

# THE GOLDEN SPIRAL



Δ CHS LITERARY MAGAZINE  
DECEMBER 2021 | ISSUE NO. 1

# Magazine Staff

We would like to thank each of the students who gave their time to making this magazine a reality. Without these students, this magazine would not have been possible. Each student on this list gave their time to reading, editing, and formatting this inaugural issue of The Golden Spiral, and for that we are forever thankful.

## **Allison Sellers**

Co-Chief Editor

## **Hunter Spurlock**

Magazine Sponsor

## **Avery Sellers**

Co-Chief Editor

## **Jake Richardson**

Magazine Sponsor

## **Charlie Brinkhof**

Managing Editor/Art Editor

## **Marsha Hook**

English Department Head

## **Caro Dudley**

Editor

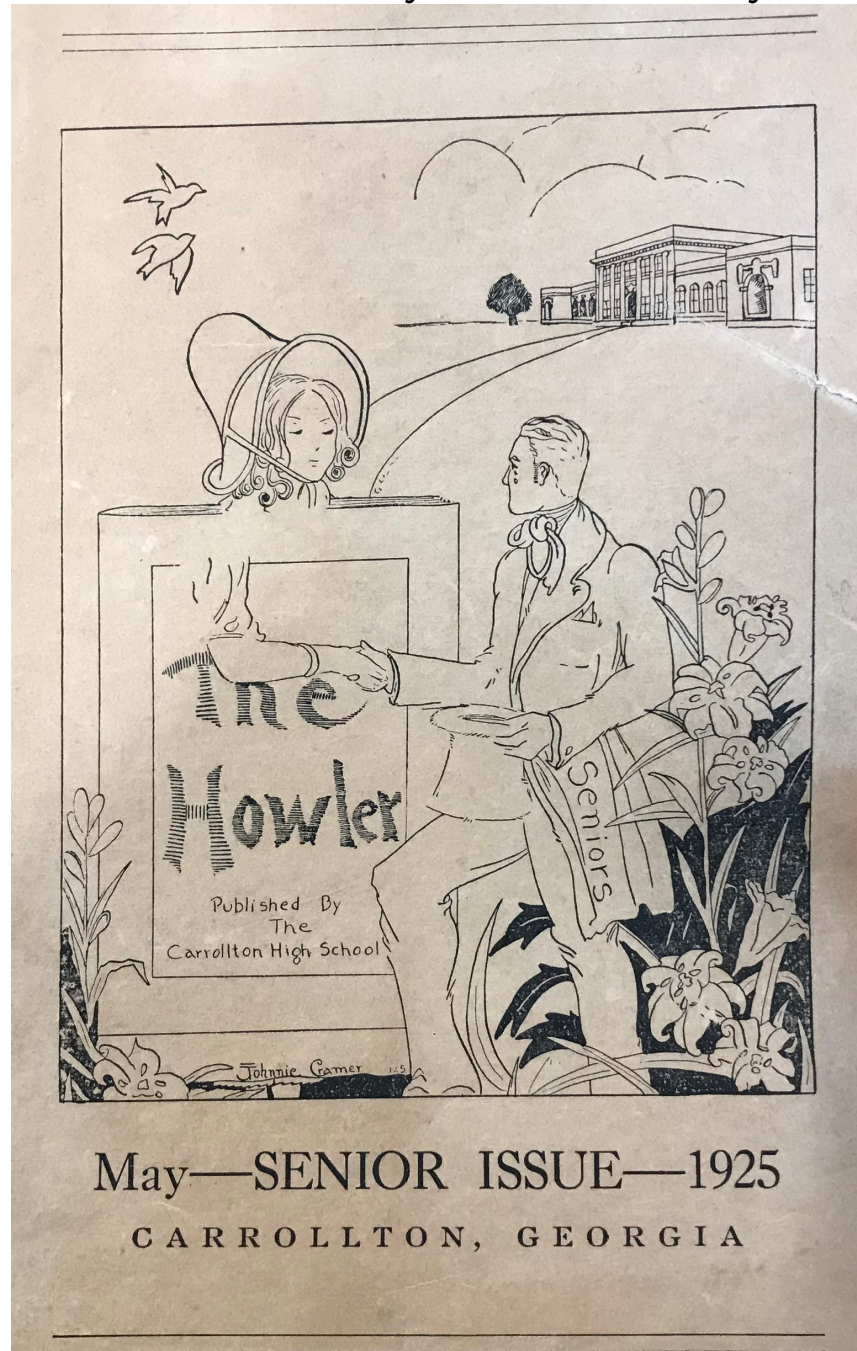
## **John VanValen**

Editor

## **Addison Lloyd**

Editor

Below is the May 1925 issue of The Howler, a CHS literary magazine.  
Picture is courtesy of Mrs. Rita Gentry



## Editor's Note

On behalf of The Golden Spiral editing team and The Creative Writing Club, we would like to thank the CCS Board of Education, the Carrollton High School administration, and teachers for their constant support, both of us and the long-standing tradition of literary excellence at Carrollton High School. Thank you to all of the parents and friends, whose roles in our lives are without measure. Finally, thank you to our classmates who bravely submitted their work. Now we present the first edition of Carrollton High School's literary magazine: The Golden Spiral. We hope you enjoy it!

