

Bare Prints



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Michael Allott

California Nightmare

Many people have dreams of going to Los Angeles to pursue some type of acting career or music career, but two friends went to get away from their old criminal lifestyle. Through the bustling city streets and crowded shopping strips there are many new opportunities for a new life, for Los Angeles is called the "city of opportunity" after all.

"Hey what do you want to drink, Kenny?" George asked.

"Man I don't care, just not coffee."

George and Kenny started bickering in the store about Kenny's attitude, but their moods suddenly changed as an attractive woman came walking towards them. The woman had eyes like the sea, bright brown hair, and long tan legs. Her smile completed her beauty, for you could spot that smile from miles away.

"Meet me outside in five minutes," the lady told the two men.

"Y-Yeah ok." The fact that George could hardly get his words out worried Kenny, but he didn't say anything. "What do you think she wants?" George asked him.

"I don't know but I don't like her," Kenny swiftly replied.

"Hey look -- there she is," George said as he walked out into the sunshine.

"Great." Kenny sighed.

"You guys are Kenny and George right, the ones who stole the Hope diamond?" asked the woman beguilingly.

"Yes" they both replied at the same time.

"How would you like to be the richest men in this city? I need your help to rob the Los Angeles Bank," she said with a smirk.

"Okay!!!!!" they both replied with much excitement, forgetting the reason they came to this city in the first place.

The three of them walked into the bank with large duffle bags and masks over their faces.

"Everyone stop!" Kenny said as he shot a gun three times in the air.

The woman chained the door to make sure no one would be coming in, or out.

Kenny and George gathered every single person in the bank to the center of the room as the woman collected all the money. When they were trying to scare the living hell out of the hostages, the desk phone rang. George answered.

"This is the LA Police Department. Let the hostages go or you're gonna be sorry," said the man over the phone.

George quickly hung up and turned to tell the woman and his friend, but Kenny was on the ground, bleeding, and the woman was missing.

"What the hell!!!!!! Kenny!!!!!! NOOOOOOO!" George exclaimed.

George looked around the room to find the woman and noticed that a female hostage was missing as well.

"What the hell is going on?" he asked himself. George paced back and forth, not knowing what to do and regretting everything he had done since the moment that woman walked her deadly smile in the door.

He decided that he had nothing to lose because his brother was dead right next to him, and the woman had tricked him into helping her, and he didn't even get any of the money! He then let the women and children go that were cowering in the middle of the bank. He didn't listen to the police bullhorns outside calling on him to surrender. For some reason, George smelled a strong dose of gas but didn't think much of it.

Before George could let the men go, a loud and painful explosion came from the basement of the bank and the building burst into flames. Out front, the police fell back before the fireball. Meanwhile, three blocks away, two women with duffle bags and glorious smiles high-fived each other as an Uber pulled up to the curb.

That's Where It's At

I wake up and slap on my hat
I need to go give my horse a pat
I ain't gettin' no neck tat
I love the farm that's where it's at.

I might wear an old baseball cap
Call my ol' dog but not to my lap
Turn on my radio and listen to the at bat
Because I love the game that's where it's at.

Wake up throw on my hat
My daughter wants a caramel frap
I said what the hell is that
She said it's Starbucks that's where it's at.

Tiffani Anto

Fatherhood

The dining room was completely silent as my family gathered around the table. I carefully placed the hot steel pot at the center, shooting a glance towards everyone seated. My grandparents looked nervously at one another and my little sister's head hung low to avoid eye contact with my father, who was sitting straight up with a blank expression on his face. As I lifted the pot lid, steam rose into the air and the smell of beef soup spread throughout the room. I frowned, for I failed to receive the usual excited reaction from my little sister.

I glared at my father who merely nodded his head, understanding the silent message I was sending him. He gestured for my little sister and grandparents to leave, to which they responded by immediately scurrying out of the room. He pulled his chair away from the table and turned to face me. He hunched over, resting his elbows on his knees. His blank expression turned into a more pained look that made me feel more aggravated.

"How many times do I have to apologize?" he asked in a low voice.

"Until you stick with it," I replied while turning my back towards him. "You know I thought this was finally it. I thought you finally cared."

"I do care! But you know that I have to leave." I heard him reply a little louder than before.

I angrily spun around, pivoting on my heel. My father had risen from his seat, standing with his chest forward as if he was at attention. "Bullshit..." I scoffed as I thought about all the excuses he would come up with this time.

He took a step forward, pointing his finger towards me as he spoke, "Now you listen here child. I have sacrificed everything for our family so don't come at me as if you understand what it takes to be a father. Don't you dare disrespect me ever again or else..."

"Or else what? You're gonna make me run a mile? You're gonna deny me food? I'm not one of your soldiers that follows your every command. I am your daughter." I shifted my weight over on my right leg and crossed my arms. "Funny how you called yourself my father. You really don't know how to be a dad, huh?"

"There's no difference between the two."

"Yes there is," I sneered.

"All right then enlighten me. What's the difference between being a dad and being a father?" he asked.

As I glared up at him, I realized that he already knew the answer to his question, but he needed me to tell him face to face. He needed to hear the answer with his own two ears. I looked away from him as I spoke,

“A father is just the title of someone who you take your genes from. He believes that his only contribution to the family is creating kids. But a dad? A dad wakes up every morning and works his ass off to make sure his family has a roof over their heads and food on the table. He doesn’t need a fancy suit or a Medal of Honor. He just needs to be there for his family. That... that’s not you. You’re just the guy who comes over every so often thinking we forgive you.”

My father didn’t say anything, and as the silence continued the air grew tense. He began to pace around the room, shaking his head and stroking his beard in a frustrated manner. As he strolled back and forth I realized that all I could see in this man was a soldier on the march. I didn’t see a family member, just a Marine waiting for his next command. It wasn’t long before I could feel my eyes welling up with tears, but I still managed to keep a straight face. He must’ve heard me sniffing because he turned to look at me. The expression on his face said it all. I think the moment he saw me with tears running down my cheeks he realized that I was right. He pushed past me and picked up his brown duffle bag in the living room. Without so much as a goodbye, he opened the front door and started to march out. Then my father froze for a moment in the door frame, as if he was debating whether or not to leave. He took one last glance at me before clicking his tongue and slamming the door shut behind him.

I wiped the tears away then turned my back from the door. My grandparents and little sister were standing in the hallway that connected the dining room with the living room. They must’ve heard the whole thing. Their sad expressions made me want to cry even more. I kneeled down to my little sister’s height as she ran up to hug me.

“He’s a good man, Ari.” My grandmother said as she returned to her seat at the dinner table.

I brushed my long black hair behind my ear and forced a smile. “Yeah... he just never learns.”

Full Plate

I sat at the dinner table
listening to my grandma hum a quiet tune.
Little by little I piled some rice onto my plate.
My grandma stopped humming and I could feel
her soft gaze looking through me.
She asked, "How's school?" and I froze.
I wanted to tell her about the nights I broke down,
overwhelmed with everyone's expectations.
I wanted to tell her how stressful it was,
how frustrated I was,
that I couldn't keep pretending.
"School's fine," I replied.
My grandma took my plate and poured the
extra rice onto her own empty one.
"It's okay."

Dream Write

There I was, standing in front of the withered remains of what used to be my house. The garage was slightly open, the plants out front had dried up and all the windows were shattered. I adjusted the bag, which held my bow and a couple arrows, over my shoulder as I turned to look at the rest of the houses in the neighborhood. Each house looked worse than the last. Some looked like they'd fall apart in a small gust of wind. There wasn't a single sign of life anywhere. It was only me and the creature that caused all this destruction. I turned back towards my ruined home in time to see a quick figure slip through one of the broken windows.

I was reluctant to follow, but I was desperate to find some sort of clue to where my family had gone. Taking a deep breath, I jogged over to the garage and crawled inside. I tried opening the door but it wouldn't budge. I exited the garage then made my way over to the porch. The front door was also locked tight. I didn't want to circle all the way around to the back of the house, so I decided to climb inside through the window. Despite all the broken glass, it was fairly easy to get through. I was devastated when I found that the inside was much worse than the outside. The stairs were broken down to only a couple of steps, glass was scattered everywhere from the antique display

cabinets, the lights that hung from the ceiling flickered a little before shutting off completely, and the paint was scratched up by what could've been a wild cat.

I tried to navigate towards the kitchen while avoiding as much glass as possible, but I stopped when a drop of what I believe was water fell on my arm. Disgusted, I quickly wiped the liquid off and looked up. Clinging to the ceiling was a terrifying creature. It had the body of an extremely pale woman and its long black hair covered nearly its whole face. I was able to make out the color of its eyes. The left eye had a glossy look, as if it were blind, while the other was pitch black. The creature slowly turned its head down to look at me. A twisted grin formed on its face as it crept its way from the ceiling to the wall in front of me. Its movement resembled that of a spider.

I reached for my bow and aimed it at the monster, but before I could send an arrow flying, it let out a high pitched scream. I dropped everything and covered my ears. I felt paralyzed in place, eyes shut tight, and I wanted to curl into a ball. I managed to look back at the creature just in time to see it lunge at me, still screaming. I felt my back slam against some glass then everything went black.

Michael Aranda

Birthdays Suck

On my birthday we had tons of balloons, and my friends and I were having fun. Mysteriously we heard a loud pop just go off, and we were all looking for who popped a balloon when we heard laughing in the distance. I kind of got scared when I saw something far away, but I didn't know what it was so I didn't even worry about it or even tell my friends until, as time went on, it got closer, and I could see it was a clown in the distance. When I told my friends quietly that I saw a clown out there they didn't believe me, but then a few more balloons start popping, which finally scared my friends enough that they noticed the clown in the distance, and more of his clown friends started to appear, so we started to run away. We all separated to find hiding spots so they wouldn't catch us, but the clowns looked for us, found one of my friends and kept him as hostage. The rest of us tried to talk to the clowns and ask them to let us go, but they wouldn't listen to us and there were more of them and they were coming closer but then, randomly, a balloon popped and at the same time a clown blew away in a cloud of dust. When we popped another balloon then another clown blew away, so my friends and I said let's pop all the balloons and they will all blow away. We popped and popped and clowns blew away everywhere until more started to come, but we were all out of balloons. Birthdays suck, I said.

Love

As her hazel eyes meet with mine
the busy world around us stops.
Her love is powerful, moving;
She makes the days so much brighter.
Her smile is perfect
And her laughter is music to my ears.
When I see her, I see the future.
Her presence completes me.
Shines bright like diamond.

Damian Arata-Vega

Gone Too Soon

It was a cold afternoon at the police station. Officers were still coming into work despite the tragic loss of another officer in a different department three weeks ago. The officer had gotten out for a routine traffic stop and been shot in the face, dying later at the hospital. The suspect in that shooting was still on the run. Despite the tragedy, a whole class of probationary officers felt ready to put their field training officers behind them and hit the streets on their own.

Officer Gomez was ready to go this cold afternoon. She would begin her first solo patrol without Officer Young. She jumped into the patrol car and went out for patrol among the wet city streets.

“Dispatch to 1-Bravo-88 respond code 2 for an 11-82.” Dispatch called Officer Gomez out to a traffic collision. When she pulled up to the scene, it looked like a simple fender bender, so Officer Gomez stepped out of the car and called for an ambulance. She went to each vehicle and found both drivers conscious and okay. She had grabbed her clipboard from her vehicle to begin the accident investigation when she heard twigs cracking behind her. She turned at the sound to see a man coming out of the bushes, pulling out a small object that appeared to be a gun.

“Put it down!” she shouted in a commanding voice. Seconds later the man fired three shots. Officer Gomez went down, reaching for her gun, but she could not grab it due to the pain of her wounds. She fumbled to the radio to call dispatch but couldn’t speak.

Dispatch cried “11-99!” through Officer Young’s radio. He made a swift move to radio back.

“1-King-23, I will respond code 3.” He pulled up to the scene with his AR-15 drawn to make sure the scene was clear, then started providing medical aid to Officer Gomez. He quickly saw it was no use.

He felt as if his daughter had got killed. Officer Young had spent the past three months training Officer Gomez and now she was just gone. Ripped from the world. Officers arriving on the scene looked for the suspect but found nothing besides a shell casing on a nearby sidewalk. Officer Young asked to look at it; the casing was from a 9mm Glock. He quickly stuffed the shell casing in his pocket.

For the first time in his career, Officer Young walked off the job. He jumped in his cruiser and drove to a local gun store, where he showed the casing to the clerk.

“Yes I know exactly where this came from,” said the clerk. “A man bought a bunch of these shells from here about two weeks ago.” As luck would have it, the store camera footage from that time was still electronically available.

Back at the station, Officer Young took a look at the camera footage from the store. He found the man, got a screenshot, and asked the office tech to run it through facial recognition and try to get the name. Jim Le Manta was a positive match.

Officer Young went to the courthouse and got a warrant for Le Manta. He grabbed his AR-15 with the rest of the Warrant Execution Task Force. As they broke down Le Manta’s door and rushed in, he was waiting for them.

Boom. Boom. Boom. Shots Fired. The officers shot back, striking the suspect in the chest two times, one barely missing his heart. The officers continued to clear the house, as Jim Le Manta succumbed to his injuries. The suspect wanted for murder of two peace officers was finally shut down.

Amiya Bernard

Blue Jay

Okay, I have to write something. My essay is due in an hour and I have no idea where to start.

I hear the ticking of Anne's pencil, Sam's snoring, and a bird. I look out the classroom window. The sky is heavy with clouds and rain. What's a bird doing out in this weather?

Still, the Blue Jay is out on a limb, singing with her surprisingly loud voice.

If I were her, I would be quieter, so as to not draw attention to myself. Yet, she sings at the top of her tiny lungs, which are probably the size of a corn kernel when full of air. How can she be so loud?

I try to look away from the window, but my gaze keeps coming back. I will be in so much trouble when the teacher collects the sheets and reads all this nonsense!

My thoughts wander. What makes this bird special is that she's not. You cannot find a less interesting, more unattractive bird than that. But boy, she can sing, and she knows what she's capable of. She invests all her heart in it, despite what others may say.

Something just clicks. I know what my essay will be about. I crumple my paper and start a new sheet.

I write nonstop for a half hour and hand it in. I hope I get an A+ on my essay about Beyonce!

Pretty for a Black Girl

“You’re pretty for a black girl.”

I hear these words often, without them slipping from the lips of others
They ring in my ear every time someone strokes my hair without permission

Discourages my dreams due to my skin color

Comments on my curvaceous figure

Or asks, “What are you mixed with?”

Because I must be mixed right?

There’s no way a Black Girl can grow long hair

No way she can be as articulate

As classy

As polite

As calm

As pretty

These words forced me to learn myself

Forced me to acknowledge that I don’t fit the description of the white man’s “Black Girl”

Because she’s too loud

Too aggressive

Too ignorant

Too ghetto

Too.....ugly

Forced me to recognize my own privilege because my skin isn’t as dark

My curl pattern isn’t as tight

And I will never know what my sisters who have these features go through

I am ashamed I have any advantage over my dark-skinned brothers and sisters

Because I KNOW their worth

Hear my truth

You do not have blue or hazel eyes

Blonde hair does not grow from your scalp

Your skin is darker

But none of this matters

You possess something so much more than the naked eye can see

Your eyes tell a story

Your hair defies gravity

Your skin absorbs sunlight

And you ARE pretty....NOT pretty for a black girl.

Kayana Bun

J.H

Walking down the halls
Lockers clashing
Students chattering
Drifting off into empty space
Keeping my head down until I bumped into you
and saw your face.

Your big brown puppy dog eyes burning through
Longing for a sign, to see if it's true,
to see if my heart still loves you.
I want to say I don't love you
I want to say you don't affect me
With all the heartache and heartbreak
I hate to say you were a mistake
That I just can't seem to shake.

The aroma of spearmint and vanilla
everytime you would come close,
My eyes blur when you walk past me
Wondering why I still love you
When all you ever do
Is tell me lies and make me cry,
With fake words I thought true.

The days go on, one by one
I'm still thinking about all we've done.
From late night car rides, to our talks by the bayside,
To all the laughs and cries,
I'll always love those big brown eyes.

What Happened to Katalina?

Dan walked towards the interrogation room with Lieutenant Pierce. "Please don't say that phrase you always do, Dan," Pierce said.

"Lieutenant, I would never," said Dan.

"Dan, this suspect is very powerful. Use your words carefully," Pierce replied.

"Wait. Powerful? She looks like a measly human. What possible power can she have?" Dan questioned. Pushing the door open, he saw a petite woman sitting there with a stoic look on her face. "Right, so tell me lady, what is it that you desire?"

"Dan, what did I just tell you? She's the daughter of the leader of the most brutal Russian gang in the world," Pierce whispered.

