could Blake know about it? Might as well open the door and get some answers.

"How do you know about the rug? Oh, and hi, Angela."

"What are you talking about, Austin? We have always asked you what's under the rug, and you said you would tell us today."

"But I just saw that rug. I never saw it before. I think I would remember a rug in the middle of my floor."

"Hi, Austin."

"Austin, come on. You told us that we could see what's under the rug."

"Ok, fine. Well let's just see what's under the rug. Let's just...what the...is that a hatch?"

It indeed was a hatch that was under the rug. This unbelievable rug. How did Blake know about the rug, and I just saw it. That's not normal. Could I have been blocking it out of my...

"Austin!"

"Hmm..."

"Come on, let's find out where this thing leads."

"I...at...did you just open that hatch? It could have set off a bomb. Blake, think before you do something like—"

"Adventure ho!" And he just jumps in the hole. Really. I was talking, and he just jumps down into that deep, dark, adventurous, magical hole not knowing where it...oh well.

This is so exciting, falling down a dark hole not knowing where I might end up. This is going to be great. This is going to be—

“Ouch.”

“Ouch, hm. Oh, hi. Austin, what are you doing under there?”

“Angela, please if you would get off of me. I can barely breath.”

“Oh, sorry, Austin. Wait. Where’s Blake? Austin, where’s Blake? Where is he? What if he’s hurt or worse? What if--?”

“Angela! Please get off of me, and I will help you find Blake. Ok, just get off.”

“Sorry again, Austin. I just want to know where Blake is.”

“It’s ok, Angela. I know you just want to find Blake. That’s fine. Ok, let’s go find him.”

Well my everything hurts. Time to find where Blake is. He must be around here somewhere, and for my own well-being, I must find Blake. But I bet I know what he’s thinking. “So, it’s real,” he thought, “It’s really real.” Ha, that would be funny if he was thinking that. Something’s wrong.

“Angela...Angela...Angela, where are you, Angela?”

This is really bad. Where is Angela? Where’s Blake? Where am I? When did I end up in this white room? Where am I? I don’t know how long I’ve been in this blank, white room. I can’t think straight. I’m...what? I’m...I...I...

My name is Austin. I live in a world that is dull and boring.

The Door

Abbey Garrison

Sherly and her husband, Paul, just retired and were looking to move out to the country and relax. They had finally found the perfect home, but this is only where the story begins. They fell in love with an old log cabin in the middle of the woods of Nebraska. They asked their grandkids to come down for the weekend to help them unpack and see the house. Sherly went out to get food and snacks for the weekend while Paul stayed home.

His curiosity has finally gotten the best of him while waiting for his wife to return. He had to see what was in the basement. He walked over to the door and soon found himself in the darkness of the basement. One creaky step at a time he made his way to the bottom. Scrambling, he finally found the light hanging from the ceiling and pulled the chain causing the dull light to glow, revealing many objects covered by sheets. He began pulling them off one by one, revealing ordinary things like sofas or bookshelves. Beginning to get bored, he started to return back up the wooden stairs, but something stopped him. He looked back down to where he supposed the noise came from, but was unable to see anything as the light was off, so he decided to ascend up the stairs again.

As he reached the top, he heard a plop, which sounded like a book or something had fallen from somewhere. He decided to go check it out. When he turned on the light back on, it revealed that it was, in fact, a book that had fallen to the concrete floor. He picked it up to set it back on the bookshelf, only to realize that there was no possible way it could have fallen from that bookshelf.

Curious as to where the book came from, he turned around to see if there was anywhere else it could have fallen from and discovered a door that he didn’t notice before. His heart was pounding when he thought he was sure he’d seen the doorknob turn. He took small, steady steps to reach the mysterious door. He noticed a small hole in the center of the door that felt like cold air was escaping from.

The cold doorknob squeaked as if it hadn’t been opened in years, only to reveal clothes? It appeared as if it had been someone’s closet, but he noticed something very unusual at the bottom of the closet: snow?! He moved the clothes aside and laid his eyes upon a magnificent sight. “Narnia,” he whispered to himself in awe. He stepped further into the magical place as the uncanny door shut behind him, to never be opened again.

Unfair Life

Treyson Hopper

It all began when someone left the window open. At the beginning of the fall, the Gates family arrived at their new home. Bill, the father of the family, knew that they were being watched as they unloaded their expensive décor for their home. Jane, his wife, had heard and read stories about the area. These stories consisted of criminals who stole more and more of people's things over time. This was the reason they had left their old home. She loved their new home so much that she didn't bother telling anyone.

Their youngest child, Timmy, got the smallest room on the second floor. He didn't appreciate the way his entire family treated him. They hated him so much they turned the bigger room that Timmy wanted into storage just to make him suffer. Timmy drowns out all of his problems by leaning out the window and enjoying the weather.

Timmy's older brother, Logan, got the biggest room, aside from the master bedroom and the now storage "closet." Timmy hated his family but especially Logan because he was always beating Timmy up and bringing him down. Yet Logan is still the favorite.

About 2 years after they moved in, Bill thought it might be a good idea to take a vacation to bond as a family. Everyone thought it was a good and was willing to go except Timmy. He didn't want anything to do with his family. They didn't like him, and he wanted someone who would.

Everyone was ready to go and yelling at Timmy from downstairs. He wasn't ready or packed. He was just sitting on the foot of his bed, staring out of an open window. They missed three flights by the time he was ready. Then he got the pleasure of being yelled at the whole car ride to the airport. After they made it through security, Timmy was dreaming of being at home with his window and the cool breeze blowing around him. Meanwhile, back home, the people that had been watching them while they were unpacking began to take interest in the Gates' homestead. First they tried to walk through the front door, but it was locked. They walked around the house, and it didn't take long for them to realize that there was an open window on the second floor...

The day that the Gates family got home, everything that they had ever owned was gone. The only thing left was an open window on the second floor. All of the blame was thrown on Timmy.

"Why can't you be smart?!" screamed his dad.

"Why can't you be like Logan?!" yelled his mom.

"You are a disgrace to this family!" said Logan.

Timmy said nothing. He just walked upstairs in shame.

It had been about a month since the incident, and the family was still giving Timmy dirty looks, and they were still yelling at him. Most of the time he was used to it, but this was different. He knew it was his fault, but he just wanted someone to be on his side for moral support for once. He couldn't handle the stress anymore.

On Timmy's 8th birthday, Bill went upstairs to get him for breakfast. Timmy locked his door the night before, and he wouldn't open it that morning. Bill grabbed his crow bar and pried the door open. Timmy was gone and all that was left in his room was an open window and a rope tied to a noose with a post-it note that said, "It could be worse."

It All Began When Someone Left the Window Open

Miriah Mattos

He sat there with a beer in his hand and her picture in the other. He kept looking at her trying to hold back from losing what little strength he had left. But the more he sat there looking at her hazel eyes, her long brown hair, and her beautiful smile, the more he couldn't help but say her name softly. His eyes became a dark cloud, and his tears fell from his face like a rain storm that never seemed to end.

He kept wishing she would walk through the door, but knowing in the back of his mind it was too good to be true. He would go back into his thoughts and remember the last time he held her and the very last kiss he gave her. He cried even more knowing he could never feel her soft, cold hands against his chest, or feel her warm lips touch his, or talk all through the night and she would fall asleep in his arms. He thought to himself, "The last thing I wanted to do was marry her; I never ever wanted to bury the love of my life."

He finally got up stumbling over his own feet, trying to make his way to the closet. He grabbed her shirt and cried even more, asking why she had to leave him like this, as if he was hoping to get an answer. He sat in the house for days. He wouldn't leave no matter how much he knew he needed to get back up and move on. Something was holding him back. He couldn't go on without her no matter how much he tried.

Things soon got worse. He kept saying he could hear her laugh as if she was there in the next room. He just couldn't take it anymore. The pain was killing him. The sight of her clothes made him weak, and it drove him crazy thinking he could hear and see her again. It drove him mad.

Then all of a sudden, he felt a cold chill.

He looked over seeing that the window was open. He walked closer and closer, then took a deep breath. The pain stopped. Love can make you do crazy things. Being with the one person you love means more than anything. More than being without them...I guess it all began when someone left the window open.

Cold, Black Eyes

Alex Mendoza

It was a perfect morning. The sun was shining, wind was blowing, and it smelt of sea salt. Sally and Charlie played at the edge of the water, shoes off, waves crashing. Sally sat at the edge of the shore, perched upon a boulder. Charlie was examining rocks, searching for the perfect one to skip. Finally, he found one, and with all his might he threw the rock. But the stone came skipping back. He stood there confused at what had occurred before his eyes. With shock, he picked up the stone and studied it. Again, with all his might, Charlie threw the stone, and again it came skipping back. He retrieved the stone once more, but as he reached down he thought he saw something. He saw a distinct figure in the water. Looking harder, he saw a face, a face that wasn't his own.

Charlie jumped back with a small shriek. Sally hopped off her rock, wondering what was going on. "Did you see that?" asked Charlie. "What are you talking about?" retorted Sally, with a look of confusion on her face. "A man, did you see the man?" He was so shocked the words just stumbled out of his mouth. Looking into the water, Sally told her brother, "Nothing's there, Charlie. You're just seeing things." And she walked away.

"B-b-but..." stuttered Charlie. Just then, the children's parents yelled for them, telling them to come back to the boat. "I'll race ya!" yelled Sally, dashing off. Charlie peered deeply into the water, searching for the man he thought he saw. He saw nothing. Maybe he was just seeing things. Being younger, he did have an active imagination. It was like he was in a nightmare. Charlie pulled away from the water and ran back to his parents.

They got to the dock, put in life jackets, and boarded the boat. Charlie wanted to tell his parents about his discoveries, but he knew he couldn't. What would they think of him? Their crazy son? Charlie didn't want to think about his morning. All he wanted was a nice day on the water with his family. He couldn't stop thinking about the man he saw. Most of all he couldn't stop thinking about those cold, black eyes that seemed to stare straight into his soul.

Charlie sat at the edge of the boat, looking deep into the water. He sat for an hour, straining his eyes in the dark blue abyss. Then he felt something grab his shoulder. He jumped, fearing it was the mysterious man. He spun so fast he nearly fell off the boat. It was only his father. His father was a tall, built man with short, blonde hair and crystal blue eyes. He wore only his bathing suit and flip flops. Surprised by his son's reaction, he took a step back. "You okay?" he asked. Charlie stood there, not answering. Finally, he managed to croak, "Yes." "Care to go for a swim?" his father asked. What could he do? His dad knew he loved to swim. Charlie looked into his father's eyes and nodded.

Looking over the edge of the boat, he looked for any signs of the man. Sally sneaked up behind Charlie as he looked in the water. She grinned and pushed him into the water. Charlie came rushing up, gasping for air. He was scared. He frantically looked around for the man. The hairs on the back of his neck stuck up. What if it was behind him? He knew he was being watched by those unforgettable eyes. Tears formed at the edges of Charlie's eyes. He must have blacked out because the next thing he knew, he was in his father's arms. The boy clung to his father, frightened. "Charlie, are you ok?!" Regaining his composure, he gave a nod and let go of his father. By then the whole family was in the water surrounding Charlie. He started to swim back when he heard a small scream followed by a louder one. It was his parents' screaming. Charlie spun around to find his parents swimming to the spot where Sally was treading water. But there was no Sally. He knew the man had taken his sister. Suddenly his dad was gone. Then his mom.