# C O N T E N T S

## **Harvest Season**

by Addison Lloyd

## **Moments That Never End**

Amya Kidd

## **Fallen Leaves**

Lillian Lewis

## **Dear Autumn**

Alison Sellers

## **When Leaves Fall**

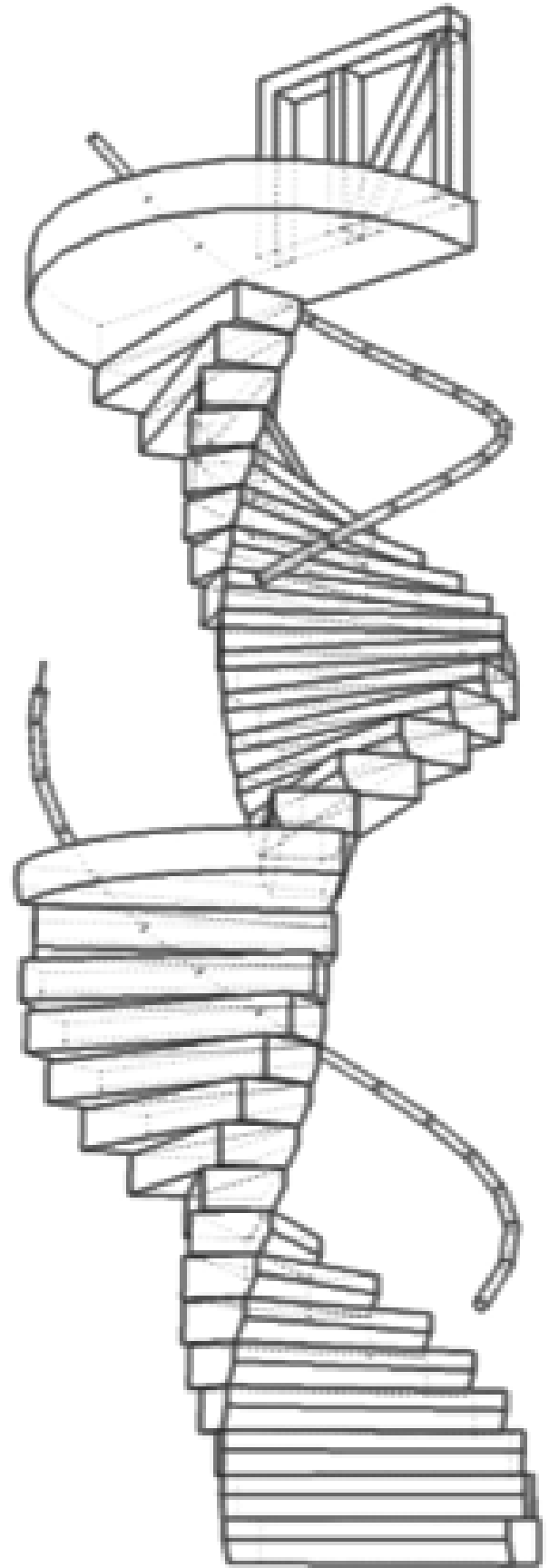
Marissa Wright

## **Cries of Fall**

Sophia Morales

## **Corriendo Hacia Mis Tradiciones**

Tania Turcios-Navarrete



# C O N T E N T S

## **Kismet**

Devon Smith

## **The Hunted**

by Addison Lloyd

## **Ghost in a Ghost Town**

MadeyInn Cook

## **To Be Beautiful**

Caroline Steed

## **Crimson Eulogy**

Joshua Johnson

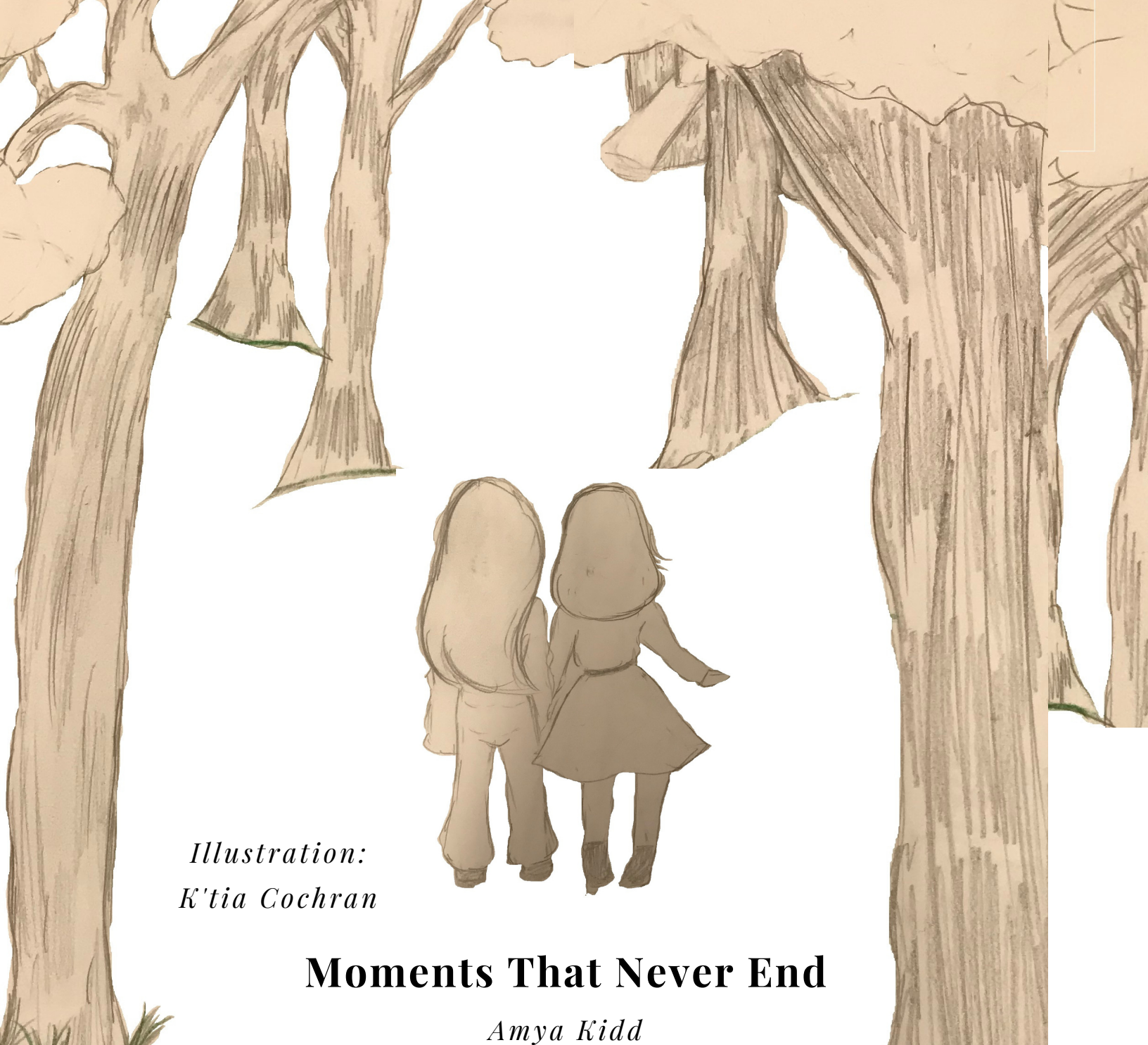
## **The Girl on the Bench**

Bronwyn Jackson

## **Her Bloody Body in My Mind**

Asha Brown





*Illustration:  
K'tia Cochran*

## **Moments That Never End**

*Amya Kidd*

With her hand in mine, I walk with my nose turned up to the sky. My eyes focus on the clouds above me as she guides me. As we walk in a winding line, she pulls my hand towards her, never letting me stray too far away. I turn my head to the left, only to see her gazing into my eyes. I squeeze her hand in mine, asking her a silent question of why she's staring at me. She looks away all too quickly, starting to hum under her breath. Her voice is so hypnotizingly melodic that I began to become entrapped with all that encompasses her. Letting her lead me again, I shut my eyes, tilt my head, and focus on the world around me: the cool autumn breeze, the sound of her voice, the sun that's on my skin. It all feels so beautiful. I wish that this moment would never end.

