



#### "IMAGINE" Literary Magazine Harrison High School Harrison, New York 10528 2018 Edition

#### **Editor-in-Chief**

Brianna Jackman

#### **Editorial Board**

Mia Altamuro, Jenniviv Bansah, Michael Barletta, Jordan Blair, Sara Bove, Giselle Bravo-Brown, Katherine Gkini, Darya Kohdakhah, Olivia Nelson, Laura Nikolla, Harrison Sakai, Albert Schmidt, Charlene Tally

#### **Front Cover Credit**

Michael Canno

#### **Inside Cover Credit**

Lilah Smolev

#### <u>Advisor</u> Mrs. Kimberly Maricevic

#### **Artwork Contributors**

Michael Barletta	Madeline Kempsey	Suraya Ortiz
Anna Cahn	Chanha Kim	Victoria Palmieri
Michael Canno	Kimika Koga	Caitlin Policarpio
Jerusalem Castro	Madeline Kraus	Josephine Robb
Amy Cro	Richard Kretzmer	Lilah Smolev
Amanda Denet	Jessica Leckhart	Elijah Turner
Jeanine Eljamal	Brianna Martinez	Micaela Udell
Judith Fierman	Cameron McClean	Risako Yokoi
Ava Judelson		



Here we proudly present to you our 2018 publication of Harrison High School's literary magazine, *Imagine*. If you picked up last year's edition, you might recall that it represented a noticeable shift in the visual presentation, both inside and outside of our publication. This year, our growth might not be as immediately apparent, but it's nonetheless bound in the pages of our magazine.

After regrouping this year, we found that there was a defining question that pushed our work forward: *What defines our Lit Mag*? What does our Lit Mag mean to us, and how can we exemplify that? To explore answers to these questions, we discussed a possible name change, and even some exciting concepts for new ways to expand this club's reach. We were even able to take a field trip to Woodstock Day school for their annual "Lit Con," which was a day where we learned about the writing and editing process of other school's literary publications. Ultimately, while we've still published this year's copy under the title "*Imagine*," our experiences this year have helped us foster our sense of club unity and identity, something which has undeniably guided our work every step of the way. The culmination of our hard work and growth is just beyond this page. We only plan to keep improving and discovering who we are as writers and thinkers. You haven't seen the best of us yet.

Happy reading,

The Editorial Staff of Imagine

# **Table of Contents**

## POETRY

Happiness Is	
Darya Khodakhah	9
<i>Pink Skirt</i> Jaclyn Ciarmella	10
<i>Meatballs in Heaven</i> Megan Margiotti	12
<i>When I Could Fly</i> Harrison Sakai	13
<i>Saving Grace</i> Olivia Nelson	14
A Pathway To You Michael Barletta	18
A Toast For Change Anonymous	21
<i>Let It Burst</i> Leilah El-Azizi	22
A Single Rose (a found poem) Micaela Udell	26
<i>Discretion</i> Megan Margiotti	27
Make Mama Proud Sheymi Olivares Garcia	32
<i>An Answer</i> Jaclyn Ciarmella	34

# **POETRY (CONTINUED)**

Half An Hour Josephine Robb	42
Their Last Slave Jenniviv Bansah	45
<i>It</i> Amanda Fameli	46
Rose Micaela Udell	47
<i>Who Am I?</i> Lauren Unterreiner	52
A Sonnet for the Purely Hearted Michael Barletta	53
<i>A Toast For Change</i> Jeanine Eljamal	56
How To Float Anonymous	57
<i>Latibule</i> Anonymous	62
<i>The Dance Of Time</i> Olivia Nelson	63

### **PROSE**—NON-FICTION

<i>Echoes Of His Voice</i> Sofia Goldstein	24
<i>Three in the Morning</i> Michael Barletta	28
<i>The Thing About Love</i> Anonymous	43
Seeing Tragedy In Color Elisabeth Eiff	58
PROSE— FICTION	
INUSE-ITCHION	
Popcorn! Dylan Fitzgerald	16
Popcorn!	16 19
Popcorn! Dylan Fitzgerald Little Monsters	

Diary of a Hauniea Paralylic48Darya Khodakhah48about realities54Day Five64

Harrison Sakai 64



#### Happiness Is...

When you finish a really good book, And you feel content for having taken the journey of the story, yet sad it is over. When you eat something you have been craving for a while, And feel fully satisfied afterwards. When you can finally curl up into bed after a long day, And can feel your muscles relax and sink into the mattress. When you kick a soccer ball and it hits just the right spot on your foot, And you know all the training has paid off. When you get a perfect score on a test, And feel a relief and a self-worth the numbers confirm. When tea or hot chocolate gets to the perfect temperature, And you can enjoy both the warmth and the taste of it. When you eat something cold on a hot day, And feel refreshed and new. When you eat something hot on a cold day, And feel warm, drowsy and cozy. When you're cold and you get in a hot shower And feel the sting of warmth touch your soul. When you feel powerful after working out, Like you could run 1,000 miles. When you see your best friend after being separated for a while, And remember how much you care for them. When you laugh so hard you cry and go silent, And your body aches in a good way. When you get enough sleep and feel refreshed, And full of energy. When you remember your dream, And it was a good dream. When you get a gift you really wanted, Especially after not telling anyone you wanted it. When you hear babies laughing, Or when you make one laugh. When you take a really good picture, Especially if it's of yourself.

And when you realize there is so much to be happy about, So much that makes you smile, And so many reasons to feel loved.

Darya Khodakhah

#### Pink Skirt (Words About Being a Woman)

If I wore my pink skirt above the knee, Does this look change who is truly me? Does this mean everything you might see is yours right away, A lock with a key? I have worn this pink skirt, since the age of four But back then, did you call me a whore? Did you say that it mattered, what I wore? That if I wore my skirt short, I wanted more? Then I turned five, and within years My mother started to develop fears From all of the news that she always hears, She told me it was time that I switch gears I replaced my skirt, and although I seemed alright, I was still not allowed alone, out at night Pants and a sweatshirt, I had built up ten walls But just one strand of hair could make monsters call By twelve I assured, my sweater was shut. For at eleven, an inch of stomach had made me a slut. To walk down the street, made me an aim, Of pointless calls, just for a game. I had my first job, when I was sixteen years old, I wore my black outfit just as I was told, Leggings and a tee shirt, long past my hips. I had earned my paycheck, with a few extra tips. Down the road I walked home, right around ten, Turns out I wanted to be approached by three men. I walk, just fast enough, and I attempt to ignore, Even though they insisted that I wanted more. At eighteen, I realize, I miss my pink skirt, So I look for the piece, dig it up from the dirt. Somehow it fits just the same, and though I admire it, Others might get messages, and some just inquire about it. But why can't I wear it, without such a chatter? Why does my body shape come to matter? And why are we making that little girl an item? Why let those monsters call, when so many can fight them? For if we tell that girl, that she is a whore, We are the monsters down to the core. With our disapproval we open a door, And by five, she can't wear her pink skirt anymore.

Jaclyn Ciarmella



#### 12

Meatballs in Heaven

She moans from the pair

She sits in her chair and leans her head on the pillow and table

We rub her back

Dad suppresses his tears

She doesn't eat She barely speaks She just moans.

I fear her last words will be in Italian, a language I can't understand.



They'll get to taste her pasta and meatballs in Heaven.

Megan Margiotti

Risako Yokoi



I remember the time I thought I could fly And I leaped from the top of my Melancholy wooden porch. I remember the feeling of Landing on the earth, And not thinking twice about Jumping again. I remember when the sky was the limit, And letting my feet touch the ground Was nothing more Than a humble suggestion

I remember the time I thought I could fly.

Harrison Sakai



Saving Grace

I was the saving grace For two women way past their prime Both at a loss, their husbands gone And I was their saving grace

I was the saving grace When he couldn't take her anymore He left her high, he left her dry And I was her saving grace

I was the saving grace When his lungs turned black and stopped I helped her through, that's all they knew And I was her saving grace

> I was the saving grace But I didn't know it yet I was there, when life wasn't fair And I was the saving grace

I was the saving grace When so many had up and died They held me close, I couldn't know And I was the saving grace

BACHER

I was the saving grace When that car hit the pole The boy was dead, he hit his head And I was their saving grace

I was the saving grace When those boys had cried and cried Their family was gone, everything went wrong And I was their saving grace

I was the saving grace There was enough of me to go around I was given, my heart was driven And I was the saving grace

I **am** *the saving grace* It's quite the burden to carry I'm glad I could help, but I lost myself Because I'm **just** a saving grace.

Olivia Nelson

Victoria Palmieri

#### Popcorn!

I wake up, or was I ever asleep?... I can't really tell anymore, the line between nightmare and reality was crossed a long time ago. Everyday I wake up to an atmosphere of terror. Generally, it's pretty comforting to have people around you, however this scenario seems to be the complete opposite. A dark room with hundreds of others packed in as densely as possible - what kind of cruel person would allow this? It's been like this for as long as I can remember... no light, no space, no hope...

Today did seem... different though? A strange feeling was passing through all of us - could it be warmth? We've been so used to feeling nothing for all of these years... the warmth surely is comforting, but also a bit unsettling... why now? Why ever? We've been in this prison for who knows how long with no changes, but suddenly... heat. I feel strange... something inside of me... wriggling... trying to escape... Why is this happening to me? What did I ever do wrong?

Suddenly I hear a loud scream piercing our - what seemed like - neverending silence. I look around me to see one of the other prisoners bursting with white guts, his skin nowhere to be seen. Before my very eyes another one makes the transformation, normal one moment, and then their insides erupting outwards at high speeds until they just become a bright white inside-out monstrosity.

My sympathy was cut short by dread - I watched all of my comrades one by one undergo a grueling transformation, all letting out a short scream before their vocal chords are shoved to the inside... all the while knowing my turn is soon. The stress of knowing what's coming next is worse than the pain could ever be. I felt it edging on... and on... until finally pain erupts from my body as my insides are thrust into the open air. A short burst of intense pain as my body rearranges in grotesque ways that shouldn't be possible. I let out a scream, but it's cut off and muffled by the guts blocking the way. My skin covered by my insides - a cruel twist of fate. Looking through a tunnel of my own intestines, I find everyone around me has undergone this transformation... but now what? Why is this world so cruel to us?

We're suddenly blinded — light — something many of us haven't experienced in years. I had never been so happy to be partially blind, however the reunion was cut short as we were tipped out of our prison into a new one... this new container was certainly bigger, but it's hard to enjoy the space when you're stuffed in the middle of an ocean of others, all suffering and waiting for fate to make its decisive move. One by one the weight of my peers is quite literally taken off of me as they are one by one — no, handful by handful — taken from this new prison.