He was next, and he knew it. This was it. Charlie swam as fast as he could back to the boat, but something grabbed his ankle. Before he knew it, the sea had swallowed him alive. The darkness engulfed him. He kicked and thrashed, trying to stop his attacker. He attempted to gasp for air, but his lungs filled with water, Charlie looked down, and his eyes met with cold, black eyes. The man cracked a chilling smile at the boy, and the light faded as they went deeper and deeper to the bottom of the ocean. Then Charlie woke up. It was only a nightmare.

The Island

Dalton Foreman

A young man sat in the passenger seat of the small bush plane, looking at his license, reading his name "David Monroe" over and over again, and listening to music to make the time pass. Throughout the plane ride, David and the pilot had a little small talk here and there, but never actually got into a real conversation. About two hours into the flight, he noticed the pilot was holding his chest with a grip like he was trying to choke someone, and then it hit him like a sack of bricks. The pilot was having a heart attack!

Instantly, David took off his headphones and put away his license, looking over at the pilot, but he was too late. The pilot was leaned back, resting there in his seat. David immediately unbuckled his seatbelt and checked the pilot's pulse, only to confirm the pilot of his plane was dead. David just sat there for a few seconds, awestruck at what had happened.

Next David moved the body of the pilot into the passenger's seat, while he took over as pilot, and maneuvered his way towards the pilot's seat. The first thing he did was pick up the headset that the pilot used to communicate, but found nothing but an empty frequency when he called out for help, and then the realization came to him. He was completely and utterly alone. There was no pilot, nobody on the other end, and nobody to tell him where to go or what to do.

David next checked the fuel, only to find it almost half empty, with barely enough to make it home, even if he knew what to do and where to go. Then he started searching for islands. Then, out in the distance, was a pretty large island, and heading there seemed like the best plan he had. David, now soaring towards the island, thought to himself for a second, and then made a very sudden, risky decision. He was now determined to crash land on the island. David reached up very hesitantly, turned off the autopilot switch, but kept his hand ready to turn it back on, just in case something went wrong. After a few seconds, with no noticeable change in the flying of the plane, he put both his hands on the wheel and flew straight for the island.

David could feel the tension rising while soaring his way to the island. His hands were starting to get a little slippery as he handled the wheel, and little droplets of sweat formed along his forehead. He was now flying over the island, and there was only one problem. There was an extremely tall mountain range surrounding the beaches of the island, but moments later found a spot for him to squeeze through without crashing or flying all the way over the mountain.

After David flew past the mountain, he spotted a fairly large lake and realized what he was going to have to do. He was going to have to crash the plane into the lake and hopefully swim up and out before drowning. David flew far past the lake, made one last U-turn, so he could crash as smoothly as possible into the lake. As he approached the lake, he slowed down the plane as much as he could without causing problems. Now, not far from crash landing, David started to whisper to himself a little countdown before he hit the water.

"10...9...8...7...6...5...4...3...2...1."

David instantly felt the incredible shock and intensity of the plane rushing through the water. The recoil was much stronger than he could have imagined. As soon as possible, he released the clamp of the seatbelt as the plane sunk towards the bottom of the lake. As he was swimming up, thrashing his arms and legs as much as he could and feeling like his lungs were about to explode, he suddenly flew through the surface of the water like an Alaskan salmon. Luckily David wasn't too far away from the shore, and once he cleared the water out of his eyes and nose, he made his way there.

When David arrived at the shore, he looked up between the trees and knew exactly where he was. When David was a little boy, his dad was an archaeologist, and whenever he would get back from an expedition, he would tell this old tale about an island in the middle of the ocean. He said that every 500 years, a man would manage to get himself onto the island, and they would know where they were because the first thing they would see would be a setting sun between two tall palm trees, just like David. The story also said that within 4 weeks of when the man landed on the island, a woman would find herself on the island, just the same way that the man did.

Sure enough, about 4 weeks later, a woman showed up in the lake after a plane crash. And eventually, they fell in love, got married, and had five children. Then, over time, they all happily lived out their legacy on the island. And about 500 years later, the cycle happened all over again because it's true. It's really true.

Strange Noises

Erick Garcia

His heart was pounding. He was sure he had seen the doorknob turn. Charles was scared to death. He knew that there was no one behind the door because he was the only one home. His wife was working, and their son was at school.

Later that day, Charles called his mom and told her what happened. His mom was scared and shocked. She went over that day, and they did some research on their new house. They found an article that said that the basement been used, and the previous owners would hear noises at night. They said the door was too old to open. Every time someone tried to open it, there was this force behind it that pushed the door so it wouldn't open. The first owners said that they always heard some strange noises, and they even heard screaming. They were curious about what was down there and what was causing the noises but couldn't open it.

Danny, their neighbor, said that he had been living there for a very long time and that the house was used to kill animals. When Alli, Charles' wife got home, they went down to the basement. Surprisingly, the doorknob was loose, so they slowly turned it and opened the door. They suddenly felt a light breeze but couldn't see anything because it was so dark. They went upstairs to get flashlights and went back down to the basement. They discovered a lot of black bags that smelled bad. They opened the bags, and inside them were dead bodies. They couldn't believe their eyes. They were in total shock. The basement smelled like rotten eggs. It was dusty, and the walls were falling apart. They were terrified. They ran towards the door, but it was closed, and something pulled them back. They fell in a hole filled with blood. Nobody knows what happened to them after that.

All an Illusion

Mark Medina

If you had ever told me that I was going to be the most important person in the world, I would have told you that you were crazy. I thought that I was having the time of my life, but like always it turns out to be too good to be true.

About two and a half months ago, it all started. I was in my room when I was in my room at home when I heard a tiny voice that asked, "Is he the one?" I started to freak out, and I said, "Who's there?" The same voice said, "Hi. I'm Thomas. I have been studying you because we think that you are the long lost prince." When the tiny man came into the light, I thought this was a prank because he was so small. I didn't believe him, so I asked him some questions first. "Where are you from? Why's your skin purple?" He told me he came all the way from Mars.

He explained that he needed to find me because evil warlocks were going to take over the world, and he needed to stop them. He asked me to come with him. I accepted his offer. "Great," he said, "We're going to get our equipment and will meet here in an hour." An hour passed, and he came, bringing a machine that was like a platform. I stepped on it. Then in a blink, I was in Mars. Time passed. I defended the warlocks or so I thought, but it was all an illusion. I was a prisoner on Mars.

The Train to Parvalos

Juan Mendez

“Believe the Unbelievable”

The cool, misty breeze of the ocean hits the neighborhood off the coast of Boston. Perfectly normal neighborhood, or is it?

Chapter 1: The Orchid

Pete was always one of the very rare, creative kids, never seeing something for what it actually is: a dinner plate was a pirate ship steering wheel, and the car was a spaceship. He liked to go through the carwash with his dad. He imagined the colored bubble soap as aliens spitting at the car trying to eat him, and the spinning brushes were them trying to bust into the “spaceship.” Pete’s dad didn’t like to stay away from Pete for too long. He was scared that what happened to Pete’s mom could happen to him.

He had some friends across the street and on each side of the house. Gabe was a weird kid but the bravest of Pete’s group. He always went first, and it was very interesting that he’s friends with Pete. Juan came from Mexico with his uncle, and he leaves every other summer to visit his family. He doesn’t speak much English, but he understands enough to be Pete’s friend. Kaitlin was the princess who didn’t mind leaving her castle for a little fun. She doesn’t mind getting dirty but dislikes getting “kidnapped by the dragon,” as she calls it when her dad tells her to come back in. She’s a very loyal friend to Pete. Every Friday they all go to the park down the street. “They always come with a new story, but it always starts with a train,” the children’s parents said in unison. The train was always futuristic blinking lights, glowing levers and buttons, shiny rocks, and a cold, scary engine room, with a silhouette conducting the train.

Pete’s Dad

I woke up with a boulder jumping on my stomach. “It’s Christmas!” my son, Pete, exclaimed. I groaned and moaned, and he pointed out I sounded like a monster from his adventures. I chuckled, trying to get up from the bed and struggling to remember the dream I’d just had. It reminded me of a loved one. Nevertheless, I finally got up, my son pulling me downstairs. Letting him down, he rushed to the presents, and I noticed an extra present. I got him a drawing kit and a kid’s table. But what was in that tiny box? Questioning where that came from, Pete shouted, “Mom didn’t forget!” That threw me off and I whispered to myself, “How could that be possible?”

“Son, why did you say that mom got you that?”

“She said she was going to pass by and give me an Orchid.”

That was impossible. My wife and I never told anyone else that the orchid was our flower. The flower I used to propose to her, my love. “Why do you think that?” I asked in disbelief.

“Mommy told me in my adventures that she was going to come visit you in your dreams. She was going to join, and I don’t remember the rest,” he said, ripping open his presents.

That was impossible. After the present-ripping, I stood up, wondering where he got it from. He didn’t buy it or steal it. There aren’t any orchids around here that I know of. Where did he get that from? Still wondering, I came in from outside, wet and running upstairs to change. If there was an answer, I’d find it there.

Pete

Making my way outside, I caught a glimpse of a blue, hazy, flying blob about to hit me right on the face. By the time I realized, it was too late, and it snapped, liquid came out, like the pills my dad takes when his head hurts.

“Gotcha!” I heard Juan say behind the bush, hiding, like a prey about to pounce.

“That wasn’t very nice Juan. These are my nice clothes. Let me change, and we can play.”

With a new set of clothing, I saw Kaitlin beside Juan, about to pounce. Miss Princess galloped towards me, cocked with a monster egg: slimy, cold, and with a hard shell. Suddenly it felt like shampoo poured on my head, lots of it. But it wasn’t Kaitlin’s water balloon; it was Juan’s balloon. I saw Gabe in the distance with a balloon too, not aiming at me, but at Juan. He tossed the balloon to Juan, and it exploded. The waves of water coming off his head looked like a sombrero, which I found funny, but cruel.

“Traitor, not good!” I heard Juan exclaim to Gabe, who just laughed. “Not funny, to Pete is funny,” said Juan cleaning off the water and squeezing his clothing,

“It’s Friday, guys. The train conductor is here. We can go to Parvalos.” With excitement, Gabe said

“Can we meet the dream catchers again?”

MagnifiZent

McKenna Holcomb

The last three words Casper promised haunted his mind. “I’ll find MagnifiZent,” he told his dad before he passed away, and he wasn’t going to break his promise. Casper left without saying goodbye to anyone. He had no clue where this land was; all he knew was it was important to his father. A year passed, and Casper was nowhere close to his victory.

“Let me go! I know nothing,” he shouted to the middle-aged natives standing a foot away. “I’m trying to find the land MagnifiZent. Do you know where I might find it?” Casper was now hanging by his feet, held captive; the natives wanted one thing—the map. Casper would never give up his map. He held it with a firm grip. It was his father’s prized possession and the only way he could make it to the mysterious land. Casper could see the fury in their eyes. He knew this might be the end. He tried his best to break through the chains. He moved back to back and side to side until he was free. For three straight hours, he was doing this while the natives were out hunting. Casper could feel the chains getting weaker as he was getting closer and closer to the ground; finally, he heard the chain snap. Casper ran. “They’re coming,” he thought. Their faint footsteps hit the ground in the distance. The closer and closer his captors got, the further and further Casper ran. He dodged through the forest, missing every tree. Suddenly, he stopped and listened for their quiet footsteps. Five minutes passed. He lost them!