"I shall not speak without a lawyer present," the suspect said.

"I see the look in your eyes, dear. I know you want to tell me your desire. Come on, tell me," Dan said.

The suspect stared into Dan's eyes. She tried to force herself not to speak, but the look Dan was giving her was entrancing.

"I want to kill her and watch her bleed." Pierce and Dan stopped in their tracks, while the suspect spoke.

"Well, look at that. So do you confess to killing Katalina Jones?" Dan spoke out.

"What? Wait, Katalina's dead? I would never hurt her, we were friends. If anything you should be talking to her husband," the suspect cried.

"Why'd you say you wanted to kill her?" Pierce said.

"I thought we were talking about her cat," the suspect replied.

"Her cat? What about her cat?" Dan questioned.

"She's always spitting up hairballs by my window and scratching at my door".

Just then Detective Decker walked into the interrogation room and took Lieutenant Pierce and Detective Dan aside.

"Katalina Jones wasn't murdered." Decker whispered.

"Well if she wasn't murdered then what happened to her?" Dan said loudly.

"She set me up." Katalina said as she walked into the room.

"Why would she set you up?" Pierce asked.

"I'm in love with her husband, and I needed her out of the way. You were supposed to die," the suspect said.

"Well that was a turn in events," Dan said with a chuckle.

Iziah Campero

That Dark Sky

We thought we were alone, then the sky turned black. I couldn't see anything but darkness.

I thought maybe the night had gotten late, but I didn't even hear my date or the other cars in the drive-in. We were parked on the far left side, you know, for some alone time. We were watching the movie where a boy leaves home to find his true love. The night went black as nothing until I saw the big bright light, but it was forming into a gate, but the gate was closed. The gate had halos of light around it, and I saw someone far out in the distance who came up to me as I asked fast and scared --

"What happened??? Answer me! Where am I?"

No answer, and as the figure got closer, still no answer, until she said, "Rest..." I didn't know what she meant by just rest. I still couldn't find my date Kathrine, she wasn't in my... car? I looked around and I didn't see even a shadow of my car or the movie or anything, just that big bright door.

I turned to ask the girl a question, but there wasn't a girl anymore there was a man with a halo and wings, and at this time I was thinking "Am I dead?" when I heard a voice say, "You are home my son." I looked around: nothing but that gate and that darkness.

I yelled at the top of my lungs, "I'm not ready! Please not now! I have too much to do for my family and loved ones, please!" That gate was slowly getting dim and a different light was coming fast. I felt as if someone were punching me over and over in my chest, then I opened my eyes.

I was in the hospital with machines and my family all around me. As I came to and felt more stable, I saw Kathrine on the bed next to mine. She was eating, but I couldn't talk when she turned and looked at me, and I could hear her say, "I love you," but I still didn't know what happened.

Hours later I found out a group of drunks came and shot up my car. I got shot 12 times in my chest area, and I took some shots for Kathrine, but she did get hit in her lower stomach. They told me I was going to live so God must have been watching me, and I knew he was. But I will never forget that dark sky.

The nights

The nights where there is no sleep
The nights where there is no dream
The nights when you don't feel
The nights when you feeling everything
The days I wish for better nights
The days the nights are all the same
The wish I make I cannot say

A pain that grows inside
No escape, trapped front sides and behind
The pain I speak is mine
This pain everyone feels throughout time
The pain can stop; we must speak our mind

The time in life is short
The time we take for granted when it's right there
We cry when we don't have time but give up when we do
Don't cry when it's gone
Don't cry.

Chad Castleman

In Medias Res

Casey lives with his Grandma and hasn't been driving long. He has taken Grandma's car to the supermarket to buy cat food and lottery tickets for the old lady, who is very demanding. As he hurries across the parking lot at night, the bag rips and everything spills out, without his knowledge. A mysterious man walks up to pick up the cat food and lottery tickets and, sliding the tickets in his pocket, he says, "EWwww Cat food is NASTAY!!!"

He pulls out a gun and says, "YOU'RE NEXT!!!!"

Casey jumps and shrieks. "Oh holy moly, why does this always happen?"

At that moment, Casey's Grandma flies in on a parachute, holding a machine gun, screaming, "AHHHH DIE MOTHER TRUCKER AHHHH!"

Her dentures fly out and hit the mysterious man in the eye, impaling him. Casey and Grandma leave him on the ground in pain and take back the cat food and lottery tickets. Good thing, too because the tickets were winners of 1 billion dollars.

Grandma hooks on to a nearby helicopter, and flies away to Neverland, while Casey gets in the car and runs over the man. He thinks to himself, "Wow, this was a crazy turn of events!"

Mr. Bear and the Balloon

Mr Bear let out a terrible roar, intimidating enough to scare the bejesus out of anyone. The friendly neighborhood Piggy happened to be on a Sunday stroll through the gardens at the time, until he was shaken up to his very core. In his frightened stance he let go of his cherry red balloon. Mr Bear stopped and stared. He'd never seen something so beautiful. Without giving it another thought, he snatched the balloon out of thin air, running away with an evil giggle. Mr Bear had decided that the cherry red balloon would become his good luck charm, and he would take it through adventures for weeks. Then one day, Mr Piggy, the rightful owner of the balloon, snuck up on Mr Bear while he was sleeping soundly under a tree and let out a roar from his CD player. This spooked Mr Bear so much that he let go of the balloon and it started to float upward where the sharp branches popped the balloon. Mr Bear slowly turned his head around to Mr Piggy. He said in a menacing tone: "I- I'M GONNA KILL YOU!"

Catelin Castro

Red

It smells like sweet perfume. The foreign scent hits me right when I open the front door. Johnny must have gotten a new air freshener. He's thoughtful like that. I shuffle my way to the kitchen to set down the grocery bags that fill my hands. I kick off my heels and check my phone for the time. It's 2:48 p.m., time to take my meds. I walk over to the medicine cabinet above the sink, open it and grab my pill bottles.

Before closing the cabinet, I look down at the sink and realize there are two dirty wine glasses along with a few plates and silverware.

"Didn't Johnny and I wash the dishes before I left for work?" I say to myself. I pick up one of the wine glasses to examine it.

"Red wine? We don't drink red wine," I think aloud once again, looking over at my wine rack that is full of only white wine. "Where did this come from?" I put it back in the sink and look around some more. Nothing else seems out of place in the kitchen. I walk to the dining room and find a vase of flowers sitting on the table. "*Just because I love you,*" reads the note.

Immediately a wave of guilt washes over me and all of the questions and assumptions leave my brain. Johnny would never do such a thing. He is so sweet, I think, as I admire the beautiful red roses.

A Dream

I open my eyes and I am in the middle of nowhere. I look all around me and see nothing but what seems like a never ending desert floor and a handful of scattered, naked trees. I look under me and I see the cracked sandy ground. As I look in every direction, I can see perfectly where the sky meets the rough floor. It is a harsh line in all directions. One second it's blue, but then it becomes the sandy color of the ground. I can't see a beginning or an end. I am alone. There is no sign of life at all, as if I were on Mars. It is absolutely silent; my steps echo as I start to walk. I don't know where I am going or what I am expecting to find.

As I continue walking nothing seems to change, as if I am walking in place. I see the exact same trees and the exact same cracks in the ground. I realize I am getting nowhere. Surprisingly I do not feel afraid. I just feel frozen in time. It is not cold at all, it is hot. So hot that I begin to feel tired. I take one long blink, and as I open my eyes a sparkling river that goes on for miles appears, as if it was there the entire time. But how could I have missed it? I walk over, bend down, and take two big gulps of water. I feel alive again. I start walking to nowhere once again. I take another long blink and there goes the river, disappearing just as fast as it appeared the first time.

Suddenly under my feet I feel a slight shaking -- the first actual movement that I have felt since I have been here. The shaking is growing more intense. I look behind me and see something increasing in size by the second. As it gets closer I am able to make out what it is. A stampede? No something much greater than a stampede. I can see more animals than my brain can comprehend. Elephants, horses, lions, cheetahs, and so many breeds of birds I've never even seen. Animals I've never learned about. They are all running in my direction. I start running too, now with fear. Fear of being trampled. The animals start catching up and now ahead of me I see a cliff. The land is going to end soon. The animals are now running beside me. To my surprise they aren't trying to kill me. As we get closer, I can see that there is a body of water at the end of the cliff. We are so close now, there is no use in trying to stop running because we all know we are going over the cliff one way or another.

We all go down. The fall is long. I finally emerge in water, and I can hear and see animals falling in after me. Tons of them all landing near me. I swim up for air. And then I wake up.

Story Brooke

My eyes open to a bright outside. I stand up on these unfamiliar grounds. I see giant green grass the size of trees and tiny trees the size of green grass. At first the sky appears to be one big rainbow of colors, but I look closer to see that it is just full of balloons, floating as clouds. They leave a colorful glow on this place, this place I don't know what to call.

I start walking on the colorful pebble road under me. I pass strange creatures that look like fruit but are very much alive. A wind blows and I get a whiff of a familiar smell: chocolate? I realize I'm hungry so I follow the scent. It leads me to a gated little blue cottage, the first sign of civilization I've seen. I think for a second and then push open the wooden gate start down the narrow walkway leading to a very short front door. I slowly walk up the three small steps and press my ear up against it. I hear a voice humming and the smell of sweet chocolate is strong. I knock, the voice goes away, and all I hear are footsteps getting closer and closer. The door swings open and my eyes fall onto a cat dressed in trousers and a buttoned shirt, standing on two legs like a person.

"Why hello there! You must be Catelin. I've heard so much about you, you're quite the talk of the town," he says.

I look around for the sight of any other living beings.

"What do you mean talk of the town? It's vacant. You are the first I've seen of your kind. And I haven't talked to anyone since I got here. How do you know my name?" I ask.

"What do you mean of my kind?" the cat says, slightly outraged. "I am the same as you. You are the same as me. We are all one kind here don't you know?"

"Oh I'm sorry, Sir, I didn't mean to anger you, but where is here exactly?"

The cat sighs, " You can call me Michael, and this is the town of Story Brooke."

Hunter Chavez

Poem

The way she smiles appeals me,
For I can't touch,
Like the midnight sky,
That has fallen as my lust.

The way she gazes, awes me,
When the sunlight dazzles her eyes,
To see how aching my loved one looks,
She's forever mine.

As the wind kisses her beloved skin,
The smell of roses blooms across my mind,
And the beauty of her hair swift as an arrow,
For she's one of a kind.

Those soft irresistible lips,
For I can't forget,
How I cherish her is like a stolen kiss,
That saved me through my troubling days.

How delicate and soft those hands can be,
Yet so beautiful like a masterpiece,
The way your hand fits on mine,
Is like fated to love you and yet so kind.

The way you walk reminds me of a child
And so breathtaking,
When our world revolves around us,
There would be no distance between you and I.

The sound of your voice,

Gives me chills,
Though wholehearted and sweet,
It always sounds upbeat.

Through ups and downs we always find a cure,
For it's no curse,
Though we try our best,
We'll always make it work.

Night of the Living Nuggies

A lowrider pulled up to the mic and out of the darkness George Lopez's head appeared. His eyes looked quickly at the menu. "Can I get uhhhhh 20 Nugget Meal, with a BIG MAC?"

Another voice answered, "A-ight Georgie, 20 nuggies coming right up." After getting his meal, George Lopez drove home to eat the nuggies. As George made it home he threw the bag onto the counter and ran towards the bathroom.

On the counter the bag began to move and flipped onto the ground and crept slowly away. As it turned the corner, the bathroom door swung open with the heavy smell of an air freshener. George entered the kitchen and saw that the bag was missing. As George walked around wondering where he'd put his nuggies, he began to hear a crackling noise and the sound of screams coming from the living room. Confused, George ran into the living room to see the fireplace was on and a football game was playing. He turned off the TV and blew out the fire. "Man... what's happening?" George then sat down and saw the bag on the table top. He quickly opened the bag, but it was empty except for a note. As he pulled the note open, all it said was "NO." George freaked out and yelled to see if anyone was was home. Nothing. Confused about where his nuggies went, George headed to his room.

As he entered the dark hallway, he began to hear a faint patter inside the walls. The farther along the hallway he walked, the louder the sound became. It became so loud that George ran into his room and slammed the door. As he slammed it, lightning thundered in the distance. Then silence. He hurried towards the light and tried to flip it. The power was out. George faintly heard the George Lopez theme song coming from outside the room, which freaked him out even more. He picked up his phone and tried

to call his friend Ernie. There was no answer. George could hear the pattering slowly start again until it became banging against his bedroom door. George closed his eyes, scared out his mind. Then, dead silence.

Confused, George slowly opened his eyes. He noticed something hanging from his room vent. He waddled towards it until it fell onto the floor. In the moonlight, it looked like a chicken nugget. George stepped back as the nuggy started to stand up. More and more nuggets began to flood the room. Nuggies started to squeeze through the vents, windows and any opening they could get through. George screamed as they began to enclose him in the corner of the room. Little laughter filled his ears as the nuggies started to jump on him, making him disappear under the crowd of chicken nuggies, until the muffled screams stopped.

Clarisse Condevillamar

Blue Jay's Song

When I was a little girl, the hallways stretched for miles -- grey carpets and tile floors, brand new book cases. A Greek Revival building that held many fictional paperbacks. All organized by color under fluorescent lighting.

The librarian would wait behind her desk, where she remained silent besides the tapping of her pen trying to solve a crossword puzzle. I don't remember ever seeing her happy.

-- Until the day I noticed chirping outside the window. The song was coming from the section where the realistic and historical fiction books were. That's where I saw the blue jay in the cage of the women's desk. The visit was a surprise.

I should have brought a better dressed book to check out. Mine was bonded with pearl pages, but I met the blue jay and heard the song that was in her heart and that's when I saw the librarian smile.

Best Friend

My best friend that is what you are, two peas in a pod.
We argue sometimes, but that will not break our bond.
To me you are like a sister that I will always care for.
Loyalty, friendship, and trust are the things we share.

I know you as in individual, I especially know you as a close friend.
Till the end of time our friendship will never end.
This moment, this second, in the next hour, this day,
Our bond is here, which is unbreakable.

My friendship with you is one of a kind.
When brought together, we are like peanut butter and jelly.
When I am at my lowest you bring me right back up,
When you are by my side, I know things are all right.

Our friendship is so strong, it is like a jawbreaker.
We complement each other like the sun and moon.

Who's Down There?

Quietly moving through the house, she heard the door opening behind her. Emilia wanted to go check it out but she was too afraid because the noise was coming from the basement. Her little sister didn't want to go down there either, so Emilia had no choice but to go down by herself. Once she took the first step the stairs started to creak really loudly, which made her jump and she fell down a few steps. Once she got to the bottom she heard someone running, but she put a brave face on and said, "It is just my imagination." As she continued through the basement, she saw an old family photo and she noticed a little girl in the photo that she thought "looks exactly like me." She got so scared that she fainted, waking up in the hospital where her mother had rushed her. "What happened?" her mom asked. She said "I saw this girl that looked like me in this photo." Her mom said, "Oh that is your great grandma." Emilia was shocked that she had a great grandma because her whole life it had just been her, her sister and her mother.

Darique Cox

I Remember Dad

I remember the times I had with my dad. There were good times and bad times. There were happy times and sad times. There were funny times and, well, not so many dull times because because my dad was a character. I remember just conversating with my dad about anything: football, God, life. I miss those times. I miss my dad. I remember when he was a drug addict and alcoholic. I remember the day my mom picked me up from school to tell me he had gone to jail. I remember seeing him for the first time after he got out of jail. I remember witnessing my dad graduate from parenting class. I remember working with my dad at the church he worked at. I remember what his co-workers called me. It meant a lot that they called me that because my dad was the best person ever! I remember spending the summers with my dad. I remember barbecuing with my dad. I remember when he told the family and me that he had cancer. I remember how devastated I felt. I remember how hard school and life was. I remember when my dad kicked cancer's ass TWICE! Those were the happiest moments of my life.

What I Really Wanted To Say...

Tomorrow is the start of the NFL Draft and I'm so excited to see who the Cowboys will pick up with the 58th Pick. This whole offseason has been a roller coaster. A lot of ups and a lot of downs. I talk to my friends and family about offseason a lot and they give their opinions on what is going on. Some teams are picking up good players, while some are getting rid of them. I told my friend how upset I was because ***what I really wanted to say*** was why the f--- don't the Cowboys do anything during the offseason? Signing all these unnecessary players who nobody even heard of, and plus they gonna get cut when the season starts. It's irritating because this one player moved ten minutes away from the Cowboys' facility and EVEN ENROLLED HIS KID IN SCHOOL NEAR THE FACILITY, AND TO TOP IT OFF THE PLAYER EVEN SAID HE WANTED TO BE ON THE TEAM. "If you can pick me up, do what you gotta do," he told the Head Coach of the Dallas Cowboys.