Finally the ones on top of me are taken away and I can see outside of the roof of my prison. There is a giant... a huge being taking bites of my brethren one by one, not even focusing on the lives he's taking — the memories he's destroying... His attention seems to be at some far-off objective, but that doesn't stop him from relentlessly murdering hundreds of innocents. It sickens me, but I'm helpless with my insides exposed, prime for the picking... I just have to wait for him to take me. I wait, and I wait... watching those who I love, and those who I had valued all get eaten, until finally I was the last one remaining. Nobody by my side. Nobody could help. Nothing has changed. My entire life squished in, contained, dark; we may have been together but circumstances led to a fleeting feeling of loneliness and solitude. All I could really ask for was for this giant to do me a favor and end my suffering, take my life, and take all of the horrifying memories with it.

I'm relieved when I am cupped up in its hand. I'm slowly lifted from my prison towards a hole in its upper region. Without hesitation I am tossed in. Ground. Torn. Dissolved. Swallowed. Finally — freedom — free from the limitless hours of pain, free from all restraints, free from the memories that haunt me most. My body may be torn to shreds in the belly of the beast, but my spirit is now free from the shackles of mortality.



Dylan Fitzgerald



#### A Pathway To You

I woke up from the tent shuffling in the wind, I opened the tent to reveal an early sunrise on this warm summer day. And a candle by the edge of my tent, A cool breeze touched my face softly, A tantalizing flicker of the fire carried by the wind. And there was a presence that at this point remained unknown I looked up to see what lay ahead I saw a light, bright yet minute, sitting far in the distance, And where it lay across the lake, was green with beauty. The breeze directed me to a trail The breeze lead me to another candle, now in the woods And more and more, growing in its density I was lead by the candles to a bridge I had crossed the lake, found the candle, once in the far distance And I was now surrounded by candles as I held one in my hand My bare feet were wet with the lake's water My pants were rolled up while I stood on a bed of rocks, And the candle spoke to me, in the voice of my brother My brother, who took me camping in these woods. My brother, who died a year ago, was calling to me But there was no sound or candles. It was just me and my brother's spirit that lived on in these woods. Brother, these candles lead me along a pathway to you.

Michael Barletta

#### Little Monsters

I hear the wooden door creak open slowly, although I reside in an empty house, with crooked floors and windows with cracked glass, so I feel the cold air of a winter's night coming into my bedroom, and the harsh whistle of the air. I am hidden

underneath a bed, where the mattress is torn and the blankets are thin and lifeless, concealing me on a dusty, mice ridden ground. I feel the cold liquid left by who knows what, and I breath heavier and heavier as I hear footsteps come closer to me. Only one phone exists in the house, an old house phone whose wires had been cut, and can no longer be used.

I hear a faint murmur in the distance, which doesn't belong to the pair of feet I see in front of me. My eyes follow upwards, trying to catch a glimpse of the creature's face. I can only see some of the leg-it appears to be a large, green snake that has come to me. The murmuring grows louder, though no other creature approaches. It's an unintelligible sort of language, sounds that I have never heard before, coming from a



voice that sounds as though it belongs to a human male. I don't dare close my eyes; to do so would be to become more vulnerable, and that's not what I need right now.

I knew I should have left this house the second I had the chance, the second someone had approached me, but I was far too skeptical and far too scared to march right into the light after being in the dark for so long. Society out there was newer and bolder, and I would be so lost inside of it.

The girl who had reached out her hand was one who had snuck in here as though it were a game. She wanted to explore a mysterious house, but she did not expect to find me.

I have lived here for years, and it has become the only thing that I had ever known. Everything I do, I stay close to the ground, away from the windows where someone may look in and see me, and I crawl back under the bed each time night comes around, because that is when the monsters come; they only get more and more terrifying, more and more hostile.

I cannot leave, that is the only rule. It's a rule I've followed, and am too afraid of breaking. There was a time this house was clean and liveable, and a family did once live here with me. The Malulus family-two parents, and three children. They all had their rooms upstairs, and I had mine in the bottom floor. A tiny little closet, where I had to roll out of bed, for if I stood in it, my head would hit the ceiling.

I was their miserable little house girl for my entire life. They claimed by birth parents sold me to them, as was the custom of the time. I did as they said each day, cooking and cleaning and fetching this and that. The work was demanding, the food was almost nonexistent, and the beatings were heavy. Such a life was not really living.

I ran away one day, into the village. I ran through the streets while the police went to go catch me. I would rather die than return to my servitude. So I snuck into people's backyards, finding work where I could, stealing when it was necessary, living life as a fugitive. It was cold, lonely, and hard, but anything was better than where I came from.

The Malulus family did catch me eventually, as they were a powerful and wealthy group, and when they did I was chased for a few more blocks, before they dragged be back to their house, and life only got harsher.

I no longer had the closet to myself, and only got to sleep underneath the eldest daughter's bed, where she frequently woke me up to go get her water. She was not thirsty, she simply wanted to annoy me. The work did not stop, and I was only given food as I was on the brink of starvation.

One piece of sanity in my life was a girl I had met. Her name was Sarah, and she called me Liv, a nickname for Olivia. She was no servant, she was a girl from the village who worked for a family store. We talked as I ran errands, and she often helped me, even teaching me to read and write. She kept money on the side, waiting for the moment she could buy me from them then set me free. Sarah was my only hope, but she died too, of the plague, they said.

Without my only friend, I was even worse off. You could only push someone so far. I collapsed in the kitchen, and my body was tossed away. Servants did not get justice during those times, you must understand. They placed a crucifix over my body, in an unceremonious way, and that was that.

I rose up, and I went back to the house where no one could see or hear me. Eventually, that family went away, but I stayed. No one ever came back, and something inside was preventing me from leaving. Without the Malulus's, I was free, yet I was still in chains from my own mind.

The monsters remind me of them. When they find me, I am teleported back to the most horrifying moments of my life. Each monster that meets me, it seems, brings back a different memory. They become more and more vivid, and it almost feels like I am back again.

After time, the house ages without me. I have not yet figured out the limbo state I am about to be in. I don't know what year it is, but time must be moving real slow, since I have not grown one bit. The house keeps on rotting, and I feel as though one day it may topple down, and the monsters will go elsewhere.

Maybe then I can be free of this wretched place.

Mia Altamuro

#### A Toast For Change

I was so caught up in our expired relationship.

I remember crying because I was so afraid that I would be stuck with you.

I heard the things that were said about me.

I worried that I would never regain my self worth.

I thought I would never be able to trust anyone ever again.

But,

I want to change.

I am independent.

I think that everything happens for a reason.

I need to stop dwelling on the past.

I try to meet new people and create good memories.

I feel hopeful that I will have a better future.

I forgive myself for being so mean to myself, and accusing myself of nonsense.

# Now I can change.

a street delle

I will be successful.

- I choose to focus on the important things in my life.
- I hope to get into a good college.
- I predict I'll live a more positive life.
- I know I will achieve greatness.

I will change.

Anonymous

Richard Kretzmer

#### Let It Burst

When we are born, we are born into a bubble. The goal is to expand this bubble; feed it. When the time is right, we can burst that bubble. Then we are in the real world; then we are truly born. When people see their bubble being filled with too much bad, they shrink it. They try to push out the pain, the insecurity, the hate. But they can't pick and choose, so they push everything out. They push and they push, as their bubble shrinks and shrinks Eventually they can't shrink any more, and their bubble starts to shoke them. There is no air to Before I was breathe. They suffocate in aware of my bubble, their ignorance. I didn't ask, I didn't care. I didn't question how things happened, or why they happened. I didn't ask why girls hung out here and guys hung out there. I didn't ask why people were being mean to someone for having glasses and braces or different skin. I was so unaware. I didn't know there was this thing called racism, where you're different because of a pigment. I didn't know there was thing called sexism where you're inferior for being a girl. I was in a tight bubble. Then I found my spark. That spark finally helped me see the world.

People are too busy masking their ignorance, they don't realize they are letting it fester beneath that mask. People will drown in ignorance and suffocate in their lack of knowledge, without even vithout even what's So I urge you; look ning. for your bubble. When you find it— and you will— try to expand it. Fill your bubble with everything; good, bad, funny, terrifying, crazy, unexplainable. Let yourself learn it all. Expose yourself to the pain, because with that pain, there will be good. If you hear something, find out for yourself if it's true. Find any ignorance, insensitivity. unawareness. knowing what's happening. Find any ignorance, insensitivity, unawareness, and get rid of it. Surround yourself with those who are looking to grow their bubble as well. And just as I want to take people with me on this journey, you need to take some with you too. Expand your mind; grow your soul. Spread it so far so no one can see it. And one day,

Let it burst

Leilah El-Azizi



#### The Echoes Of His Voice

I don't remember my grandfather's voice. My family tells me his voice was so distinct, that he was an amazing singer, that his voice embodied his big personality. I nod and believe it, picture him in the kitchen making milanesas and singing, but I don't have a clear picture in my mind because in addition to my grandfather's voice, I don't remember his face. Everything that I know about his appearance is from photographs. My grandfather passed away from liver cancer when I was just three years old.

This isn't an essay about how I lived while loving someone with cancer. I'm not lucky enough to have memories of living with my grandfather. This is an essay about my family loving someone with cancer, and how I have lived afterward.

My maternal grandfather was from a family of musicians in Paraguay. He was the only one who left Paraguay to become a highly regarded ambassador, but he was a kid at heart. Always happy-go-lucky, he looked at life as if the glass was half-full. His catchphrase was, "Felices y contentos," which means "happy and content." The culture in Paraguay is very personal and close, the kind that welcomes you with two kisses on the cheeks and a bear hug when you first meet someone. Life in Paraguay runs on a different axis than life in the United States, specifically in New York. There's no rushing anywhere, no worrying about the future. The people just enjoy the present moment, focusing on only what is front of them and not concerning themselves with what is to come. As a result, Paraguayans don't usually get to places on time, because they've been enjoying the time spent before having to go somewhere. Unfortunately, this habit has transferred to my mother and I, but what can I say? It's the Paraguayan in us.

When my grandfather was diagnosed with cancer, no one would speak of it. It was as if the word carried a curse. It was as if by speaking the word, the situation was real and people could no longer pretend in their heads that everything was okay. It was as if by acknowledging the sickness for what it was, they were acknowledging the hopelessness of him ever getting better. In six weeks, my grandfather was dead. The greatest optimist had the most negative ending. There was a period of silence that stretched from Paraguay to El Salvador to Washington DC to New York as my family felt the quiet engulf them. It seemed like he had taken his food, his music, the sound of his voice with him and left us with deafening silence. As time wore on, we realized that though there was quiet where he should have been, he hadn't left us with silence. My grandfather left us with memories and stories and phrases that he used to say and food that he used to make and songs that he used to sing. He left us every part of him but we couldn't put together the parts to be whole, and we had to let that be enough. Thirteen years later, I have grown to be sixteen years old. I have heard countless stories about my grandfather and they're still coming. He is with us everywhere we go, whether we're with other family members or with strangers. My mother, his daughter, will be having a conversation with someone for the first time, and they'll say, "Ha!" at something she says, and my mother will stop mid-sentence and say, "Ha! Fantastic!" and tell them how her father used to say that, smiling. How just one word brings back the flood of memories that come with his person, no matter how many years have been spent building the dam to keep these memories in. Because the truth is that my grandfather was never meant to be kept in, to be kept away. He was meant to be with people, whether in person or in spirit, meant to enjoy life with people as one with his culture. Even though he is no longer alive, he always finds a way to be with the people that we are with through our telling his stories. He hasn't stopped finding ways to enjoy life, regardless of the fact that he is dead.