Casper couldn’t believe his eyes. The trees in the distance were a beautiful, lily-pad green, and each one had something unique about it. His favorite tree bloomed brilliant blue flowers, and growing on the trunk were vines that wrapped so perfectly, the tree itself looked like a candy cane. Miraculous birds flew above him big and small. Casper’s eyes were wide open; he couldn’t manage to even blink. He didn’t want to miss the beauty he was seeing. He could have sworn it was MagnifiZent. He read a decently large sign at the end of the forest, written in big, red letters. It said, “Welcome to Magnificent, where dreams will soon begin.” Casper was confused. He couldn’t comprehend why it didn’t read “MagnifiZent” with a “Z.” He was certain it was a typo, or he misread it because he had travelled far enough with his father’s map to be a phony. An older man with pearl-white hair and unusually large ears approached him.

“Sir,” Casper said, “I’m trying to find MagnifiZent. I have this map my father gave me, but it seems like it doesn’t even exist.”

“Oh no, MagnifiZent is surely real. It is ten times better than this land. Keep following your map, and you will get there eventually. It will all be worth it in the end.”

Before Casper could let a word out of his mouth, the man was gone. Casper couldn’t see footprints nearby or any other person. The man had vanished; all Casper could see were the tall, green trees.

The long journey Casper had been on requires him to eat bugs and leaves for his nutrition and occasionally coconut milk if he gets lucky. The next morning, as he was searching for his meal, Casper heard the deafening tribal call from his captors. He gathered the few things he still owned and made a run for it. He jumped over many logs and ducked under many trees. Even though Casper felt like he ran like a cheetah, he could soon feel the warm breath from Chief Kajudon. Startled by their presence, Casper lost his balance and one foot left the ground with the other one following. The wind was blowing in his face as he was sliding down the mudslide. Mud flew everywhere. The weight of the chief was against Casper’s neck. He soon realized his captors had followed him. At the bottom was a ten-foot deep pit of mud each victim fell into. Drenched in ten layers of mud, Casper asked, “Why are you guys interested in my map that is now ruined?” The chief responded with a stern, raspy voice, “MagnifiZent is full of the riches and glory my tribe needs. Your map is the last of its kind, and we need it to get there. Basically, it’s you or the map, and, regardless, we will get the map.” Hesitantly, Casper handed over the brown, crusted-over map. While they examined it, Casper was let go.

For hours, Casper roamed the beaten paths with no clues where to go. He felt like a rat in a maze. He tried to remember what the map looked like, the different forests, lakes, and valleys. But he couldn't seem to fit the puzzle together. With his tired mind he saw a man with pearl white hair, the man from the land Magnificent. He could spot those ears anywhere. The closer he got to him, the more real the other man seemed.

"Hello again," the man said. "I've been waiting, and it has taken you long enough." Casper didn't have any words, so the elder kept talking. "I see you have lost your way. It's hard to make it somewhere unknown without a map." Casper was nervous, but the man's smile was comforting. "Well I'm here to point you in the right direction. If you turn around and go south, MagniZent will be right under your nose." All Casper could manage to get out of his mouth was, "Than-" before the older man was gone. Confused, Casper turned around and walked unusually fast to see what was ahead of him. He passed tree after tree. As he watched the golden yellow sunset, he continued to search. Darkness wasn't going to stop him. In fact, nothing could stop him. In the faint distance, he could see lights glistening in the soon to be night sky. And the faster he walked, the brighter the lights got.

Soon Casper stood in front of a silver sidewalk with the biggest smile on his face. Every tree glowed in the dark when the sun touched the ground. Blue, pink, and orange were all he could see. Remarkably tall castles stood in the distance with moats in front of them, exactly like the fairytales. A clear, blue river ran through the land with every fish he could imagine swimming in it. Children were fishing, but everything they caught was released so as to preserve the soon-to-be extinct fish. Mothers and fathers danced in the distance. Their beautiful dresses were swaying back and forth on the glistening silver sidewalk. Everyone was kind and genuine. Love spread through the air.

"So it's true," he thought, "it's really true."

Bitten

Christian Hernandez

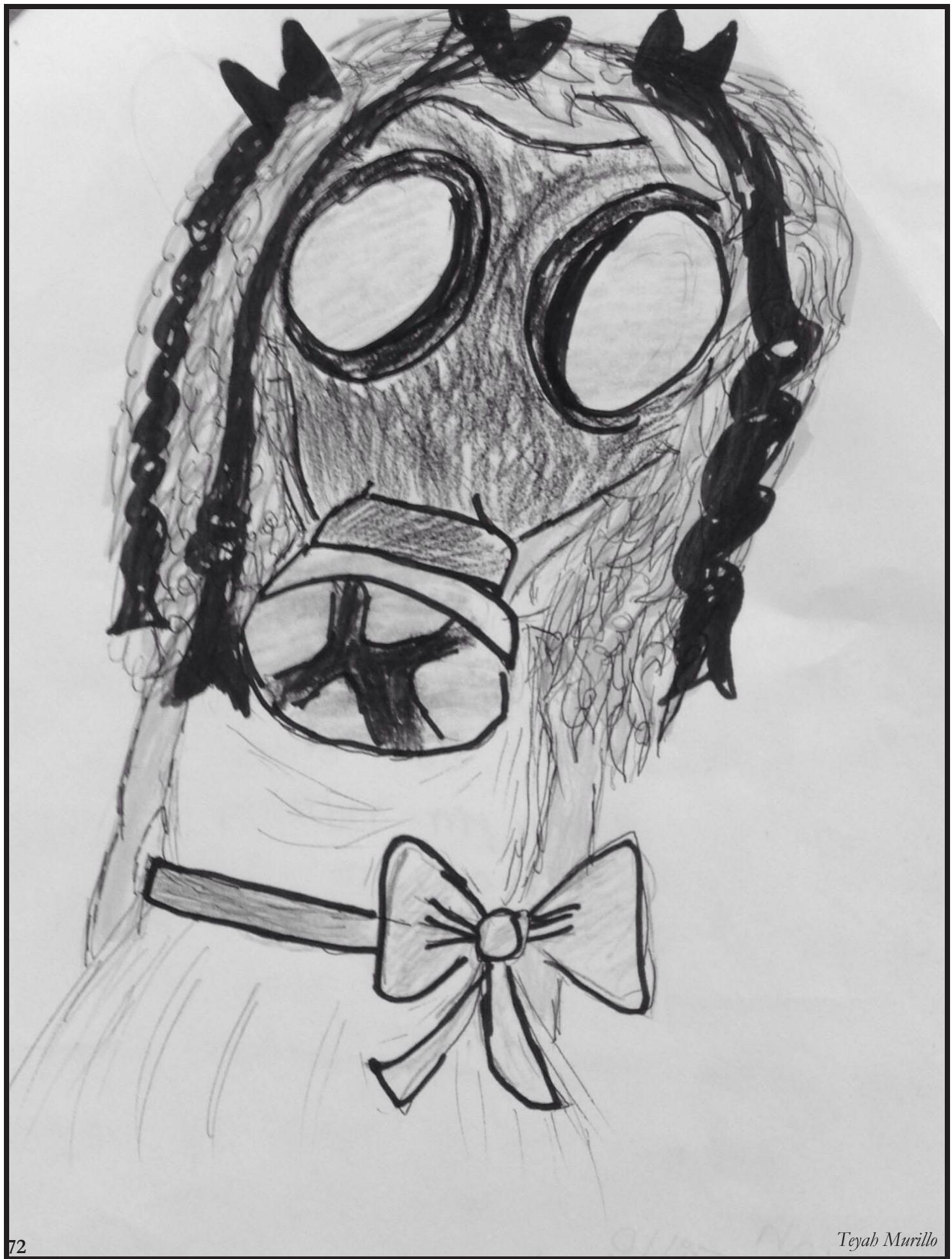
It all began when someone left the window open. Bob was asleep and didn't realize he had left it open until morning; nothing had happened to him. His mom and dad, Margaret and Joe, were in the kitchen feeding his baby brother, Toby. Margaret asked Bob, "Why did you leave the window open?" and he had no answer but to say, "I forgot to close it before I went to bed."

The next two weeks went by, and he closed his window every night. But the next night, he left it open a crack and went to sleep. When he woke up the next morning, he saw the window was open all the way. Bob wondered, "How did it open all the way when I had it open a crack?" Bob thought it was just a broken window. He thought it was only the wind, but it wasn't. He went to school like a normal 14 year old.

The next night, Bob was sound asleep, and when his mom went to check on him, she turned off the TV he had left on. That same night, he had the door closed, but out of nowhere, the door opened. There was no one there. Bob's blanket was pulled from his body, but no one appeared to be doing it. Whatever it was started pulling Bob into the closet and shut the door closed. The next morning, Margaret saw that Bob had a bite on his arm and asked him, "What happened?" He said, "He is here for Toby." His mom wondered what Bob was talking about, and from that day on Bob started to become crazy.

The next night, Bob got up from his bed and walked into Toby's room. He grabbed Toby and carried him, as Toby started to cry. His mom came in and put Toby back to bed, and Bob went back to bed without saying anything. The next night at midnight, Joe was asleep in the living room with the TV on. Bob awoke, walked downstairs, and performed a magical spell that lifted his dad into the air and killed him. Toby started to cry, so Margaret went upstairs and picked him up. But then Bob ran upstairs and used his power to push his mom back, and she died. Bob grabbed Toby and left.

The next couple of days passed by, and the police finally found out. They discovered Margaret and Joe's body, but they didn't know where Toby and Bob went. They never found them again.

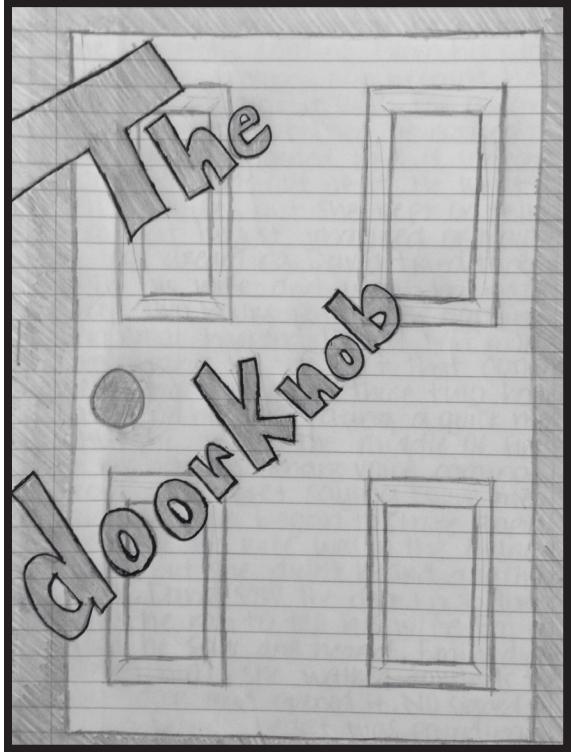


The Doorknob

Andrea Valenzuela

One evening David was on the couch sleeping when suddenly he heard one big noise coming from his closet. David was freaked out because he didn't know what it was. For a second, he ignored it, but then he noticed the doorknob turn. As if someone wanted to come out of it. He went to tell his wife Emily, but she kept saying that he had imagined it, that he was dreaming. David tried to agree with his wife and went back to sleep. Two hours passed, and nothing out of the normal happened. Later on, he was eating a quick meal. While he was finishing up, he heard a woman's voice coming from the closet saying, "Save me. Save me." He began to shake in fear. This time, his wife was in the living room, and once again she heard nothing. David saw the doorknob turn again. He ran to tell Emily what he saw and heard. Emily didn't believe him. She walked towards the closet door and opened it. No sign of anyone. David's heart was pounding.

He was sure he had seen the doorknob turn.