# Harvest Season

*Addison Lloyd*

There was no time that breathed as much life into the rustic town of Breezebury as the Harvest Season. When children laughed as they plunged jovially into vast seas of crimson-stained leaves with a great crackle. Where gentle gales whipped playfully through the swishing treetops, stirring up fiery whirls of those very same leaves. The air was crisp and delicately sweet, like the plump apples that bloomed ruby red from their charitable trees, their perfect glossy surfaces almost mirror-like. And at night the stars glowed like a billion fireflies, a radiant halo around a Cheshire grin of a crescent moon, while a chorus of crickets sang their symphonies.

Asher Cormac was a girl of about 15 with bushy chestnut hair and thoughtful amber eyes the precise same shade as the hallmark leaves of the season. She hailed from Breezebury, which itself was a tight-knit community where everyone knew everyone and rumors spread around like wildfire. She was the daughter of the town's mayor, Mr. Cormac, a portly, busy man with little concern for what his only child did, even if he hadn't the faintest scintilla of an idea about where she went all day. Asher was as clever as a fox and just as wily, and like everyone else in Breezebury, she relished the Harvest Season and all of its bounties. So, one morning, she decided to go out for a stroll.

Asher opened the oaken door to her father's cottage with a hollow creaaak. In response, soft, golden light flooded into the entrance hall, painting the carved stone furniture with its honeyed shine. Asher stepped out into the town square, which was still deserted.

Shame, thought Asher. That a beautiful morning like this would go to waste. She grinned to herself. Shame that it's all for me.

Wooden structures rose out of the morning mist, their windows still dim. Nearly all of them had one or more pumpkins stationed outside their front doors like runty little guards. Their carved faces grinned and scowled at her as she walked by. Asher breathed deeply, relishing the autumnal air as it rushed into her lungs like a cool stream. She began to walk out towards the nearby forest, a dark blotch on the mist-blurred horizon. Her shoes clicked rhythmically against the cobblestone path, and the sound eventually faded as the stone shifted to earth and Mother Nature reclaimed what was hers.

The dewy grass tickled Asher's exposed ankles. It was as though she had stumbled into a whole new world, crossed some sort of invisible barrier into the kind of place she would read about in a fantasy novel. The forest was lush and overgrown, the ground almost completely covered in fallen leaves, an exorbitant garment of scarlet and gold. Early morning birds chirped unseen above; perhaps chickadees or cardinals. The trees themselves were colossal, their trunks thicker than an elephant's leg. They were towering elders of the forest, watching over the seedlings, whispering tales of years gone by to their children. Asher meandered on like this for a while, witnessing with awe the forest's gradual awakening. All was serene- until a shrill shriek split through the morning air.

Asher froze, her heart quickening. The feeble cry sounded again. It wasn't human, deduced Asher. But still, the squeaky sound carried an almost definite note of fear.

Asher remained still, her thoughts racing. She knew that her father would tell her to get out of there. She could almost hear his voice- "Human or not, it's dangerous!"

Asher shook off the voice. The cries for help hadn't ceased, and each one of the pitiful squeaks fractured her heart. Her mind made up, she broke into a dash towards the source of the sound.

Spindly, leafless tree limbs reached out hungrily for her, but Asher tore on until the sounds seemed to be almost in front of her. At last, the trees thinned and she emerged out into a clearing covered in long, wispy grass. Asher gasped.



*Illustration:*  
*MaryPayton Rogers*



In the clearing lay a tiny baby deer, its cotton-soft back flecked with snow white spots. Around one of its skinny front legs was a tight coil of string that was attached to some sort of bolt in the ground.

A trap, Asher recognized. The hunting of deer had been outlawed in Breezebury, but somehow the fawn had still gotten itself ensnared.

“Shh,” whispered Asher, approaching the fawn carefully. “It’s alright, little guy.”  
The fawn turned its wide, frightened dark eyes on her. It tried to stumble back, but slipped down again with another cry.

“I won’t hurt you,” insisted Asher, with all the tenderness she could manage. Miraculously, it seemed to register with the fawn. It stopped struggling and stared silently up at her, its tiny chest rising and falling very quickly. Asher took another tentative step towards the creature. When it remained quiet and still, she reached for its captured leg. It flinched where her fingers touched it.

“Hey...” whispered Asher. “Don’t worry. I’ll get you out of there.”  
The fawn fell still yet again. Asher examined the string. It was a fine silver gossamer, like a thread of spider silk. Asher marveled at how much damage something so miniscule could cause.

“C’mon...” she mumbled, rummaging around in the light pack she had brought, relief blossoming in her chest as her fingers connected with her trusty pocketknife. She extracted the blade, and the fawn let out another high-pitched wail and started to thrash around in terror.

“No, stop!” Asher protested, afraid the poor creature would hurt itself even further. Thankfully, it eventually settled down, though its liquid eyes still bulged with fright as Asher lowered the knife towards its leg. Gritting her teeth in intense concentration, Asher severed the thread with a slight cut, freeing the fawn.  
Immediately, it sprang up and darted away into the forest without a second glance back. Its cotton tail had vanished into the undergrowth in an instant.

Asher smiled. Her work here was done.

...

The rest of the day went by without a hitch. Asher returned home to Breezebury before anyone noticed she was gone. Now, dusk had settled over the town, and the lampposts cast long, dark shadows over the cobblestone pathways. The Jack o' Lanterns' candlelit eyes burned fiercely, and a careless breeze brought the chill of the night caressing through Asher's hair.

She stood at the outskirts of Breezebury, gazing over the meadow one last time before she would head home to her father's cottage. A flicker of movement at the boundary of the woods caught her eye. She gasped.

An elegant doe was trotting along the glade, and behind her trailed a tiny, snow-spotted fawn.