My grandfather had a very distinct voice, I've been told. He always voiced his opinions, and I'm working on following in his footsteps. I run a foundation called Candles For A Cure, a local charity that makes and sells homemade candles with 100% of the profits directly benefiting brain cancer research at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. I am carrying on this project for two years in memory of my grandfather. The girl who founded the charity, Taylor, started it as an homage to her mother, who passed away from brain cancer the day before her fourteenth birthday. Taylor, her father, and her aunt are like family to mine, and I can't help thinking that this is yet another way that my grandfather has impacted us. He has taught us to open our arms to people, an act that turns strangers into family. Candles For A Cure has grown very successful in its three years of existence, making nearly fifteen thousand dollars for cancer research. Selling these candles, I have come to realize that almost everyone has had a cancer story greatly impact their lives just as I have. Almost everyone has been affected by cancer in some way, and many are comfortable enough to tell me their stories. I figure that it's only fair for me to tell my story now.

I don't remember my grandfather's voice. But I'm creating my own, voicing what I'm sure he would have said. There needs to be more songs sung, more laughs shared with those you love without worrying about what might happen in the future. I don't remember my grandfather's voice, but I'm using my own voice to make sure that this is not the case for anyone else. I'm using my own voice to make sure that everyone is heard, that everyone's music is remembered and that together, we can continue to sing their songs.

Sofia Goldstein

Madeline Kempsey



#### Discretion

#### FDBZNLK

The only one she finds interest in was in her position. He knows, Kinda. They talk endlessly and he makes her smile. Parrots of expressions. She's confused though. This wasn't intentional, feelings just pried into her head. But what is it like without feelings? Alone. She convinces herself: he misses her, he wants her. She compares herself and the other, Never finding confidence or satisfaction, Always wondering. Is it a mask or candid? Who the hell does she divulge her soul to? So she waits; To lose him and to tell herself she was right. To seek another victim of her presence.

Megan Margiotti

Micaela Udell



#### Three in the Morning

There she was, standing amongst the rest of the crowd, smiling as always. I walked up to approach her and be the one to break the ice for once. Usually it was she who would say the first word. Maybe that meant she was interested in me. Maybe she was just cool like that and doesn't consider herself to be "too good" for even just a platonic relationship. It could very well be the latter. I mean, how many girls try to impress a guy by sending intentionally unattractive pictures with contorted faces in order to get a laugh out of the person on the other end? Maybe that was her secret; to do the most unconventional things in order to stand out and be the most attractive. Paradoxical... Yet ironically successful. Even her most contorted facial expressions had an appeal to them. They would draw me in wanting more, and I would get more. She seemed to like me, at least. After all, she talked to me everyday and even though I was too awkward to start up any conversation worth talking about, once we started talking, we never stopped.

I moved closer to her and touched her arm gently, giving a slight pull toward my direction as I said, "Do you want to dance?" It was very loud and I am convinced she couldn't hear me over the music and screaming voices but she nodded anyway as if she didn't need to hear me to understand what I was thinking. My hand that had landed on her upper arm slowly slipped down into her hand and we moved away from the crowd to a less populated area. This part of the dance floor was off to the side and almost by the tables where I would have typically been sitting instead of muscling up the courage to ask her to dance. It was much quieter here, and although we still needed to shout to hear each other over the obstructive noise, at least we could hear each other this time. A slower song rose from the trail of the previous song and the room became quieter; void of obnoxious laughter and shouting which was present before. Almost everyone had sat down at tables or got food or drinks; neglecting the beautiful melody coursing through the air. It would have been so easy to follow everyone else and do the same, acting as if we were just friends sitting down at a table and putting end to our time on the dance floor for the night. My body itched and I almost pulled away, but I looked into her deep, forest green eyes and I was reminded that I could stay and continue to dance with her. The room was quiet and I didn't want to make a scene out of my affection, so I leaned closer to whisper a seldom message, "You look beautiful." And it was true. Even though she had a knack for sending comically gross photos, she was in fact beautiful. It was the kind of beauty that was natural. No heavy lipstick or eyeshadow or obnoxious eyebrow makeup or even heavy contouring. She wore makeup, don't get me wrong, but she didn't look like a clown. Her beauty was all very sincere.

"You look very handsome." She responded in a slightly shaky voice. It wasn't shaking out of nerves, I don't think. She always seemed to talk like that. However, her delivery of any compliment was far superior to mine, which had been extremely robotic despite my struggle to practice natural dialogue—that's something I often don't get to practice.

We kept talking quietly through the whole song as we swayed side to side and back and forth. She asked how my hamster was. God, she loved that hamster. She insisted that she'd feed it every morning when she would come to my house before we walked to school together. I told her that my hamster was good, and that she should know because she fed him that morning. We shared a laugh and then she put her ear to my chest and wrapped her arms around me. Her arms went under mine to accommodate for the height discrepancy and she locked one hand onto the other hanging by my lower back. My arms slid to her upper back when she made the first move. Of course she made the first move. She always made the first move. I could feel her cheeks, still tense from her smile. She held onto that smile for longer than I anticipated, until her face became completely relaxed as if she has gone to sleep on a pillow. We held each other for a long time. Tonight's was abnormally silent. On her part at least. Usually she would chatter on and on forever but tonight was a night of embracing our feelings, not the false words of what we said our feelings were.

As great as this moment was, I wished we were alone. I didn't like being in public with her because everyone else just acts as an unwarranted spectator. And as much as I loved this moment with her being silent, I felt an urge to hear her voice become passionate and ramble aimlessly, going on tangents and rarely pulling back to the main topic. Those were some of my favorite moments with her. And as I lived the present, holding her in my arms, I reminded myself of the past when a day ago after school we were walking home from school. We had a simple conversation about pets, so of course my hamster was the first to be mentioned. She was trying to remember all of the animals she had seen in real life. She had such a childish manner to her. She always did. She made everything seem so simple. This was a trait I tend to find agitating in other people when they act childish in a way that is immature. Despite her tendencies to act childish, Jess was mature. She was a kid at heart first and foremost and loved to act as if the world was simple but she knew this wasn't the case. However, she let her inner child take over anyway because it was how she loved to be. She knew how to balance her inner-child with maturity and awareness. Her childishness was different from anyone else's because it was charming. That charming childishness had a way of reminding you of how great it was to be a kid in elementary school, seeing the world so simply and being reminded of all of the good that comes from innocence. The nostalgia was a very big part of our relationship. I had forgotten for so long what if felt like to not have a care in the world and feel free like a 5 year old on the playground playing tag until she reminded me.

The song ended and a more up-beat song started after. I was pulled back into the dance floor from my own headspace. Everyone crowded the dance floor right by where we had initially moved to and she asked me if I wanted to leave with her. Without hesitation I said yes as loud as I possibly could. She led me to the door which was barely visible through the maze of people jumping up and down with their arms in the air but once we reached it we exited the building finally feeling free. Once again, we were alone but I felt less lonely than I did on the dance floor. The air was brisk and I could see my own breath fading into hers and then disappearing in the shadow of the night. It was past midnight. I don't know how she got me to stay out that late. We stayed just beside the door, waiting for our parents to pick us up. They would have arrived an hour later so I told her, "If you're cold we can call our parents to pick us up earlier." I offered this assuming she was cold because I was and she gets cold much quicker than I do.

"I'm okay waiting if you are." She says to my surprise. I was cold but I told her I wasn't so I could spend more time with her. She told me she was cold even though she said she was fine and so I held both of her hands in my own hands. Her hands felt like ice and looked like fire. As her hands started to get warm, my own did as well and I looked from her hands back to her face. Her eyes - those incredibly intoxicating forrest green eyes - met with my own. My jaw tightened and she leaned in closer. I expected her to make the same move she did on the dance floor, putting her ear to my chest and hugging me to help warm herself up. But instead her head stayed leveled with mine and her eyes closed as she inched closer. I pulled back an inch and then stopped; she hadn't noticed, fortunately. Her lips met mine and my eyes closed. I didn't know what I was doing so I let her take the lead. I had never kissed a girl before unless a cheek counted. Honestly I forget how it felt. Everything went numb, even my cold ears that had not been warmed up by hands. So unfortunately, I can't describe the physical sensation that I felt in that soft moment of complete intimacy. All I know was that there was an intangible feeling of tenderness. It was clear, in that moment, that I loved her. Romantically, I cannot decipher at this moment whether or not I am in love with her. However, I do know that at the very least there is a platonic love between the two of us.

So why am I writing all of this? Well it's three in the morning, my first kiss was a little over two hours ago, and I still don't feel like I've had enough time to process it all. I've been laying in bed for about an hour and a half trying to fall asleep but I can't. I just needed to write about this wonderful moment that I had. One of the big "firsts" in life. And to me, it meant something. I don't know what this means about the future of her and I. All I know is that when my lips met hers there was a feeling in my chest that I had never felt before. There was almost a feeling of breathlessness.

Michael Barletta



#### Make Mama Proud

Yo trabajo y tu estudias Mom never fails to remind me that she is working hard. Not for her, but for me *Tus Estudios primero, amigas después* A Latina mom's favorite line. Y si todos tus amigos se tiran por un puente, tu también te tiras? The staple phrase in a Latino household. Causing the common curiosity to arise....would you?

My mother has worked days and nights, through holidays and storms, sick or tired Works around 3-4 jobs a week Monday to Saturday Now where's my bonding time? What does one do when your mother is being stolen from the adult world? Nothing.

Mama comes home, wearing her typical Aeropostale shirt she got on sale and her comfy Skechers Abuelita got her for *la navidad* Tired out of her mind and what does she do? Cook She takes off from working just to start working at home Never having a day off from either

Que quieres de comer? Oh you didn't know? My mom is a chef! A donde vas? Y si me mientas, ya vas a ver Oh, I forgot to mention, she's an FBI agent Si yo te ayudo con las matemáticas Oops, and a mathematician Aye dios, ya te vas a enfermar Oh, and a doctor Dame tus jeans, voy a subir la vasta And a seamstress I love you Oh, and one last thing She's mi mama





Yo trabajo para que tú tengas un futuro mejor El mejor cosa es tener una carrera A doctor! Help others, help mama Yo hago todo esto por ti Solamente quiero que tengas un mejor futuro You then remember

Her dried out hands from all the cleaning supplies, her tired eyes from working She easily has a choice to stop it all She can skip work and get a manicure She can turn off the alarm and sleep more She can do so much more So why would she continue? For me

I am her American Dream I am the one who determines my own future and success But she's always on my mind *Sueño de tener mi casa con una piscina!* Mom has dreams too, and I'm here to help So I will buy her a house With a pool, of course

Mama I need to work. I need money No necesitas a trabajar I want to help you out No, tienes que enfocarte en tus estudios She works so hard for me She sacrifices her time for me She does everything for me How do you even repay her? What job do I get? Tu ya sabes lo que tienes que hacer Oh, that's right!