William Cueva

Big Dog in Charge

In our family of five, the dog is the one who's in charge. The "Dog" is like the man of the house, the big dog. Out of five people who used to be here, there is a pet dog named Josh, and a daughter named Selena, and the mother of Selena, but the father and the son have been missing since the Doomsday. The family are in hiding because of a group that searches for survivors and steals their supplies. Since father and son are gone, it's hard for the mother to survive and protect her family all by herself, but she can't give up and she doesn't need the aid from another person because she is independent. Her independency is risky for her and her daughter and dog, so all she can do is hope that her husband and son are still alive because she is worried sick.

Life's Games

Life is like a big game. It obviously is taken seriously because in a game there are different obstacles or some sort of challenge that you, or the in-game character, face to get to the winning goal. Just like life itself, you face different obstacles and run into issues on the way to the top. If you want to make a goal or dream happen, you've got to commit to that goal or dream that you desire in the future, and you can't let nobody bring you down no matter the circumstances. You can't let people just step over you if they see you becoming successful at who you want to be or do with your goals and dreams. You can't let them become the reason you're not where you want to be because at the end of the day you're doing it for yourself now, and in the future it would be beneficial for you. In the case of me, no game or person is going to mess with me. Period. The position that they put me in, it's all gonna come out in the wash because later, people show their true colors whether you win or lose, regardless, because they want to prove their point and make you seem like a fool, but you can't let that happen. If you lose, they talk all the crap and become envious jerks, but if you win they still act the same and hate much more so basically you're on your own winning team or you're not.

Dajon “Mustard” Davis

Demons

Some are old
Some are new
I see demons in each and every one of you
I see them struggle
I see them fight
To show their true colors each and every night
You try and fight
You try and hide
Some would wish that they would just die
But I keep on looking
I try and find
Someone who could understand the demons I have inside
Once you find
You get scared
Then most of the time they leave you in despair
Now you give up
Now you lose
I see demons in each and every one of you

Delete

I was seven years old and just watched an episode of Jimmy Neutron, and it was about how he had built robots to help him in his studies, but they went rogue and went on a rampage -- walking down the street, going up to people, saying "Delete" and deleting them from all existence on earth. The robots had them sent to this place that was pitch black and nobody knew where they were. After the show I went to bed and had a dream I was walking down the street with my parents and my grandparents and the robots walked up and deleted my parents and grandparents but not me for some reason. After that I woke up crying and ran up to my grandparents' room and went to sleep in their bed.

Why Can't I Just Move Towards the Memories?

I wake up and look around, and it seems as if I am floating into deep space with what seems to be nothing around me, but as I look closer I start to see images that seem to look like memories, but they aren't mine, so I start to wonder, "Whose memories are they?"

I try to get closer and closer, but I can't find a way to move the way I want to, so I'm floating there, drifting further and further. I try doing a swim-like movement by straightening my body and swinging my arms in a circular motion towards the images around me, but I still seem to be drifting away from them. I start to panic, and I just can't figure how to get nearer, then right when I start to believe I've done everything I think: "Why can't I just move towards the memories?"

Jessica Garcia

Lost Girl

I was lost in my feelings; I felt a way I never imagined or even thought I'd feel, ever.

My life was crazy. I can tell you that things about me and my life were both changing in a blink of an eye, and it truly sucked. I was going through stages, though along the way I lost many things and in particular a lot of people, people I personally thought cared about me. I can tell you losing loved ones you thought cared for you is the absolute hardest, especially for teens today. Throughout high school, teens go through a lot of personal things that make them feel lost, whether it's family issues, friend issues, or personal issues about themselves. One thing I can say is that it's really effective. I've never felt more lost than when someone in my family shows me fake love or is even willing to put me last, putting other things that are nowhere near as important before me. It hurts and changes my view on everyone and everything.

People just want someone to be by their side and help guide and or support them. During teenage years you meet many people -- friends or even a partner, as I did. He vanished out of my life in a heartbeat like nothing meant anything after two years, and it made me feel twice as lost and confused like I wasn't good enough. It's sad when you open up like never before to someone who you just want to be straightforward and real with, then they begin to treat you with no respect, ignore you, and not even claim you and leave you waiting. It's all a lie. If there's one thing my parents have taught me in life it's to not chase after people who aren't willing to chase after you. I used to have a girl in my life, someone who was my best friend in the whole entire world, who was down to do anything for me and with me. We had stuck by each other for 12 plus years, we were family and I relied on her for everything, but when you get into high school you watch friendships fail. She had met the wrong people, had done things she shouldn't have done, had been experimenting way too much, and it just wasn't something I was down with personally. Like always, I was the outcast, so we dropped our friendship. Till this day, about a year later, it still hurts. The fact that we claim we don't like each other bugs me, especially when we once claimed each other as family. I just want her to know I'll always care. No matter how lost I am and upset I am, she'll forever hold so many places in my heart. I can spill more problems about my life but I'll stop here. If you're going through many personal things and changes I want to tell you It's all a part of life and many things happen for many

reasons and it's okay. Never be ashamed to be you. Do what you please and express yourself In any way shape or form. Respect your own decisions and don't ever let someone else's opinion knock you down. If you're lost the way I was, find yourself and change your ways to be a better, happier person.

Dramatic Monologue Poem

Today I woke from a nightmare, I remember my mom coming at me with an axe. As I stepped to get away I remember seeing my mom dressed In yellow satin pants and this weird shirt. A marigold In winter when I held my arms out to embrace her, she raised the axe and struck me right INTO MY NECK! My head fell to the left side of my body only hanging by the skin. A river of signs poured from my cut as I bled out to die; my momma only said goodbye. I later woke from my dream but ever since that dream my mom has forever scared me.

Hector Gurrola

Osama

Osama walked to the house, stood up straight, tried to fix his hair, and tied the dog to a tree. He took big slow steps, reached the front door, raised his shaking arm to knock, still carrying his backpack full of narcotics. Just as he was about knock, he saw the old lady get out the house by walking through the wall. He then all of sudden began to hear his mother yelling at him, but she wasn't around.

He and the old lady walked towards the middle of the road feeling dim, so they went to Texas Roadhouse to have a nice meal, only they were without any monetary value, so they were just going to run once they were done, even though they knew it was wrong, but they didn't have a choice. Driven by hunger and stupidity, they ordered the whole menu. Now this made the waiters suspicious because they didn't seem like they could pay for it.

He woke up, after getting home from last night and having a deep sleep that made him think about food. He hadn't eat in about a week -- well he had, but not a full meal. He decided to go out to eat something. As he walked out the door he saw a guy eating a burrito. "Hey you, I'll give you five dollars for that burrito," he said.

"But I already took a bite out of it," the guy said.

"Does it look like I care about that?" Osama asked.

"Sorry, I'm going to eat," the guy replied.

Osama then put this fierce look on his face like when your mom tells you you can go out the day all of your homies are out. He looked like he just won the lottery and had everything he ever wanted, but he woke up because it was a dream. Osama then told the guy to wait a little bit. He went inside, grabbed a cleaver, came out and chopped the guy's head off. Immediately after he realized what he had done he was so angry, he wasn't thinking straight. He panicked.

Joaquin Hurtado

[△ Disclaimer △: (Message to people who *might* read this story) This story is entirely a joke and not meant to be taken in a literal manner. If you feel like you'll be offended because you are a weak-willed individual who doesn't comprehend the concept of a satirical narrative, then please, immediately stop reading this story. Got it? Okay, let's continue!]

Last Terminal

"There has been another bomb threat made by solo Chinese terrorist, Ho Lee Fūk," the female news reporter stated on the TV.

"His IQ is said to be in the 590s, he was already accepted to Stanford University by the age of six, and he received 38 PhDs and 20 Bachelor's degrees. He might have obtained this high intellect by watching numerous CrazyRussianHacker and TechRax videos on YouTube," added the male news anchor on the TV.

Another news reporter came on and said, "He has 5.5 million casualties under his belt, a little above 30,000 he has injured, and over 300 bombing raids on specific airports. That's at least 18,333 deaths and 100 people injured per raid. That's all in a span of four months!"

A video of Ho Lee Fūk released by the government showed him waving a makeshift P99 around in one hand and a half stick of dynamite in the other hand, shouting at hostages in an airport saying, "Everrybodie, get on de [censored] grround! Don't look at mi faace!" Surprisingly, he didn't have a Chinese accent; he had more of an Indian accent for some reason, no one knows why. He is currently the most wanted man in the entire world as of 2072, and is the reason why nations around the globe banded together to create the New Order of the Oblate Spheroid (N.O.O.S). His raids are completely random, but authorities may have somehow located where his next attack might be held: Denver Airport.

"What will we do with this madman running around just bombing people with IEDs? He's way too damn smart for Christ sake," said the Chairman of Canada.

The Chairman of Mexico retorted, "The real question is: how have we not caught this guy yet? Doesn't he buy materials to make his guns and his bombs? Also, don't we have cameras in our airports? We should be able to track this person down using facial recognition."

The Chairman of the U.S. replied, "He shut down agencies like the FBI, CIA, Mossad, NASA, NSA, Homeland Security, ASIS, and many more; he uses disguises so

convincing that he flies way below the radar, and his IP address constantly changes. He even hacked into the World Bank and stole \$251.7 billion without getting tracked down. The only good that came out of his raids is the fact that other terrorist organizations don't want to come out anymore because he is significantly superior to them. So, yeah, that's why we haven't caught him yet."

The whole room went silent. Nobody knew what to do. Everyone went home for the day in disappointment, but they would return tomorrow to make a plan to take down Ho Lee Fūk once and for all.

"Hahaha, dey never find mi," said Ho Lee Fūk to himself. He lived in a cardboard box in the middle of an abandoned road. Under the cardboard box, however, was his high tech base of operations. From his 20 quantum computers, he could Bitcoin mine and control the entire internet with a 3 zettabyte hard drive full of CrazyRussianHacker and TechRax videos, 100 million PVC pipes, 300 billion pennies, and IEDs that he made out of nothing but paper clips, orange peels from oranges he bought on the Black Farmer's Market, double A batteries, Altoids tins, and shotgun shells. Though small, his IEDs still had the force of 56 dynamite sticks going off at once. Ho Lee Fūk was working on his new model 1887 Remington shotgun; he made it out of PVC pipes and melted pennies, with hollow point bullets of melted pennies and firework gunpowder. As he was working on those things, he was also watching a CrazyRussianHacker video, *8 Hot Dog Gadgets put to the Test*, while contemplating something that had been on his mind: *Why do I do the things I do?* He then realized, blowing stuff up was for the cool kids, and he always wanted to be cool.

He thought back to when he was a junior at Stanford University, when he would always be teased by the significantly older individuals in his classes. One day, he had enough and he broke. He came to school with a seven-foot pencil and two car jacks with an iPhone plug perfectly connected to them. He grabbed the pencil and wrote on the wall in Chinese lettering, "你以后会感谢我的 (You'll thank me later)." Ho Lee Fūk then laid the pencil down, connected the car jacks to the wall, and attached the car jacks to both ends of the pencil. People were staring at him with bewilderment as he ran away from the pencil, but 30 seconds later the pencil caught on fire then exploded. The explosion was big enough to blow half the school up and leave a crater in the ground. Only four people died, which were the bullies. Nobody cared about those guys anyway because they committed tax evasion. After the Stanford Pencil Bombing happened, they rebuilt the place and it became the most successful university to ever exist.

"Ah, memories," said Ho Lee Fūk as he reminisced on the good times, when he had people around him who rivaled his intellect and worked on inventions that actually gave him a challenge. Nowadays, he thought that Albert Einstein and William Sirgis were the dumbest people ever conceived. He didn't realize that 22 hours passed by as he was remembering stuff from his past. He took his 10-minute sleep and got right back

to work. He could enter REM sleep easily due to watching 24 hour challenges on YouTube; he gained one hour of wokeness each time he watched one. It did not damage his health in the slightest.

As Ho Lee Fūk was remembering things from the past, N.O.O.S. was planning their attack.

“Anyone? Does anyone have an idea to take him down?” asked the Chairman of Australia. Everyone stayed silent, looking downward. One of the Chairmen spoke up; it was the Chairman of China.

“So, you need a plan to take down Ho Lee Fūk?” the Chairman of China said.

“Yeah.. That’s exactly what we talked-- were you even here yesterday?” asked the Chairman of the U.S.

The Chairman of China replied, “I ,uhh... I had to take my son to his engineering school yesterday.”

“Well, whatever, what is your plan?” the Chairman of Canada asked.

“Well, here it goes: we let him bomb the airport and we catch him right there!” the Chairman of China exclaimed.

The Chairman of Mexico looked down in complete lack of amusement and said, “You can’t be serious... right?”

The Chairman of China retorted, “Trust me, it will work. As a matter of fact, Ho Lee Fūk and I were good friends back in Stanford... before the Stanford Pencil Bombing happened.”

“That is absolutely effing ridiculous,” said the Chairman of Ireland.

“Shut up, drunkie,” said the Chairman of England.

“Piss off,” the Chairman of Ireland replied.

The Chairman of the U.S. finally got to speak. “Gentlemen, shut the hell up. We have a common enemy we need to take down. China, if you think this plan will work, then so be it. It’s the only plan we have.”

“From the intel I’ve collected, he may attack Denver Airport in about two days!” exclaimed the Chairman of Germany.

“Then two days we shall wait,” said the Chairman of the U.S.

Ho Lee Fūk was finishing the last of his 2,537 IEDs that he made in under one hour. He was thinking about finally giving up on terrorism because it was boring being a cool kid. “Too boring being cool kid, I give up,” said Ho Lee Fūk, but he added, “I do one last bo ming reid.” He would create a bomb 9,000 times more powerful than the Tsar Bomba using only a soda can, artillery shell gunpowder, Febreze container, firework fuse strings, and 1.2 lbs. of uranium he bought from the Dark Web for \$2.78. He spent 46 minutes creating the bomb. When he was finally done, he called it *Nuke-a-Cola*.

Ho Lee Fūk headed to the Denver Airport with 29 IEDs, *Nuke-a-Cola*, a Remington shotgun, 7 EMPs made from an ordinary light bulb, and a lighter. As he was heading towards the airport, the members of N.O.O.S. were going there as well.

“Come on, Gents, we have to find him quickly,” said the Chairman of the U.S.

“We know, we know,” said the Chairman of Canada.

“I have an idea,” said the Chairman of China. “Canada, you go with Mexico to the jet bridge. U.S. and I will go to the aircraft parking lot to see if we can see him. Germany and Ireland will wait near the entrance for him”. They all nodded and headed to their stationary positions. They waited and waited...but no indication of Ho Lee Fūk was anywhere.

“Anyone copy?” said the Chairman of Mexico.

“Ya, what’s the problem, mate?” the Chairman of Ireland responded.

“We’ve been stuck here for six hours with no sign of him,” said the Chairman of Mexico.

“Don’t worry, we will be alright. We’ll find him,” said the Chairman of Germany. All of them heard a blaring siren go off.

“THIS IS NOT A DRILL. I REPEAT, THIS IS NOT A DRILL. THE AIRCRAFT FOR *AUSTRALIAN AIRLINES* HAS BEEN HIJACKED BY CHINESE TERRORIST, HO LEE FŪK,” said the person on the intercom.

“We have to end this, once and for all,” said the Chairman of the U.S. to the rest of the other Chairmen. “Execute Protocol 177013”.

Ho Lee Fūk was on the plane talking to the passengers on board. One stewardess hesitantly asked him, “H-how did you get on the plane w-without police catching you?”

He replied, “Oh, I use powerful EMP made from light bulb and smash on ground,”. People looked really confused and one of them started questioning reality itself. One person got up and scolded him for being a terrorist saying that abstinence is cooler than terrorism. He had long hair and had a sweater that had *Weeaboo Trash* written on it. Ho Lee Fūk said to him, “Sit down or I shoot chopstick off.”

As he was talking to the passengers on board, the Chairmen were flying towards the plane in their Krabby Patty Tarter Saucer Alien Aircraft they borrowed from Area 52 (Area 51 was abducted by a mothership back in 2053, so they rebuilt it and made Area 52 in March of 2067).

“Oh crap!” exclaimed the Chairman of China. “His IQ is now in the 920s zone! We’ll never be able to defeat him now!”.

Once he said that, they saw a body launched from a window of the aircraft. It was Ho Lee Fūk’s body. The *Weeaboo Trash* kid had had enough of his antics and drop kicked him out of a window. The passengers immediately fixed the hole using Flex Seal and Flex Tape. The Chairmen watched as his flailing body descended.