Andrea Valenzuela

That night David couldn't sleep because he kept on hearing noises and voices coming from the closet. He was about to wake up Emily when suddenly everything got quiet. After 30 minutes of silence, noises of footsteps started up. David got more scared. He turned on the light, grabbed his gun, and waited. He waited, and waited, and waited, but the footsteps never got to his bedroom. Confidence started coming back to him. Days passed, and the noises were still there, but David wasn't scared anymore. He grew used to them. One morning he woke up at 7:30 a.m. and went to get breakfast. In the middle of his nice breakfast, he heard a man's voice saying, "Save me. Save me." Quickly he ran to his bedroom to get his gun in case he needed it. David decided not to tell Emily what happened. Instead, he decided to figure it out by himself. The man's voice was still there, while David walked towards the closet door. The doorknob turned, but nothing or no one came out. David decided to move towards the door again. Each step closer, he began to shake more. He was a couple inches away from opening the door when he heard a huge boom inside the closet.

Voces started talking at the same time, and it became impossible to pick out a single voice just like picking out a single dog out of a barking pack of dogs. He got to the door, placed his hand on the doorknob, and turned it slowly. The door opened wide. David turned on the light and almost passed out when he saw what was inside. There was a robot that was programmed to talk and move the doorknob automatically. A laugh started behind his back. It was his wife Emily who had arranged a prank to see how he would react. David started to get really mad at her but then decided, "Ahhh...I'll just let it go. No one has made me a prank like this in centuries." Both of them started laughing really hard and thought to themselves how happy they were. Weeks passed, and peace was with them. But then the noises started again in the same closet. Emily at first thought it was David getting revenge, but when she asked, he said it wasn't him. At first she didn't believe him. David wasn't being honest with her.

Strange things happened more often. This time it wasn't voices saying, "Save me." Now they were screaming in pain. The doorknob turned all the time. Nails scratched the door at night. Emily was really scared, and so was David. They couldn't stand living there anymore with these strange occurrences. Now that it was confirmed that it wasn't a robot or a prank, what could it be? Was this really an unknown thing haunting their home or a prank from their kids? It's still an unknown mystery.

Here We Go Again

Faizan Qureshi

“Is he the one?” a tiny voice asked.

“Yes,” a deeper voice replied. “He is the key to our return.”

Gray woke up to the sound of two voices with a throbbing sensation in his head. He was in a small room where all four walls were only five feet from each other, but he had no memory or getting inside. Or anything at all. Gray was about to open the door to see what was going on but stopped when he heard the two people converse again.

“Are you positive he knows where it is?” The one that sounded like a woman whispered.

“I bet my life on it,” the man said as he slowly walked toward the closed door. “But if he won’t tell us, I’ll just rip it out of him.”

Hundreds of thoughts ran through Gray’s mind when he saw the dark hand grab the door handle. Sweat trickled down his cheek as he made eye contact with the figure behind the door.

“Resisting wouldn’t be the smartest thing to do,” he said while Gray saw the most sinister smile he has ever seen.

Without thinking, Gray ran out of the closet, pushing the mysterious man out of the way and escaping out of the room. That’s when it hit him. Gray started to remember where he was. He had just left his little brother’s room and now he was tripping on himself in the hallway.

I’ve got to get out of here, he thought. I need to survive to tell the others.

Right as he was about to turn into his room something whizzed past his ear and the wall in front of him exploded. Small pieces of wood and glass rained down giving Gray small cuts and splinters. He felt a small groove in his hair above his now bleeding ear. Gray’s eyes immediately darted to the giant hole in the wall where his family pictures used to hang, but when he turned around his eyes slowly locked on the man reloading what looked like a futuristic gun. Gray’s heart pounded harder than ever before. He knew he was facing death right in the face, and there was no way out of it.

NO! I won’t die. Not here, not now.

“Just give up,” the man said, as if reading his thoughts. “There’s no hope for you.”

Mustering what little strength he had, Gray got up and said, “You need me. Without me, your life would be pointless.”

Just as the man opened his mouth to reply, Gray pitched a piece of wood he was hiding at the man’s forehead, knocking him out on impact before running into his own room.

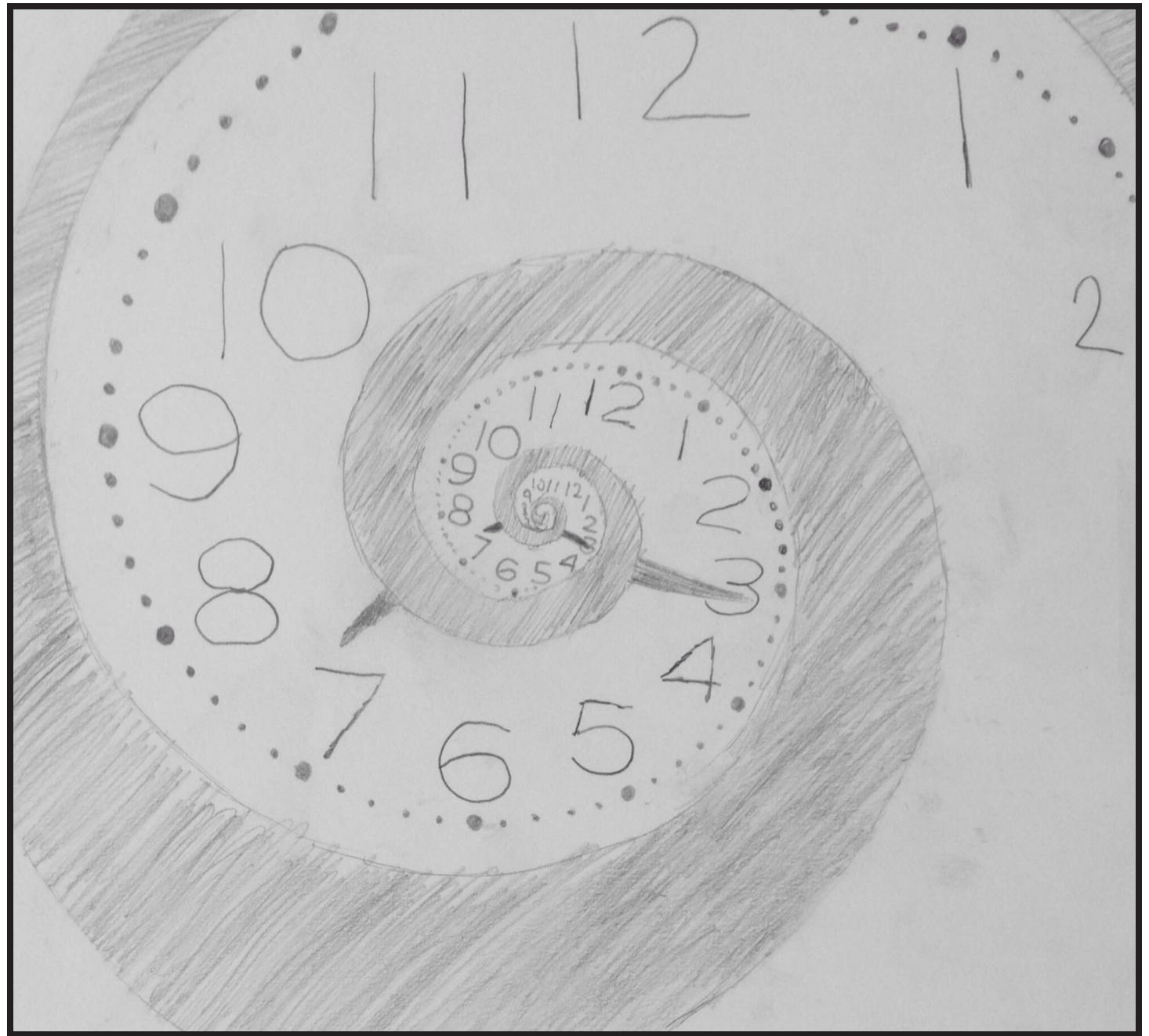
Gray finally understood why he was being chased. The two humans were actually from the future and were trying to find the time machine that he found and took home. He slowly walked towards a safe corner of the room, when he unlocked it. A small silver rectangle the size of a shoe box was waiting for him.

Gray carefully picked it up, examining the colorful flashing buttons that were far too complex to understand and the chrome color which he could see his bruises in. Just when he was about to smash it on the ground to end the madness, the door burst open to reveal the time traveler with the tiny voice, wielding a long sword that would scare even expert swordsmen. The woman walked towards Gray without speaking a word while he just sat there paralyzed.

“Give me the machine,” she said, “and your death will be less painful.”

Gray crawled back until he realized his hand had pressed something, before he could even think about it, the time machine let out a blinding light. Gray felt like he was falling through a slide. When the sensation was over Gray fell to the ground in a closed area and hit his head, causing him to pass out.

“Is he the one?” a tiny voice asked.



Faizan Qureshi

Ef

Amy Huynh

He was walking down the street in a baggy sweatshirt and jeans. His boots making a shhh sound as he walks on the sidewalk which was flooded by water puddles since it was raining heavily during the storm just last night. He was minding his own business, until a girl—a typical, beautiful girl—in a long-sleeved v-neck, black leggings, and knee high boots approached him.

“Ine weather we’re having, right?”

She couldn’t seem to be able to pronounce the ‘f’ sound.

“Mmm...I guess so,” he replied. He walked a bit faster to try to avoid the awkward girl. He just wanted to go home and eat something after a long day of work.

“U—um, S—sir...?” She stretched out her arm to reach for his sleeve, but he accelerated too quickly for her, making her miss. “I...I need your help!”

He stopped and thought to himself, You just want to go home. Just go home! Walk away! He sighed as he could never have the heart to say no. “What is it?” he asked, irritated and cold.

“I...I need something from you. It’s kinda, sorta important...” she doubtfully answered. She was rocking back and forth on her heels and looked away trying to avoid eye contact.

“Well?” he replied harshly, “I don’t have all day, you know. I might just die of starvation, thanks to you.”

She was shocked at his statement and her eyes widened under the shadow of her umbrella hanging loosely over her head. She froze. “Never mind, then. Take care of your li’e...” She ran away upset. Before he could realize it, she was nowhere in sight. What is her problem? Ehh, she was probably just lost and too intimidated by my manly charms to ask any further. He walked home, took off his shoes, and laid them on the snow rack. He locked the front door he entered through and went to his room. He lay in bed, put an arm over his eyes and closed them. What should I eat today? I haven’t cooked in a whi... Suddenly he noticed a familiar smell.

It was not a pleasant type of familiar smell, like mama’s old shepherd’s pie. It was the smell of... something burning. Smoke! He ran out into the kitchen and noticed there was a pan on the stove; there was something burning on the stove. I never – I never cooked anything at all... How...? He turned his head left and right, looking for anything suspicious before he turned off the stove. Still curious, he looked around his home. He went to the front door. His shoes were on the floor. The door was unlocked.

He rubbed his eyes, opened wide at the scene. Maybe he was hallucinating? For some reason, the moments he spent with that girl flashed in his head. Take care...of...my lie...?

Right as he murmured that under his breath, the lights turned off. He shrieked like a child and fell to the floor. The lights turned back on almost instantly, and before his eyes was the beautiful girl from before, holding the same umbrella over her head, eyes not visible. She was almost like a shadow, even in the brightest of lights. In her light was... a round figure. He looked up at her and nervously noticed her apparent pain, as tears were raining down her cheeks and glistened as each droplet disintegrated as they fell to the floor.

“WHAT IS YOUR PROBLEM?! BURSTING INTO A STRANGER’S HOME?!” He screamed as he reached his arm for the phone on the table, which was unfortunately missing. He looked at the girl and noticed she held two broken objects that appeared to be the broken phone. How was this possible? He didn’t see her move even an inch. He ran into his room cautiously, looking behind him to make sure the girl was not following him. She was not. Click. He locked his door. He went through his dresser, searching frantically for his pistol. He held the hand gun close to his collar bone, shaking while pointing it at the door. His heart was pounding. He was sure he had seen the door knob turn. Then he heard a whisper.