Make mama proud

Sheymi Olivares Garcia



An Answer

You get up in the morning, start confessing, Wish you didn't wake, but this sunrise is a blessing. Look at the mirror. You don't like what you see. But there are millions of people like you, that they'd pray to be. You close your eyes, can't bear to look But your magnificent eyes have somebody took. Your smile lights the room up and though you don't show it, Your face is pure perfection, only you don't know it. You pray for the pain to stop. This is your call, your cry. I'm here to answer, 'till your eyes turn dry. You think you're alone, but like a star in the sky, Around you is filled with darkness. The moon is so nigh. Even mornings feel like nighttime, you won't open your eyes. Look up at the mirror, speak deprecating lies. If you keep your eyes closed, then it's no wonder to me. Why for some reason, you don't see what we see. What you thought shone back at you, is not your true reflection. Breathe, let it go, start a new inspection.

One step out the door, I promise that you'll make it. Those thoughts seem to linger, for so long that you take a hit, You're strong and you're wise, for this is why you are here. A knight in the darkness, no more bad dreams to bear, For you are not alone, nor a burden, you are meant to be. Through the dusk it might be hard, but I pray that you'll see. You're loved by the stars and the moon, By myself, your friends, and those you'll meet soon, By your family through blood or other ways too, For the love you own, has no limit to you.

So take the sky, for it is yours, and not just for tonight. Take the sunrise, keep it. Hold the pink clouds tight. Speak out your call to the moon; it will listen Through the reflections you make, your call will glisten. In the wind, I'll hear your voice with my ears open wide. Tonight is a storm but tomorrow a calm tide. You must swim, so that once you catch your breath it won't disappear I pray that you will call, when your head is filled with fear. The reflection in the water is a sunny day of light and I pray the day that your eyes will open so your worth remains in sight.

Jaclyn Ciarmella



Light In Darkness

My name is Lux in Tenebris. Most prefer to call me by my surname Tenebris, though I've always preferred Lux. Not that anyone here really cares about what I think. I was never born nor conceived, I was simply made by some of the forces that exist around this area. They determined who I would be- a tool of the dark realm, an entity crafted to haunt the Earth, to torture innocent souls and to drive others into depression and insanity.

Once a soul is depressed, they are easy to control and manipulate, and to be brought into this darkness. I occupy houses, mostly, though occasionally I am held in a certain vessel, such as a doll or Ouija board, where I remain until the subject has reached a point of insanity. Then, I collect my things and move on to the next. For the first four hundred years, I did my job without any effort or passion. During the 1600s, all the way to the 1900s, it was easy to haunt. People clung to their religion alone, and still believed in us indisputably, doing everything they can to avoid us. It was difficult to work past the sage and the praying, but it was entirely possible due to their fear alone, which gave me enough energy.

During the 1990s, and the 2000s, however, I saw a dramatic shift. People no longer believed in the sort as much as they used to. They laughed at the idea, and would find explanation after explanation as to why their house was acting strange. Not only that, but people seemed to want paranormal activity in their life. They'd play all sorts of games to invite us in, and once we were in, rather than screaming and trying to get us out, they'd document the whole event to show it off on the internet.

One day, sometime in 2003, I decided to figure out why. I believed I would save the entirety of evil, to figure out what exactly made demons so unthreatening nowadays. I would enter an American town, latch onto a person, and see what it was. There was a sleepover of five or six girls, who had taken out a Ouija board. Naturally, I joined. It was a standard game, where I began to do strange motions and give bizarre, unclear answers to their shallow questions of who they will marry and confirming/denying gossip. I didn't actually know the answers, I just knew which ones they wanted to hear.

As teenagers usually do, they forget to tell me goodbye, therefore not damning me back to the spirit world and instead leaving me here on Earth with the host of the sleepover.

Her house was on the smaller side, though it seemed like a normal house in this town. I spotted a mother, but no father, the appliances broke and tensions were in the air without any help from me. For the first time since 1894, I visited a school; they've changed a lot since then. They've gotten larger, with more kids, and the curriculum is more advanced than counting sticks.

As I sat in class with her, and observed the thoughts of each student, noting their increased anxiety over their own social lives and futures, and feeling a sense of pain as I went on in this new, modern world, observing the lives of individual souls, that is far more terrifying than tipping over objects and blowing out candles.




Here in this world, I learned about fear and loneliness. Even those who seemed to have it together inside were struggling with their own doubts and conflicts. They knew the pettiness and insignificance of their own lives, and feared it.

Each period, someone was worried about who they would find; they were worried of being harassed, rejected, humiliated or ignored. Back in the olden times, people only cared that they had lunch, but now the cafeteria is a battleground of social cliques and loners.

Humanity had finally learned that the true evil comes from themselves, not from the other side.

Along with this new discovery, my dark soul crafted for evil had found a new sense of sympathy. Although it would be easy to turn to psychological methods of torture on humans rather than physical or spiritual ones, I couldn't bring myself to add to these soul's pain. Instead, I desired a new career of guiding them out of it.

Such was not what I'm supposed to do. It is the angels that are meant for love and for light. My old demon friends mocked me, claiming I had gone soft. I sat on the edge of two realms, gazing upon humanity. Wherever I went, disaster would follow, simply because I was constructed that way.

Perhaps I could help the world by appearing where the bad reside, and to bring them disaster. I spent my hours in miserable prison cells and death rows, amongst the criminals. At first, it was great to punish those who needed to be punished, to see them fade away in solitary confinement, smashing their heads against concrete walls.

What I would also learn is how complex each human is. I did not only see hardened criminals, remorseless and cold, but those falsely accused, or those who killed an abuser, and my spirits fell. Who in this world was good, and who was bad? Such answers would only be known by an angel. I must transform to one.

I had read in ancient Latin texts that for a demon to turn into an angel, they had to fall in requited love with one. If a demon was good enough to not only feel true, sincere love, and if an angel could see the good in them, they would not be a demon at all.

An angel I could come into contact to was Luna, as she was the most active archangel at the moment. It would be easy to fall in love with angels, as they are perfect beings. I could admire one, wish to be one, and want to keep that light protected. But Luna was complicated.

Her job was to rid the world of entities such as myself, and was sent to attack me and damn me back into the realm of darkness. So, I hid in the darkest corners, running away from her. Seeing her eloquently lift the beautiful people of this world out of their dark paths, and save others from spiraling down the wrong routes, I grew to admire her personally. I wanted to meet her, to learn each detail of her life. But how, without being kidnapped?

I am a crafty and intelligent soul. I can manifest myself into a person, though I can only be impoverished. As a result, I snuck into the shadows of London, as a small orphan, ragged and homeless. She, an angel, would feel immediate empathy and not even stop to think of who I may truly be. Such is the nature of angels. Luna became a wealthy entrepreneur, as angels can become people too. The difference is that angels can transform into whatever they want to be; they are not stuck in the lower corners.

In this sense, evil is always at the mercy of goodness. When Luna found me, not realizing who I was, she took me in and treated me as her own son. I was clothed and fed and bathed, loved after and cared for.

I felt moved by this act of kindness, and inside of my dark self, I felt an increasing amount of pain within me, and an urge to strive towards the angel realm. I was changed forever, and could no longer return to the demon realm and continue to spend my years taunting and torturing other souls.

Not only that, but I began to wish for Luna to be with me forever for more than just my own soul. She was kind and generous, someone who was everything I aspired to be, made into a real manifestation. Our love was impossible to achieve, yet something I dreamed of each night.

She was still set on finding the demon known as Lux in Tenebris, who had been hiding from eternal torment, and was running in Earth. Little did she know it was me, and if I was only able to tell her how I was crafted into hell. That I was not like the others who fell into wickedness. It was not my fault I was there, it was not my choice nor my desire. I could have been an angel like her, only if I started in a different place.

While she did not see the evil entity I was, her eyes lit bright inside of mine, her touch was gentle and her voice was soft. She held me gently, and took my hand in every moment in this world. I was forced to attend school, and walk amongst the humans and their stresses. I was with the young ones, full of innocence, that would smile brightly. But I was over three hundred years old, and knew how hard the world would sting. Luna alone was my lifeline, the one who instilled hope in me, and told me of all the lovely things in this world from ice cream to friendship.

Together we grew a carefree, joyful feeling, a brave unity in this world of light and darkness. It would break her heart if she knew who I was.

Instead, I told her that I was an angel, locked into the body of an orphan to test the kindness of humans here on Earth. Lies rolled off my lip, telling each story of every cynical mindset and every kind stranger, creating my dream world where I am an angel made of warm and loving light. Where I am Luna.

Perhaps I could keep this lie going, and she would finally see that we were meant to be one. But not as a child. I transformed to an adult right in front of her, demonstrating my power, and that we could be together if she chose. The creatures of darkness could appear attractive-sometimes they appear more attractive than the light. But an angel like Luna would be too intelligent to see a creature such as me as an angel for so long.

It is only the blind and misguided humans who see us as something beautiful. Although I knew the attempt was pointless, I still could no longer hold back my love for her.

I felt her eyes melt, and her body swoon. She kissed me, and grabbed for my hand. I closed my eyes, and began to imagine what our years together may look like, now that she feels the way I feel.

It was all working-I was growing more angelic each day. Still, I felt empty, and I knew the reason was that I could no longer live this lie. I blurted out, "you should know...my name is Lux in Tenebris. You have spent years searching for me."

The dark realm stood in the back of my mind as she took me in her arms, embracing me...I haven't heard their voices, urging me to return, or to do their bidding, yet I feared they were still there, waiting for my temptations, and that now she would send me back to them for being an imposter.

"I knew you were an angel. It just had to be unlocked." She spoke to me, her voice soothing my tensed muscles and putting my reckless mind at ease. And in that moment, I felt myself glow at last, in my penury and wretchedness, into something better than what I once was.

Anonymous



# Half An Hour

There are eight, Four on the water trampoline, Three on the water mat, One on the dock, Fishing. Fishing in the hopelessly empty waters near the dock. With patience at his side and perseverance in his pocket, He waits.

There are eight, Three on the water trampoline, Two on the water mat, Three on the dock, Fishing. Fishing in the shallow waters that flow beneath the dock of 2 Sleepers Island. With kindness in his heart, He helps them choose the appropriate hook And cast their petite lines into the water.



