

Cover Art by: Ashley Toombs

# URSIDAE

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Ashley Toombs



## The Slip

The bell rings and we file into the room, standing by our desks patiently waiting for the sanitizing spray to dry off our seats. We notice there are fewer people than yesterday and wonder if they are late.

We know better. Class begins and we sit in the seats that are not yet dry. The smell of Germ-x reveals someone has sanitized their hands. The teacher begins to lecture and perhaps we begin to learn something. For a moment the distraction is bliss. A knock on the door grabs our attention. The teacher crosses the room.

A hall aid hands them a slip. We freeze and watch, waiting for the teacher to make eye contact. We all eye each other suspiciously, wondering who is next. Someone sanitizes their hands. The teacher crosses the room and places the slip on a desk. "Bring all of your things with you," they say.

We have heard that before. The student stands, gathering their items. We wave and say goodbye, glad it wasn't us. As they shut the door we breathe a sigh of relief, but not too deep because the air is poison. The teacher begins to talk, perhaps we could have learned something...

But none of us are listening. Someone coughs. Someone else sanitizes their hands. We watch the tick of the clock and wait patiently for the end of class. Just when we begin to relax another rap sounds on the door. The teacher opens the door and the slip passes into their hand.

I wonder if it's me.

By: Hailey Smith

## My Name was Red (an excerpt)

My name was Red.

I've had three close friends in my lifetime, none of whom, I am now forced to accept, ever really existed.

The... incident happened when a fourth personality formed from my unstable mind, and it happened like this:

Wolf, my fourth persona, was a brand new addition, and although I felt no small amount of animosity towards him, my friends were far less hostile. They thought he was a great deal of fun, and while it's true he was a pleasant fellow, not often coming across as bellicose, he was far more... flawed... than my other personas. I was the only one who saw him for what he was: a predator. He lied and he cheated, and I don't think he ever said a truthful word to me. But my friends absolutely adored him, so for their sake, I kept quiet.

Oh, how very wrong I was to do so.

The problems began when Wolf killed our village's entire flock of sheep.

It was a massacre, blood and wool scattered everywhere. Not a single sheep was spared, not even the lambs. They were dead, all of them. And I knew who had done it. Wolf had been complaining for days now, complaining that pickpocketing the townsfolk and cheating at cards were getting too boring for his liking. Of course, *I was wary, but I hadn't thought he would go quite this far. I had told him in no uncertain terms to shut up, and to stop being so cantankerous.*

And now the sheep were dead.

Now, it's important for you to remember that at this time, I myself was unaware of my mental condition, and I had no idea that my friends were, in fact, people I had created. So as you can imagine, it came as a nasty shock to me when a witness came forward, claiming they had seen me- not Wolf, but *me!- slipping into the sheep pasture in the dead of night.*

I was furious. I had protected Wolf all these years, but my loyalty to Jill, Chloe, and Sarah only went so far. I was *not going to jail for him. These thoughts ran through my head fast as lightning, and I pointed the finger at Wolf.*

Nobody seemed to have heard of him.

I was carted off to the village prison, and in such a small settlement, found myself the prison's only occupant. I had to get out. I had to find Wolf. And I had to do it *fast*. My mind is blank as to what happened then, as it so often is when I change personalities. Sarah told me afterwards that she had taken over and broken me out. I didn't ask how. All that mattered was that I was free.

Cont.

I was spotted almost instantly after I left the prison- I really should have been more careful. The village folk hadn't been particularly kind to me after I was accused of massacring the sheep, but after seeing me escape from my cell, their antagonism towards me had only increased. I panicked.

Wolf took over at that point, and upon seeing the villagers in pursuit, took off into the woods. I was chased, but nobody could match my speed, and I quickly found myself alone. I was Jill when I emerged from the trees moments later, after I'd followed Wolf into the forest, but hadn't been able to find him.

Then Red was back in control.

I took my father's shotgun and I dashed off into the woods, intent on finding Wolf and killing him. Sarah helped me- the best hunter and tracker of the five of us. I raced through the trees, constantly switching between Red and Sarah, and finally we found Wolf.

That is to say, I *became Wolf*.

Now it was no longer Red and Sarah I was switching between, but Red and Wolf instead. We had our last conversation there, in those woods. That conversation turned into a heated argument and Chloe- the most captious version of myself- tried to intervene, but I wouldn't let her. This was *Red's fight*.