"What's wrong? I thought you said...you were going to help me..."

"YOU'RE INSANE! And what lie did you chatter about earlier?! I never made a lie to you!"

"Ah yes, your lie. Don't 'orget about it..." she whispered. Click. Click. Click. Clickclickclick. She seemed to be struggling to unlock his door. Clickclickclickclickclick—screeeeech. In the open door, she still held her umbrella over her head, but had the round figure in her left hand. He was about to pull the trigger until—"Don't do it," she chanted.

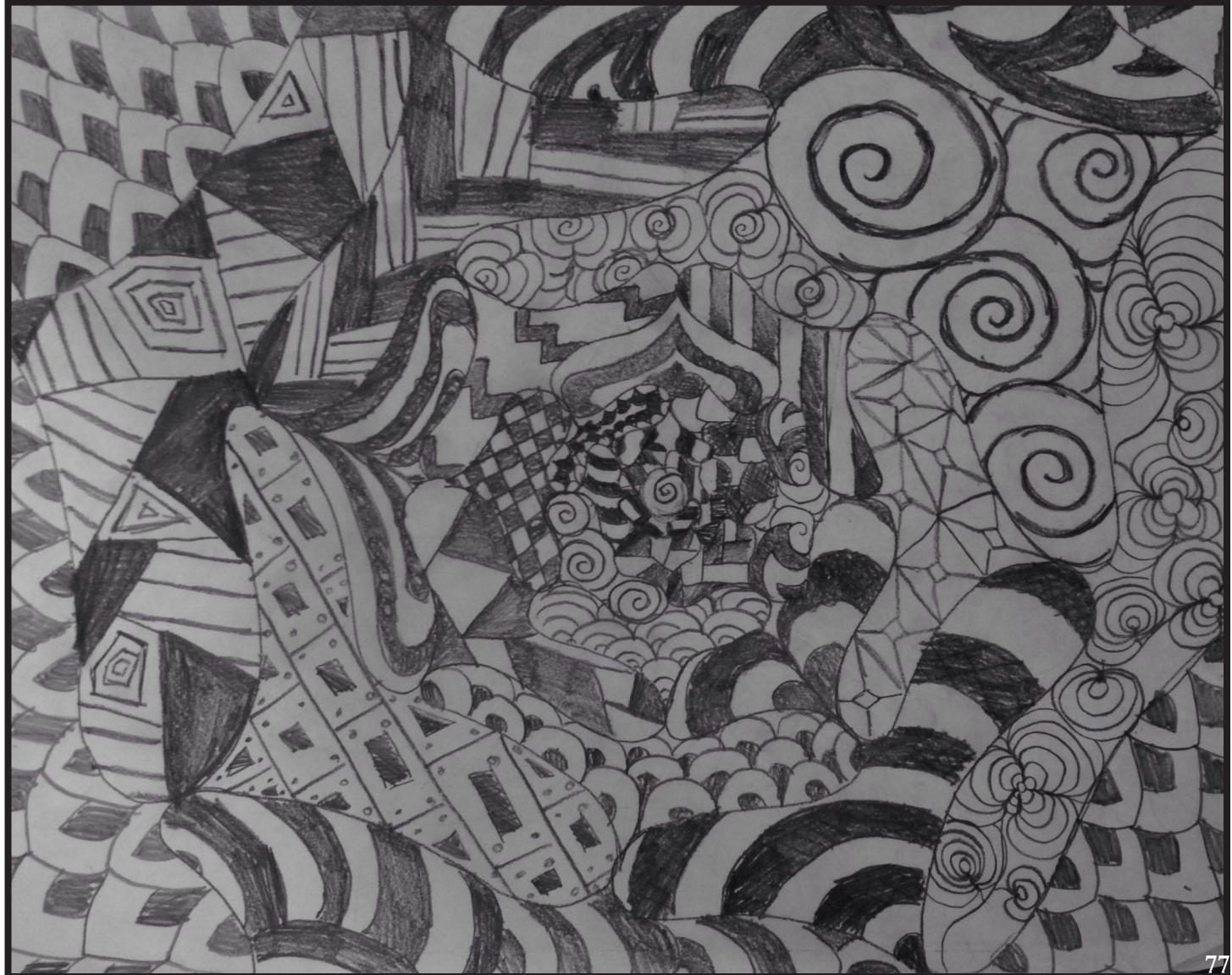
He hesitated for a few seconds then pulled the trigger. BANG. Right as the bullet was shot, everything went into slow motion. Cling. A bright line came out from the contact between the round figure and the bullet. He looked up and stared at the spreading bright line. He was deep in thought. ine... ine... lie... lie... orget? 'Orget? Forget? --- Fine! Forget! ...Li'e. Life!

"I need... your life," she calmly stated as a demented grin spread across her face.

The light cast a shadow on the wall and would stay there forevermore. The shadow consisted of a man under an umbrella that floated approximately three inches above his head.

"Thank you for taking care of your life. I really needed it." She held her own hands over her heart and walked out, heading for the route she walked along with the man before his life was taken. Her ghastly smile was clear to the world as she walked away with an umbrella hanging loose on her shoulder and over her head. Suddenly, a man who was also walking on the sidewalk started to catch up to her. He said with a grotesque smile, "Ine weather we're having, right?"

Daniel Windham



The Box

Kenzie Rao

His heart was pounding. He was sure he had seen the doorknob turn. He was sweaty and shaking, just waking up from a nightmare. Nah, I'm just freaking myself out, he thought to himself. He began to doze off again, and BAM, right when his sleep started to take over, it fell. It was the box that, from the very moment he saw it, changed his life forever.

There was no going back to sleep now. I have to get out of here, he thought. Rick ran out of the room, grabbing the box on the way out. Rick ran and ran, not sure why he hadn't stopped yet. He couldn't figure out where he was running, but he also didn't know why he couldn't stop. The sun began to rise, and Rick started to be concerned. The box! he thought. Rick thought maybe the box had something to do with the uncontrollable running, so he dropped it. As soon as the box hit the ground, Rick's feet stopped. He glanced around. Where am I? Rick wondered. Rick grew up in this small town, but never had he seen this area before. In the distance he could see a big black blur, what he assumed was a building. As he made his way towards it, leaving the box laying in the grass, he noticed something. He was alone. There was not sight of anything living anywhere, even the yellow grass crunching under his feet was dead. Realizing that he had stopped walking, he again hurried his way towards the building.

It was strange. He'd never seen anything like it. A huge black building with little to no windows faced him. The few windows he saw were mostly broken. Hmm, an abandoned house? he pondered to himself. Rick, not sure whether to be scared or curious, or even both, decided he had to know what was inside. The noise that the knocker made filled Rick with an uneasy feeling. It was stiff and squeaking, revealing that it hadn't been touched in a while. No response. He knocked again. Still nothing. Rick tried the handle. Locked, Rick mumbled under his breath. To his right was a rusty brown shovel. It looked as if it had been used often and was definitely not new. Grabbing the shovel, he jammed it in the door in between the knob and the hinge. The door swung open, hitting the wall. Rick stumbled inside, looking for a light switch.

It was dark in there, the kind of dark that your eyes can't adjust to. Footsteps, loud footsteps. Where were they coming from? The thumps surrounding his ears were coming from above him. There has to be stairs somewhere, thought Rick. Slowly Rick held his sweaty, shaky palm out. He carefully walked around the black room. He felt something. A pole. Meaning stairs? Rick gently put his foot out and placed it on a platform higher than his other. Yes! Stairs! Rick whispered almost too loudly. He stumbled up the winding staircase. There it was again. The thumps. He heard them coming from his left side. He turned and made his way toward the noise. It seemed as if it was getting louder, indicating that he was going the right way. Finally, he reached the door in which the room inside held the footsteps that had brought him there. As soon as Rick reached for the doorknob he heard a gunshot. Holding his breath, Rick opened the door. What he saw left him speechless.

Brown, damp hair coming down to her shoulders, she stood there. You could smell death in the air. Sam, the mother of twelve year old John, couldn't handle what she just witnessed. She shrieked, dropping to her knees. Her hands covering her face, as if to erase the sight of him being shot. The musky, old man who had shot this little boy had vanished. Rick hurried into the room to make sure Sam was all right. Never having met this woman in his life, he still gently sat down and wrapped his arms around her, knowing her pain after having watched his dad slowly pass away three years before. It seemed as if hours had gone by when Rick finally let go of her. He hadn't actually seen the woman's face yet. He sat back and waited for her to look up. When she did, it struck him. The look on her face said it all. "He was your son, wasn't he?" Rick asked. Sam didn't respond at first, so Rick quietly waited. "My baby, he's gone," Sam whispered. Rick had known. They both sat in silence for what seemed like decades. It was so quiet in the gloomy room that

you could hear the birds chirping outside of the ragged window. "If you don't mind me asking, what happened?" Rick spoke up.

Sam glanced up at him. "John and I were driving to Indiana when we saw this building and couldn't help ourselves from stopping to look inside. When we got inside the house, the door immediately slammed shut and locked. I ran towards the door, but John had darted toward the staircase behind me. Forgetting about the door, I ran after John because I didn't want him running around in this unfamiliar house alone. I called his name several times with no response. I didn't think much of it at the time. I just figured he had found something cool, you know? Just John being John. Then I heard a big bang and scream come from this room. It was a blood-curdling scream. Not like the kind he would scream just to push my buttons. Then I heard a gunshot. I hurried towards the room, but it was too late. What I saw laying on the floor was my own son. Unconscious. Not Breathing. All white and ghost-looking. I still haven't come to deal with the thought that he is gone." Sam started to choke up.

"I'm so sorry that happened. You don't deserve that, but I need you to come with me. There's something that may be able to help," Rick responded without hesitation.

"Oh, I don't know. I hardly know you, and..."

"You have to trust me!" Rick interrupted.

"This way?" he exclaimed. "I found a window not too far from the ground. You're just going to have to jump."

Out the window they landed in the grass, where Rick led her to the box. They came to a stop, drops of sweat dripping down their faces. Rick and Sam both stood around the box.

"What is it?" Sam asked.

"I don't know yet, but it's what brought me here," Rick said. "I still haven't figured out why though," he added. "Where are you coming from?"

"Kansas," she murmured.

"Why were y'all headed towards Indiana?"

"To see my parents," Sam explained.

"Won't they be worried when you don't show up?"

"No, we hadn't told them we were coming. It was going to be a surprise."

"Oh."

Nothing else was said.

The box, Rick thought. He reached down for it. Opening it for the first time, he noticed something. The letters "RS". RS? What could that possibly mean?

"Oh, I'm Sam by the way"

"Rick," he responded. "Wait a minute... Sam. Rick. SR...RS," he started rambling on. Sam, extremely confused, peered into the box. She saw nothing except the letters "RS" carved into the wood.

"I knew there had to be a reason this box dragged me out here in the middle of nowhere. You, it's you," he said softly.

"What are you talking about?" Sam asked.

"I was brought here to save you!" he shouted, too soon. He saw that same terrified look on Sam's face that he'd seen a few hours ago when her son was shot. Before Rick could turn around, the bullet went through his chest and then hers. They both hit the ground with a hard thud.

Sweaty and shaking, Rick woke up from his nightmare after he heard it drop. He sprang up, quick as a fox, only to see a box laying on the floor.