# The Thing About Love

The topic I seem to come across everyday is love. It doesn't matter if it's a family or non-family type of love, it just seems to pop up unexpectedly. At times I do feel like a hopeless romantic, mesmerized by how there is so much love around the world and how it may come across my path as well. Other times I am annoyed by it, frustrated at other people who do cliché things. Small fluff makes everything seem so innocent. It all depends on the situation. Is the love shown adorable or gross? My family constantly reminds me that they want the best for me because they love me. I believe them but I get tired of the same reasoning over and over



again. Not everything is done out of love. Some things are done because you have to, since you don't have a choice.

I am realistic, yet imaginative. When I'm out in the real world; trying to understand the logic and reasoning, I look at things from a realistic point of view. You just say that because if you did what we asked you to do, you would get in trouble. So, technically yes you could do something about it but you choose not to so you can protect yourself. If there is anything I learned in the world, it is that you can always do something.

Many people do things out of love. Crazy, unexplainable things. In the heat of the moment, it feels as if this is the only opportunity for you to impress them, to show them that they deserve you and to show that you are committed to them and them only. But sometimes the other person doesn't feel that way. Maybe they never have felt that way. From what I've seen and read before, it is heartbreaking and unimaginable for the person. They may go into denial thinking they could have said something else or hung out with them more. Sometimes that may never be the case and the person they were in love with fell out of love with them. I couldn't imagine how people do it so easily, they make a conversation look simple and quick. I observe the relationships that I see and I've come to the conclusion that many people want to jump into relationships or hold on to a toxic one because they want to feel love. I think that us, being human, we naturally crave and want attention and love from someone. I think that because of this nature we have made ways and ideas in our head telling us that if we don't find this we won't be happy. I think that this allows for short-term relationships and toxic relationships to form. We believe that if we are not romantically involved with someone then we are unhappy.

We also believe that if we don't stay with someone we won't ever find someone else. I have been a person who believes that we should be patient when it comes to this because if we aren't patient the topic of love will not be special, it will be ruined and consume our lives making us all crazy inside and second-guessing every decision we make.

I've observed people that come across my life become affected by a toxic relationship. They are sweet and gentle yet fierce if you mess with them in the wrong way. The thing is... he broke her. He was controlling and didn't let her do many things. Her friends had tried to talk her out of it but she kept on insisting it was 'love'. Finally, she's come to her senses and realized who he truly was. This makes me curious. She knew the signs of a toxic relationship but she ignored them? As time passed on I realized that she was afraid. Not of him, but of being alone. She wanted somebody to be there for her, she wanted that feeling of being loved and adored by someone else.

Love can do many things. It can bring happiness or bitterness. It can make or break someone. Love is delicate yet powerful. It has the potential to change someone. The world often misuses the word. It is mistaken for other things such as infatuation and lust. If people around the world truly knew what love meant then we'd be in a much better place.



Anonymous



Their Last Slave

There she was, Thinking she built her wall High enough that she could clearly see and talk to the stars But then they came and took one brick after another Until the wall came crashing down She was left exposed. When they left, it took her months to rebuild. Countless hours, adding brick after brick in the blazing hot sun At night, the moon helped rebuild her anger They destroyed the wall that befriended every star Her anger was her strength Her tears were the glue that plastered every brick together Her ambition, the height of that wall She would look up every night to the stars, and say "soon" Years later, the wall was rebuilt, and they came back They tried to remove the bricks, but they wouldn't budge this time So they started to climb, but never got close to reaching the stars.

Jenniviv Bansah

It doesn't care about your gender, It doesn't care what country you grew up in, It doesn't care about your siblings, Or the places you have been.

It doesn't care if you've got an education, It doesn't care about the friendships you have made, It doesn't care what religion you practice, Or what games you have played.

It doesn't care if you are married, It doesn't care if you have just got a promotion, It doesn't care that you just bought your first home, Or if your dream is to cross every ocean.

> You can hope they discover it quickly, Before it gets out of hand, You can try to predict it coming But this disease is never planned.

> Intensive care is needed 48 hour rounds, Your mentality is completely changed, You may even shed several pounds.

#### But

You still have a family, You still have love, You still have support, You still have community.

You must have faith, You must have hope, You must have determination And the willingness to cope.

You can't go back in time, You can't reverse the clock, You must continue to move forward, and the fight must never stop.

Amanda Fameli

Suraya Ortiz

It

ROSE

around and around go our hopes, in a spiral of red chaos,

flaunting our opinions and beliefs,

a brief smooth sailing of the stem,

only to be interrupted by our sharp fears,

the prickles only hinder our decisions,

but we let our petals bloom,

and our beauty unite us.

Micaela Udell

100

Judith Fierman

### CASE TITLE: Diary of a Haunted Paralytic

<u>Case Number:</u> 39426801 <u>Name:</u> XXXX XXX <u>Age:</u> 17 <u>Date reported missing:</u> Since October 13th, 2003 <u>Description:</u> The following passages are excerpts from the private diary of 17 year

old XXXX XXX used in the investigation after her mysterious disappearance and suspected kidnapping. Throughout the progression of these entries, and ending with the last entry she wrote, a suspicious figure is described in her room in the days preceding her absence. This case was opened two days after her mother found her bed neatly made (reportedly more neatly than normal) and her daughter nowhere to be found.

Status: Unsolved

#### October 9th, 2017

You will never guess what happened to me today. I died. Well...I dreamt I did.

I was floating in a dense empty space, surrounded by darkness. I was alone, and I consciously felt my innards as if I were free falling, or standing on the edge of a cliff. My arms were flailing around, tracing wide arcs around my body, trying to grab hold of something...anything...but all they did was move in slow motion through the darkness. All around me I could hear whispers and metallic clicking, and a high pitched ringing noise getting louder, and louder. It was horrible, and the ringing continued to get more shrill and increase in volume, seemingly coming from both within my head and the terrible emptiness around me. Louder and louder, it rang incessantly until I was sure my ears were going to bleed, and my eyes were squeezed shut in pain.

#### And then there was silence. Everything stopped.

I opened my eyes...I actually opened my eyes...and realizing it was only a dream, I tried to wipe the sweat that had dripped down my temple onto my ear. But my arm didn't move. Nothing moved. Not my toes, not my head, neck, legs. Nothing. Only my eyes could swivel back and forth in terror; my frozen lips blocking the intense scream my brain told my body to make. That's how mom found me: mute, sweaty, and struggling to breathe with tears rolling from my eyes.

We went to the doctor later. "Sleep paralysis", she said, "A fairly common event in the US. It only lasts a few minutes, but is always a very frightening experience indeed. We aren't sure the exact causes of it, and there is no real 'cure', per se, so I recommend trying to relax before bed and getting early nights rest. Try to limit your stress". Not like I could've told myself that. Totally looking forward to not being able to move every time I wake up.



After the doctor's visit I went late to school. Today was actually a pretty good day. Carter bought me my favorite candy (he knows me so well at this point he's such a great boyfriend) and the test, essay, and project I got back were all above 95. Honestly, I think all my teachers love me. Weird how life seems to have a balance of good and bad-ups and downs.

### **October 10th, 2017**

It happened again today, only this time I didn't have the dream. I didn't dream at all. I just woke up, and immediately knew it had happened again: my body felt numb and heavy, and it was as if I was aware the weight of each atom in my body resting against the bed, yet distant from it as if they were all individual and not connected within me. The weight was suffocating. It felt like all the air in the room was being sucked out, and my lungs felt more and more compressed every second. I sucked in each breath slowly since my disconnected body was still in sleep mode, and was unable to breathe as fast as my brain wanted to. I imagined my brain slowly becoming small and wrinkly as if all this pressure were squeezing it like a grape. But there was something else. Another weird intuition I was feeling. I had this feeling, like someone was watching me, or like there was someone else in the room, and the violent red lights of my alarm clock were the only eerie evidence that I was actually conscious. My blackout curtains, the ones I had bought to protect me from the light of the morning sun, were suddenly my worst enemies: closing me off from the outside world and confining me to what felt like the darkest corner of the universe. Rotating my eyes around the dark room, I had returned once again to my alarm clock, and spent the rest of my time while paralyzed watching the seconds go by. My body slowly regained feeling and flexibility like a block of iron slowly melting into liquid, but I never shook the feeling of being watched. The first thing my body did when I fully regained control of itself...was shiver.

#### **October 11th, 2017**

Today something was different...there was something in my room. I could hear it. I breathed slowly, with a quiet, raspy, humming sound. I could smell the musky, wet scent of it, and I could feel its presence in the sudden temperature drop in the room. And then I saw it. Two eyes...two red eyes...were floating in the opposite corner of my room. There was no mistaking it. All the nights where I had trouble falling asleep had given me enough time to accurately memorize the layout of my room, and these red dots were not the fire alarm. Wide eyed, I had watched as the eyes blinked simultaneously, disappearing for a second, and then reappeared 3 feet closer to my bed in conjunction with a heavy, scraping sound. It was now about 6 feet from my bed. I couldn't pull the covers over my face with my body lying useless and unresponsive...although I doubt that would have assuaged my fear...so I just squeezed my eyes shut and counted the seconds until I could actually curl my toes. During that time, however, it hadn't moved again. I'm sure of it. I would've heard its...appendages (although I'm not quite sure what they are)...scrape the floor again. But that didn't make the waiting any easier: the minutes of agonizing semi-silence, the doubt of wondering if I should open my eyes to check if I was just imagining things, and then the immediate terror at the thought of what I may see if I was right. When I was sure I had regained all feeling, I waited until I could see the light of the morning sun glowing behind my evelids before moving a muscle. When I opened my eyes, it was gone, and I was left stiff, sore, and scared.

My teachers have begun holding me after class. They prompt me about the dark circles under my eyes, the red vines that cross hatch my tired eyes, and my unkempt hair. They ask if everything's ok, and why the light in my eyes and the glow on my face have been snuffed to dull and unresponsive expressions. They make puzzled faces at me when I twitch and shy away from their touch, and concern drips from their voices in thick globs like honey. They don't know anything. They can't. I haven't told anyone. I can't. They'll think I'm schizophrenic and send me away to be locked up in sterile white rooms with padding and cameras and pills and shock therapy and...I can't tell anyone. Maybe it will go away. Maybe it won't.

#### **October 12th, 2017**

I'm not going to school anymore. At least for now, until these paralytic episodes go away. Or until the thing in the corner gets me. *I'm kidding.* 

It did the same thing today: it got closer with more heavy shuffling until it was only about 3 feet away. A quick peek had confirmed this estimate, and I had seen the eyes floating closer than ever. Abruptly, it let out a long, slow hiss. It was at this point I started crying, and thank god for the paralysis, or else the body-shaking sobbing my brain commanded me to make would've clearly drawn the thing's attention. It just stood there hissing, it's eyes swaying slightly left and right. Teasing me. Mocking me. Challenging me. I had held my breath and braced myself, eyes sealed shut, for fear it would pounce on me at any moment. It never did. And just as the days before, when I opened my eyes after regaining my strength...it was gone.