Wolf and Red had always been contentious, but this went beyond that. As Red, I screamed at Wolf and threatened him, taking aim with the shotgun and telling him I would pull the trigger unless he turned himself in. As Wolf, I tried all the slippery tactics I could think of to get Red to lower the shotgun so I could escape her.

In the end, neither of us won.

That was the only way it *could end, really. Red was Wolf, and Wolf was Red. Regardless of who won the argument, there would have been no victor.*

Red never fired the shotgun, and Wolf never escaped, nor did he turn himself in. Instead, my voices, raised as they were, drew the attention of the nearby villagers who had been hunting for Wolf, and they came crashing through the trees, guns raised. In that moment, Wolf took over completely, and I ran.

At least... I tried to.

Red was fighting me, begging me to turn around, begging me to turn myself in. I fought back, but soon I found myself switching back and forth between Red and Wolf, and the villagers caught up to me. A chorus of gunshots rang out as they aimed for my heart, my head, my stomach, and every one of them squeezed a trigger.

When I died, my name was Red.





Seana Gallagher

## Barriers

We look from behind the glass  
A man in orange sits in the lone chair  
His dark skin contrasts the blinding white room  
Blurs of blue strap him in  
Securing his arms  
His legs  
Placing a metal plate on his head  
A tear slips down my face

I failed.

They allow him his last words  
“I do not deny I have sinned.  
I made many mistakes.  
Hurt those I loved. Those I didn’t know.  
But I tell you,  
before God,  
that I did not commit the crime they accused me of.”  
His deep voice shakes  
His face contorts with painful cries

I failed.

“I know this is true...  
I want my wife and daughter to know it too.  
I don’t want my baby... my little angel, to think her papa is a *murderer*.”  
He pauses, letting the word float through the air

I failed.

“I hope and pray that I have become a better father and husband.  
I don’t want to leave you two again, but this time I have... I have no choice.  
I love you.”

I failed.

Cont.

A woman rushes to the window, attempting to shatter the glass with frustration,  
Trying desperately to break the barrier that separates her from her husband  
His tear streamed face doesn't flinch

I failed.

I guide her away from the window and wrap her in a hug  
She shakes with noiseless sound  
I promised them *I would set him free*  
Achieve justice  
He was innocent after all

But  
I failed.

Now over her shoulder I see the guards  
Pulling the fatal lever  
I close my eyes  
When I open them his body is limp

I pull her closer

*He was innocent*

By: Rosalyn Visser





**Neva Grewell**



I see her face in the sky each night,  
And each night I wish I could be with her.

But I can't. Because I'm down here,  
And she's up there. And that just sucks.

She's up there with the stars.

She's so much more

Than a star.

When I stand in her silver sea of light I can almost feel

Her lips on my cheek, her hand in mine.

I swear.

I once had a dream that she kissed me,

And when I woke up, there was moondust in my hair.

By: Jack Wyss

## Break Loose

Where exactly does a story or tale start? Does it start when things begin to head down an interesting path? If so, there would be so many stories that begin with a road.

They begin with that first step. The thread starts with that first adventure. Does it start with the beginning of a life? Once again, there would be so many stories with that premise.

No, stories and tales do not just commence when the curtain pulls back, they gradually build up until the story is worth telling. Some make it to that final act rather than just the opening scene. They reach that well at the top of the hill, and some do not; they slip and tumble down the hill. So where could I begin to tell mine? With another question I think.

What defines a hero? If people were to know what I do and everything behind it: the lore, the reasons, the danger, everything! They would label me a hero. But they do not know what I do, why I do it. So, I'm labelled dangerous. A villain if you will. There is a shadow, a wisp, between what society considers heroic and villainous. The only difference is we know the reasoning behind the heroes grand heroics, but we never know why the villain acts so villainously. We never bother to know.

I help people. I protect people, but they don't know. Of course they don't.

To explain simply, I'm a hunter. No, not one for animals. I hunt creatures. Creatures that could easily rip your still beating heart out of your chest. Creatures that slowly worm their way into your head and break down your sanity bit by bit until you're nothing but a ragdoll for them to use. Creatures that hunt down humans for their own sick and twisted games. They don't care who you are; a mother or a brother, a criminal or a saint, an ambassador or a pauper. They put no thought into position or power, only your demise.

And they're coming, a wave load, coming here. I guess that's where my story starts. On August 31st, the day all hell broke loose in Phoenix, Arizona.