The Open Window

Blake Wilson

It was June 12, 1968, nine o'clock, when I woke up from my slumber. I remember thinking to myself, "Where am I? What is this place?" Having no recollection of how long I'd been asleep, I knew I had to pull myself together. And to think, this all started when someone left the window open.

"Jacob," my sister screeched. That's me, Jacob Harding. I live with my family of 4 in Wichita, Kansas. My sister Hailey is 10 years younger than me, and she seems to think I am a master at everything. She always asks me to pick out her clothes or to tie her shoes.

Anyway, I rushed downstairs to see what my sister needed. When I got to the kitchen I saw chocolate and peanut butter everywhere. "I was trying to make a smoothie, and I forgot to put the lid on the blender," my sister said. I furiously yelled at my sister, "What were you thinking?! Mom's gonna kill us!" I hurriedly ran up the stairs, making my sister clean up her mess and making sure that I wasn't the one blamed. When I got to the middle of the hallway, I felt a cool breeze roll over my shoulders. It was coming from the guest room. I slowly pushed the door open, expecting to find someone inside...but it was empty! I quickly scurried into the room, searching under the bed and inside the closet, trying to find someone hiding.

As I shut the door of the close, I noticed something. The window was wide open. Nervously, I looked out the window to figure out what was going on. As I looked out further, my leg gave out, and I fell to the earth hitting my head on the soil below me. When I got up, the world started to spin. My memory started to come back to me, and I ran to my front door and punched at it to get my sister to answer. NO ONE CAME! Luckily, we kept a key under the rug. I grabbed the key and tried to unlock the door...but I couldn't get the key in the slot. I was shaking so badly I couldn't focus.

Finally I said to myself, "Calm down, you gotta get inside the house! You're going to be ok!" Eventually, I calmed down and unlocked the door as I felt relief rush through my body. When I got inside, I slammed the door behind me. I began looking around, trying to find my sister. I saw nothing. It was pitch black! All I could see was a faint blue glare coming from upstairs. I walked nervously to the stairs, trying not to make noise. The closer I got, the better I could hear it. There were faint, quiet whispers coming from upstairs. Every step I took, the louder I got, until I got to the fifth step. When I stepped down onto the step, a loud creak filled the house. I could hear the whispers panic and become silent. At this point, I was tired of sneaking around! I wanted to know what was up there.

I rushed up the stairs as quickly as I could, one foot after the other. When I reached the room, I was astonished. The room was empty. I soon remembered back to when I was in the guest room and the window was open. I began to take fright not knowing what was going on and missing my family, and then I realized...this was the guest room, but not the one that I remembered! It was like a weird alternate dimension, but I knew I couldn't think about that at the moment I had to get out of there.

I turned my attention to the guest room closet which was where the blue light was coming from. I opened the door and saw a blanket of light, as if it led to another world. Rapidly, my curiosity got the better of me, and I jumped in as if I was skydiving. I felt as if I was falling and I would never land, but in about 10 seconds I hit the ground...or at least what I thought was the ground but was actually a thick, gooey substance. Once again, I heard the voices. In a sudden movement, I turned over and saw them. Two figures stood about 6 feet tall, and one tried to strike at me with its club. I jumped to my feet and sprinted in the other direction. Soon I realized the creatures were much faster! They didn't seem to be running though; they seemed to fly or hover over the ground. One of the creatures passed me and made a U-turn, bringing his club to ready position like it was about to hit a baseball. In the split second before it swung, I dove to my left.

They didn't seem to be running though; they seemed to fly or hover over the ground. One of the creatures passed me and made a U-turn, bringing his club to ready position like it was about to hit a baseball. In the split second before it swung, I dove to my left. Not seeing the second one, I rolled back to my feet getting whacked in the back of my head by a club. I didn't pass out at first. I lay there stunned, watching the black finger get closer and closer.

I felt their bright green eyes scowl at me, as if they were observing me for an experiment. As the figure to my left bent down on one knee, my head began to throb in pain as I slowly lost consciousness. When it put his hand under my head and the other under my knee caps, my eyes shut, and I blacked out.

I'll never know what happened the day of June 12, 1968, nor will I know who opened the window, but one thing that I do know is that those 2 figures made me feel what fear really feels like. I will never forget those two anonymous creatures that made me more appreciative of life.

Better Days

Sarah Lopez

Two weeks passed, and it happened again. The carpet had a mysterious lump, appearing in a weird round way. Bang! The lamp stand came tumbling down knocking everything down. Mr. Kirt grabbed the bright red antique chair that Mrs. Kirt's grandmother had given her. He tried hitting the mysterious lump that was moving in odd ways. Mr. Kirt yelled for the mysterious object to come out, so he could see what it was.

"Come out, come out now!" While he was yelling he grabbed a chair that had been sitting in the corner for years in their living room to try to hit this thing. While Mr. Kirt was holding the red chair it started glowing a bright neon yellow. Mr. Kirt didn't know that the chair was really sacred, so while he was yelling at this thing and everything was falling, his wife came out to see what was going on. When she saw the living room her face was in such shock. Mrs. Kirt had a secret that she hadn't told Mr. Kirt about the chair her grandmother had given her. She yelled at Mr. Kirt to put the chair down immediately.

The chair was still glowing, and Mr. Kirt put all his focus on the chair. Mrs. Kirt was trying to explain to her husband that the chair was not to be dropped or picked up. Now that he had picked up the chair, he was going to have bad luck for 17 years straight. This all happened because of that mysterious object that they were trying to get rid of. Mrs. Kirt was already frightened about the chair and that her husband was going to have bad luck for 17 years. She didn't know why he grabbed the chair anyways.

Then all of the sudden she saw Mr. Kirt fall like a row of dominoes out of the corner of her eyes.

She turned her attention to the small lump in the carpet that was moving in the oddest ways ever. She was trying to wake up her husband because he had fainted. She was in such a panic. Sweat ran down her face like a cloud when it's about to rain. Her hands shook like tree branches in the wind when a storm is about to blow in.

Mr. Kirt finally woke up when Mrs. Kirt was crying. The mysterious object was crawling towards them. The closer it got, the more they could hear the sounds that it was making. As it was moving towards them, Mrs. Kirt grabbed the end of the carpet and slowly lifted it up. With the carpet lifted, they saw a little white ball that looked like a ball of snow. They poked it with a long pointy stick, and it was a really mysterious kind of pet.

Mrs. Kirt ran over to pick it up because she thought it looked cute and cuddly, actually friendly. Mr. Kirt wasn't sure about what it was, so he looked it up on the internet but couldn't find anything. Finally after five hours of research he found it. This pet was known to be really rare. This pet was known to bring good luck to families that need it. So they decided to keep it and name it Daisy.

The reason they decided to keep it was because Mr. Kirt had a lot of bad luck with what happened with the chair. The chair was thrown into the dumpster so that there wouldn't be any bad luck in the house anymore. Two months passed and everything was going better than the way they had started.



Insensitivity

Zac Szczur

My insensitivity is my downfall.

She tells me her dad dies, and I respond, "Ok." She cries as she walks away.

I would never know what she feels, my insensitivity makes my emotions not real,
as if it's nothing to me if someone gets killed.

"It's natural selection," I say to myself, trying to find a light in the darkness of this sick, twisted mind of mine that replaced the sensitivity I left behind.

"My parents abuse me," they say. My emotions run away.

I lose balance and sway back and forth, back and forth.

They talk about their problems, as if we all just have a solution to solve them.

As if we have all been through the same thing.

Witnessing parents as they throw away rings, break their promises, break their vows, break their voices, and then break down.

Emotions to me are just the sounds of the many who have had struggles in their lives.

From a father, a mother, a sister, a brother, a friend, a lover, or any other who has witnessed
a man beat his wife or a man held by a knife or things that make you sad, make you cry, make you mad,
want to die, but on the inside you get over it and rise above the rest.

You can be better than the rest. Be a good friend, be sensitive, and care, be there for a friend

The stress of a sport judged on the court is just a game to me.

I don't feel that passion for teams due to my insensitivity.

This state I have become of little emotion is not because I have seen it all
but I've been close. And I know a lot of you have as well.

Insensitivity is its own little hell.

Our emotions are what we interpret and decide whether or not they are worth it.

To rise above it or forfeit, to hate or love it,

So if you come to me with problems or issues, I don't have a shoulder to cry on or a box of tissues.
And when you leave, I won't miss you. You either rise or fall, fail or pass. It may be harsh, I may be crass.

On your own you're independent. Then, then you realize how empty it feels inside.

Then you begin to appreciate what you have, like I do.

The clothes on your back, shower, food and shoes.

Then you make friends and you won't have to rely on anyone else,
and your accomplishments are so much greater because you can do it by yourself.
When people say their life is bad, I've seen kids with worse, who don't know if they can eat
and have no chair to sit on, no education, just survive, because out there it's live or die.

But this messed up world is what we made it. We stopped trying to live greater than the greatest.

The bar is so low, man became tools, and women, you know...

Don't ignore this truth, how can you already know what it is and you don't try to change it?

So you feel bad for yourself because your life is another hell? Then say I'm insensitive.

Ok, I'm mean because I don't feel the sadness you do.

But I don't ignore it. I have these bottles inside, I hoard them. I feel bad for you, not openly empathetic or sympathetic, but I know there's worse out there. Things that can't be helped.

You have so many options, so your complaining, your issues, they have no effect.

So go ahead and look at me differently as I walk down the halls.

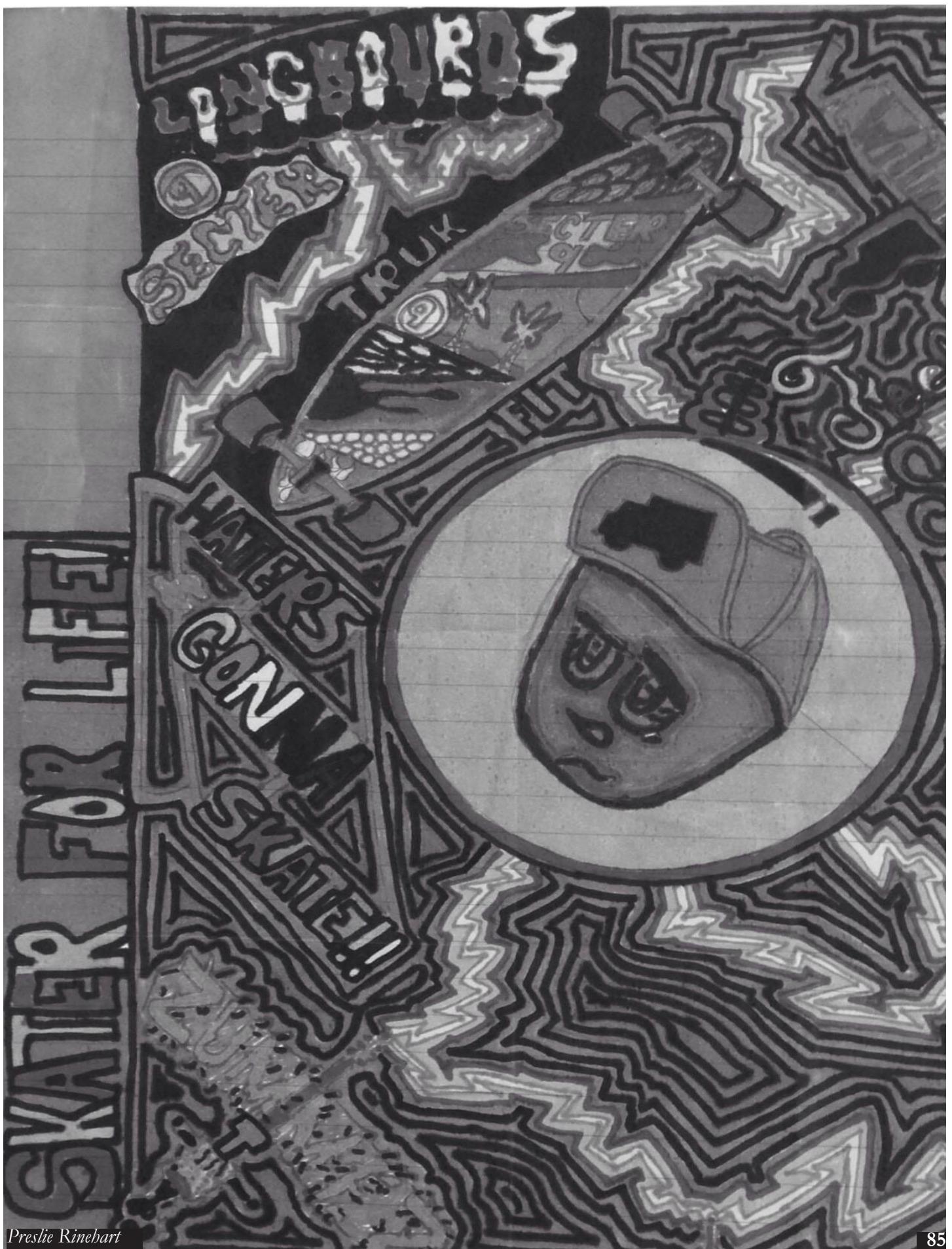
Tell me my insensitivity for you is my fault, you feel as if you can't be helped so blame it on someone else. That's not me, that's what I hate to see, that's not who I wanna be.