Ho Lee Fūk smiled as he realized he was finally beat by someone. He grabbed the *Nuke-a-Cola* from underneath his jacket, lit the fuse, and waited. As he hit the ground, he left a huge crater but didn't die due to having binge watched TechRax videos the night before. "Damn, thank g-," Ho Lee Fūk said as he was interrupted by the *Nuke-a-Cola* finally exploding. The entire continent of Australia was destroyed, and so was Ho Lee Fūk.

After Ho Lee Fūk's death, other terrorist organizations disbanded due to the fact that they could never top what Ho Lee Fūk did. They all admired him greatly and made Friday the 13th known as Ho Lee Fūk Friday. World Peace eventually happened, and all crime on Earth was made illegal. N.O.O.S. continued to prosper and even invited the *Weeaboo Trash* kid into their organization to replace the Chairman of Australia. The only bad that came out of Ho Lee Fūk's death was that CrazyRussianHacker videos were now banned on Earth, although people watch his videos on the Dark Web or on different planets with other alien species. TechRax and 24 hour challenge videos were also banned, and they were banned from the entire universe. The place where Australia used to be is now so irradiated, that it disintegrates anything that comes within 30 miles of the radiation core and it won't be safe to inhabit till the universe has passed its 20 billionth birthday.

Prologue

(novel excerpt)

During the 2020s, there was a spike of strange accounts of ghostly and spiritual activity documented by paranormal enthusiasts and scientists. Though still uncommon, statistics showed that there was more ghostly activity then than ever before. Concurrently, there was a slight boost of people who were gifted with special abilities commonly known as a *Blind Eye*. People who possessed a Blind Eye were known as Sightseers. A baby born with a Blind eye (a .94% chance) would be able to access their power by the age of five.

An individual with these abilities could use their mind to the fullest extent, so they naturally had a higher IQ than normal humans. When a person use Blind Eye, they can perceive a dimension a regular person cannot see with the naked eye. This dimension is called the *Dimension of Anguish*, where time doesn't matter, where special and general relativity don't exist, and where supernatural malevolent forces occur.

All people with a Blind Eye used telepathy, but their unique abilities, usually developed by the time they were six to eight years old, varied. Their Sightseer abilities

were exclusive to them and based on their personality. Sometimes, they even set a path for what the user would become in the future. Some people embraced what they received and embarked on a career as a Priest or Reverend to exorcise demonic entities and rid any poltergeists from a location. An adequate handful of people weren't too impressed with their gifts at all. Other people, however, thought their powers were a burden in their life. Other people like a 19-year-old shut-in named Adam Wells.

Adam was born on August 12, 2022 in Summersville, West Virginia, and had dealt with the paranormal all his life. He suffered from depression and social anxiety due to being different from the rest of the people he knew. Adam saw ghosts that wanted his help to make it to a place only known as the *Silver City*. They would sense his psychic aura and ask if he could help them. He wished that he could help them, all of them, but he couldn't. Whenever he tried, his Sightseer ability would go out of control and obliterate the spirit. Adam felt like it was his fault that their existence is now forgotten, or so it seemed to him. Their "existence" now actually resided in a dark and torturous realm only know as *The Abyss*, something so malevolent no one could understand how evil it truly was. As a result of the obliteration, Adam shut away his abilities and refused to use them ever again.

Although he was a shut-in, Adam still managed to maintain good grades; he even got honor roll and perfect attendance at his high school. He would be accepted to Ohio University on May 4, 2041 and finally leave on August 24. That is where his story begins.

Ashes To Ashes

My friends and I were hanging out and talking to a new kid that recently came here. His name was Joseph and he came from Quebec, Canada. We had talked to him a week before and he seemed pretty chill. He was really into the supernatural, but we all thought he was a little *too* into it. He believed in witches and demons, and after that we all thought he was a little crazy.

It was late in October, Halloween was around the corner, and we wanted to do a Halloween prank on Joseph. We decided we would tell him about a ritual to summon a witch and one of us would try to scare him while doing the ritual. My friend, Maurice, was hesitant to do the prank, but he joined anyway, and we went to my house to get a camera. All of us went to a creepy place called the Judgement House and installed the camera in the corner by the fireplace so we could get his reaction on footage.

The next week, it was finally Halloween. We told Joseph about the ritual and how to perform it. I told him to draw a pentagram in black ink and set 5 candles down on the

points of the shape. Then, you chant “E Pluribus Unum” over and over again. I told him that a specific witch would be summoned this way at exactly midnight on Halloween only. He fell for it, even though I made it up on the spot.

Later that night, we went to pick Joseph up from his house. We drove him to the Judgement House and we walked him to the front of the door. I told him to do the ritual near the fireplace since he’ll have a better chance of summoning a witch. He nodded, and he went inside. I turned the camera on and we left. Two friends, Immanuel and Maurice, stayed to scare him and then drive him home. We didn’t know that once he went inside, we never would see him ever again.

After Joseph had been missing for five days, we all got worried. I blamed Immanuel and Maurice for his disappearance, but said they said they didn’t even go in the house to begin with but left instead because they felt like they were being watched. We went to investigate and retrieve the camera from the Judgement House. When we entered, the house felt really cold. I ran to the fireplace found a pile of ash next to some melted down candles in front of the fireplace. I felt a strange presence inside the house, so I quickly got the camera and I left.

I plugged the camera to my PC and I looked at the footage. I brought Immanuel and Maurice into my room to look at the footage with me. We skipped to 11:58 P.M. and saw Joseph drawing the pentagram and setting the candles down. At 12:00 A.M., he quickly lit the candles and chanted, “E Pluribus Unum.” I chuckled, and so did Maurice and Immanuel.

We felt bad for a moment, but only for a moment. Just as soon as we started laughing, we stopped. At around 12:02 A.M., we saw what looked to be a demon creature. It must’ve been around seven feet tall, very dark, and with horns on its head. The thing was creeping towards Joseph, and it started to cover him with darkness. He was almost engulfed by the darkness, but the camera froze as he started to scream. Chills went down my spine when I saw his face filled with terror. The timer kept going, but the footage was still frozen. I fast forwarded until it finally unfroze at around 3:33 A.M. What horrified me the most was that the only things left in the room were some melted candles, a scratched pentagram, and a pile of ash in the exact same spot Joseph was sitting in. We vowed to keep this a secret from our family, friends, and everyone.

No one knew what really happened to Joseph. Police investigators stopped searching for him three months after his disappearance due to lack of evidence. It would become one of the most mysterious disappearance cases in the world. No one knew what truly happened to poor Joseph except me, Maurice, and Immanuel.

Caroline Kim

A Lost Soul

The day Mia Salmon disappeared, her sister Lily waited for her next to her hand-me-down minivan. She texted her, to no avail. She called her and left voicemails accusing her of abandoning her at school, even though the old Acura was still in the student lot where Mia had parked it that morning. She was annoyed at first—she'd probably gone off with her friends and forgotten about Lily—then angry, then worried, then terrified.

When the winter sun started to set, Lily realized that Mia was likely in worse trouble than she could bring upon her by telling their parents. She sat on the curb and called her father, who then called her mother, who reported her eldest daughter missing.

By the end of the night, all the police knew was that she had vanished.

A few days after Mia went missing, Maisie and her family had flown to Los Angeles and camped out in the Salmons' guesthouse. Maisie was a distant cousin, related in ways that Lucas, the younger of Mia's two siblings, didn't quite care to understand.

Maisie and Lucas were the same age, and minutes after her arrival the two of them were banished to the backyard with vague instructions to "go play" as their parents sat at the kitchen table in solemn silence. Maisie immediately began to explore the Salmons' neglected flowerbeds, lacing her fingers through the spiderwebs that had formed between the rose bushes. Lucas stood on the back porch, arms slack at his sides, and watched the adults through the kitchen window. His parents sat across from Maisie's, all eight of their hands touching in the center of the table. He thought he heard a humming—the kind that comes in through your bones rather than your ears—from somewhere inside the house. The grown-ups were all still, eyes closed, silent except for that hum.

Maisie tugged on his hand. "Play with me," she said, and ran off across the yard, leaving Lucas to follow. He glanced back through the window once more and saw Maisie's mother open her eyes and shake her head. He couldn't hear what she said, but from the movements of her mouth it looked like, "I can't."

Lucas turned away and chased his cousin across the crisp, dead grass. It was deep winter then, but his cousin didn't care—she ran barefoot over the hard ground, looking for beautiful things like bugs and bones, and it was all Lucas could do to keep

up. Maisie had been raised with an acceptance of death that Lucas strived for—perhaps if he thought of things as simply as she did, his sister's disappearance wouldn't hurt as much.

Maisie stopped suddenly, her head lolling back to stare up at the hazy sky. "Point to a star," she said, though few shone bright enough to cut through the city's pollution. "I know them all."

Lucas lifted his arm toward the twilight horizon. The gesture was languid, lazy, his body exhausted from their play.

"Jupiter," she said, and hummed a single, droning note.

Across the city, Mia was dying, although Lucas could not have known it.

In the kitchen, Maisie's mother sat with her hands folded on the table in front of her and explained that it was too late, that a death had already been traded for a life.

In the house next door, a newborn baby cried.

Maisie moved in a few months later, a few weeks before the LAPD started speaking of Mia in the past tense, a few days after her parents' car was hit head-on by a semi-truck. Lucas was shocked that, even as a new orphan, she was just as untroubled as ever. On her first day in the Salmons' house, she strung hollow bird bones from her bedroom ceiling as if they were streamers.

"She's weird," declared Louisa, who was now the oldest Salmon child in Mia's absence. Louisa had spent the past months always looking over her shoulder, waiting for Mia to slip back into their family like a key into the right lock. "She's weird, and I don't like her."

Mia was dead and summer fell heavy on the Salmons' house. Maisie rescued roadkill from the rushing thoroughfare at the end of their cul-de-sac. Raccoons, opossums, the occasional coyote. Mangled bodies came back together when she pressed her small hands to their crushed and bloody paws. Sometimes she vomited into the gutter afterwards, black sludge that Lucas thought smelled like weeks-old compost—like death made fertile. He held her hair back and rubbed her shoulders until it passed, every time.

The animals Maisie couldn't save—the ones that had been left to rot too long in the sun—she stripped down to bone with her bare hands. The bodies seemed to obey her, to yield, to unravel into their constituent parts neatly and with very little urging. The collection of skeletons hanging in her bedroom grew.

Maisie taught Lucas more constellations than he could remember. They forsook perfectly good beds to pitch tents in the yard and sleep on the ground, adorning each other with flowers and leaves.

In August, she sang that sad note to the sky and readied herself for her long march to elementary school.

Two summers became three. Three became four. They were in middle school now, and Lucas fought Maisie's bullies with his bare fists. Louisa went to college on the East Coast and only came home for the month of July.

"There are ghosts here," she said. "And I've never liked those bird bones."

This puzzled Lucas almost as much as it puzzled Maisie. Of course there were ghosts here – there were ghosts everywhere. Dying was as natural as breathing, and that didn't scare him the way it used to. He was twelve years old and invincible.

Maisie and Lucas babysat Bodhi, the little boy next door, while his parents went to work. He was a smart kid, raised on organic produce, Mozart, and Dr. Seuss. His little mouth dropped open when he looked at the stars. "Jupiter," said Maisie, while Bodhi pointed and babbled. She'd tried giving him coyote teeth and snake bones to play with, but he didn't want them. At four years old, he was a clever boy, but never quite clever enough to see the beauty in dead things.

"He's just like Mia," said Maisie, although she had never known Mia at all. Lucas took her at her word, forgetting that Mia had already gone missing by the time Maisie's family first came to visit—something in the way Maisie spoke erased the need to ask questions.

"I miss her," Lucas told her.

"I know."

"Every single day."

"I know. She'll come back for you."

"You can't just say things like that," said Lucas. He didn't want to be like Louisa, always waiting, always wondering. He believed that his sister was dead, and that his sister's death was final.

But here Maisie was, holding out her hands for Lucas to inspect. They were small, brown, ordinary. He had seen them do incredible things, zip up wounds and unravel intact flesh. He had never once felt afraid of her.

"You can't just say things like that," Lucas repeated. He turned Maisie's hands over in his to look at her palms. "Do you . . . Do you miss your parents?"

Her mouth quirked. "You can't just ask things like that, Lucas."

"Do you?" In their years of being inseparable, they'd never talked about Maisie's family.

She looked up at his face, then back down at her hands. "Yes, but I wouldn't bring them back. Do you understand?"

"I don't."

She flexed her fingers back, then clenched her hands into fists. "When they died, they left me this."

It was Maisie's fifth Los Angeles July, and Bodhi's fifth July at all. Maisie, Lucas, and Bodhi pitched tents outside, ran barefoot to catch the ice cream truck, and played in the grass while the sprinklers sprayed.

While Bodhi and Lucas lay on the lawn, Maisie hollowed out a curved length of bone, perhaps a rib, to make a pipe.

The pipe only played one note. Though Lucas was a terrible pianist, he knew that it was middle C.

"Bodhi," said Maisie. "Ice cream."

Bodhi looked up.

Down the street, a familiar tune played.

"I'll race you," Maisie said, and Bodhi was up in an instant, sprinting to the edge of the cul-de-sac. Maisie jogged alongside him; Lucas walked half a block behind.

Bodhi reached the corner and kept running, down to the pavement. "Mia!" Maisie called. She looked back at her, and then the truck hit her.

When Maisie hauled her out of the road she was life in the process of being unmade, beautiful and terrible all at once. "Mia," she whispered. She fluttered her hands over Bodhi's throat, barely touching him, and her eyes fell open. They were glassy and cold. Lucas could hear sirens approaching, paramedics coming too late. In a distant sort of way, he knew that Maisie could have saved Bodhi; in an even more distant way, he knew that she could have killed him far sooner. Why wait for a cataclysm, when she herself was cataclysmic?

Maisie gripped Lucas's hand so hard that he saw stars. He heard her breath come in a harsh and wet rasp through her open mouth. Lucas thought he felt a shift in the great big cogs of the universe.

"A reversal," Maisie said, chest rising unevenly as she inhaled. "A death for a life." Lucas tried to adjust his hand in hers, but she only gripped him tighter. "Please—I can't hold him alone. We'll lose him if you let go."

Lucas thought he understood. Mia's spirit—or soul—or whatever it was called—was nestled in Bodhi's broken body, and now Maisie and Lucas held it between them. Mia was in the space between their palms, twining around their arms, and Lucas had never known anything as certainly as he knew that he would not let his sister go.

"What do we do now?" Lucas asked.

"We find Mia's body, and then we wake her up."

When Bodhi's parents arrived, Lucas thought they had too many questions, and didn't understand why they insisted on complicating the simplest thing in the world. Their son was dead, and that was it. Why couldn't that be all?

In his impatience, Lucas thought he might have become too much like Maisie. Or maybe he had grown toward her just enough to survive, like a plant curling toward the sun.

"I waited," Maisie said to Lucas as they walked home from the scene of the accident. Their block had never felt so long. "You wanted your sister back, and I wanted to give her to you, but I waited."

"What?"

"You were going to ask why I didn't do this sooner, weren't you?"

"I'd never," Lucas said, and it was true. He'd gotten used to living with unanswered questions. He still hadn't found the edges of Maisie's abilities, still didn't quite understand the myriad ways she traded death and life, but he didn't need to.

"You wondered," Maisie said, and that was true as well. "Why didn't I do this sooner? Because you didn't want me to. You wanted Mia back, but you didn't want me to kill for him, so I waited." She paused, as if waiting for Lucas to speak. "It really was an accident, Lucas. And he was hurting. Before I touched him, he was really, really hurting. I would have waited – I know you would have wanted me to wait, right? I would have let his heart stop on its own, but I couldn't let him hurt like that."

"You could have *saved* him." It was confusing to watch her bend the lines between life and death, to watch her make these choices—why save some creatures and not others? Why let some die their own deaths, and why kill others? Coming from someone who had the power to save lives, putting someone out of their misery felt an awful lot like murder.

"Of course I could have saved Bodhi," Maisie said, "but wouldn't you rather have Mia?"

"But he was a *kid*."

"He was Mia," she said. Something in her voice made Lucas feel stupid for not understanding. "It doesn't always happen like this—the trade isn't always so direct—but when it is, we make the trade regardless. I do what I have to. A death for a life, Lucas. You know that by now."

"I don't care if you're my brother," said Louisa. "Hell, I don't care if it could save the world. I am *not* driving you across town in this traffic."

It took Lucas nearly an hour to convince Louisa. In that time, he never once loosened his grip on Maisie's hand.

"So what's this about?" Louisa asked as she backed Mia's old blue minivan out of the driveway.