By: Camilla Welsh





**Stella Yeager**

# The Good, the Bad, and the Forgotten

Soft blades underfoot, Mr. Jones' wheelchair sat easily within the shade. Primed in the 70s, then chipped over years. Faded by experience. Now a husk. Gentle winds whispered through memory. Thoughts usually evaded his mind without a trace; foggy residents with no origin, with no escape. Echoes of loud noises corrupted the music, his life's sonata. Diving further to investigate, screeches of similar tune; both tires and people.

"What was I? Was I in a horrific car accident turning my life for the worst?"

More ringing of chaos floods the void of Mr. Jones' body. Pain pumps into him, sharp but precise. Silhouettes with tools of destruction come within memories, riddling holes into what Mr. Jones called a body. Questions with less answers, but the evidence keeps cycling through. A man's voice fades into existence with radio static humming. Faintly without reason nor coherent, just urgency followed with static.

"Was it war? Was I a soldier with a sacrifice greater than most actions?"

Jones' imagination flowed like rushing white streams. Ideas of heroism arose, painting Mr. Jones into a false idol. A fantasy turned dystopia. Returning, silhouettes crawled into new light, setting the stage with dark undertones. Silhouettes take their roles, not as villains, as upholders of the law; holding the smoking gun of justice.

"No it can't be. This isn't my ending. This isn't the persona I wish to believe. No!"

Tears of anger and confusion pour over the leather face of Mr. Jones. The winds turned to howls, taunting Jones as he wrestled with the truth. Soft blades under foot morph into hands of madness, pulling him into the darkness of his mind.

"Mr. Jones, yard time is up. Back to your cell maggot."

By: Ian La Vé



# Capital Offense

A dark forest sat on the outskirts of town. Overgrown pine seemed to consume light like a black hole. Inside the forest, a sturdy cabin, all log and effort, clung to the flanks of a lonely mountain. There were no vines trying to reach their way inside. Only a single window acted as a portal to the outside world, that and only a singular door.

\*\*\*\*\*

If a person swung open the door on a dark night, they would be surprised to find Chinese takeout cups strung about, a singular brown rotating chair illuminated by the glow of a grey brick computer, and a singular man. He sat, bent over, as his neckbeard gleamed in the CRT light. Glasses perched on his pudgy nose as his eyes scanned the screen before him. Stubby little hands clicked back and forth on his brown keyboard. Why live in this filth of garbage that he called home? Why live in a dark forest on the outskirts of town? Was it for the isolation, the lack of regulation, or maybe it was the Chinese takeout restaurant nearby. No matter.

\*\*\*\*\*

The man spent his hours working, day in and day out. He lived this way for months and months. On one dark night, this dark night, it all paid off. He watched the numbers go up. .001, .01, to finally .1, a 9900% increase. This man covered in grease from Chinese takeout had just made 99 Million Dollars off Dogecoin.

By: Maxwell Arvanetes

# Metaphorically Speaking

“Life is a highway”

“Life is a journey”

How about:

Life is a metaphor?

*Metaphorically speaking*

We think one thing then meaning changes

“An evolving family dynamic”

The purpose polarized

Every move and gambit made to further

“An old man playing chess”

Forget seriousness

“A child with paint”

Easily broken

Yet able to be repaired

“A mom mending with duct tape”

Enriched through connections

“A smile from a stranger”

Finding identity

Solidifying thoughts

“A student divulging to their diary”

Mixed as a glass of lemonade and iced tea

Extended as arms reaching to the sky

Or dead as the garden flowers

Yet the beauty remains

So

Life is a metaphor

By: Rosalyn Visser





Lauryn Ruff

# Hope

Is finding the light in the dark  
Hope?  
I know hope  
Is real  
Yet fear  
My fear  
Is stronger than  
My hopefulness  
Still  
How can I hope?  
When reality can be so bleak  
What is Hope?  
I don't know

By: Rosalyn Visser

Note:

Poem reads top to bottom and bottom to top



# A Homecoming

To describe it as a homecoming appeared accurate in nature, but nothing about it felt like returning. Most of my threads never left that angular, worn down building, woven with memory and humanness as sure as its foundation. It wasn't a place you could leave, it was a place that took pieces after every visit. By now, most of me existed there, whether I acknowledged it or not.