#### **October 13th, 2017**

It touched me today.

It started back in the corner. It seemed so far away, compared to how close it had been yesterday. The extra space was almost comforting. Almost.

Immediately after I spotted it, it lurched abruptly and started towards me quickly: scraping the floor with each step and quickening its breath every inch it moved. And then it was right above me. The closest it ever was. I could smell its rancid breath, I could feel the pulsation of its body with each rhythmic exhale, and I swear it was so close I saw my reflection in its glowing, red eyes. Slowly, it smiled. An unsettlingly exaggerated arc of reflectively white teeth appeared through the darkness. These weren't jagged or pointy teeth...but a squared off...dare I say human -like...set of pearly whites. For what seemed like an eternity, its smile continued to grow. Wider, and wider, until it spanned about a foot in length: like a sick, twisted, cheshire cat from Alice in Wonderland. And then it laughed. And when I say laugh I mean it let out a broken hiss, and its smile became a sneer.

And then it touched me. All felt was an unsettlingly long, sharp nail trace the side of my head staring at my temple and moving to my jaw. Then I passed out.

It's now almost 2am as I write this. I'm too afraid to go to sleep. One thought keeps circling my mind like a vulture: if it wasn't afraid to touch me today...what will it do tomorrow...



Darya Khodakhah

# Who Am'I?

1

Flowers blooming, Mother's Day, I was born. White, soft, missing, my baby blanket, gone forever. Confident, smart, hard worker, names for me. Soft sand on my feet, the Californian beaches. Wet eyes, puddles streaming down, the horrors of my past hit me. Balloons, 12th birthday, forgotten lunch, crying, hungry and by myself, all alone. Happy place, my room. Highs and lows. Still figuring myself out.

> To conquer the world, my dream. Friends, all of me. Appreciation for ones who care, who love, who are there. Veterinarian, my legacy. Family, my life. End of the day, at peace. Waiting for tomorrow and the next. Flowers willing, in front of me. Lauren Unterreiner

> > Risako Yokoi

# A Sonnet for the Purely Hearted

When I glance into your beautiful eyes I'm taken on a journey to your soul, A pure heart surrounded by trees and skies Frolicking in the bright moonlight, so whole. Below the night with a painted starry gaze, Your head rests on my shoulder as we dance. For you, my heart beats fast and burns ablaze As I am caught in a stunning romance My hand--which rested in your hand--lets go; And moves to touch your freckled cheek so soft, Softly I pull your head up from a bow And now I feel like my heart is a loft. We kiss for a moment; we feel too short, But embrace it once more and shan't abort.

Michael Barletta





about realities

Ellian Cole believed in temporary realities, an idea that one moment in itself was its own reality, but with its own rules and logistics. Ellian found that her temporary realities were like bubbles; they popped on their own eventually, but someone could burst them before its time was up. Currently, her reality was her bed, which was a bubble her own mother couldn't burst no matter how hard she tried. She woke up at seven thirty on Wednesday morning, beyond the point of oversleeping. Three alarm clocks couldn't wake her up, but a text message from Rowan Batowski could, as he created and popped bubbles on his own accord.

# From: Rowan 07:27 I'm outside your house. We're skipping first period.

When Ellian was a little girl, her parents recited her full name to scare her into behaving for the rest of the day. Now, nothing really scared her. You could tell her there was a monster in her room and she would turn down the covers and fall asleep in there anyways. There were only few things that could pull Ellian from her reverie, and Rowan tended to know what they are.

To keep Rowan from waiting any longer, she didn't bother to brush her hair or make her bed, and tucked the white shirt she went to bed into the pair of jeans on the floor. She remembered her glasses and books but she couldn't be bothered to put them back in her bag from the night before. With one hand turning the doorknob, the other carrying her books, she stuffed her feet in old brown flats that peeled off at the toe. Rowan watched her struggle opening the door, and considered everything she attempted to juggle in her hands. Although he knew better than to ask her if she needed help, he still leaned over to open the passenger door.

The first thing Rowan said was not 'good morning', but asked if he should drive their normal morning route before their separate first period class. Ellian nodded, flipping through CD cases until she found the one she wanted to listen to. They first stopped at a cafe outside Jefferson Valley, only because Ellian was afraid they'd be caught from their northern high school. Ellian got chamomile tea and a scone. Rowan got black coffee, and a plain bagel with cream cheese. Despite them getting breakfast on the south side of town, they snuck to the stream behind the school in fear of getting caught playing hooky. With breakfast and beverages in hand, they walked through fallen leaves and branches. Ellian missed early autumn, where the leaves crunched under her feet. Instead, the leaves squished under her mother's shoes. It had rained last night.

They soon reached a boulder, which was elevated enough to make Ellian take careful steps. Rowan already reached the end, sitting down and letting his feet dangle off the sharp edge. Ellian sat cross-legged and drank her tea before it had the chance to get even colder. The two sat in near-silence, the only sounds being birds and their chewing.

"What's due?" Ellian asked.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, there has to be some reason why we're skipping first period. Something must be due today."

Rowan rolled his eyes, for the fact he could no longer hide anything from her.

"It's just a little essay that I forgot to do. No big deal."

"If it was 'no big deal' I think you would've done it. That can't be all you didn't do."

He shook his head. "Nice shoes, Ellen." Ellian laughed dryly, "I think they go well with my punk librarian look, don't you think?" They chuckled. A little bubble was created surrounding Rowan and Ellian as they sat shoulder to shoulder, but their bubble popped when Rowan checked the time.

"Are you ready to head back?" Rowan asked her, crumpling the wrapper his breakfast came in, then putting it into his empty cup. "First period is almost over." Ellian sighed, not wanting to part with her temporary asylum. With their little bubble. Finally, she nodded, and Rowan helped her up. The two walked back to the car, slightly saddened about the reality they now had to face.

Brianna Jackman

Risako Yoki

# A Toast For Change

I was hesitant.

I remember when I heard many tragedies occurring all over the world, I heard the protesters chanting for freedom, I saw thousands of Palestinian kids being killed on the news, I worried about how to change the world, I thought that I wouldn't be able to change it.

But, I want to change.

I am a strong, passionate woman. I think that the whole world is beautiful and that some people are just too stubborn to see, I need to be able to help people in other countries, I try to show people how we can help, I feel driven. I forgive those who are able to help, but don't help.

Now I can change.

I will become a humanitarian, and a lawyer.
I choose to dream outside the box,
I dream that I'll be remembered.
I hope that I can be known for positive change.
I predict I will be successful.
I know the world will be better,

I will change.

Jeannine Eljamal



# How To Float

I'm watching you fall apart at the seams and I feel so helpless I watch as what you used to be fades into this shell of a person I watch as everyone you love is pushed away I watch as only darkness enters, overcomes, and grips your soul, squeezing the remaining life I'm reaching out, trying to pull you out of your head Trying to fix the broken parts Trying to mend your wings But all of my advances have failed Like you said, how can I help you when you don't want help

How can I watch, as you erode away How can I try to fix you, when I feel like giving up and plunge into the abyss of Nothingness and nebulous emotions My agonizing thoughts The fear of losing you and feeling myself plummet deeper into the numbness

How do you tell the one that you love that you aren't okay How do you express to them that it isn't their fault, you were manufactured this way How do you deal with the pain in their eyes How do you deal with the constant questions How do you deal with telling them that you don't wanna hang on How do I tell you that I might leave you in order to sink and drown alone How do I tell you that I don't want to do this I close my eyes and block out your cries, I sink deeper into my sorrows I watch as you close your eyes take your last breath and fall in I watch from underneath, as you sink gracefully and let death overcome you I swim to you I can't I won't I refuse to let you drown I plead with you to let me teach you how to fly, and when it's time, let me kiss your wings and watch you soar

After, I begin to detach myself and accept the watery grave As I turn, you grab me and beg me to teach me how to float

Fear the obscure Fear the desire to know the unknown lurking in the shadows, or beneath the soles of our feet Fear the beauty in the scythe But never fear me Never deny me and my love for you Never deny the bond that was forged between us, in which encompasses our dark secrets and desires Where we are both stripped of our facade, and see each other for who we are and for what we really are Broken and afraid But together

Anonymous

Brianna Martinez

### Seeing Tragedy In Color

The world is enormous, yet its cruelty still finds a way to reach you. The news reports the tragic facts to the people who don't feel their impact, except for when the world decides it's your turn. This time, it was my turn. Or it was my father's turn. There were no news stories to cover what happened because the tragedy wasn't large enough. It wouldn't get enough attention because it happens frequently on the highways. But when it does occur, all of the rubberneckers seem to care. However, they aren't actually interested in how the family might feel. All they desire to know are the details of the accident and then, they punch the gas pedal to the floors until they are far enough away from the disaster to forget about it. I imagine there were rubberneckers and police officers and ambulances. However, none of the bystanders recognized how the incident affected the family. No one cared to. And unfortunately, I couldn't floor my gas pedal here.

It was August 23, 2017. Underneath the cloudless sky my friend and I sat outside, sipping ice cold water and discussing what we planned to do with the remaining days of summer. We had practiced our twirls and our batons rested next to our tan thighs. My siblings were relaxing inside my tudor house, being blinded by the television.

It was around 4:30 when my dad returned home from the gym. My friend and I had relocated to my white kitchen because the August heat was thick enough to cut. Dad came in through the front door and headed straight for the snack cabinet. His brown hair was not brushed and was bound with curly knots. He wore a pair of loosely tied New Balance sneakers that molded to the shape of his feet. His friendly smile hid behind his parallel lips that were glued together in shock. Routinely, he walked into the kitchen to eat the Smart food popcorn that he loved.

As he reached for the bag, I noticed a white plastic hospital band glistening in the fluorescent, kitchen light. "Why do you have a hospital band on your arm?" I asked, laughing in front of my friend. *Just a check up, he would say. I went to the doctor for my back, he would say.* 

He pulled out the bag and his hand dove to grab a handful of the the popcorn, "Because I totaled my car."

What did he just say? "Totaled my car"? I've heard those words every day on the news. The numbers that were killed and how it happened. The images of the dented bumpers and inflated airbags. But did it just come out of my father's mouth?

No, so then it wasn't a check up. He was driving and suddenly crashed into---I choked on my laugh. My brain couldn't understand what was happening. I was blinded for a minute. When I was able to open my eyes to reality, he had grabbed the popcorn bag and walked out of the kitchen. I could feel my heart in my throat, the edge of my chin touching my shirt, and the moisture accumulating within my eyes. But every ounce of shock that was rising had to be disregarded as I noticed my friend's uncomfortable stare. Her face was stuck between laughing and frowning. I'm sure she didn't know what to do. And the funny thing was, neither did I. Cry? Laugh? Run and hide? Tell her to go home? I sat there and smiled. "Well, I don't know what that was about," I said. Her face let go of the tension and filled with relief. Sadly, I wasn't able to experience the same sense of relief. My father was nearly killed in a car accident. What if he died?