"Magic and science," said Maisie.

"Mia," said Lucas.

"Magic. And science. And Mia?" She formed her mouth around her name as if worried that the vowels could cut her gums.

They were leaving the cul-de-sac, the silent summer suburbs. Without saying a thing, the three of them remembered tricycles and rapidly melting popsicles, running barefoot on freshly trimmed lawns, splashing around in kiddie pools.

"It's complicated," said Lucas.

"We have a long drive," said Louisa.

"It's a manmade lake," said Louisa, as the gang tumbled out of the car and marched into Echo Park. "There's no magic in a manmade lake."

She'd spent the entire drive demanding to know why they needed to go to the park, threatening to turn the car around in response to the kids' careful non-answers. She hadn't questioned the cluster of emergency vehicles at the end of the cul-de-sac or the drying smears of blood on Maisie's shirt.

"There's still science," Lucas said.

And then his sister's hands were on his shoulders, holding him in place, even as Maisie kept tugging him toward the lake. "Lucas, none of this is real. You know that, right? You have to know that."

"But . . . you already drove us all this way."

"Because, whatever this is, I think I'm going to have to let it disappoint you."

When Lucas didn't answer, Louisa settled for scowling and scuffing her feet against the ground. She followed Maisie and Lucas down to the lake.

Mosquitoes floated in the stagnant water and nipped at their bare legs as they walked laps around the lake, first clockwise, then counterclockwise. Every few steps, Maisie breathed through the bone pipe, tuned so unwaveringly that it made Lucas's head hurt.

The sun was beginning to set when they stopped. "Jupiter," Maisie said, and Lucas had never heard her voice so hesitant. She played that note again on her pipe. The sound was long and low, with a sort of mournfulness that Louisa associated with late August. It was the whole universe contained in a single tone.

"She's underneath us," Maisie whispered. They shuffled a few feet away from the lakeshore and looked up at the sky again, leaning slightly toward each other.

"Point to a star," she said. "I know them all."

Lucas understood then the exact moment that they were trying to recreate. Five years ago, winter, dead grass hard and cold under his bare feet, hours of hunting through the yard for pill bugs and bird bones, chasing Maisie until he could barely breathe. He felt it all, perhaps even more strongly than he felt it then. He felt the moment Mia died, the moment Bodhi was born, the way something shifted and clicked

between them. He was awed by his cousin all over again, the arrogant way she claimed to know every star in the night sky. He pointed toward the twilit horizon.

"Jupiter," said Maisie. She played that note again.

The damp ground began to shift. Layers of mud retreated: a ribcage, a skeleton, Mia's tattered blue jeans.

Flies gathered around them and covered the skeleton. When they departed, the greying flesh had returned to her body, tattered in places, wounds not clear enough for Lucas to piece together what got his sister into this predicament. Worms appeared, looping through the spaces in Mia's skull, then slid back into to the ground. Her eyes were swollen and bulging until they settled back into place, eyelids closing over them. Her finely stubbled jaw shifted and creaked, healing from some invisible fracture.

In the wind, the leaves whispered "Galileo, Galileo, Galileo." Maisie took up the chant. Lucas joined her, gripping her hand so tightly that his whole arm went stiff.

After the years had undone themselves, the three of them stood there, staring at Mia's pale corpse. She looked the same as she had when Lucas last saw her, save for the beating she'd taken.

"Galileo," Lucas whispered, and let go of Maisie's hand.

Mia's eyes opened.

The Trials

(Novel excerpt)

1496

The crickets sounded all around the castle at night, exquisite sounds that held agility beyond the company of just the royals; the scent of fresh harvested grains fermented the air for the people outside the castle grounds. Like the Fleur family, the castle was sound asleep.

The jingling of keys from a nearby guard shifted the silence, and a Lady, *Jane*, was roused from her slumber. Her face tilted up, the slope of her chin pointed toward the marble ceiling, blonde curls cupping her jaw, amber-green eyes fluttering open, thick lashes brushing soft skin.

Knowing it was not normal to hear sounds so closely to her bed chambers, she sat up in her bed, her white linen nightdress riding up, her coverlets pushing down, and

got out with a single push. Her dainty feet touched the marble floor and she shivered as she pulled her over-shawl around her shoulders.

Jane walked to the nearest door in her bedchambers, her nightdress flowing around her as she went. If she could just get past the door to her sister's bedchambers then maybe she would not be so alarmed.

God willing, she thought.

Jane pushed the heavy wooden door open, slipping past the small opening, and closed it gently behind her, the sound echoing slightly but not enough to rouse her sleeping sister. She raced to her sister's bedchamber door, opening it and slipping through just as quickly, and spotted the shadowed figure of the cube-like bed with four long wooden posts, a dwarf-sized lump under the coverlets on the right side, at the foot of the bed where pale feet peeked out from underneath, a head of thickly raven curls, long and untamed, on top.

As Jane waddled across the spacious room, pulling her over-shawl around her arms tighter so she was more snug in the cold night air, she noticed the rattling of the keys became even louder through her sister's bedchambers. She climbed over the wooden planks around the bed frame and over the coverlets to the small lump that was her sister. She sat on top of crossed ankles and placed her hand over her sister's shoulder, *Margarete's* shoulder. Nudging her back and forth, trying to wake her, asking for her sister during the night was routine for Jane.

Margarete was a sixteen-year-old Lady, placed high in the world that belonged to French Court. But to her family, to Jane, Margarete was the daughter who could always make their father proud. Margarete was being courted by the King of France, Philip. He was only seventeen years old. It was a scandal that they weren't already engaged to be married. After all, she was the first daughter of the King's Lord Admiral, Thomas Fleur, and he had the most advantage with captaining a war, any war.

And though Jane was a ten-year-old Lady, she mattered little to the Court because she was not first born. She was scraps of her father's name, but that didn't mean she wasn't loved the same as her sister was. Jane had little to care about at the age of ten; she was just beginning to come out into society. She was just engaged to a young Lord, Lord Frederick, at this age -- a betrothal her parents thought a good advantage for her future, with a secure home and plenty money and land.

While both sisters were loved the same and had the same love for each other, they were very different in the Court's eyes. One, Margarete, was graceful and had little to complain about, while the other, Jane, was a little nymph that ran her mouth like a canary. Together, the two complemented each other like it was meant to be.

Margarete woke with a small nudge, lifting her eyelids to see through her bright green eyes, to look up at her younger sister. Her dark brows furrowed with worry, but she knew deep down that Jane was just frightened like always. Jane had nightmares. It

was that simple, to Margarete. It was a routine she held dear to her heart, being able to keep her sister safe in her bed.

She sat up and turned to face Jane, lifting her arms up to wrap them around the small body and pulled Jane down with her to cradle under the heavy warmth from the cotton coverlets, resting her chin on top Jane's curls and exhaling softly. Margarete mumbled something incoherent under her breath, something Jane couldn't hear correctly, and started to get more comfortable around the bundle of coverlets.

She cannot hear the keys, thought Jane.

She moved her arm out from under her waist, pulled it around so she could place it on her half-awake sister, and nudged her just the slightest bit.

"Mar," she hissed softly in the quiet room, a small candle placed at the side of the bed on a table, allowing the word to echo slightly in the bedchamber. When Margarete didn't move or mumble an incoherent sound, Jane nudged her harder. "Margarete, I think there is someone outside the door!" she hissed out into the darkness, lifting her head up over the covers so she could see further, blonde unruly curls falling over her forehead.

But once she saw the darkness drift around the furniture making the objects look frightening, her amber-green eyes went wide with fright as she lowered her head to look down at a once again sleeping Margarete. But despite a harder nudge, and a small *hm*, Margarete didn't move a muscle.

This made Jane uneasy, causing her to shift under the bundle of cotton and cradle herself further into the warmth of the bed. But she heard the rattling of the keys even louder now, the sound moving around outside the door to Margarete's bedchambers.

Where is it going? questioned Jane. Panicked, Jane hissed out, "Margarete!" and shoved her with all the will and strength she had left -- causing a disgruntled Margarete to wake with a start, her green eyes flying open in a frenzy, and Jane to sigh with relief.

Margarete must not have noticed Jane come in, at least not with full coherency because when she saw her sister leaning against her silk-covered arm, looking at her with panic and relief, she jumped up into a sitting position, revealing her white nightdress that rode up over her pale knees. It would have been scandalous to anyone else, but to Jane it was a sign of trust. Margarete didn't have to cover up around her, Margarete knew she could trust her not to say anything to anyone, and it was refreshing to feel loved.

"Jane," Margarete whispered into the darkness, looking around the room to see if there was danger, then back at her little sister to check for nightmares. She lifted her hand to place a calming palm on Jane, knowing about the nightmares, the bad ones,

the ones that reminded her of the horrible times when their family lived in a cottage around the war. "What's happened? Did you have another nightmare?"

Margarete searched Jane's eyes for any sign of tears, but noticed she had not been crying like she usually did afterward.

Something else then, thought Margarete.

"No," Jane shook her head softly. "I heard something outside my bedchambers. I went for you, because I thought I was just being silly, but it followed me out to your privy chambers and I can hear it outside your room...*right now!*"

More rattling was heard outside the echoed walls of the castle, then male shouting, causing both girls to gasp and Jane to shiver in more fear. Margarete pulled her forward for a hug, but Jane went onto her knees to pray. Her hands clasped together slightly -- too sloppily for prayer in the church but it would do for now -- her palms hardly touching as she closed her eyes tightly; a worry line appearing in between her brows, her face looking older.

As she mumbled under her breath a prayer for God, Margarete went out of the bed.

"God, help us." Jane was out of breath by the time she started praying out loud.

More shouts were heard, Margarete froze and Jane went silent as they heard their mother's cry for help, for God.

The shouts were distinctly male, some old, some young, though the cries were close to their room, their *mother* and someone else, someone familiar. Now, not just rattling anymore, thuds and booms were heard throughout the whole side of the royal quarters.

The doors fly open, Margaret and Jane are terrified. The shadow surrounds them as they look to each other confused. The screen goes black, Jane wakes in her bed. She feels a slight insomnia. She questions whether what she recalls was reality or not.

Nije'r Lockhart

Don't Fast Forward

Driving in the car all I see are the lonely sidewalks and lifeless grass
With jazzy music playing in the background that clashes with the rough wind noises
entering my ear

A gray sky and gray clouds cause my soul to be at peace
Thinking about nothing but my life I wonder how hard it will hit me

Will it be like a sucker punch to the eye
Or will it be as easy as driving a car?
Being on my own for the first time I could do anything with no nagging from my mother
I could leave whenever, do whatever, drink whatever, and be with whoever.

Something about not knowing what will happen to me excites me.
The possibilities fill me with anxiousness and excitement.
Who will I meet? Will I be happy being away from my natural habitat?
These questions should typically scare a seventeen year old

But I'm not scared
My mother taught me life goes how you want it
I can't be scared of something when I have no knowledge on it.
If I fast forward on life I'll just be confused
I'll take a sip of life each day and continue to grow
I'll move forward with life and live how I want to live
So when the glass is empty I can happily say I enjoyed the drink.

Misadventures at Craig's House

"MICKEY BRING YOUR ASS HERE!!!!" my mother yelled at the top of her lungs when she got home.

I got up quickly and ran out of my room, which looked like a tornado took a nap there a few minutes ago. When I saw my mother holding a white piece of paper that said Report Card on the back my heart ran away from me. I knew I didn't do good this year but I was hoping I could get a pass because my teacher Mrs. Femaledog did not like me, but my mom probably wouldn't accept that.

"I can explain that I promise." I cried.

"Explain it then! Because I'm tired of working when my child isn't doing good in school!"

I looked at her with puppy eyes, but before I could explain she yelled out "I DON'T WANNA HEAR IT! I WORK TOO DAMN HARD FOR YOU TO BE SLACKING OFF IN SCHOOL! THAT'S IT! I'M MOVING YOU TO A DIFFERENT SCHOOL!"

"Well that sucks, now I gotta start 6th grade by myself." I said.

After everything that had happened, my 6th grade year ended up being the best year in my school history so far. I had passed as one of the top students in my class. I guess my mommy was right when she said transferring schools would be best for me. Moving from a school in Manteca, California to a school in Sacramento for my last year in elementary school was a good idea, but it started off rough. My grades were doing fine, but considering that I didn't know anyone I was the school loner -- up until I met Craig. Craig was an 11-year-old short, chubby Latino boy with a mohawk, and for some weird reason he always had a basketball in his hands though I've never seen him play. He was always smiling and cheering me up so I just naturally became his acquaintance even though we were opposites. I was a 10-year-old African American boy who was tall for my age and built pretty slim. I was naturally a quiet person, with a noticeable frown on my face, but I was never shy. I had a mini afro that I kept bugging my mom to cut, but because of my grades she said I had to go a full year without a trim.

Once the summer started I was excited to go home and be lazy and antisocial, going nowhere but my room, the kitchen, and the bathroom. At least I thought I would be doing that, but before I left campus Craig stopped me and we started talking.

"What's up Mickey! You leaving already?" he asked me with the creepiest smile on his face.

I looked at him in disgust as I responded, "Yeah...I mean it is the last day of school so I-ma go home."

“Yea, I know, dummy, but instead of being alone all summer why don’t you come sleep over at my house for a few days?” he asked. I sort of wanted to go because I wanted to see what kind of place this slob lived in, but first we had to ask both of our parents. After a brief conversation it was decided that I could stay at his place for three days.

Craig’s dad drove me to my house to get my stuff. Their car was a dark pine-green Jeep that smelled like cigarettes. Craig’s dad played a lot of smooth jazz, wore a large black T-shirt and was a little fatter than Craig. I never got his name and I never tried to find out more about him, but he kept asking me strange questions like: “What is your diet? Do you eat healthy? What is your blood type? Do you eat healthy?” All of which I didn’t have good answers to except, “I don’t know” or “Kinda.” I wondered why he kept asking health questions when I was slim; he should have been asking himself and his son these questions considering they were both unusually fat.

We reached my place in an apartment complex with light brown walls and black gate doors with solid white wooden doors behind them. I said hi to my mother and went to my messy room and packed my bags. I packed three pair of pants and shirts and some video games because I thought we would be in the house for a majority of the time. Craig’s father and my mother had a brief conversation before we left the apartment.

“How are you doing Ms. Lockhart?” he asked with a smile

“Good.” she replied “Can you promise me to keep my son safe?”

“Of course I promise to keep him safe. He is a very healthy and special boy,” Craig’s dad said. That statement made me and my mother both uncomfortable, as I could see in her face, yet I still went to Craig’s house.

When we stopped I was shocked to find out that I wasn’t even at his house, I was at his grandmother’s house -- a two-story red building that stuck out because it was far away from any house in the city. A long road led out to it, surrounded by trees. I noticed that if I looked in back of the house I could see a big brown gate, but I didn’t have a clear view of it because immediately Craig’s grandma showed up to greet us -- a nice, short lady with a gray bun who, like her son and grandson, was unusually fat. She was nice to me even though I was just some random boy in her house looking through stuff.

“Momma I’ll be back, I gotta put gas in the car,” yelled Craig’s dad.

“Oh, no. Before you do that, can you go fix that door in the basement? I don’t want you forgetting again,” she replied.

Once I was in the house, Craig’s dad fed me a lot of food and eventually I lay down to take a nap. When I woke up, Craig showed me around the house and eventually he showed me the backyard, which had a decent sized grass field, a hot tub, and a large pool with glowing, light blue water that shined in the sun. Behind the pool was a really large dark brown wooden gate. Craig told me to go put on some swimming

trunks, but I told him that I did not have any because I thought we would just stay in the house.

“Ew, no, staying in the house is disgusting and unhealthy!” I was still wondering why he talked about being unhealthy when he and his family were all fat.

Luckily, he had an extra pair of shorts that were a little too big for me, but I just tied the laces and it fit better. I was planning on just staying in the shallow side of the pool where I could walk around and enjoy the water, but Craig kept yelling at me to get into the deep water. I kept yelling at him telling him that I can’t swim and he didn’t believe me. After awhile I got out to go to the bathroom and he got out with me on the other side of the pool and kept trying to convince me to go on the deep side of the pool, but I just kept ignoring him.

“Mickey get in the damn pool stop being a wimp!” he said frustratedly.

“....”

“Hey, don’t ignore me. It’s my grandma’s house, you have to listen to what I say!”

“....”