Sure, there was no telling whether or not it was the same one that she had rescued earlier that morning. But somehow, she was certain that it had to be.. As another gust whipped through the grasses, sending a stir of leaves dancing through the air, Asher was filled with gratitude for the little beauties of the Harvest Season.



*Illustration:  
MaryPayton Rogers*



# Fallen Leaves

Lillian Lewis

Fallen leaves and barren trees

New endings are just as diligent  
as new beginnings;

as shedding becomes bedding  
for new trees, by means that if we  
also let go, we'll receive new  
opportunities.

Leaves sewn to the soil, as the  
lace of turmoil.

Turn your harrowed worries into  
hollowed release, for on the  
morrow we might find peace.

# Dear Autumn

Alison Sellers

The sun, tired of the humid summer  
Peeks through his kaleidoscope  
And twist the world into vivid color

An array of scents fill my head  
A few I can recall...  
Apple pie, autumn stew, and cornbread.

Autumn winds begin to blow  
Grab your cardigan  
And sit around the fires' glow.

Jack O'Lanterns and pumpkin seeds  
A season of fun is guaranteed!

*Illustration:*  
*Camron Ware*

*Illustration:*  
Georgia Noori

## When Leaves Fall

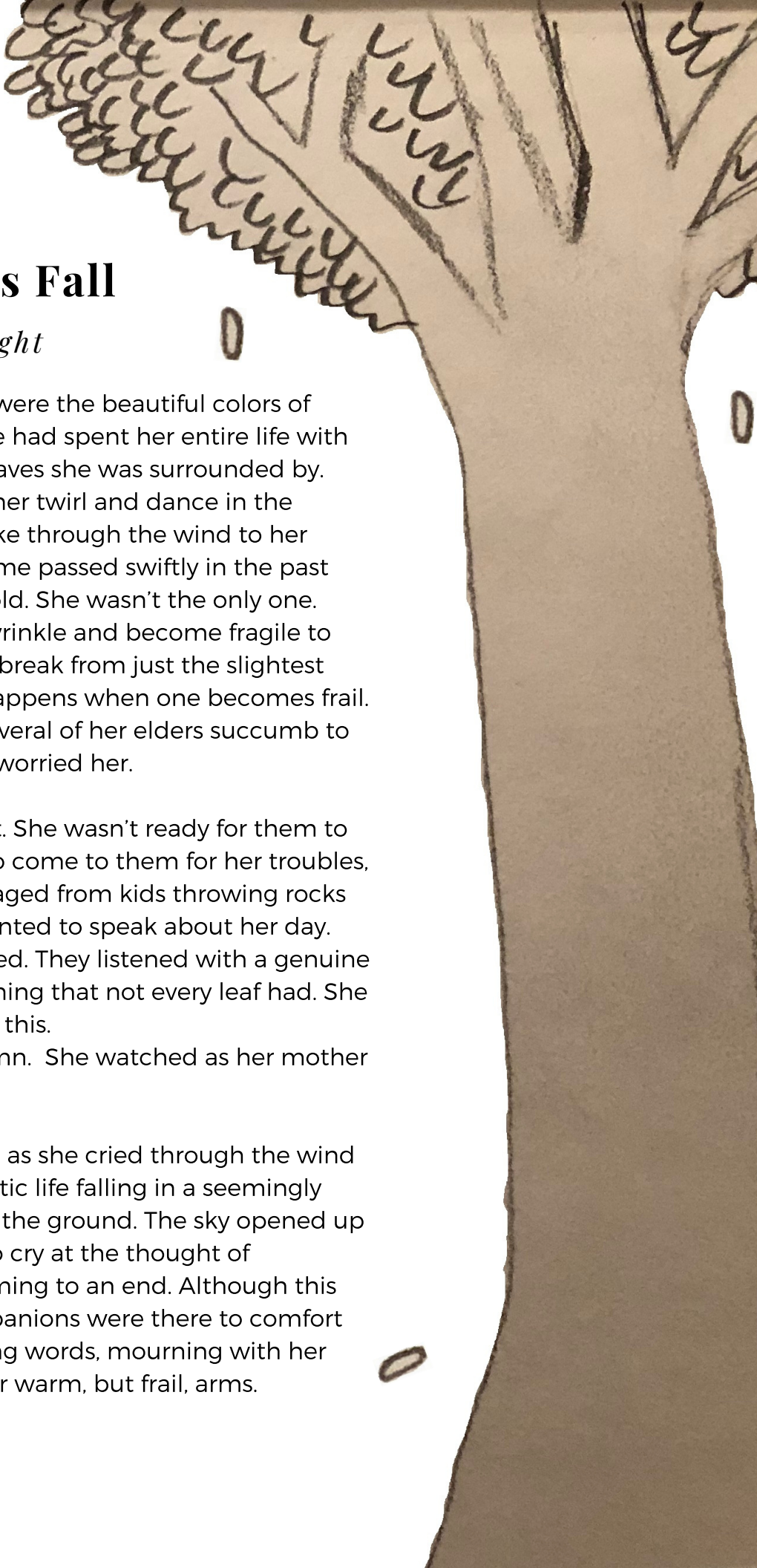
*Marissa Wright*

Red. Yellow. Orange. These were the beautiful colors of Gale's family and friends. She had spent her entire life with them, learning to love the leaves she was surrounded by. The fresh autumn air made her twirl and dance in the afternoon breeze as she spoke through the wind to her surrounding companions. Time passed swiftly in the past year, allowing Gale to grow old. She wasn't the only one. Many others had begun to wrinkle and become fragile to the point where they would break from just the slightest touch. She had seen what happens when one becomes frail. As a child, Gale witnessed several of her elders succumb to the slow decay of time. This worried her.

She wasn't ready to leave yet. She wasn't ready for them to leave her. She had learned to come to them for her troubles, whether she had been damaged from kids throwing rocks into the tree or if she just wanted to speak about her day. Either way, her friends listened. They listened with a genuine interest, and this was something that not every leaf had. She would be forever grateful for this.

It was the third day of autumn. She watched as her mother left her.