Though I couldn't ignore the overpowering feeling, that cast of shadow upon me as I shoved open the steel doors. This constant in my life, once easily dodged now slipped in time, toppled with ill change. To the unknowing eye, everything appeared as it always was. But I recognized the new staining of the carpets, the cut edges of tables where the wood had begun to strip, the things once cared for diligently that now lingered on to-do lists. Before me, patrons shuffled through the lobby, I in suit to escape what last breaths Winter had to offer.

Immediately after pushing myself into the spaces between conversation and laughter, I became all too conscious of a presence adjacent to me. Daring my eyes to travel passed ground level, I affirmed my intuition. He was exactly as he always was, but his eyes spoke of traumas I hadn't yet heard. He sat stoically against the wall, in the optimal position to view each person within the small lobby, tapping his foot in rhythm with the flickering light above him. What I noticed through my furtive glances was a long, walking stick. It met the ground a few feet ahead of him, contouring slightly with the weight of the user. Always overweight, a long, strenuous battle of hospital visits and bad news seemed to thin him, taking the strength he had left with it. What now fit him loosely were his iconic overalls, which he paired with a shirt washed on Tuesdays, then worn for the rest of the week. I knew he was looking at me. The voices in my head, the ones I usually pushed aside, the shallow fear of rejection and judgement, that evening clamped my mouth.

The choice not to greet him pains me now, I'm sure he would've appreciated my voice after a year of hiatus. The lights dimmed and my heart rested, I knew some things would always stay the same.

By: Chloe Tschetter



**Lexi Poepping**

"So. Kid fancies himself a writer."

The stranger's face is half-hidden by the long darkness, only illuminated by the intermittent glow of the cigarette he's got clamped between his teeth.

"I do."

He laughs through his cigarette and it blinks like a Christmas light. I wince at the sight.

"You're lucky you came to me."

"Am I."

Suddenly the cig is in his hand, dancing in the alley shadow like an *ignis fatuus*. *He's got my soul pinched between his first two fingers and I can feel it burning. He taps it once against his leg. It coughs out a few lazy embers.*

"Guys like you tend not to appreciate the value of salesmanship." He takes a long drag and reveals his pallid face without shame. "Back in the day I was *the man*."

*"Back in your day."*

"Before Jack Kennedy."

I nod. Those glittering beetle eyes watch me intently. *What does he know about Jack Kennedy? they whisper. Nothing. He's a faker. I can feel my right hand scribble something on the notepad I'm holding. I hate it when that happens. When my muscles work on their own accord without the sensible influence of my mind. I'm afraid to look down at the paper.*

"I want to buy something," I say, trying to keep the edge out of my voice and failing.

*"Well, I've got many somethings for sale." Mercifully, he drops the cigarette into a puddle of stagnant water at his feet. My soul, baptized in the runoff of last night's thunderstorm.*

"Like what."

"Well you seem to've run out of question marks. Those are buy-one-get-one right now."

I check and yes, I'm flat broke in that department. But punctuation, that's elementary. The trouble with buy-one-get-one question marks is that they pile up. What would I need twelve question marks for. I want the good stuff. Vocabulary. I'm a collector.

"I was looking for some half-decent adjectives."

"How about we talk about gerunds first. You look like a gerund type of guy."

I scoff. *Jack Kennedy, I think. This guy's a fraud. "Gerunds are useless, if you don't mind my saying."*

The stranger frowns. I see the tension in his shoulders. I shouldn't be here. Obviously. You have to be careful around guys like this. They look like men but they're demons and wolves and hyenas, knowledge-peddlers who coalesce out of the night to sell, sell, sell, and then disappear back into the blackness once they've got your money.

Cont.



They're dangerous, and they're ancient. One wrong move and you're dead.

But then he just shrugs. "You're smarter than you look. Adjectives. I got loads of 'em. I could set you up with a basic color package. Doesn't include beige, though. I--"

I stop him with a raised hand. I'm willing the thing not to shake. "Look, man. You and I seem to be on different frequencies. When I say adjectives, I mean adjectives. Top-shelf. I'm a big spender." That's how they get you, with their packages and deals, their color sets that always include either beige or maroon but never both. The stranger raises a curious eyebrow. He plays it cool, but his eyes can't lie. I feel their ravenous gaze. They are set deep in his skull, twin pits boiling with inhuman hunger.

"I got a few of those."

"Let's see them."

He pulls a beat-up ring box out of his pocket and flicks it open like he's proposing. It hurts my eyes, but I can't help but look deep into the light. I try to examine the shape of the words but the glow is too bright. I close my eyes and look away. I hear the ring box snap shut.