Eventually he grabbed me and attempted to throw me in the water, but I held onto a table and started yelling at the top of my lungs that I couldn’t swim. We kept at it for a good four minutes until he overpowered me and threw me into the deep water. I was struggling trying to grab the ledge of the pool so I could pull myself up, but he threw me farther than the ledge, so I was just grabbing hope. After a few seconds of drowning and struggling, I started to sink and it got harder to breathe; my nose started to feel like it was full of water, and through all that I saw my friend’s helping hand. Being a dramatic airhead, I completely dismissed it because I thought it was the hand of Jesus and I assumed that if I grabbed it then that would mean I was dead. The hand got closer and closer until I realized that it was Craig and he wasn’t even trying to help me, ‘cause when his hand got close he pushed my head down until I sank deeper into the bright blue water.

I passed out....but I didn’t die.

I woke up hours later smelling a bunch of boiling vegetables. I looked around and nobody was there; all I saw was a dirty white lamp that had no bulb in it and the brown couch with cross hatching texture that made it uncomfortable to lie on once I realized it. The kitchen was connected to the room I was in, but I realized that I was truly alone. I walked to the backyard with butterflies in my stomach wondering why the back door was wide open, and then I saw the hot tub had various types of vegetables in it from baby and adult carrots to eggplants and potatoes. Because I hadn’t eaten since lunch time at school, I grabbed a steamed potato and started to eat it.

“Tastes good. “ I said with a shocked expression considering I had my doubts that hot tub potatoes would taste good.

I got back in the house where I saw Craig's grandma standing there holding a dark grey hammer. Confused, I attempted to ask her questions about where Craig was, why there were vegetables in the hot tub, and why she was looking creepy, but before I could ask she started questioning me.

"Why are you awake?" she asked eerily.

"Uh I don't know. I guess I passed out after I drowned." As I said it, I wondered how I could still be alive even though I'd drowned. In the middle of my thought, Craig's grandma swung the hammer at my face. I ducked and started yelling at her: "What the heck is wrong with you!? What did I do?!"

She stared at me red with anger. "You weren't supposed to be up or alive at all. You were supposed to be the main ingredient for our stew!!

"INGREDIENT?!" I squealed in complete fear and confusion.

I ran to the backyard planning on hopping the fence to get away from that crazy lady, but once there I realized that Craig and his dad were looking out the window behind me, staring at me with ice cold eyes that made my body shiver. I got to the gate and realized that it was too big for me to climb because there were no areas for me to put my feet in. The fear inside me started multiplying as all that went through my mind was that they were trying to eat me and I couldn't escape. Craig's grandma threw the hammer with uncanny precision and hit the back of my head and I fell to the ground, feeling like my brain was punching the inside of my head. She grabbed my legs and started dragging me until the hammer she threw was in my reach.

"LET ME GO!" I howled

I swung the hammer and hit her left elbow hard enough that she had to let me go with that one hand. With one leg free, I started kicking her face until she fell. Once I was up I noticed that Craig and his dad weren't in the window watching me anymore but were running my way. Thankfully once I got up I noticed the side gates leading to the front of the house and ran towards there. Craig attempted to grab me but thankfully I'd always been more athletic than him due to his weight. The side of the house was filled with loads of trash, and in a clear plastic bag I noticed a bloody arm, which struck me like lightning with even more fear and anxiety.

"Is that what's gonna happen if they catch me? Why would Craig do this to me? Is it because I call him chunky all the time?" These questions scrolled through my head as I ran. When I reached the front gate it was easy to open, so I sprinted along the road and ran for as long as I could, looking back every now and then. I was thankful both of my overweight pursuers couldn't catch me....until I saw a car, a dark pine-green jeep. It came closer and closer until Craig could almost reach me by putting his hand out the window, but before he could grab me the car suddenly stopped.

Running like the wind, I remembered that Grandma hadn't let him put gas in the car. "YAHOO!" I yelled happily. I knew that no matter what they couldn't catch me on

foot if I kept running. After 20-some minutes hard running, I reached the nearest neighborhood, filled with generic white and brown houses with various cars in the driveways. I knocked on the first door I found, hoping for help, and at the second house someone came to open the door. It was a skinny, tall female with brown hair, wearing a light purple robe and looking at me with gentle yet confused eyes. She let me in her house and I explained the entire situation. She gave me food, and we both called the police and my mother. Once safe and home I slept peacefully in my bed.

It's Just Me (After Langston Hughes)

The teacher said,
Go home and write a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you.
Then it will be true.

I wonder if it's that simple?
A 6'3" 17-year-old boy born in Oakland, California.
Grew up in Stockton, California and goes to Bear Creek High School.
But I question if I really know what truth is?
Me? A kid who barely knows himself?
It ponders my mind as I take a right at a small park with earphones in my ear.
I cross the street and make a few turns and I arrive at my two story house.

I get home but I hear nothing 'cause it's so quiet.
But that's how I like it 'cause I don't like loud noises.
I sit around listening to music and reading manga.
Doing absolutely nothing.
It's a common trait between most teens.
Makes me feel normal but lazy.

Being me is the hardest thing to do
I'm so out of place and different from the rest
I think and act differently
I'm not as social as most people
I don't like parties, loud people, or being around a large collection of people

Which is weird 'cause most people enjoy those things
So different yet the same
I mean it makes us human
To be so different yet the same
Our personalities, looks, likes and dislikes are all different
Yet we share the same DNA and history
We're made the same way
And go out the same way
So I guess I'm not that much of an outcast
I just feel like an anomaly

Juan Lopez

Dream Write

I am walking down the street wearing a nice dark blue suit. I look down and see a shiny diamond watch matching with my gold necklace. I feel happy because I know I am living the best life I could be living. I approach my shiny red Mustang GT and start to drive home while blasting some music. As I get to my neighborhood I see sets of garden beds filled with roses, daisies, and tulips that light up the path from house to house. Arriving at my house, I stand there joyfully observing the beautiful work of art that I call my home. From the doorstep I can hear a freshly streaming fountain combined with the sound of birds chirping. At the door, I can hear echoes of my dog running towards me with joy, tongue out, slobbering everywhere. In the living room I see my beautiful wife with mid-length, jet black hair setting the TV up with a comedy movie and a pizza ready to eat on the table. Looking around, I see the house is clean, so I sit down and enjoy the movie. Life is good. Or so I think until the roof comes crumbling down, demolishing everything in sight. Everything I worked for is taken away from me within seconds. Outside the open ceiling stands a 50-foot green creature dripping in ooze. My wife and kids are being held hostage by the creature, and I feel so useless because I cannot think of any solutions for this disaster.

Bad Day

The room got dark, and all of a sudden Ricky fired. After the first gunshot was heard the room filled with gunshots going back and forth. When the room silenced, Ricky went to turn on the lights. Money lay scattered all over the floor, covered with blood, on top of dead bodies. Ricky was shocked to see how this all turned out. A simple drug deal turned into a mass homicide. Ricky was the lead officer in the drug bust, but after the shootings he was the only remaining officer. He looked down and saw blood flowing out of his leg, then the it all came together: he had been shot. He called backup and then he waited at the scene until other officers arrived. The police sirens could be heard from miles away getting closer and closer. The first squad car approached at full speed and made a rough stop on the side of the abandoned warehouse. The officers were disgusted when the aroma of dead bodies and gunpowder reached them. Hesitating to enter the room, they finally decided to kick the door down.

Julio Melara

Story Starter

All was good until the family moved to South Carolina. That's when.... the plane had suddenly started malfunctioning. Everyone started panicking. My parents, since I was in elementary school, had always taught me and had me read books on what to do if me and my sister were ever stuck in certain life situations. One of the books we read was what to do if a plane starts to crash. So as soon as the plane started breaking down I was the main one that could do something because I was in college studying piloting and airplanes. So as soon as it happened I ran through the plane from the back and rushed to the pilot, who was panicking and didn't know what was going on, but I saw that there was a red thing on the front dash and I knew exactly what it was because I had read about it in the book; it was the radio transmitter for the plane and the exhaust. So I took over the plane and had to land safely on ground somewhere closest. I then piloted down onto the island of Hawaii and fixed the transmitter before the pilot that was in charge flew us off and we were finally on our way to South Carolina.

Eduardo Montes

Back to the Ropes

It just hasn't been the same since
I always wish that I didn't do what I did
Everything would have been easier
I would have had my life made
If only I didn't do what I did
But I'm moving on
Not letting my mistake set my destiny
I know it won't be easy
But I will strive on and I won't be held down
My destiny is still in my hands and I will make it
For the people I care about and for myself
I will make it.

At this point, what more do I have to lose
I've lost almost everything now
My family has always had my back though
Yes, they've always had my back
No matter what, I know my family will always be there
For them, I'll make it for them.

Penny for Your Thoughts

Penny for your thoughts
I call it an investment
Believe me that "penny" is worth more than a cent
I've opened the pockets of my mind for you
Do you want to take advantage of it?
I'll tell you my thoughts

I've noticed a lot pain and a lot of suffering
It's worrying and it angers me
I wonder if this is how God feels when it sees us be the reason of our demise
I don't know why I feel like I have the power to change everything
To be the leader that the people need
But it can't be me
But what if it was
Oh well then I must be
Maybe in time I will see
If I am destined to lead
These are my thoughts
Now I offer a penny for yours.

Luis Montes Silva

Into Their Shoes

Being in between all these Jews, Farnz felt uncomfortable in the tight quarters. The room was super small and full of people that had very little clothing. Farnz's father was a part of Hitler's SS. Farnz believed that his father was doing the right thing by eliminating the horrid race.

Farnz's father didn't have the slightest idea where his son was. He looked all over the camp, but there was no sign of his son. Farnz was known by the SS officers as the type of kid to always get in trouble. Farnz has been caught taking rations from SS chamber near the camp. His father had told him that his actions could cause him great harm, but Farnz knew that he would be safe because his father wouldn't let anything happen to him. "My father controls his area and he is under the command of our great kommander," he said.

One day Farnz became curious to know if the camp was as joyful as the films showed. These films showed kids playing with toys and other swell things, but Farnz could only see misery and sadness on all the people's faces. He went into a hut that was filled with skinny white people. All of a sudden, a group of SS officers broke into the hut and told everyone to get a move on. Farnz was stuck in the middle of these weird people wearing striped clothes. The SS told the people that they were taking a shower and to get clean because they were being moved. Farnz was scared to death and screamed for his dad, but no one bothered to care at all. Farnz didn't realize until this very moment that these so-called Jews were just that same as him. His beliefs were wrong in a way he never knew or could fix in his mind.

As he was shoved in the room to take off his clothes, Farnz wondered if they had the lavender soap wash that his mom always brought him. As he was pushed into the shower room, he believed that the soap would drop first and then water. But no water came.

Desert Rescue

Ricky knelt with his head on his knees, exhausted, sand on his forehead mixed with sweat. It was one week after the crash as Ricky and Juan looked over the desert landscape, seeing sand until the horizon. They knew it would be a long road ahead.

At the Air Force base at 09:00 hours on July 31, 2016, Commander Ricky had been given a task to deport an outcast named Juan Torres back to Tijuana. The deportation order was made in June, but Ricky's plane broke down and couldn't be moved. Juan also got another chance to say goodbye to his family in the United States. Watching Juan say goodbye gave Ricky memories of watching his own son leave for Iraq to serve two tours. He never saw him again.

With a heavy heart, Ricky readied up the aircraft and double checked everything for a safe flight. When he was filling the fuel tank, Ricky thought later, the spark plug must have started a small leak. Ricky did not realize that his tank was leaking, Ricky hopped into the aircraft with Juan in handcuffs, ready to take off.

At 3,000 feet over Mojave Desert they were fine, all smooth sailing, until all of a sudden the plane nose dove straight at ground; the plane was falling 200 feet per second. Ricky had trained for these situations but never thought that he would have to use the techniques he had learned. Ricky knew that he couldn't die because he didn't want to leave his family. At 1,500 feet in the air, he needed to find a quick and life-saving solution for himself and Juan as well. Up ahead there was a clearing big enough to land his plane. It was like a sign from God that told him that he wasn't going to die today, and he knew what he needed to do.

Ricky tried to use the radio to signal a crash landing but no answer came though the speaker. As the plane was diving toward the ground he knew that it was now or never. He didn't have anyone to guide him and he knew his life was on the line. As he braced for impact, he only saw a beam of white light and everything went dark with a child's scream in the background.

When he woke up, Ricky jumped out of the cockpit and opened the storage unit where he grabbed any supplies that had survived the impact. Juan was still locked up and strapped in his seat. Ricky needed to get him out of there. The materials that Ricky picked up might last them both three weeks at most. The aircraft was leaking fuel, which caused the crash, so Ricky knew they had a limited time before the aircraft blew up and so he scrambled to get Juan free from his seat. His hand was cut severely and blood

was everywhere. Juan had minor bruises. With a Bowie knife from the storage unit, Ricky cut him free from his seat. Realizing that they were in the middle of the nowhere with no communication with anyone in the civilized world, Ricky opened the handcuffs.

Juan barely knew any English and could barely communicate with Ricky. Ricky came from a Hispanic household but hadn't learned that much Spanish from his parents, so that let him down in this serious event in his life. Ricky made a shelter with a roof and some sheets so they could try to sleep under the desert sky. The sounds around him were somewhat familiar, but he still couldn't shake off the feeling and sound of that little girl screaming when the plane crashed just before he lost consciousness. That voice is going to drive me insane, thought Ricky.

The voice played over and over while he was trying to get some sleep and woke him up as the desert sun was rising. The voice seemed so real but yet so fake in his mind. He told himself that it was his mind playing tricks on him and that he needed to get over it so he could go back to his family. Juan didn't sleep at all. Ricky caught him looking at the horizon of the desert. When Ricky asked what he was looking at, Juan didn't say anything back and just nodded with a slight despair and frustration. Ricky didn't know how to answer that except that they needed to get back to civilization sooner rather than later.

The sun was the only thing telling them the time by the shadows. That was where Juan came in and said he could maybe help. He said that the cactus pink flower always bloomed towards north. He said that his mother told him this tip in case he got lost trying to cross the border to the United States. Ricky was reluctant to believe that Juan's story was factual, but having no other choice, he followed Juan north. The sun was directly over them and the shadows were short when they stopped to rest in the shade of some rocks, a huge relief for them both. Ricky didn't recognize any of these mountains and neither did Juan, but they realized they might not be alone when they saw footprints in the sand. The small, shallow footprints looked like a human child's. Ricky couldn't believe it. He wondered if the footprints belonged to the little girl that screamed before the plane impacted the ground. Juan said that the footsteps were heading north towards the big mountain. He believed they could be supernatural, but Ricky told him that was a bunch of nonsense. Still, Ricky thought their only choice now was to go north and figure out whose footsteps these were. He put all the supplies in the bag and said, "It's time to head to that mountain."

Ricky knew that if they wanted to survive they needed to get to the top no matter what child creature might be in the way. Juan said that they would have to be careful to

not get caught off guard by the creature. They needed to move quickly before the creature got any new ideas. The trail was clear for now and they needed to hurry up towards the top and find their way home. About halfway there, Juan saw something in the distance that was mind-blowing to Ricky. It looked like the city of Locomotive, a small city located about three hours from the air base he took off from. Maybe they didn't need to go all the way to the top. The city had been found and all they needed to do was walk north to get back to civilization. Juan believed that if they didn't get off the mountain soon it would be all over for them as the supernatural child creature was probably looking for them at the top. They needed to find a faster way to get down. Juan tied a rope to the strongest rock on the ledge. Then he tied it again to make sure they didn't fall to their death. Ricky jumped off first and never looked back. Juan was about to jump when he heard something loud behind a large rock off the edge. A shadow the size of a small car was emerging from the side of the mountain cliff. Juan jumped then. He never saw what the cause of the shadow was, but he didn't want to figure out what it was either.

They realized that they were almost home when they parted in the desert. They knew where to go: north. Juan said thank you for helping us survive until the very end, then he took a different route away from the Air Force base and deportation. He said, "See you on the other side," with a smirk on his face. Ricky said "Sure buddy, why not?"

Ricky to this day cannot say what the creature was, but he does know that he'll never want to find out. The scream also shall haunt him till the end of his days.

Celeste Orajel

Subject: Window

A window is but a shield, shiny sometimes withstandable, sometimes breakable it is both dangerous but useful, it can separate touch & feeling, it can trap a human inside and out, often times we see things we can't unsee but see any way.

It also protects from the outside & inside, it can let us see things that we only want to see and not touch, so our window, more like our shield, is both protector and villain.

Out

I wake up dizzy, my vision blurry and my head pounding. I'm still in the clothes I went out in last night. I don't remember a single thing. How did I get home?

Wait a minute, is that my friend Bryan? Why is he here in my room?.....Wait a minute, this isn't my room, what the hell happened last night? I hear sheets rustling and see Bryan looking at me happily.

"What are you smiling at me for? What happened last night? Why am I in your room and did you hurt me?" He looks at me, annoyed, and rolls his eyes.