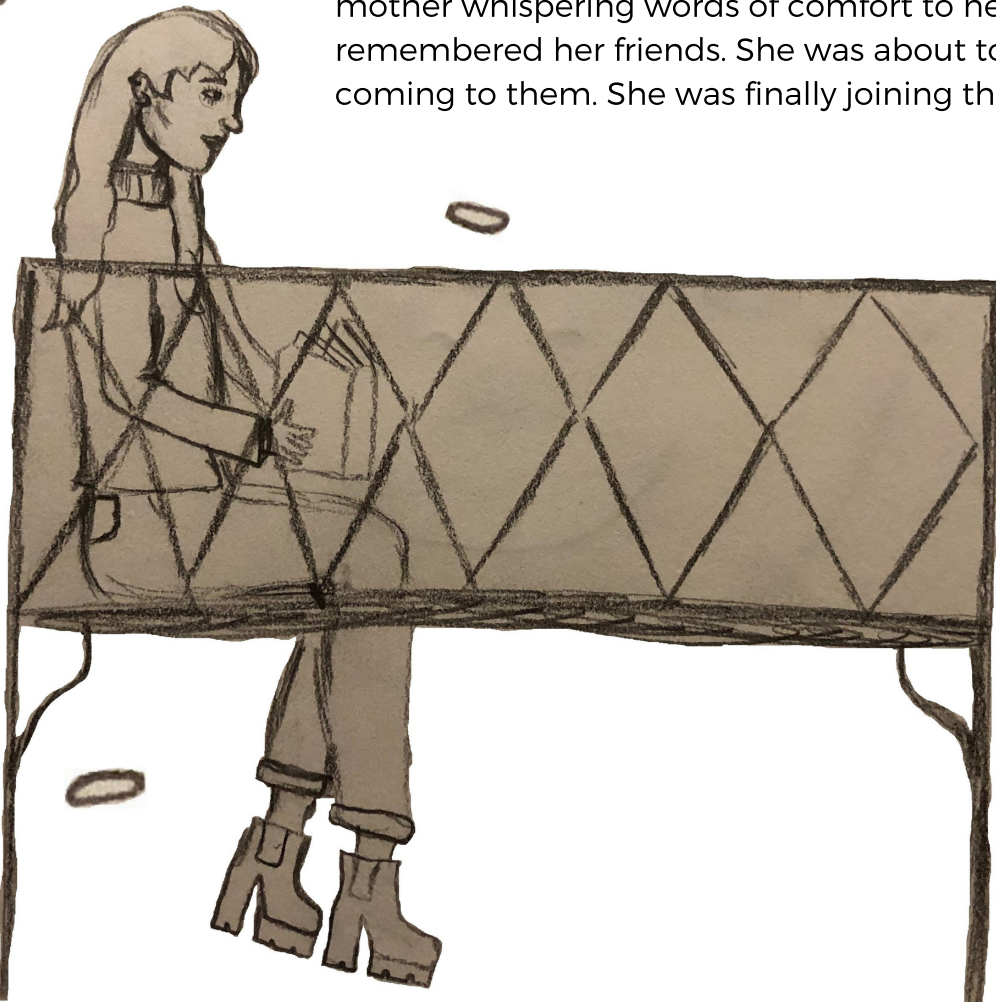
The pain was overwhelming as she cried through the wind at the sight of this sympathetic life falling in a seemingly endless but serene dance to the ground. The sky opened up into a downpour, seeming to cry at the thought of something this beautiful coming to an end. Although this was a difficult trial, her companions were there to comfort her with their soft and inviting words, mourning with her and welcoming her into their warm, but frail, arms.



On the 11th day of Autumn, three of her closest friends fell to the ground. She felt a piece of her heart fall with them, leaving her feeling empty. She had lost four pairs of open arms. Not many were left to supply her with such an invitation.

As the season carried on, many more passed on to the ground, the breeze carefully bringing them to peace. She was left alone without any familiars to hold her aching heart. Without the help of her friends, she could feel her own grip on the tree starting to loosen. She almost wished that she would fall from the tree. The loneliness was grabbing at her mind, seeming to capture her feelings and melt them into a hollow nothingness. She looked around at the surrounding houses. She heard families talking and laughing as the smell of turkey drifted through the evening air. A sudden gust of wind slammed into her delicate body. This was it.

She let go, a satisfying feeling filled her heart and mind. She watched the thin branches of the tree begin to shrink and draw back. She remembered her life and her experiences. She remembered her mother whispering words of comfort to her during difficult times. She remembered her friends. She was about to see her friends. She was coming to them. She was finally joining the fallen leaves.



*Illustration:*  
Georgia Noori

# Cries of Fall

*Sophia Morales*

One of nature's favored phenomenon  
Pondered by humans, animals, and creatures alike.  
It's drawing towards the middle of September  
When kids are enjoying the chilly, windy weather whilst on their bikes.

A couple months away from the soft sand of Summer,  
And the aromatic fragrances of Spring,  
The songbirds and the rustling leaves of the forest  
Generously welcomes the arrival of autumn's zing.

The sheer chilly wind makes its arrival known,  
Blowing the multi-colored leaves away into places no one else knows where  
They let out soft cries as they lose grip of their home  
As they shrivel and die upon slamming against the concrete, betrayed by their old friend's burning glare.

Oak and birch trees, and weeping willows too  
Mourn bitterly of the loss of their slowly dying children  
Who were once abundant with color and life  
Under their mother's branches they were raised; now they lacked their presence.

Birds and land creatures, even the sluggish snails,  
Make an attempt to shelter themselves from the coming cold,  
The dead leaves pile up into one enormous stack, as evidence of what they once were,  
Kids gleefully scream, jump, and throw themselves on this pile, a fall tradition that never grows old.

This is autumn  
This is fall  
This is our season  
From daylight to nightfall.



*Illustration:*  
*Christine Earwood*

# Corriendo Hacia Mis Tradiciones

*Tania Turcios-Navarrete*

Algo me viene persiguiendo desde mi casa pero no quiero voltear a verla. No hay ningún escondite secreto para esconderme de esa cosa curiosa. Volteo a ver si hay gente que me pueda ayudar pero todo está oscuro. La luna es la única luz que me permite ver hacia la distancia. Lo que observo es un escondite secreto pero el escondite no deseado. Corro más rápido que un león tras su comida. Corro y corro sin poder respirar y mis botas golpean las piedras de este lugar. El lugar donde muchos visitan pero donde no es correcto esconderse. Doy a la izquierda y brinco como el canguro de la película, "Kangaroo Jack." Esa cosa extraña se esconde pero no la puedo ver. Todo está oscuro y de repente, algo veo y es algo que mis ojos jamás han visto.