You could feel great, greater than great but you can't just sit around and wait, go out and earn it.

You don't know it, learn it. These emotions you show, someone else has worn them.

With me you may not agree, but I'm going to let you be.

All I ask is you realize my insensitivity, and let me be me...



Not Knowing

Teyah Murillo

I get so deep in thought to the point that I lose myself. To the point where nothing is real. Almost as if I'm not on Earth, just stuck in my brain, trapped in my head.

I just get so worried about things. I think things. I question things I don't understand. I wonder "why" things happen. "Why" people do things? "Why" just about everything?

Things happen for a reason, and I haven't found mine yet. I don't know what's going to happen in the next 10 years. All I know is it will happen for a reason.

I think that I'm scared of not knowing what the future holds. Sometimes dreams don't happen. Maybe that's what I'm scared of. I'm scared of not knowing.

Things change, people change, and the world will change. I don't know what's going to happen in the next 10 years, or who I will become. That's something I do know. I know that I will never know why. So, I'm not going to ask why anymore. Because there is a reason behind all this. "Why" is just something that can't be answered.

Laugh

Jose Leyva

Laugh at something different, don't try to understand it
It's like you never will
Laugh at me, my accent, my culture
I'm below you, you see me as an animal that never got
domesticated.
Laugh everyone laugh.

Repetition

Steven Solis

I see the moon and say,
Moon landing on
space with open arms.

I see the sun
Man it's far.
They call it far-fetched
I call it ours.

The things I've put up with I'm surprised I'm still alive.
Laugh at me, come on, I know you want to.
How could a person build a fort of ignorance?
I try to speak but get bombarded with names I would
rather staple my mouth shut, laugh.

The Drowning

Macilynn Avary

The world of fake and card-
board cake
Nothing is real, nothing to feel.
Eyes cannot see mind swirling
decay
Like a planetary ocean of human
waste and disease.
Knowledge, hope, memories,
intimacy and tossed
Like jetsam drift...

I look alive and well as it doesn't affect me but I'm
a hollow shell of what used to be me.
I practice, practice, practice to become like them, dress
like them, act like them.
But you laugh even more. Why?
I've tried to be one of you and now I'm a wannabe
Laugh at me, everyone laugh.

The sound of your voices are on repeat like a
canary that only sings one song.
I say goodbye, I've had enough, you've won
I'm gone now
Why is no one laughing now?

I Started

Pedro Pérez

Well, I was born in Mexico. In Veracruz. It was a life full of struggle, but we seemed to keep going every day. I came here when I was 9. At that time, I was a good kid supposedly, but in middle school I started to make my mistakes.

I started to hang out with people that weren't good for me.

I started to fight. We always got in trouble with people we didn't like.

In 5th grade everyone was cool with everyone, but in 7th grade, everyone acted like enemies. For a moment, it was fun. Since the day I started to do bad stuff, the cops started to pull me over with my friends and other stuff. I got away for a little bit, but when they got out of jail, I started to do the same thing over and over.

I started having problems in my house.

I didn't care anymore.

But the same people who used to tell me to skip and never be afraid of nothing were telling me now that they regret all that and that I should keep going to school. I used to want to graduate, but I just feel like I can't. I don't know why. I ask myself, "Why?" I don't know my answer.

Only someday I will be able to answer it.

Many things have happened that...I don't know.

But I hope I can change sometime, and I hope it's not too late, and I won't regret it.

How Would You Feel?

Andrell Harrison

How would you feel knowing someone wants you off the Earth?

How would you feel knowing you were marked for death as soon as your mother gave birth?

How would you feel if you were walking to your friend's house and get shot at because you're on the wrong turf?

How would you feel if your best friend was beaten senseless and was close to death?

How would you feel if someone passes away in your arms?

Have you ever felt like you're lucky even though you have charms?

How would you feel if you were running away from the cops' alarms?

How would you feel if you walked a mile in someone else's shoes and your toes were scrunched up and badly bruised?

Do you know how it feels to ride on 28-inch rims, smoking like a chimney?

Do you know how it feels to get a call from the doctor saying your aunt has a terrible kidney?

Do you know how it feels to be on the block all night?

Do you know how it feels to rebel against the boys in blue and white?

Do you know how it feels to be treated like a horse with three legs?

Do you know how it feels to work hard then in a split second everything you worked for diminished?

Do you know how it feels to start a race and never finish?

Do you know how it feels to have a dream to live on top of the hills?

Although my hopes are as high as Alaska's elevation?

How do you try to reach that peak without motivation?

Do you know how it feels to have a pocket full of money and no one to spend it with?

Do you know how it feels to lose your dad and not be sad?

All of these created an impoverished boy, who's always mad?

I don't. I was taught to always keep a smile and never be sad.

But please bear with me.

How would you feel if you seen things that haunt you in your sleep?

How would you feel if you were trained and played with the most elite?

How would you feel if you were in a jungle full of gorillas and you're the only spider?

Just answer this...how would you feel?

Inspiration
Justin Wollscheid
I kept looking
for inspiration, until I realized
that everything surrounding me was flimsy
enough to leave with
the wind.



Gambling

Christian Mack

The dice go rolling

life's a gamble they say and you push forward your whole lot hoping to win

When someone pulls a total flush off you're nothing....

I crawl away penniless once again in the alleyway of my mind

Doing what I must to play "that" gamble.

My thoughts and emotions all pushed in and....

That royal flush appears

Out to the streets I go...

Grudging up more and more

from the stretch of my being every time my thoughtly currency grows larger only to be taken by that royal flush.

I put up the memories of joy and they're gone...

I bid the memories of concerns and they're gone...

I scavenge up the memories of self hate and of hateful words

memories of the unwanted piety and put them up for grabs and...

He folds in

I win and my trophy is "I'm sorry" and the next time I approach the table my care, my love, my feelings and I walk away.

A rich man my own currency left.

I walk to the table and the cards are gone...

I walk towards the table...

Purposes

Christian Mack

eyes for seeing they say.
ears for hearing I'm told.
But my eyes are shut. blinding my sight.
my ears deaf leaving me longing in the symphony.
Dark is my world quiet and vast like space.
Skin for feeling;
hands for holding they cry.
But a thief I was and marked I be.
Never to steal Again from the heart of her.
Skin numbed from the pain.
Like the snow all still, unmoving, nothing grows.

A heart for beating,
lungs for breathing they chant.
But dead for two minutes I scream.
In the ground I should be.

A mind for thinking
A soul for being they whisper.
But my thoughts be dark and my soul be not.
Like a statue in the shadows.

A life for spending
A death worth meaning they voice
But I've died many times before quiet and blue,
Alone in a room , on the inside day after day
from the looks of them.
A life of no value no matter the currency.

Time like sand they echo

And right they are for it's all gone lost in the wind.
Like a canvas a new, better left without the blue...

Tell Me I'm Wrong

Alex Warren

Tell me I'm wrong.
That a boy of 18 has no future, because he doesn't have a 4.0 GPA and has no chance of getting into college.

That a boy, like many others in the world, has trouble learning. Dyslexia – to the point where he reads a sentence three times to understand it. ADD – to the point that just because he read it three times doesn't mean his brain wasn't thinking about dinner or the new movie coming out.

Tell me I'm wrong.
That it is ok for the boy to be yelled at for dozing off in class when he was up all night trying to decipher the gibberish that his teachers gave him...
Tell me I'm wrong.
That he is called stupid every day because he can't pass his classes.

That word...
That word has defined so many people based on their ability at Math, Science, Social Studies, or English.
The word that, in the vocabulary of so many people, defines whether or not you will have a future.

Tell me I'm wrong.
That this boy doesn't sit around thinking that everyone is right...
That he should just give up and be stupid.

I'm Okay

Erin Mansur

When I was a little kid, I used to be very clumsy. My parents tell me how I would always hurt myself or fall down or even run into walls. There would be nothing in my way, but I would always fall down and say, "I'm okay." They tell me I would always trip going down the stairs and say, "I'm okay."

My parents tell me every time I got hurt, I would say, "I'm okay," even if nobody was around. They say I would be upstairs, and they could hear me fall down in the basement and say, "I'm okay." My parents always make fun of me for saying, "I'm okay" when I was a little kid.

Every time I get hurt, they would say, "How come you didn't say your line?" Then they all laugh about it. Every time I walk up or down stairs, they ask me if I need help. They always tell me not to run into walls. They will tell me, "Hey, there is a wall there. Be careful."

It gets on my nerves how they do it all the time, but I get over it. It can actually be funny sometimes. Especially if I actually fall or run into things.

I'm okay.

Dedication to What

Justin Wollscheid

There's a saying, you have to find the door yourself.

People always talk about this door like it's amazing. How when you open it, you will have so many options to choose from. They teach about this door in every school. They make us dedicate our lives in search of this door.

People talk of stairs that lie just behind the door and how the stairs will take you to new heights. That once you climb these steps, you're golden, set for life. And so we are made to dedicate our lives in search of these steps.

People speak of the roof that the stairs lead to. They say that nothing can touch you once you're there. That you have everything you want. And so we are made to dedicate our lives in search of this roof.

I have seen the door. And when I opened it, I found the legendary stairs. When I climbed them, I found the roof. But I was so alone. Sure there were others there, but as I looked down from the roof that seemed like the peak of a mountain, I could see my friends who now looked like ants. With an empty glance behind me, I turned and jumped off to meet my friends.

And that is the story of
A door
That leads to steps
That climb to a roof
with a sign
that screams
jump.

Untitled

Christian Mack

time and time again

My mind like the hands of a clock going round and round always doing the same things always making the same tick tock, words that I spew.

My eyes seeing the same images every day like a calendar marked completely full with the same agenda day in day out.

Time and time again I find something or someone with spending my time only to spend so little time with them like the minute hand with the hour hand only together for minutes at a time.

Time and time again the days and nights go by a.m. p.m. a.m. p.m. constantly flipping and it all goes by with a blur as I stay awake for days on end

And time and time again

oh wait I removed the batteries the clock stops and I stop going around in circles like the hands on a clock.