Stunned myself, I thought back and realized that at the same time that he had to accept the reality that he was going to crash, I sat in my backyard, oblivious. I was probably smiling in the warmth of the summer when he was terrified he would lose his life as metal crunched on metal. In that moment, his car was crashing and no one was there to protect him. But, he had protected me my entire life. And during that possible, final millisecond where we would both breathe together on earth for the last time, I wouldn't have known or appreciated it.

But that's my anxiety. Because that didn't happen. So, I took a deep breath and walked upstairs. His door was open and ESPN was flashing across the screen. I gave him a hug, and told him how happy I was that he wasn't much more hurt. I could sense that he was still in shock by the way his brown eyes frantically moved from side to side and his tense posture that couldn't relax. I wanted to comfort him so badly, but I wasn't capable of it in this moment. Not until I was stable enough to gather myself. So, I wrapped my arms around him for a minute, told him how much I loved him and left his room.

As I walked down the stairs, I heard my mom reminding us that we had to bring my sister to a birthday party. My mom knew about my Dad's accident but was trying to stop her own rush of anxiety until she had some time of her own to sit down and process it. So, she kept her distance and distracted herself by keeping us on our daily schedule.

As usual, we were late, so I was forced to quickly dry my tears away. My mom didn't ask what was wrong. She knew, but we both understood there was no use in talking about it unless we had the time to weep. But we didn't, so I was just quiet as we piled into our Ford Explorer. It was a sad ride as usually I was the one blasting The High School Musical soundtrack and rolling down the windows. I'd belt the lyrics and stick my hand out in the summer air, letting the wind pass through my fingers like rushing water. It would flow through the gaps between my fingers as if I had placed my hand beneath the nozzle of a sink and turned it on. The only thing was, if you pushed against the rushing water, it would build a puddle in the palm of your hand. It would then seep through your fingers and down the drain, until you pulled your hand away and let it flow directly into the metal of the sink. I would push against the wind until the build up made my arm ache. Pushing and shoving so that it couldn't flow and I wouldn't have to acknowledge it. Then, I had to let it go because there was too much pressure, and all of the rushing water would spill. It was out of my control though. So as I let the air lace through my hand, I realized rushing water will rush towards me, but I must decide how to react.

The car ride continued for another half an hour or so. I couldn't tell, though, my mind was drifting off somewhere else, thinking about what could have happened. However, in that moment, I wanted to forget it all. So, I sat in the passenger's seat of the car and let the High School Musical playlist fill my ears.

The day progressed until darkness fell and the sun set on that August night. I laid on my bed in shock, drowning. It was late but I needed my dad. I needed to know that he was there. So, I ripped the blankets off of my legs and searched for him. I imagined how the stranger who pulled over to help my father searched through the broken glass and metal to find him. I had to rummage through the anxious debris within

Josephine Robb

my mind to find a stable place to talk to my father. Eventually, I was able to find that place, but I only reached peace when I was able to be next to him.

I tiptoed into my parents room and glanced at the clock: 10:45. The blue rug tickled my toes and I felt the humidity seeping in again from the navy sky. My dad was fast asleep wearing his hospital-gown-blue pajama bottoms. I watched his chest move up and down. He was alive and here. I didn't want to bother him but ultimately decided to wake him. He lifted his cheek off of the aquamarine striped pillow and looked at me. When his eyes found me, I saw he was tired as the teal crescent moons dimly beamed under his eyes. Instead of saying anything, I wrapped my arms around him and burrowed between my parents for what seemed like forever. I wanted it to be forever. Just us. Hearing the sounds of my parents' azure veins pump eternally. As I listened for forever, I turned to glance at the alarm clock, again. The numbers blinked red, screaming at me that the world doesn't slow down, even when we hit a red light. However, as we look for strength to propel us forward, we are lifted and comforted by the support provided by those that don't drive away. Hopefully, there won't be as many people that avoid the incident and there will be more that pull over to provide support.

When my father got into the car accident, I can only imagine how much red he expected to see. The red of the police sirens and of his blood. The cracked maroon tail lights that lead his BMW. But I stopped thinking about it. Because a man pulled over and helped him during a time of shock. And after remembering the kindness within his soul, all I heard that night between my parents was the beating of our rose hearts, synchronized and so full and rich with the warm red of love.

When I woke up the next morning, I was still in the place I had shed blue. I could see the streaks of my tears across the pillow. My dad was up, probably running in the rushing wind. His New Balance sneakers striking the concrete as his blush heart fiercely pumped his blood. The roses that lined my neighbors front garden swaying in the wind when he passed them, just like my heart trembling when I thought about the accident. My dad was still here with me. He was still working hard to keep us happy. He was till enjoying exercising and running with my dog, Charlie. He was still playing on the XBox, even though it was my brother's. He was still here and I was grateful for him.

So, maybe the world seems cruel, but it is beautiful. I may not have been able to punch the gas pedal when I was informed of what had happened, but my family and I can now run in the rushing wind, knowing that he is here. So, thank you, World.

Thank you for keeping my dad here with me.

Elisabeth Eiff



# Latibule

A hiding place; a place of safety and comfort, We go here when we are afraid: We imagine ourselves drifting away, Hoping to feel warm like the summer.

The monsters can't come inside, We cowered in fear As if a light caught a deer, But we still remain with our pride. We want to fight the monsters with everything we've got, Fight them back with rage While unaware of the cage; While we are tired, we see what we fought. You give me your tired, your poor

For we will nourish, care, and send them to war; They were nothing while they were yours and now they've become something even more.

You gave them threats, deaths, and watched them as they left, We gave them love, care and everything we thought was fair.

They feared you when you took their prized possession, They stood by us when we healed them from depression.

They were broken and wounded before, Now they have comfort and are ready to roar.

Anonymous

### The Dance Of Time

The summoning of children one by one We all line up for death to come, A fearful whisper that sweeps through the hall That all of the children must come to a crawl



We go through life on a conveyor belt With the same old hand that has been dealt Those alive at the dawn of time Started this dance without rhythm or rhyme

So how do you go on when your feet start to stumble and How do you dance when you fear you may fumble The dance can't be changed and it can't be renewed So I guess we'll keep dancing until the dance of time is through.

Olivia Nelson



Day Five

It has officially been five days since I graduated college. It, completely coincidentally, has also been five days since I realized I was completely lacking a future. Is that too over dramatic? *Well*. Maybe slightly. The truth is, I think I spent all of my high school career convincing myself that I just had to get into the perfect college and that then my life would be set. And then I spent all of my college career waiting for that feeling of "being set" to kick in. And then it didn't. Fast forward some, and now I'm a college grad kicking around, doing her sort-of-weekly check of the houses inventory so I know what I need to pick up after work... *Toilet paper, fresh cereal, and a gallon of 2% milk...* Yup. This is what my life has become...

'Sort of weekly' house inventory checks.

"Someone's up early..." I pop my head out from the bottom of the fridge to see Gavin's undeniable head of tangled sandy brown hair standing groggily above me, today it's accompanied by an unfortunately attractive five o'clock shadow.

"Gavin it's ten in the morning. That's not exactly early." He stops a moment and looks at his wrist as if there were a watch there. There isn't, and I promise you there hasn't been recently.

"Well, I guess you're right," he replies. I give a small laugh, and Gavin swings his head over the fridge door to peer inside. "No milk..."

"Nope. No cereal either." I hold up the post it note, with notes I've scrawled out and what I determine to be our current needs.

"I'm stopping by the convenience store after work, you'll have to figure out something else until then. Maybe learn how to crack open an egg..? Don't worry, it's not as scary as you think." I dish out a small smile so he knows I'm only teasing.

"Ah the trials and tribulations of the modern twenty-three year old male." "You're an idiot," I offer.

"A sexy idiot." My eyes glance over to him.

"Yeah, well maybe... Still an idiot. Well I have to go to work. I'll be home later." I slip my jacket over my shoulders and grab my bike helmet.

"Alright, I love you. Have fun selling multipurpose smartphone pillows."

"Actually, Gav, it's travel speakers this month... Love you too." I step out onto the front stoop, closing the door behind me and letting my back collapse into it, watching as the air escapes my lungs and materializes around me. My jacket slides with ease down the foggy glass of the door and carries my body into a crouch that makes me look kind of like a frog. *Do I though?* I'm not really sure I do anymore. I used to, and I'm not just saying that, I really did.

My back feels a sudden push from behind, and I jolt my head around.

"What are you still doing here?" It's Gavin, he's thrown on a solid gray sweatshirt and begun to push the door open.

"Oh y'know, just taking a minute..." He makes a puzzled face, then joins me in his variation of the sort of frog squat I'm in on the ground.

"What's on your mind little lady?" He's doing a weird sort of cowboy voice, but somehow it's cute. It's caring, and it's soft... It's completely Gavin.

For a second I relax as his head tilts slightly down so that it's level with mine. He's looking straight out into the frosty morning air just like me, it's like he's trying to get my perspective. As if maybe catching the right angle towards the horizon will help him get in my head and know how to help me with whatever's on my mind. But then it's guilt.

"Oh it's nothing," I blow a raspberry in a fuddled attempt to convey my point. "Just the whole... I can't believe we just graduated. We're like *adults now*." *He chuckles*.

"We graduated college, not high school! We've been adults."

"No I mean like... *Adults adults.*" He doesn't say anything. He doesn't get it. "Sorry, I really should get going. I'm going to be late." He checked his fictional watch again. What a bad joke."

"Woah, look at that. Better get going Jen." He kisses me on the forehead. I stand up and start climbing on top the saddle of my bike. "Send my regards to the pillows."

"Travel speakers!"

\*\*\*\*\*

I think it's about the third hour of standing beneath the neon "As Seen On TV" sign every day that makes work truly unbearable. We're stuck in these shitty uniforms too, that are like weird aprons in an atrocious blue color. There's also about a gajillion pockets on the front just to ensure that they are baggy and unflattering, which is actually entirely unhelpful because just about the only thing I keep in any of them is a golf pencil that I took from one of the kiosk drawers because it makes me feel like a professional.

When I got this job, there was something sort of exciting about it. I was a freshman in college and I remember I was just determined to feel like I was making it on my own. Even with the job at the kiosk my parents were still paying just about every penny of my tuition, but I was gonna afford the apartment on my own. It's not like my parents couldn't afford it, we're a pretty well off family. I just wanted to feel like an adult, I guess. There was something exciting about that to me; about having a job, living on my own. Gavin would call it the feeling of "grabbing life by the balls". I guess that's one way to put it.

Golf pencil situated in my drooping bun, I get to work stacking the latest shipment of portable travel speakers into tree shaped towers. They're the featured item of the month, needless to say, like nearly every product we sell at the "As Seen On TV" kiosk, they're not the best... So I can't exactly say that we're dealing with overwhelming amounts of customers.

"Uh, hi!"