Señoras y señores de todas edades trayendo ofrendas para sus familiares. Las conchas rosadas y amarillas en canastas de diferentes colores están siendo puestas a lado de las tumbas. Una tumba dice, "en memoria de Vicente Martinez." Todo es tan bonito pero ¿por qué nadie me ve? Una cosa rara me viene persiguiendo desde mi casa y nadie me ayuda. Todos están tan felices de estar reunidos con sus seres queridos a lado de una tumba pero yo me estoy comiendo las uñas del miedo que tengo. De repente, algo frío toca mis pies y siento que me voy a desmayar. No lo puedo creer. Esa cosa que me venía persiguiendo está a mi lado.

"Que haces aqui Eliza?" grita la cosa extraña. Trae un sombrero color café y unos pantalones todos rotos y sus zapatos son de diferentes colores. Mi imaginación empieza a correr y recuerdo que este señor es mi tío, el que murió porque lo atropelló el de los helados. Siento que no puedo respirar y mi tío Raul vuelve a preguntarme que que hago aqui. Quiero pensar que este es un sueño pero él se mira tan real. Grito lo más fuerte que puedo y empiezo a correr. El empieza a correr detrás de mí pero lo que no entiendo es, porque lo puedo mirar si él está muerto? Corro por las oscuras calles de Monterrey. Los lobos empiezan a aullar y el señor que es mi tío, desaparece. ¿Dónde se fue y por qué sigo corriendo? No entiendo qué es lo que está pasando. Lo bueno es que mi casa está cerca y de aquí puedo ver la luz de mi vecindad. Corro para llegar más rápido a mi casa y de repente algo me golpea en los pies y hace que me caiga. Caigo en unas hojas y las hojas se ven tan perfectas con sus colores brillantes. Veo a mi alrededor y no veo nada pero absolutamente nada. Intento levantarme pero no puedo. Miro mis pies pero tienen una herida que me está sangrando muy rápido. Me quito mi suéter y lo amarró en mi pierna e intento levantarme. Luego veo algo impactante que hace que mis ojos lloren y que mi herida quiera explotar.



*Illustration:  
Keallon Kennedy-Cook*

Miro un hombre con una mascarilla. No se si es mi tío o si es alguien más. Me levanto y empieza a correr detrás de mí. Caigo de nuevo y ahora se me hace más difícil levantarme. No hay nadie que me quiera ayudar. Estoy sola y la única persona que me acompaña es la luna. Voy a morir y no podré despedirme de mis papas. La última vez que los vi fue hoy en la mañana en el desayuno. Fue una decepción para ellos porque les dije que no les iba ayudar a poner las ofrendas para nuestros seres queridos que se han ido para el cielo. Ahora que me voy a morir, me arrepiento haberles dicho que no. No le quise ayudar a mi mamá a hacer el mole verde con las tortillas a mano. Tampoco le ayudé a mi papá a arreglar el altar ni puse las fotos de mis abuelos y de mi tío como tuve que haber hecho. Merezco mi muerte y moriré muy triste por no haber celebrado a mis seres queridos en el cielo, pero en unas horas los veré en el cielo.

El hombre grita, "morirás Eliza y no podrás poner a tu tío en el altar de los recuerdos." En ese momento recuerdo que mi tío Raúl al principio me venía persiguiendo. Yo pensé que era por algo malo pero yo creo que era para decirme algo. El último aullido del lobo y el monstruo que está enfrente de mi se empieza a transformar en un hombre con el rostro quemado. Humo empieza a salir de los zapatos de este monstruo. Empiezo a rezar el padre nuestro y cierro los ojos, pero inesperadamente el monstruo cae a mi lado y le grita a otra persona, "no lastimaras a mi sobrina." Abro mis ojos y veo que mi tío Raul ha derrotado al monstruo. Me levanto muy rápido que se me olvida que tengo una herida en mi pierna. Intentó abrazar a mi tío Raul pero recuerdo que el esta muerto. Yo no lo puedo abrazar. Estoy abrazando el aire pero mi tío Raul me dice, "Gracias hija por el abrazo. Se siente como un abrazo de oso." Mi tío me empieza a contar que él me venía persiguiendo porque quería protegerme de ese monstruo malo. Me cuenta que es el monstruo malvado que intenta robarse a los niños para que no puedan poner las fotos de los seres queridos que han muerto. "Hija ve y disfruta de tu mama y papa y pon mi foto en el altar de los recuerdos. Disfruta ayudando a tu papá a poner el altar y disfruta ayudando a tu mamá a hacer el mole verde con las tortillas a mano." Ahora todo entiendo y le doy el último abrazo a mi tío y corro hacia mi casa.

Llego a casa y corro al baño para secarme la herida pero de repente veo algo espeluznante. La herida en mi pierna ya no está. Mi pierna se ve tan perfecta sin ninguna cicatriz. Corro y abrazo a mi mamá y a mi papá y les pido perdón y nos damos un fuerte abrazo de oso. Me siento muy cansada y con sueño. Al siguiente día despierto y empiezo ayudar a mis papás a poner los adornos para el altar. Luego con mi mamá hacemos ese delicioso mole verde con tortillas hechas a mano. Ponemos 3 sodas de Pepsi de botella, unas conchas deliciosas de color amarillo, blanco, y rosado. Siento que tengo hambre al ver toda esta deliciosa comida. Me siento tan feliz porque mi familia está más fuerte que nunca y recuerdo que mi tío Raul fue mi héroe. El que mató al monstruo que mata las tradiciones para recordar a nuestros seres queridos que están en el cielo. El monstruo corrió detrás de mí para matar las tradiciones pero yo y mi tío Raul corrimos más fuerte para hacer esas tradiciones más vivas y alegres que nunca.



# Kismet

*Devin Smith*

I dressed in my jean jacket over a white t-shirt with black pants and black and white Vans and left my house, braving the cold in exchange for a night of shenanigans. My short hair offered no protection from the cutting October wind. It was the middle of the week in the first week of fall break. I lived in Norman, Oklahoma. Our high school released us for fall break the third week of October, which neared us for Halloween. Many people had already decorated their homes with pumpkins, plastic skeletons, and other common items you see for a western Halloween. I wasn't one for Trick-or-Treating or baking Halloween cookies, but I did enjoy the costume parties and the TP-ing of houses. It was my Halloween tradition.