"How much?" I ask, rubbing my eyes with the back of my hand. Color spots explode across my field of vision.

"Don'tcha want to know what they are first?"

"Doesn't matter. I can see that they're good." Bad move, but I'm excited. *Now he knows you're desperate. That your writing's started to get B-O-R-I-N-G.*

"Yeah. They're good." He puts the ring box in his shirt pocket and then out of nowhere he's holding another cigarette. "Words like this, they can't be... en-trust-ed to any *Joe Schmoe.*"

"I've got cash." I really hope he doesn't light that cigarette. I don't know how much soul I've got left to burn.

"Question is how much. These are a hundred-dollar words here."

"How many are in there."

"Three. Plus tax, that's three hundred and seven."

There isn't any tax in the black market. That's another test. Each one of these ghouls has his own tax, but it's code. You can't agree to pay it. It's against the spirit of the transaction. Shelling out the seven bucks makes you a fink.

"No tax. Three hundred." The words shake a little as they come out. That's the trouble with language.

"No tax?" He smiles and his teeth are like fangs. "I like you, kid. I really do. Just for you, no tax. Just for you." He's somewhat intrigued, but he doesn't even try to pressure me. His eyes give it all away, speaking of their own accord. *How did he know about the tax? They're surprised that I did my homework.*

Cont.

I pat my back pocket and feel the crumpled-up bills pressing against my behind. Can't be done with him quite yet. It's a dance you have to do, show him you mean business but don't be rude about it. This sort of thing has rules. Rules older than the pyramids. Other writers, they get caught up in the wonder of it and they forget. The words they know glint like old pennies if you hold them up to the sun right, and they think that's power. They don't know how to act around the stuff that *shines*.

"What else do you have in stock. Anything interesting." Maybe I should pick up a question mark or two. I'm starting to sound like a robot.

"New German swear word, imported from Munich. Limited production." The stranger's tongue darts out of his mouth and I try not to look at it. "Running a special on abstract nouns."

"I'll take both," I say, even though I've already got all the abstract nouns. "And twenty question marks, for the road." I brought nearly a grand with me, but all in all, the transaction sets me back three hundred thirty-seven dollars and fourteen cents. Money up front. No haggling. I slip the ring box in my breast pocket and feel its heartbeat pulse against mine. The German word comes in a cheap plastic ball like you might get from an arcade in the mall, *Wunderbar! scrawled on the side in black Sharpie. The word's glow is weak but feisty. Might get some use from it. The abstract nouns are bundled in Christmas wrapping paper. No two packages are alike. They come from all the world's gutters and storm drains. That's how the stranger and his pals operate. They're scavengers. Comb through enough trash and you ought to find a diamond somewhere.*

"You're a good man," he tells me. "Come back some time. You know where to find me."

"You'll never see me again."

"Maybe."

I wish he'd stop looking at me like that. Like I'm a germ under a microscope. I take a step backward, and he finally brings his cigarette to his lips. I see the spark of the lighter. A cheap Bic with the American flag printed on the side.

"Did you know Jack Kennedy?" I blurt. Nineteen question marks left. But it worked. The lighter fizzles out and the cigarette remains unscathed.