Growing Up

Damien Day

Growing up was not the best for me. When I was 4 years old, my mother and father got in a fight, and my mother went to jail. When my mom went to jail, my dad and I went to his mom's house, and I met my 2 sisters for the first time. After 2 days, we went to my aunt's house. While I was there, I tried to talk to my dad. He locked himself in a room, and I got the door open, and I saw him doing drugs. That was the worst thing I could have seen as a kid. After I saw him do that, he tried to talk to me to calm me down. He did and took me and my cousins out for ice cream. My dad and my cousins and I went back to my house. Every time I came home, I would call my pet guinea pig Whiskers. He would usually come running to me, but this one time he didn't. I looked around for him, but I couldn't find him. My cousin Mario told me to look between 2 washers, and it was my guinea pig, dead. My dad put him there, and I cried and cried. I cried myself to sleep that night. That is all I remember about my father: him killing the only thing I have ever loved, my pet. My best friend.

A Cautionary Tale

Guillermo Toral

One cold morning in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1969, there was a scared student. He was about to take a test, and he forgot to study like he does every day. He decided to do something very sneaky.

What Keaton chose to do was cheat, which he had never done before in his life. Now he had to do it, for it was the only chance he had to pass the test. He looked for someone to cheat off, but he couldn't find anyone. That made him in even more jeopardy. Until something very lucky happened.

The teacher left to go print out some papers, and Keaton said to himself, "If there was an answer there, I'll find it in his desk."

When he was going to go and get the answers, he tripped and made a ton of noise. So much noise that it made the teacher come back all the way from the copy machine room to the class. Keaton was busted holding the answers and his teacher said, "You've got a 0 and a detention. Don't go near my desk without permission again."

False Hope

Teyah Murillo

The endless ticking of a clock. Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

Always in rhythm, always on point.

Like the banging of a drum. A drum being beat on by a young boy in a marching band. A young boy who is following his classmates in this line of a jamboree. A jamboree that is being led by an angry instructor. A young instructor who goes home to an abusive husband.

A husband who drinks at an old pub every night, flirting with the bartender.

A bartender who hates her job and talks to the pictures on her bedroom wall.

Pictures that don't ever reply. Just give her false hope. False hope that everyone falls for.

A world that is endless. The endless ticking of a clock. Tick. Tick. Tick. Tick.

Talking to Dyslexia

Essence Lassiter

Hi. How are you?

You know, because of you,

70-80 percent of people have some form of learning disability.

I just happen to be one.

I'm ill.

I'm ill from this illness of tricking my mind of being ignorant,
cause I feel like a baseball that's been hit into outer space and landed on a completely different planet
that says let's switch every letter from a to z to z to a.

But I'm sick.

I'm sick and tired.

I am tired of playing this master mind game,
but in reality my own instructor don't even know I have this disorder.

Is it bad?

Is it cause of you that I write an 82 when the answer is really 28,
or may write a b instead of a d.

You know the mind is supposed to be filled with knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.
but I'm a generic brand of paper towels, I soak up the attitude I got
and I don't need no daggone assistance.

I walk away from the stress that makes me seem mindless,
that may be interpreted as a slow turtle in a race against my own education.

You know I wish I could just wake up and say bye, bye. Be free, leave me.
But my mind is like a blender. I place guidance in and seconds later it turns to mush.

When you look in someone's eyes you can sometimes tell a lie,
but when you look at me you can't tell I hide the fear of looking dumb, being impaired, being treated differently, NOT the one who is called out when test day comes.

NO that is not me.

My mind is like a cyclone. It's up down side to side left to right criss cross.

It's 1-2-3-4, 2-4-6-8, 3...6...9...No...3-6-9 Yeah 3-6-8-12

Oh no, do I have to start from 1?

Or do I focus on one thing at a time like a Cyclops with one eye?

No it's like flames jumping at me like letters and numbers jump me as I stand here and look at you and say,
Why me?

Me

Sarah Lipscomb

I'm silly, blunt, yet broken.

My days seem too long, and my nights too DARK.

I always trip on my INSECURITIES.

I require attention, long for passion, and WISH to be desired.

I use MUSIC TO SPEAK when words fail me even though WORDS are more IMPORTANT to me
than the air I breathe.

I LOVE hard and with all I have.
even with my FAULTS, am I WORTH LOVING?

Suburbia

Johnny Millar

Innocence.

Lethargic lives, formulaic families, homologous homes.

Dazzling emerald grasses that defy age better than housewives.

Warped adolescence, only visible through the seepage of stolen Schnapps.

Churches where sinners sin, and the holier-than-thou condemn differences.

Innocence.

Wholesome fathers, tossing the ball and fifty bucks a dance.

Mothers with painted beauty, flashing smiles only after Boone's Farm mortally stains the soul.

Innocence.

Children raised on the hopeless morals of the American Dream, fighting for the pain and despair of big bucks.

With that girl that gets hit and is too stupid to leave or that boy who drowns in muscles and skanks because he can't be a "fruitcake."

Innocence.

With those people that ruled with exuberance that now shoot up with tears foggier than the smack they'd kill for.

Innocence.

That boy who big-wheeled and cackled down the street is now that kid with the stash.

That girl who loved clothes now survives on losing them.

That Dad, who was always so friendly, got too friendly.

Innocence.

"Everything's fine," we console, "we're all good."

But we don't accept it, we just reject it,

Pouring a glass to hide it.

Partying to hide it.

Lighting up to hide it.

Running.

There's nothing innocent in fear.

Untitled

Blaine Allen

His poem reminds me of when my parents left me.

It aches in my heart to this day.

My blanket is all I have left to remind me that I used to have a loving family.

The Room with the Candle

Kinsey Robinson

I lay in my cold, dark room left to my own thoughts. I'm a junior; life should be simple and easy, but really is it? I just turned seventeen, and I do a lot of stuff. I'm top 5% of my class, play in the band, dance in the winter guard, watch my two younger brothers, and work at Chili's as a waitress. On top of that I somehow find time to apply for college, see my friends, and see my boyfriend.

Saturday rolls back around, and I'm pushing myself through my shift at the restaurant. Tonight after work I'm going to Josh's and we will be watching a movie. It will be him and I until seven-thirty when Becca, Kyle, Lexie, and Justin show up. My shift finally ends, and I run home to change to look cute. I arrive at Josh's around six; we have an hour and a half before the others show up, so I help him set up drinks and snacks. When we are done, we cuddle, wrapped in each other's arms and watch some T.V. shows.

BANG BANG... RING RING... BANG, I look up at Josh "I think they might be here..."

"Yeah... I think you might be right," he says as he stands to get the door. I follow right behind him. Josh opens the door, and Lexie walks right in. "I'm here. Let's start this party." Right behind her is her boyfriend, Justin.

Kyle is next to walk in with Becca, his girlfriend, right behind him; with a smug look on his face Kyle says, "You wish, Lexie! It's starting because I'm here."

Justin slips in The Breakfast Club. We watch, and they snack; the whole time I don't eat a thing. We do the same for the next few weeks. We hang out at someone's house, watch a movie, or play a game, and they snack. I don't realize that I have not been eating for five weeks, but Josh does. One night Josh confronts me on our way to Becca's. We are almost there, and he turns the radio down to almost nothing. I hear him say with a certain shakiness in his voice, "I'm worried about you... for the past couple of weeks I have not seen you eat anything..."

"Babe, I'm fine... it is sweet that you are worried but there's no need to be worried..." I pause and grab his free hand. The rest of that night he watches me from the opposite side of the room; he would not even talk to me all night. I think everyone was starting to notice, and the rest of the night became awkward to the point I want to make up a lie saying my mom needed me to help her watch the boys, and she was coming to pick me up. But I don't. I finally get up and go into the bathroom just to get a break from the weirdness in the room. I start to walk back in. I don't recall much, but I do remember feeling really light headed. The room is spinning and changing colors: purple, then black and green. I fall and hit my head on the corner of the table. Everything goes fuzzy, but my friends are all around me, and Josh yells to call 911. "I'm sorry...so sorry!" It is so hard to breath now; my chest is so heavy. "I didn't know this would happen..."

I'm standing in a black room with a very small candle that's in the middle of the room putting out minimum light. There are now windows and no doors... no way in, no way OUT...

Everyone I love is on a screen, Conner and William, then my parents, Becca, Kyle, Lexie, and Justin, then last Josh is standing there; just looking at Josh makes me sad because he knew that I didn't believe him. The screen flashes, and I see a fragile, tiny baby girl. She's in the hospital.

The soft sweet voice of my mom comes on. I look around but there's no one, "Lilly, you were born as a preemie. You almost died... several times. The February you were born was terrifying for me and your father; if you died I don't think we would have more kids, so your brothers would never been born." It flips back to the first picture, and Conner and William slowly fade out of it. "WAIT! NO!" I scream like they can hear me.

Justin's voice comes on gently, "Your dad moved in with his parents after your parents got a divorce... and your mom moved out of the state, but no one knows where."

94 "NO! This is not happening... I'm alive."

They start to fade out when I think to myself, but wait am I really alive? I'm confused and conflicted... am I alive? Or am I dead?

Josh's smooth, kind voice comes on, and I start to tremble hearing it. Tears are now slowly rolling down my face. "As for Kyle, Justin, Lexie, and Becca, without you none of them would have met. Justin died in a car crash when he turned sixteen because we didn't throw him a party, so he was out driving without us." Justin slowly fades out and I'm backing into one of the corners. "Kyle got paralyzed in freshman football and dropped out of school." There goes Kyle; I'm hugging my legs trying to make sense of all of this. "Lexie moved to Kansas and was never to be heard of again, and Becca dated a guy who got her pregnant at seventeen, and she is now a single mother who works three jobs and dropped out of school."

"NO! This is not real, this is not happening... I was there! NO!" Tears are pouring down my face now. I can't handle this; it's awful.

Josh is now standing in the middle of the screen, "So it was true..." He thought it was, and it really was.

Kyle's masculine voice comes on and says, "You and Josh would have never met, so all the time you spent together, he would have been doing other things. One night he went to a party and got completely trashed and decided to drive home, and he wrapped his car around a tree."

I'm screaming and crying uncontrollably; I have my head hidden in my arm and sit there for what feels like hours. I finally decide to look up, and the room is now full of pictures on the walls and hanging from the ceiling. They are pictures of my life, of me and family and friends and Josh. I am about to break down again when I fall on the ground, and my head hurts, and the room's spinning. I think to myself, "This is it I'm dying..."

I'm starting to wake, but do I really want to if I'm not with the ones I love? What's the point of enduring this pain? There is a blinding light right in my eyes, I fling my arm over my face, and I hear a piercing noise in my ears.

Then I hear the screeching of Connor's voice, "MOM! MOM! NURSE! NURSE! ... She's up."

Something That Keeps On Going

Teyah Murillo

Some people don't even think about it. Some people don't even want it. Some people want it but can't have it. Some people need it all the time. Others are caught up in their own lives that they don't care. Some people are just plain confused.

But there's something that drives us. Something to look forward to. Something to get us through the day. Is it motivation?

If so, what is the motivation? Is it the thrill, that heart-pumping sensation that gets us going? Is it the attention, the "ohhhs" and "ahhhs" we get from others? Or are we the others? Maybe we are just an audience, and it's the excitement of not knowing. The excitement of watching. The excitement of experience.

Maybe it's just another day. The happiness of being alive. Or could it be death? Just waiting to see what comes after this life.

Do things get better? Do things get worse?

Did you just now realize that there is something. That there's something that keeps you going. Something to live for.

Or did you just now realize there's nothing. What's the point? Why do you care?

What's the motivation?

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