My best friend, Bartholomew, knew that I enjoyed these things. He was slightly taller than me and had a darker skin tone; His hair was cut short and wavy. He was dressed as a pirate and had a fake hook on his right hand, but wore black Air Force 1s instead of pirate boots. He has always been a bit of a loose cannon, and was always getting into trouble: Stealing, cheating, fighting, you name it. It was a surprise he was even still in school.

We decided to go to a Halloween party near my house. We heard of a haunted cornfield about a mile from where I lived and, with my curious mindset, I decided we had to go explore it. Bartholomew was not as excited, but agreed to go with me. As we drove, he covered his nose and made a show of looking over at me.

"You gotta tone down that cinnamon cologne. You smell like my grandma."  
I stared at him before sneaking a smell for myself.

"Well girls like it, so why not put up with it? Plus it's only for this party."

"Aight, whatever."

We began near the edge of the cornfield, and we both stopped around five feet from the entrance. I looked left and right, searching for another entrance. It was nearing dark, but I estimated we still had an hour of daylight to be in and out. The corn stocks were towering over me, and even over Bartholomew a little. The vegetables seemed ripe, but I didn't see anyone tending to the field. I looked at my best friend and he shrugged.

"Don't seem haunted to me, what are we waiting for?" Bartholomew asked.

Shrugging as well, I followed him into the cornfield.

We walked around in the maze for about an hour, sharing party ideas and Bartholomew telling me about the most recent time he was suspended. He was also complaining about his shoes getting dirty, but he never made an effort to turn and leave. After about thirty minutes, we had seemingly made it to the center. How did we know it was the center? How had we missed the scarecrow hanging on a cross? Its face was terribly deformed, and its limbs seemed to dangle helplessly. It had a very tattered straw hat and rugged clothing. It had an eerie and disturbing stitched smile on its face. The pit of my stomach lit alive, but Bartholomew seemed to have no problem with it, as he walked directly to the scarecrow and began messing with its post.

“HA! LOOK AT THIS! IT LOOKS LIKE MY GRANDMA!”

He began kicking at the wooden post, making it shake and wobble. I stepped a bit closer, laughing at the insults he made towards the scarecrow. He even took it off of the post, the body dropping to the ground with an abnormally loud thud.

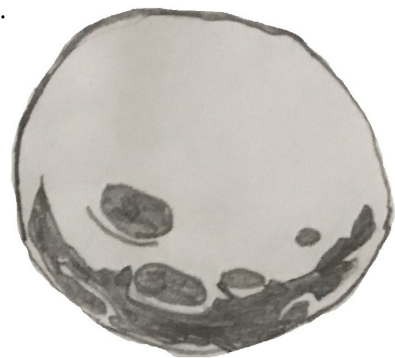
“Yo, who knew these things were so heavy?”

Bartholomew began wrestling with the scarecrow as if it was alive, while I drew on its face. We kept this up for about thirty minutes, before leaving the scarecrow in the center of the maze. We headed back through the maze the way we had come.

“Man, this was lame. Never waste two hours of my life again,” Bartholomew asked.

I laughed and adjusted my clothing. I began booking it upon seeing the exit, causing my friend to follow suit. I heard his steps behind me for about 10 yards, until the sound disappeared. I stopped running and turned to look.

He was gone.



*Illustration:  
Geroge Carden*

I went back into the corn maze and searched for Batholomew. I called his name, but he did not respond.

“Come on Barty, this isn’t funny. Where are you?”

Still no answer.

I was walking for almost an hour and I still saw no sign of him. I was starting to panic, and the movements within my stomach came back much more violently. I felt like my body was heavier and my breathing had become heavy. That’s when I heard movements to my left in the dense part of the corn. I looked that way, a smile upon my face.

“Alright Barty, stop hiding. We gotta get going for real.”

I stepped towards the dense edge, but what launched at me wasn’t my best friend.

The scarecrow, alive and moving, grabbed at me viciously. I screamed. I screamed so loud that I sounded like a little girl. My voice must’ve carried for miles. I struggled, attempting to get away but the scarecrow seemed to be everywhere. Its straw limbs wrapped around my arms and pulled outwards. It was so much larger than me; I couldn’t fight back. It pulled me in towards its disturbing, smiling face. Its mouth began to darken, and that’s when I saw that blood was beginning to ooze out of the stitches.

I fell backwards onto the ground; the scarecrow jumped on top of me. My arms shot waves of pain up to my shoulders. That’s when I realized the scarecrow was ripping off my arms. I continued screaming, shouting until my throat fell out of my mouth. The straws of the scarecrow came up to my mouth, filling my throat with the sharp needles of dry stock in my esophagus. I looked away, realizing this was the end. As my eyes became blurry, I noticed something about twenty feet from me. It was sticking out of the maze, and my eyes widened and tears streamed down my face.

It was Bartholomew’s Air Force 1s.



*Illustration:*

*Danis Fabricio Hernandez*

# The Hunted

*Addison Lloyd*

My hands securely on the driver's wheel, I veer right. The harsh pavement crumbles before a stretch of rocky pebbles that grind against the rubber tires of my car. The forest is dense. With my eyes, I sift through the trees as the car rumbles along, scanning for my destination, unsure of what I should be looking for. At last, the purple tin roof of the Hunter's Guild shines through the sea of scarlet-and-gold trees like a beacon. I slide the car into a safe park just outside, and step out onto the pebble way.

Instantly, my senses clear in a rush of sweet October air, carrying with it the delectable perfume of apples and wild things. The autumnal trees stand colossal and confident; this wasn't their first harvest season. Their crimson boughs stir up a crackling cacophony that drifts down to me on a playful breeze. Uncertainly, I turn to study the Hunter's Guild itself.

It was a tall, brick structure strung with lacey vines popping with purple berries. The vivid violet roof that had given its location away to me gleams metallically in the afternoon sun. Backpack hitched over one shoulder, I headed towards the door.

It opens with the tinkling chime of a bell. A saccharine haze fills the room, a direct contrast to the pleasant slight sweetness of the air outside. It's dim, lit only by a few candles perched atop shelves and tables like luminous birds. I cough, somewhat wishing I was back outside. But I shake away that feeling, remembering what I had come here for in the first place; Hunting Season.

A thrill runs through me just thinking about it. Here in rural Canada, October was the picture of a hunter's paradise. This year is my first chance to try out my new rifle on some of the local game. Sure, maybe not all of it was legal, but what of it? There was a huge cash prize in it for whoever could bring in the most deer pelts. I wasn't one to turn up my nose at an easy profit like that...