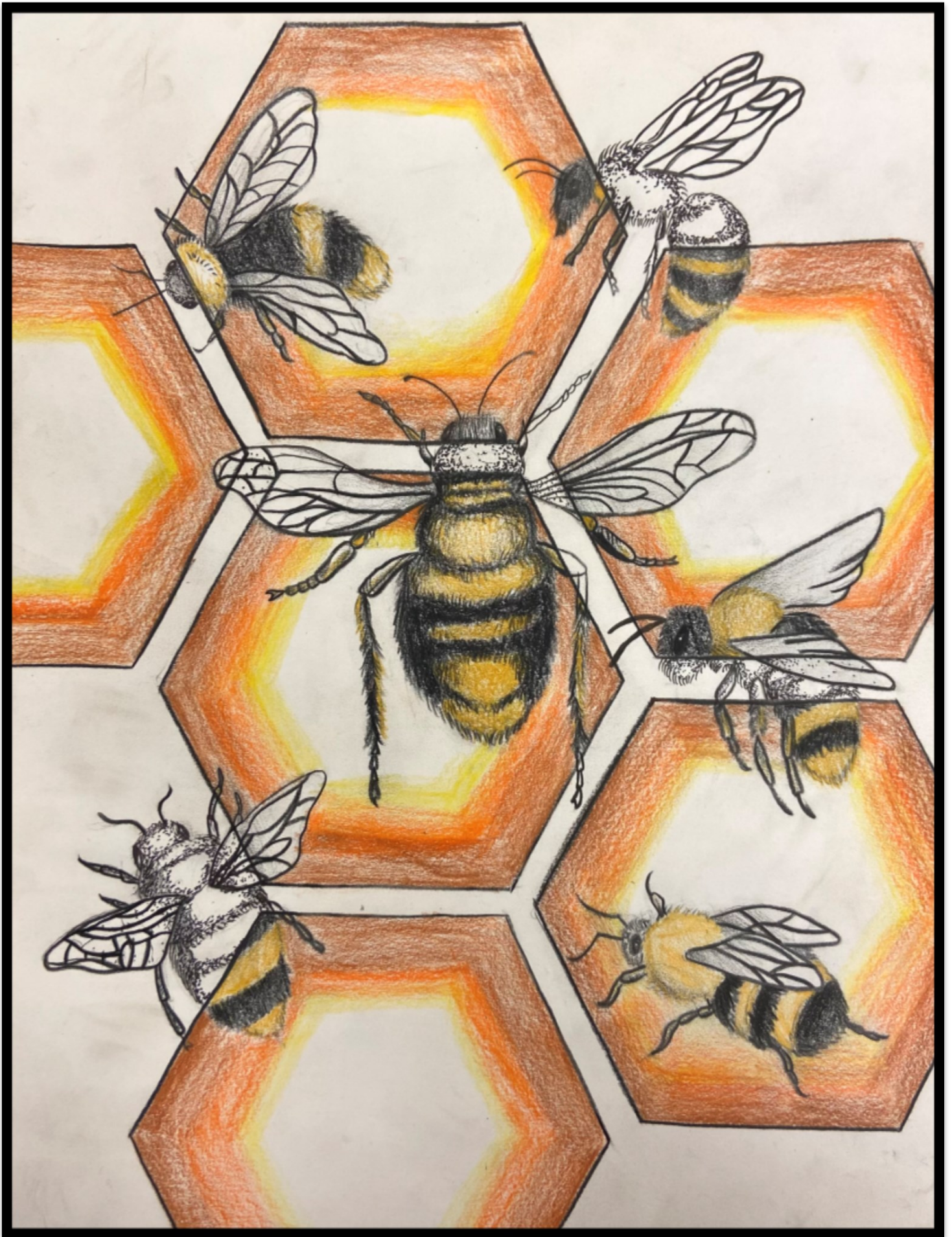
"Yeah," the stranger says. "Yeah, I did. You have a great night, kid." The darkness consumes him and it's like he was never even there. I wait, blinking slowly, deliberately, but he's gone. Icy fingers dance down my spine. I spin on my heel and walk away. You aren't supposed to turn your back. That's rule number one. But it's late, and my eyes hurt, and I want to get home. The wind picks up. It smells like rain and motor oil.

I finally look down at my notepad, to see what my subconscious had to say. *1963.*

"There's no way," I say to myself. He can't have been older than thirty. "There's no way."

The night declines to comment.

By: Jack Wyss



Jason Ramirez



# Manifesto

Somewhere, someone thinks their life is insignificant.  
They don't realize that they, despite all odds,  
Are the glue that holds a thousand lives together,  
The last piece of yarn on the tapestry,  
One which is so important,  
And yet,  
They think their life is insignificant.  
But they are wrong.  
Nobody has a perfect day,  
Yet we all pursue it,  
A universal impossibility,  
Which we crave infinitely.  
Appreciate the small things in life,  
For they might be a big deal to you tomorrow.  
Appreciate life for what it is,  
In all it's imperfect glory.  
Satisfaction doesn't come from grades,  
Money, or status,  
It comes from small things,  
The pie your grandma made.  
There are currently thousands of people who will or do count on you,  
Don't let them down.  
But always remember,  
No matter what,  
Toast is good with eggs,  
Bacon is great,  
And the only way to fail,  
Is to give up on yourself.  
So I say this to you,  
Somebody who doesn't feel loved,  
From somebody who might not know you,  
You are worthy,  
No matter what.  
People can't deceive you,  
You're great, what can you say?  
The best part about you,  
Is that you are *you*.

By: Jonah Benner



**Lydia Phillips**