"I would never hurt you, and you know that you just got drunk and ran into a pole pretty hard. I mean look at your forehead. You got a lump that's huge." I rush to the mirror on the back of his door and see a bump on the corner of my forehead, a mixture of purple and red and very swollen.

Turning to him, I ask, "So I just magically went to your room then, huh?" He sighs.

"Well what would you have preferred for me do? Leave your ass outside in the freezing cold to sleep on cold hard ground or in a nice warm room on a comfy mattress? Remember, I got two twin beds. We slept separate."

I mentally slap myself. He wouldn't hurt me, I've known him for so long, why on earth would I assume he'd do something bad? It's technically my fault for getting drunk and running into a stupid-ass pole, I guess. I get up from the bed, put on my combat boots and tie them tightly, then put my hair up in a high bun and walk out the room, then out his house, feeling the cold hair hit my face while I walk out, heading home.

Julian Perez

Call of the Sirens

Sitting on the beach was always so peaceful -- until people started noticing strange things in the water. Until one day men started disappearing into the water and never coming out. Thirty-two men were declared missing within just two weeks.

My friends and I would go to the beach and have a great time playing volleyball, collecting seashells, and surfing. It was around eleven at night when my "friend" Jason and I sat on the beach together, finally alone. We talked and cuddled as I rested my head on his broad shoulder. We were talking about what college we would go to after we graduated high school, about our dream jobs, about what we would do with the rest of our lives considering graduation day was only two weeks away. As I rested my head on him and he held my hand in his, we saw a light skinned male who appeared to be in his twenties walking towards the water with his clothes fully on. T-shirt, black skinny jeans, and some Nike running shoes. Jason said to me,

"This guy. Is he really going into the ocean with all his clothes on?"

"I know, right?" I replied, still holding Jason's hand.

As we were talking we noticed that the man was walking very stiffly, as if he was in some sort of trance. As he continued to walk into the surf, Jason and I saw four heads arise from the water. We watched in confusion, and Jason said, "What the hell."

The heads appeared to be the heads of women, rising out of the water, revealing seashell bras while extending their arms to him as if to say, "We were waiting for you to come home." Chest deep now, the man extended his arm out to grab hold of one of them. As his hand met with one of the women's another four began to circle him, the two behind starting to take his shirt off while kissing the back of his shoulders ever so gently as the two in front began to kiss his lips while caressing his arm muscles.

Jason let out a little laugh, saying "Looks like someone's getting a little something tonight."

I laughed too, shaking my head a little. "Let's get out of here, I don't wanna watch this." As Jason and I got up we saw even more women arise from underneath the water. We could see about another fourteen heads.

"Jason," I said, a little concerned. Jason didn't say a word but just kept watching hypnotically. More and more women got closer to the man until one let out a loud shriek, biting his shoulder violently. The water frothed, and there was blood in it.

I pulled Jason's hand and we ran.

St. Mary's Brothel of Horrors

It was a Friday night and Jason Carter was having a drink at the fanciest hotel in all of Southern California, the White Stallion. He sat on his barstool with a glass of Scotch in his right hand and his left arm resting on the bar as he leaned back with confidence, staring across the room at two of the most beautiful women he'd ever seen in the world.

The women wore short, skin-tight sleeveless dresses. The first woman wore a blue dress, had long straight dark brown hair, and wore black Louis Vuitton heels and a Gucci lapel pin on the left side. Her eyes were a beautiful dark hazel, which matched her hair perfectly, and she had gorgeous, passionate nude skin lips. The second woman wore a red dress, had long, beautiful natural blonde hair, and wore black Coco Chanel suede heels and a Michael Kors rhinestone lapel pin on the right shoulder. She had gorgeous light blue eyes and deep red lips.

Jason Carter could not take his eyes off of the women. He told the bartender to send two pomegranate mango daiquiris their way. When the bartender set the drinks down on the women's table he said, "Here you go ladies, a refill on your drinks." The two women looked at each other confused, wondering which one of them had asked for another.

"Umm... We didn't order another one," the woman in the blue dress said.

"They're already paid for," the bartender responded.

"By who?" the woman in the red dress asked.

"The man sitting at the bar. He already covered your tab as well." The two women looked over where Jason was sitting and he gave them a dashing, devilish smile while lifting up his drink as if he was saying "cheers."

Shaylee and Clarissa took Jason to their hotel room upstairs. Clarissa was holding Jason's hand, leading him to the room while Shaylee followed behind them. Clarissa opened the door and Jason made his way to the bed with anticipation. Shaylee closed and locked it so nobody would disturb them. As Jason sat down on the white bedsheets, Shaylee and Clarissa headed towards the bed, kicking off their black designer heels with red soles, then unzipping the backs of their dark blue and red short, skin-tight dresses until they were in nothing but their undergarments. Jason's eyes shot open with excitement. Shaylee put her hands on the bed and made her way towards his ear, whispering, "Keep her company 'til I get back, and do whatever she tells you to do. Okay?" Then she tugged on his ear, making shivers run through his body. Shaylee slid off the bed and headed towards another room in the hotel suite.

"Take it off," Clarissa said demandingly, staring Jason directly in the face from the foot of the bed.

"Yes ma'am." He took off his black tie and unbuttoned his red silk dress shirt as fast as he could. He threw his shirt and tie to the wall so they wouldn't interfere with what was going to happen next.

"Now lose the pants." He did what Clarissa said until he was sitting in just his underwear.

"Now back up towards the center and let me show you a real woman." Clarissa bit her red lips and a few pieces of her curled blonde hair that covered part of her right eye.

As Jason scooted back and lay down, Clarissa slowly crawled onto the bed. She leaned in and pressed her lips onto his, just kissing him slowly, then more passionately. Jason closed his eyes with his hands around her waist and Clarissa closed hers as well resting her hands on his back and moaning softly -- until Shaylee came back in the room, when Clarissa's eyes opened wide, although she continued to pretend to enjoy making out with Jason. Shaylee walked slowly with her hands behind her back, then gently crawled onto the bed and extended her arm to Clarissa, placing an item in her hand. Raising their hands in the air, Shaylee and Clarissa plunged their sharp knives into his back and right shoulder. The knives they used pierced and ripped their way through layers of Jason's flesh. His eyes and mouth opened, and blood poured out of his mouth like an endless river. Shaylee and Clarissa left the knives in Jason's flesh, took their hands away and began the next step in their plan. Clarissa got off Jason's lap and made room for Shaylee to sit next to her. The girls cracked their necks and opened their mouths and hissed as fangs shot out on the top rows of their teeth. Shaylee on the left and Clarissa on the right, they went for Jason's neck, penetrating his skin and plunging their fangs deeper. Jason let out a loud scream, but it didn't matter because nobody heard him. He tried to push them off of him, but their fangs were so deep into his flesh that pushing them off would have meant an instant death.

An hour had passed before Shaylee and Clarissa had drained out all of the blood from Jason's body, leaving it pale and shriveled. Shaylee got off first and wiped the blood from her lips that was dripping down onto her chest.

The telephone rang at a loud and busy police station in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Officer Scott Arden picked it up.

"Scranton Police Department. How may I help you?" There was a long pause. Officer Arden spoke into the phone again saying, "Hello?... Is anybody there?"

"Who is it?" Officer Nathaniel Lockwood asked. Officer Arden rolled his eyes.

“It’s a prank call from some stupid teenagers.” Just as Officer Arden was about to hang up, a raspy, deep, suspicious voice spoke. “Go to 553 Carbondale Highway.”

“What? Who is this?” the officer demanded.

“Go to this location if you want to find your next clue about the missing people with no blood.” Officer Arden’s eyes shot open. This was the case about the victims with the blood drained from their bodies, their heads removed, and their fingers and toes cut off. The Scranton police had been working the case for three months and they had no new leads, until now.

Officer Arden burst through the brown wooden door of the conference room where Scranton’s Finest were meeting. Captain Roland gave Officer Arden a very serious death stare.

“We’ve got a break,” Arden said.

Melissa Perez

I don't remember

I don't remember...

Your name.

I don't remember what you truly look like or your voice.

The thing is that I don't even want to remember.

You have caused me more pain than you could ever imagine.

Maybe there is a reason I forgot after all.

I don't remember is a phrase, a phrase that is constantly used by people who deal with the disease of Alzheimer's. My *abuelito* doesn't remember who I am.

He goes on and calls me every name on the face of the earth except my actual name.

I don't remember the last time he called me by my actual name.

He goes out to the grocery store to shop for groceries but doesn't come back.

Imagine not knowing where your house is. It almost reminds me of when you park somewhere and forget where you parked so you freak out when you're looking for your car.

It's like living in constant absent mindedness.

I don't remember my first time walking or my first day of school.

Our minds work in mysteriously interesting ways.

Why do we only remember the bare minimum?

Do we forget because it's for the best if we don't remember? Maybe there's a reason our mind only remembers certain information and shuts off all the other relevant information.

Some key words may trigger a memory and help you become aware that you actually remember.

Alzheimer's: I wonder, how can someone live without remembering?

The constant feeling of confusion is overwhelming.

The saddest part is watching someone struggle to remember a family member's name.

I feel as if us humans have our peak where we are completely aware of everything going on around us but then we go back to being like babies.

We are born and we have little to no memory.

We grow up, we have more knowledge and are aware of everything.

We grow old, our bodies begin to shut down in ways.

Our memory worsens. We aren't capable anymore.

I don't remember.

Dream Write

It was late at night at a *quincenera*. It wasn't just anyone's *quince* it was mine. The colorful disco lights were shining all over the ballroom onto the walls and onto the crowd of people dancing. Suddenly it got quiet, although everyone else was still dancing as if they could still hear the music playing. I assumed I was the only one who couldn't hear the music or the dancers. In the middle of the ocean of people, a path opened, which I then followed and which led me to my *abuelita*. I couldn't hear anyone or anything except for my *abuelita*. She reached out to me and grabbed my hand and said to me,

“Mija, have fun on your big day and enjoy it. Even though I wasn't able to make it, just know I will still be there.”

She then hugged me so tight that I didn't want to let go, but I soon had to. She kissed my forehead and told me to take care and that she loves me. Tears started in both of our eyes and soon my vision became blurry and then she disappeared in the crowd. I could finally hear the music, people, and laughter again, so I did what my *abuelita* told me to do.

Miaa Torres

Ode to The Roach

Oh poor Roach you were crawling home
When your daily route was thrown.
The curly haired boy stopped you in your tracks:
He taunted you with papers and pencil backs.
You were just trying to get home.
Did he think of your family waiting for you alone?
Curly hair picked you up with a tissue;
Remember when Raid™ was your only issue?
He threw you in the trash, the room grew silent,
He beat his chest in victory, but we knew you weren't violent.
Now you lie in a pile of muck.
This is your curse, running out of luck.
To the Roach of A10, forever stuck.

No One Knew

No one knew why John always wore his hoodie until the wind blew his hood off and exposed a small platypus cuddled in his hair. The girl behind him screamed at the top of her lungs, scaring the poor little platypus wide awake. It jumped out of John's hair onto his desk and then to the floor. The class became a madhouse. There were people jumping on tables and girls shrieking as they ran out the door. The poor little platypus nestled itself inside a left behind backpack. The teacher, Mr. Chanz, urged students to stay calm, but over the loud hustle and papers flying through the air, there was no way that was going to happen. John crouched to the floor calling out for his beloved friend.

“Charlotte?... Charrlotte?” There was nothing. At this point half the class was outside trying to fathom what had just happened and the other half were still inside helping to look for poor little Charlotte. Just as John was beginning to lose his sanity he heard her call.

“ grrrrrrgggg.”

“Charlotte!!” John wailed with joy as he saw Charlotte climb out of the backpack. He crept closer to her and patted her little head with his finger. He made a similar noise to the platypus before she climbed back into his hair. John stood up with pride. He slipped his hood back on and slumped his hands in his pockets. John decided it was time to go to lunch and headed on his way. The class watched in disbelief as he walked off down the hall.

Dramatic Monologue

So here I am putting in my share of the work, doing the dishes, sweeping the floor, vacuuming, and all the rest. All I ask for, Jared, is a little -- a *little* help around here. You tell me you had a long day at work -- you're too tired to pick up your crap. You have no energy to pick up after yourself. I have work too, you know. I don't sit at a desk punching numbers into a computer all day like you. I have to keep the register, stock the shelves, clean the aisles, clean the bathroom, deal with rude customers, keep everything in check. Oh, but today it was your turn to restock the printer paper. See this bowl? It's been here since Sunday. It's Thursday. You left a bowl filled with spaghetti on the kitchen table for *four days*. *Four days, Jared!* The bathroom's got trash basically flooding into the hallway because you're too lazy to throw anything out. I have to walk into a dingy parking lot at two in the morning to take out the trash. Every night. Now there can't possibly be an excuse for that. I was talking to the girls at the bar and you know what I hear from them almost every day? “*Oh my little Jacob is such a good boy. He puts all his toys away every night and puts his little dishes in the sink.*” “*My daughter always helps around the house with her mom.*” “*Oh, I raised my child to be clean.*” Tell me why *children* are more clean than you, Jared. Why can't you just do your part? I'm not asking for the moon. Just do your part.

Oh don't start with the yard, Jared. You don't take care of that either. It's true! The plants are super overgrown and dying, the weeds are taking over everything, the grass is getting too long, the patio is as dirty as -- dirt, and you're trying to tell me that it's not? GOD, Jared! I just -- I need to be -- I'm going out for a bit. I'll see you later tonight..... *Ugh, God.*

Noah Ugalino

Can One Have A Heart Without A Soul

The clicking of the elevator drones on as floor by floor I reach the dark, rainy sky. My coin sounds as I flip it up and down, the clicking stops, the door opens. I walk down the hallway where paint is decayed, giving way to the rotten wood underneath its extravagant coloring. I walk to the crime scene but the officer blocks me from entering.

“Hello, I am Cody. I am the android sent by Quantum,” I say. The cop moves aside but mutters, “Effing androids. They going to steal our jobs too.”

I walk in and I hear the clicking of the cameras, see a trail of blood leading to the dead body. I look around, and I open my face tracker, and I find the lieutenant I was sent to work with.

As I walk towards him I can hear, “Great. A fucking android.”

“Hello lieutenant. I am Cody. I am the android sent by Quantum,” I say.

“Well we can start by looking at the body. Obviously he was murdered but we can’t find evidence of the murderer,” the lieutenant says.

I walk to the body and the lieutenant follows behind me. The blood has stained the floor and the bat he is holding. I grab the sample and put my hands over it to sense the cause of murder.

“How can you stand the stench?” the lieutenant asks.

I finish processing the blood: died hour ago, stabbed 10 times, deceased. I get up and follow the blood trail to where it started.

“Right, android” the lieutenant says.

The trail stops in the kitchen. I see a belt on the floor, a kitchen knife gone from the block but nowhere to be found.

I leave the room and walk to what looks like a kid’s room, empty, but a mess.

“Was a kid found here?” I ask the lieutenant.

“No kid was found here. Neither was his android.”

I walk back to the bat and I decide to see if maybe android blood is on it.

“What do you see?” the lieutenant asks.

“I think the android did it. The bat has android blood on it. The knife is missing. I think the android used the knife and still has it,” I say.

“Well maybe it left. We can catch up --”

“Androids only do this in emotional shock. That’s the only thing I can think of that can trigger this behavior. It may be afraid. It wouldn’t know where to go. It’s still here.”

I follow the trail of android blood leading to an attic. I grab a chair and open the attic. I climb up and walk around inside the attic where I see a bunch of lifeless androids. I then suddenly feel a push, and I hear the scream of a child and footsteps crunching down out of the attic from the direction I entered. I return to the trap door and jump down.

“They went that way. Get them!” the lieutenant shouts, pointing to a broken window.

I see the android and kid running across the roof of the next skyscraper, so I run and jump across to them. I start to catch up as the flashing lights from the neon signs light my way.

The android and child both stop as the rain falls down harder, rolling over my gun. The android slowly turns around and I see scars on the child and everything makes sense. An abusive father with a belt, an android who began to care, a knife taken for defense, hit with a bat.

“I couldn’t watch it anymore,” the android says.

For some reason I go against my orders and put my gun down, and I watch as they run away.