Now, naturally given the circumstances, the benign voice from over my shoulder scared the life out of me, so much so that I lost my balance enough to knock over the entire *stack of speakers I was working on*.

"Oh my goodness! I-I am so sorry. I didn't mean to scare you like that."

After I compose myself a little, I see that it's Elvis Thompson. Elvis is single handedly the basis of, I'd say, the majority of our consumer income.

"No, no, not at all. Don't worry about it. It was really me." I'm a little embarrassed because he's bent over and began an attempt to rectify the disarray before I have. I join him on the floor and start helping him pick up the boxes.

I have to admit Elvis really cracks me up. Today he's wearing a dark gray knit sweater with a white button down underneath along with well fit black jeans. A pair of rounded glasses with wooden frames sit upon the bridge of his nose, like the cherry on top. It's a little geeky but it also feels fashionable, which seems like an oddly fitting description of his personality. His hair is well kept, with bangs that sweep just above his eyebrows, but in a way that makes you uncomfortably conscious of how close they are to falling into his eyes, (even though they never do: he probably uses some kind of product). I actually find myself thumbing at my own messy bangs when looking at him. Nonetheless there's something indisputably likeable about him.

"So, do you need me to give you the hard sell on why you should buy one of these horrifically made plastic speakers, or did you see my beautifully stacked boxes from across the floor and just knew you had to take one home?" We've been picking up boxes, in close to silence, just long enough for me to be a little uncomfortable. Besides, he actually seems to enjoy my obnoxious jokes. He's stopped by enough so that I've actually found myself taking part in enjoyable banter with him on multiple occasions.

"Uh, no. Actually I was hoping I could ask you something."

*"Stop.* I know what you're gonna say. No, there isn't a loyalty discount," I say in a joking manner. He laughs sort of nervously, but I don't think much of it. *"I*'m teasing," I say, *"what's up?"* 

"Well, I was actually wondering if you'd like to go out tonight? Like, if you're free, I mean."

"Go out? You mean like as... Friends right? Cause I'm still... I mean, *Gavin*." Yeah, Gavin.

"Right! No um, yes. I mean *yes*, of course. As friends." There's a weird hang in the air, we've now abandoned the stacking of boxes altogether.

"My shift ends at four. You could come pick up toilet paper with me?" I pull out the crumpled shopping list from one of the aforementioned gajillion pocket and give a sort of half smile.

"Uh, yeah. Totally. Sounds goo- I mean great!"

\*\*\*\*





About midway to the convenience store it's already getting dark. Elvis didn't bring a bike so we ended up having to walk. Honestly it's significantly more awkward than I anticipated, which I guess is on me because well... I mean it is him after all. You'd think he'd be a little bit more conversational though, I mean he is the one who asked me out in the first place. As friends I mean, but...

"So how's uh, school?" He asks. I want to roll my eyes because we've been walking in mostly silence for the time we've been together. But since I haven't made much conversation either, I reply.

"Well I just graduated. So that's something."

"Hey same! Oh that's cool, congrats!"

"Oh yeah... Thanks. You too." He takes a second, almost as if he's trying to get out all his oh's and um's before he opens his mouth again.

"You uh, you don't sound too thrilled ..?"

"Yeah sorry about that-- I mean hey, you too congrats." I don't feel like looking at him. This was a stupid idea, this was dumb. Regrettable. I let out a stiff laugh. "Sorry can we talk about something else?"

> "Oh yeah for sure..." He takes a moment to find something new to say. "How's Gavin?"

"Wow okay, you really know how to pick your questions." I did not mean for that to be said out loud.

"Sorry, I mean, that was kind of personal, I didn't mean it like that. I meant like- you don't have to-"

"No, don't worry...He's good, he's really good." And I mean that. Honestly he is, he's wonderful. He always has been.

"Oh, that's great... I'm glad to hear. I haven't seen him since he stopped working at the mall."

"Yeah, since he got picked for that internship he's been doing well." We're coming up on the convenience store now and I set myself just a bit ahead to lock my bike up at the rack in front.

"How about you, Elvis, how have you been doing?" I catch a slight chuckle escape his mouth for a second, I turn my head around. "What?"

"No I just... You're actually the only person who calls me that."

"Calls you what ..?"

"Elvis."

"What does everyone else call you?"

"Well, uh, mostly Thomas if I'm being honest... Cause, well, 'Elvis Thompson'." I burst out laughing.

"You're kidding," I look back at him, he's got this goofy sort of crooked smile on, noticeably perpendicular to his currently crooked bowtie. He's got a bit of a red flush to him. "I've been calling you Elvis for like two years now!" This makes so much sense, considering he's not even remotely an 'Elvis'. Thomas suits him much better.

"Yeah..." He twiddles his thumbs a little, "kinda." He laughs a bit more. I finish locking up my bike.

"Well Thomas is definitely more fitting, I'll admit that." He looks like he's about to argue but stops himself.

"Not for lack of effort though. I really tried to live up to the name! I actually learned how to play guitar when I was in the fourth grade." He's talking a bit more confidently now, but his eyes are still darting all over the place when he speaks.

"No way. *Hold on*. Didn't you buy that beginner guitar set we were selling a couple months ago?" He pauses, this time managing to make eye contact, which feels oddly bold coming from him.

"Yeah I, uh... Well, I guess I didn't exactly need that, per say..." For a second it's just him looking into my eyes. There's a good couple of feet between us and I can see the moon bouncing off of his glasses lense. It reminds me of the way you look at people through the window of your car when you think they can't see you, without reserve, intently.

"Well you'll have to play for me sometime, I guess."

"Yeah, I guess so."

After that we're in and out of the convenience store, every item on my crumpled paper crossed out with my golf pencil that was still lingering in my hair. The conversation is flowing a bit more naturally now. Honestly, it's really nice to be doing something that feels a little different, that gets my mind off of things. I don't want to go home, somehow I feel like this wonderful void space has been created. This space that I live in, that I breathe in. In the chill air and under the stars speckling in the sky, and in this space I don't have to worry about tomorrow. Or the day after tomorrow. Or the day after that. As we get get farther I find myself dragging my feet. We pass by a park, and I watch the final rounds of kids in puffy coats slide down a purple slide. They don't have a care in the world. No responsibilities. Nothing. I open my mouth to speak. "Y'know, I really envy them." I say.

"Sorry, who?" I point to a kid wearing bright pink ear muffs, and then another with a yellow scarf wrapped around their neck.

"Her... And him. That time, I guess." I can tell Elvis, well Thomas I guess, doesn't really know what to say. "I don't have any clue what I'm doing. I just graduated and now it's just..." I plop down on one of the benches facing the playground. "The rug got ripped right out from under me, and I feel... *Empty.* Like I'm weightless, but not in a good way. In the way where I can't quite feel the ground under my feet kind of way and... They-" I gesture almost desperately at the kids again, "They don't wonder who they are or how they fit into their life. They just are, they just do. And I want to do that too but..." I take a sharp breath. "Alright I got a degree. So what? What now? What do I have to offer anyone?" I'd kind of settled on Elvis AKA Thomas taking up the listening position, but his voice unexpectedly interjects from beside me. Apparently he's taken up residence next to me on the bench.

"Quite a lot actually... Well um, I mean, I sure think so at least." The last word sort of sounds like a breath more than it does an actual word. He's looking at me the same way he was before except, given the dimensions of the bench, he's much closer this time. He's caught me off guard, I wasn't expecting him to respond. A part of me just sort of expected the words to float in this wonderful void space.

"Oh, thanks," I say. Elvis AKA Thomas is still looking at me the same way and all of a sudden I can feel a weird pull at the bottom of my stomach bringing my breaths in and out with slightly more tug. Then I can't breathe anymore because he's leaning in now and his lips are on mine, and for a second (one of those seconds that makes you realize a second can be a really long time) I forget to think about what's happening at all, and when I think enough to pull away I can't even remember concretely whether I was kissing him back or not. I don't know what to do. We're in the real world now, and now I do have to worry about tomorrow and the day after tomorrow and the day after that. The words float out of my mouth and I'm honestly not even sure entirely who they're directed at: "You're an idiot." Behind his car window glasses I can see that Elvis has shut his eyes.

"Yeah! Um, yup. I am, I am sorry. I don't know what I was thinking, um..." The words are all coming out of his mouth with an awkward thud, but I'm not really hearing them because instead I'm hearing Gavin reply, '*A sexy idiot*'. Now, of course, my phone rings and Elvis peters off as the ringtone plays. I slide to pick up the call.

"Hey Gav!" He's just calling to check 'what's up' he says, I'm running later than usual. "Oh, yeah," I reply, "I'm just on my way home." He says that's good, and than jokes that I should be proud of him: He learned how to crack an egg while I was out. I cough out a laugh. He says I sound upset. He wants to know if everything's alright.

"I just kissed Elvis Thompson. Did you know he goes by Thomas?"

Despite the fact that I'm not with Elvis-Thomas whatever his name is as I float home, I don't ride my bike. I walk it all the way back, and I can feel the resulting soreness in my arms as I do. I've strapped the helmet onto my head anyway though, because it feels secure, and maybe it'll actually keep my head from splitting open like my parents always said. I think there's a slight chance that when he kissed me he sucked up the last parts of me that felt like those of a fully fledged human right through my two chapped lips. That's not his fault though, it could have been anyone. When I get home Gavin's laying on the couch. He sits up to the sound of the door opening. I make sure to talk before he can open his mouth.



"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, to be honest I didn't really kiss him, he kissed me, but I didn't *not* 

kiss him. It's just he asked to go out and I said as friends but I knew what he meant and I just thought... I don't know what I thought but I thought going out, going out--Not like going out, but just like hanging out, with someone I don't really know that, well, might clear some things up for me for some reason because recently I don't feel like anything makes sense and like I don't know how I fit into anything and I just..." I can feel tears rolling down my face now, which makes me mad because I don't want Gavin to think I'm just doing all of this so that he doesn't get mad at me. He just sits on the couch for a second and doesn't say anything, he's just staring at the floor. Finally he gets up and starts walking over to me.

"Hey, don't worry about it." I can feel his arms wrap around me from behind. He's trying really hard to act composed. He's not mad, not at all. He gets it, *of course he gets it...* He understands all the mess I just said, and what it meant. God! Screw him. He makes things like this so much more difficult.

He's significantly taller than me, but finds a way to lay his head down on my shoulder. I don't say anything for a bit, I just let him hold me while I cry, and I think he might be crying a bit too. I can't really tell though, I'm actively trying not to hear it just in case he is.

"I have to break up with you," I whisper. I feel his body tense up just the teensiest bit.

"I thought you might say something like that." He whispers back, It's a little croaky. I can feel his lips moving on the side of my neck. "And there's nothing I can do..?" I smile, just a little bit.

"No... No, of course not." It's just about silent now. "I just, it's not even tonight... I think it's me, I just..."

"Shh..." I don't have to say anything else. He knows everything I mean to say.

Harrison Sakai