A Blue Balloon

It’s so cold. I have forgotten how long it has been since it happened. I miss the sunlight and the feeling of beach water crashing against my feet, the sweet rain that fell from the sky. All that’s left is the ash that blocks the sun and my vision. I followed a faint light that led me to a small zoo and I began to remember the old world. I walked in and it was like any other zoo until I looked at the cages. The birds no longer flew around, no longer could I hear the roars of the lions, all that was left was bones and ash. I wandered around the remnants of the lost civilization, and I found a small balloon stand with bright colored balloons that lit up the dark endless abyss that I now call home. I grabbed a blue balloon that reminded me of my youth and continued my wandering. I then heard the screams of the creatures and I broke into a sprint away from the monsters. I began to realize that no matter how far I got they followed close behind and I realized my balloon lighted their way to me. I know the sensible thing to do would be to let the balloon go but I don’t want to let go, I don’t want to lose the memory of everyone and everything, but most of all I don’t want to lose and forget who I am. As the creatures got closer and closer so I decided I had to survive no matter what it took so I let my blue balloon go to the sky. I ran back to the ashlands with the cold feeling filling me once again.

Theme for Creative Writing (After Langston Hughes)

The Instructor said,
Go home and write
A page tonight.
And let that page come out of you-
Then, it will be true.
I wonder what I am truly.
I am seventeen, born in Lodi.
I enrolled in Creekside, Delta Sierra, nowhere
I lived in one place my whole life, Scarboro place.
My house is the same, not one change since its construction.

Who am I truly.
I am a listener and a learner
I am intelligent but ignorant.
I am quiet in speech but loud in words.

I am a writer.

This is my poem for Creative Writing Period 3.

Heidi Wright

The Woman Warrior

On a cold winter's night in the village of Limerock, Myra was trying her hardest to keep her four children warm by the fireplace. She never intended her life to end up like this: a small cottage on the outskirts of town with six people living in it, a meager amount of money, and married to a man she abhorred and despised. At times, Myra didn't eat for days because she wanted to ensure her husband and children had plenty to eat. She wasn't in love with him, but she loved her kids very much and would do anything for them. In this year of our Lord 1831, women's jobs included cleaning the house, cooking, pleasing the men, and having their children. Women were also forbidden to go to school because the men felt that women weren't capable of doing a man's job. Myra disagreed strongly, but for her sake, she kept her opinion to herself. Until one day she finally had enough.

"Did you get any of my bread from the baker's Myra?" her husband Wallace asked as he walked in the front door returning home after a long day of work.

"No honey I haven't had the time. Nicolas has been really sick and I am getting worried that we might have to take him to the doctor," she replied softly.

"Do you know how much that would cost Myra? That's not going to happen. You startle yourself too much. I'm sure he will be fine in a couple of days. Next time instead of lying about all day why don't you do the things I ask you to do?" he snarled with disappointment.

Myra had learned not to spit back at her husband when he got mad like that. Myra had promised herself to always put her children first. She dreamed of a life being married to someone who treated her like she meant something, like she was worthy. Wallace made her feel like she wasn't capable of anything, and Myra wanted to prove him wrong someday. She desired to study English and travel to the New World with her children and fight for women's rights. Deep down she knew it wouldn't be possible; knowing how strict men were, they would never allow it.

Wallace and Myra had three sons and one daughter together. Dawson, the oldest brother, had natural strength and a handsome complexion. He was always putting others before himself and was very protective of his family. He worked alongside his father to help earn money for the family. Joseph was the middle child out of the three sons, and he was very intelligent. He was ahead of all the pupils at the village school and loved to build things. Nicolas was the spitting image of his father, very

arrogant and hard working. He wasn't an exceptional student like his brother, but he was too young to be with his father and brother at work. The youngest child was the only girl, Elizabeth. Her beauty was beyond compare and her heart was full of compassion. Joseph secretly taught Elizabeth how to read, and they had a wonderful sibling relationship.

Myra tried to hide from the children how horrible their father was, but they could see it clearly. The children did their best to help their mother, for which Myra couldn't be more thankful. Sometimes she thought if she didn't have her children, she would not still be here.

One day Myra was walking through town returning from the market when she saw a sign that read: "All men over 21 must enlist in the military immediately." Her heart suddenly dropped, and for a second she thought she would have to send her son into war, but when she remembered that he was only 19 her spirits rose as she realized that only Wallace would go to war. If he were gone, Myra wouldn't have to be scared every time the front door opened or worry whether she was always doing the right thing or whether she was pleasing him every minute of the day. She knew it was a bad thought, but she wanted the war to last for a long time. When Myra returned home she found her husband sitting at the supper table with his hands over his face.

"What's wrong darling?" she asked with fake sympathy.

"Did you not see the signs plastered all over the village Myra???" he yelled back.

"I...I... I did.... What is going to happen?" Myra stuttered.

"God, Myra, I don't know! Will you stop asking me stupid questions!"

"I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry," she replied, scared.

Wallace quickly got up from his chair and marched over to his wife. Putting his large hands around her neck and reaching his face close to hers, he made her look at him.

"I am being enlisted in a war and all you're going to say is sorry? You are pathetic and a disgrace to all women and the worst wife among all in this village. I should have never married you!" He threw her to the ground and all the groceries scattered across the floor.

Myra cried quietly, knowing if she made any noise he would come back and beat her. In the past, if Myra had done something that he didn't like, she would be punished for it. He would beat her until she cried and make the children watch.

"Pa stop hitting Ma! You're hurting her Pa!" Elizabeth would scream from across the room where the children hid in the corner.

"Your Ma deserves this. She can't do anything right! You better shut your mouth, young lady, and keep in your place," he would scold his daughter. Myra was thankful for the children defending her sometimes, but she wished for a much better life for them with a much better father.

On the days that followed, Wallace moped around the house feeling sorry for himself. Both Wallace and Myra knew how gruesome this war was going to be, and it was only a matter of time until the war came to their town of Limerock. Myra feared the war because she didn't know how to defend herself, although she wouldn't care should her husband not return home because she could start the life she wanted with her children. Still, she had to act heartbroken in front of the villagers when the families would say their goodbyes. The day came when the men had to set off to the war and all the families from the village gathered around to say their farewells. Wallace had always acted like the best husband in front of other villagers, and Myra always went along with it only because she was afraid of his wrath if she didn't.

"Goodbye, my lovely wife. I will see you again soon, don't worry. I love you very much and never forget that," he said as he kissed her on the cheek.

"Goodbye, Wallace, I pray for your quick return," she said dishonestly. The children said their goodbyes and Wallace climbed up onto his horse and joined the 200 other men from the village. Myra had tears rolling down her face -- tears of happiness at the sight of Wallace riding away from the village. But not all men rode off to fight in the war, as some owners of businesses stayed behind to make sure the village kept running. The blacksmith stayed behind to make armor and swords to provide for the men in battle. Everyday, Myra walked to the other side of the village to the river where she wrote in her journal and wondered how her husband was doing. The river was surrounded by large trees and flowers of all colors and the birds were always singing a song. Everyday when she returned home, she would see the blacksmith outside working. Myra found him very handsome. He would give her a smile and tip his hat to her, Myra always returned the smile. One evening, the blacksmith stopped her.

"Hey! Myra!" he yelled waving at her to come to him.

"Good evening, sir."

"How are you doing this evening?" he asked.

"I'm doing wonderfully. The weather is perfect and I love to be outside. Might I ask how you know my name?" she replied.

"I'm a friend of your husband's. We ran around together when we were young lads," he said with a smile.

"Oh I never knew that."

"My name is William. It's very nice to finally meet you. I see you walk here everyday and I've always wanted to say hello but I'm a shy person," William said.

"I really must be going, my children are waiting for me to start dinner, so... if you are so shy, then why did you say hello to me today and not any of the other days I've walked by here?" she asked.

"Beauty deserves to be noticed," he responded with a smile.

They said their goodbyes and Myra walked all the way home with a smile on her face. From their short conversation, she had noticed how kind he was and how he appreciated her. Every day after that, Myra would go to the river for a short while and then visit William. She would bring him breakfast and they would talk for hours. Myra would write while William was doing his work, just enjoying each other's company. He would teach her about the many different types of swords he made and how they were used in battle. Myra wanted so much to learn how to defend herself and use swords properly, but women weren't allowed to do so. She felt so close to William that she knew he wouldn't judge her when she asked him to teach her.

"I would love to! My father has been teaching me ever since I was a small boy" he said excitedly.

"I know it's forbidden for women to do these types of things, but we don't have to tell anyone," she replied.

"This stays between you and me, Myra. I won't let anyone find out and I won't let anyone hurt you," he said softly.

Myra felt anxious, knowing sword fighting lessons went against what she was taught all her life, but she didn't care anymore. Myra believed that women were intelligent and strong enough to do the same things men could do. She felt at peace knowing that William supported her, and for the rest of the day he showed her how to hold the sword properly and the footwork of fencing. Myra and William laughed together when Myra made a wrong move.

"Now keep your right hand at the bottom of the handle and your left hand right above your right hand," he said.

"This is exciting," Myra grinned.

"Yes indeed it is! I'm so fascinated that you want to learn how to fight in battle," William said.

"It really means the world that you are teaching me how to fight."

"You are such a strong woman. There has been talk among the village that Wallace beats you on occasion."

"How do they know?" Myra's shoulders fell and she lowered her sword. She walked over to the table and sat down. William followed.

"In your eyes," he said, as he looked at her with compassion.

Tears rolled from Myra's glistening blue eyes down her olive skin. She didn't know what to say.

"That man should be damned to hell. You are such a vigorous, marvelous, intelligent, humble, and bright woman. That's what I like about you," he said as he grabbed her chin and kissed her.

Myra had never felt a connection with someone so strong and full of love. While she was kissing him, she forgot about everything bad around her and nothing else mattered.

That evening, William walked Myra home. She invited him inside and to stay for supper.

“Ma, who is this?” Elizabeth asked as they both entered the front door.

“This is my good friend William. He is the blacksmith who makes armor for the men in battle,” Myra replied.

“How fascinating! You must be very busy throughout the day!” Elizabeth said.

“Why yes I am but I love my job, and I love being able to help people out,” William replied.

Dawson and Joseph, being the oldest brothers, didn’t like the idea of this man hanging round their mother, but Nicolas was a sweet and welcoming character who loved that his mother had made a new friend.

“How long have you been working as a blacksmith?” Nicolas asked as he helped William set the table for supper.

“I’ve been a blacksmith since I was about 17, when my father needed help so I decided it would be best for the family if I started to work with him. I’ve loved it ever since because building things is my favorite thing to do,” William replied, engaged in the conversation.

“I love to build things as well! I just don’t know what I am able to do yet. I want to finish school first though,” Nicolas replied.

“That is a very smart idea, always to put your education first,” William said as he passed out the plates to everyone. Myra was in the kitchen cooking dinner with Elizabeth, listening to the conversation William was having with her sons. This was a life she dreamed of and she never wanted it to come to an end. Dawson and Joseph still hadn’t warmed up to the idea of this stranger in their home. As the night moved forward and William told everyone his life story, Dawson and Joseph started to respect him more. After William left that night, Dawson walked up to his mother as she was doing the dishes.

“I really enjoyed having a man in the house who talked to us and showed us that he cared about you. You deserve someone who values your beauty and doesn’t take for granted your love and sympathy,” he said as she turned around with a large smile and tears in her eyes.

“Thank you my son, and I don’t want you to think that I’m an awful person,” she said timidly.

“Mother, we don’t think that at all. You are the best mother in the world and we think you deserve a man like William,” Joseph said as he entered the kitchen.

Myra felt so grateful that her children were so welcoming and accepting of William. She knew this felt right and wasn't going to let anything happen to ruin it.

For the next couple of months, Myra went to the smithy every day to visit William, and he taught her everything he knew about sword fighting. They grew to know each other very well and built a love that was greater than Myra had ever known. She felt so close to him and forgot all about her husband who was fighting in the war. Myra knew that was a bad thing, but she didn't care. She loved William and he loved her, and she was willing to do anything to keep that love.

One September morning, the clouds were covering the sun and the wind was blowing through the trees. The fog had fallen very close to the ground so you could barely see what was right in front of you. Myra had lost her bearings on the way to the blacksmith's and started to become worried. It was unusually quiet and no one was out and about.

"HELLO? IS ANYONE THERE?" she screamed into the fog.

Myra began to hurry home because something in her knew that something was very wrong. As she returned, the fog turned into smoke and it smelled of fire. She put her arm over her face so the smoke wouldn't enter her lungs and began to walk much quicker, worried about her children. Suddenly she heard her name being called out by a familiar voice. It was her husband's best friend who had gone to war with him last winter.

"Rodger! What are you doing here??? What is going on?? Why is there so much smoke??" she said worriedly.

"Myra listen to me, your husband is an evil and angry person. He turned against us all and killed everyone in our camp. I managed to survive only because I acted as if I was dead. Do you know why he is doing this??" Rodger asked.

Myra had nothing to say, she felt so empty.

"Where... is he?" she stuttered.

"I'm not sure at the moment. I know he is responsible for all of this. I followed him through the mountains after he turned on us," Rodger replied.

Myra needed to get home, and get home fast. Rodger had his horse with him and she remembered when her grandmother would take her riding as a little girl. She didn't even think as she ran towards the horse and climbed on top of it. As she was riding the trees flew past her rapidly and the smoke grew thicker. She saw the roof of her house from the bottom of the hill and jumped off the horse and ran for her life.

"Please be well, please be well, please be well," she said to herself aloud as she ran to the house.

When she entered she found her children sitting with William as he comforted them.

"Ma! Myra!" they all screamed at the same time.

“What happened??” she said.

“An angry man entered the village early this morning and set a fire to all the houses and shops,” William said sadly.

Just then there was a loud bang at the door. Myra knew in an instant who it was. William told Myra to take all the children out of the back door, but she couldn't bear to leave him behind, not like this. She told Dawson to take them to William's house.

“What if we never see you again?” Nicholas said with tears in his eyes.

“Fear not my children. Everything is going to be all right. Now go! Hurry!”

“Who the hell do you think you are?!?!?” was the first thing she heard as she entered the house.

Myra stayed back, planning to sneak behind her husband and strike him, just to allow herself and William to escape. She could hear them arguing back and forth, a loud thud, and then suddenly silence. She ran to the front of the house only to find William on the floor with his eyes closed.

“NOOOO! How could you do this?” Myra screamed at Wallace.

“You whore! You are a cheater! A liar!” He yelled.

“No, I am a woman! I am none of those things!!!” she said angrily as she picked up William's sword from his unresponsive hand. She ran towards Wallace with her sword and they began to fight. She dodged every hit he would take at her. Swords clanged together as they moved about the front of the house, and then outside to the edge of the hill. Wallace knocked the sword out of Myra's hand and jumped on top of her, going for her throat, but she blocked his grip with her strong arms.

“So Myra, he taught you how to fight. How romantic,” Wallace growled sarcastically.

“He is a much better man than you will EVER be. He loves our children and he loves me. He appreciates everything that I do and loves me for who I am,” she shouted back at him.

“You are only a woman. What good is there in that?” he said, confused.

“You men would be nothing without us women. You are a lowlife and you deserve everything that is coming to you! How could you kill all those innocent people? What is the matter with you???”

“Any man who appreciates women deserves to die,” he said with a smile.

“And so do you!” Myra lifted her legs and rolled him off of her and over the edge to his death.

Myra and her children moved to the New World with William after Wallace's death, where they all lived the life they dreamed of. William owned his own blacksmith company where Nicholas also worked. Dawson and Joseph both became sailors and sailed with many great explorers of the continent. Myra became an English teacher and

Elizabeth was the top student in her class. They all lived a happy life as a family in the New World.

Theme for Creative Writing (After Langston Hughes)

The instructor said,

**Go home and write
A page tonight.
And let that page come out of you-
Then, it will be true.**

Why must we share about ourselves?
I am two months away from becoming an adult.
I was born and raised in California
And my life has yet to be planned.
Being around people is not for me, I love my own company.
The corn fields fly by me, and the interstate comes over me.
Down the street with the trees hanging over,
I pass the glistening lake and clubhouse to my court
I turn the lock and walk to my yellow room.

Planning for the future has been stressful.
I don't know what is yet to come
Or where I want to attend school nor what I want to study
But time is flying by like a jet
Which makes me ever more uneasy.

I like to read romance, listen to my records, and be in love.
I like to be around my family and close friends, eat, sleep and watch movies.
For Christmas, I don't even have to receive anything and I would be happy
Because Christmas is my favorite time of year.
Love fills the air along with the smell of cinnamon.
You can hear the Christmas carols from the corner house.

For me, I only enjoy certain people,
Everyone else just annoys me,

Puts me in a bad mood.

People here don't appreciate the things they have.

Stuck up rich folks have no idea how bad some people have it .

I travel to different countries every summer to build houses for those people

And it boils my blood when people aren't thankful.

So, instructor, ask yourself this

What are you thankful for today?

Are you surrounding yourself with the people you love?

Being thankful makes you kind

And allows your heart to grow

Therefore, everyone should be thankful

Even if you feel like you shouldn't be

Someone always has it worse than you do.

Bare Prints



**See you next
year!**