The lobbyist desk is vacant. Shifting nervously, I scan the room for a sign of life, the choking perfumed fog beginning to make me dizzy.

I didn't even notice the elderly woman that stared at me from a round table 6 feet away until she started shrieking at me.

"FOOL! You have come here with impure intentions in your mind and greed in your heart!"

She had grizzled gray hair, and a wild look in her bespectacled beetle-like eyes. I stumble away from her, nearly tripping over a loose floorboard. But she wasn't done.

She jabs a spindly finger in my direction, practically trembling with rage.

“ORION HUXLEY! I know you, foolish one! You may not believe me, but you will soon meet with a terrible fate, if you do not do as I command and leave this place for all time! This is your final chance to save yourself, Orion Huxley! For when the moon is black, you can’t turn back!” she screams, beetle eyes bulging.

Ma’am, I-“ I sputter with a start, but was saved when a younger woman came dashing down the stairs to the elderly lady’s side, her eyes alight with a mingled mixture of annoyance and embarrassment.

“I am so sorry,” she mutters, casting a quick flustered glance up at me before she returns to the still shaking elderly woman.

“Mother, how many times do I need to tell you, there’s nothing in these woods we need to be afraid of!” she growls exasperatedly, helping the elderly woman to her feet. She was still scrutinizing me as if I’d just committed some kind of heinous crime right in front of her.

“Oh yes, there is! There’s beasts, I tell you! Monsters!” she howls, thrashing in her daughter’s grip. “You should know, girl! They took your father!”

The young woman shakes her head with a weary sigh.

“Mother, the police said that Dad was killed by a mountain lion, remember? It was a freak accident, and there’s been no cougar sightings in this area since it happened. Please, don’t go around telling our customers that there’s monsters of all things in the woods. It’s bad for business.” She tosses me a plastered-on smile, dropping it as soon as her mother starts flailing again.

“NO! My husband was not killed by a mountain lion! It was a monster, I tell you! It lurks silently in the shadows, leading it’s prey deep in the forest, able to mimic any voice perfectly! Its breath is as icy as death, and it’s eyes black as night! Once you’ve lost sight of the moon, that’s when you know that it has you!”

She utters a long, garbled string of words as her daughter hoists her up the stairs, returning alone after a minute. She smiles weakly.

“Sorry about that.” she says apologetically, sliding behind the reception desk where she flips through a well-loved notepad. “You’re Orion Huxley, yes? Signed for a hunt tonight at midnight?”

I nod stupidly, dumbfounded by what had just occurred.

“Well, here’s your room key, Mr. Huxley,” she replies airily, handing me a glossy silver object which I fumble for, pocketing it. “Rest up. I’ll wake you when it’s time for your hunt.”

I nod again, coming to. But a particular question still lingers in my mind.

How did that old woman know my name?

Night had settled comfortably over the Canadian wilderness. I stand just outside the Hunter's Guild, my rifle painted silver by the full moon that hung directly above in the sky, a perfect pale orb. The stars twinkle like a billion distant crystals, and together with the moon they cast the swishing undergrowth a delicate silver. It was much colder than it had been when I arrived. I halfway wish that I could drop the rifle and stow my hands away in the pockets of my fur jacket.

An owl hoots nearby. I try to hang on to the enthusiasm I had felt for this hunt earlier, try to ignore the old woman's voice in the back of my mind.

Are you a coward, or a hunter? a second, bolder voice in my head challenges. My mind made up, I swallow my fear, and push into the undergrowth.



*Illustration:  
Max Peters*

Dry leaves crunch beneath my boots. So far, there was no trace of movement. The owl had fallen silent. There seems to be no signs of life anywhere. In fact, I notice that the trees, too, had stopped whispering in the wind- the wind, which had stopped blowing.

I stop abruptly, stealing a hissing intake of breath, my heart suddenly pounding.

If the wind had stopped, then what was the frigid breeze on the back of my neck?

I spin around. Nothing. I laugh hollowly at myself. Stupid. It was probably just my imagination.

I keep moving.

The forest is dead silent, other than my feet on the leaves. No crickets. No owls. No deer. No pelts.

I adjust the gun in my hands so that it lay at my side. It was turning out to be a pretty uneventful night. Until I heard the scream.

My blood freezes. It was an indescribably horrific, agonized scream- and it doesn't stop. The scream resounds over and over, melting into desperate, choking sobs. It sounds like a woman's voice. And there was something oddly familiar about it, too. I make a realization that causes the hairs on the back of my neck to stand on end. It is the voice of the young woman from the Hunter's Guild.

Rifle at the ready, I charge into the undergrowth, searching blindly for the source of the screams. They don't stop. Over and over, the screams and sobs don't stop. My stomach turns. I feel ready to vomit.

Branches reach out ravenously for me, their twigs like spindly fingers that were vying for my face. I stumble over a root, hitting my face hard on the earth. I taste the copper tang of blood and know I must have bit my lip. My head spins, and my vision dances with a kaleidoscope of spots. I look up, trying to get my bearings.

Then two things occurred to me.  
One, the screams had stopped.  
And two, I couldn't see the moon.

"For when the moon is black, you can't turn back!"

That's when I see it.

The woman from the Guild had never been in danger. No. She was safe, probably tucked in her bed without a worry nor whim. No, she wasn't in danger.

I am the prey.

Looming out of the vegetation is an unearthly tall figure; even though it is hunched over, it was easily 9 feet. It was almost humanoid, but there's something sickeningly off about it. There is no flesh on its skeletal, emaciated body- only a thin sheet of ashen gray skin that barely just managed to stretch over its jutting ribs and bulging spine, looking like it could puncture at the slightest touch. It's sunken face is almost animalistic, with twisted antlers and a long, deerish snout. Its arms are far too long, even for its abominable height, stretching well past its knobby knees. On its plate-sized hands, it had talons for fingers, wickedly sharp and stained with something nauseatingly red.

And it's eyes...

There is no moonlight to reflect in them. They are emotionless abyssal pits, carved into the gaunt face, unfathomably dark black holes.

I don't know what compels me to speak out. It's as if my lips are moving against my will. Like this thing has possessed me, mocking me, like a cat playing with a mouse.

But I ask.

"What... what are you?" I whisper.

And it replies with a single, raspy word. It's empty, rattling voice is the winter wind.

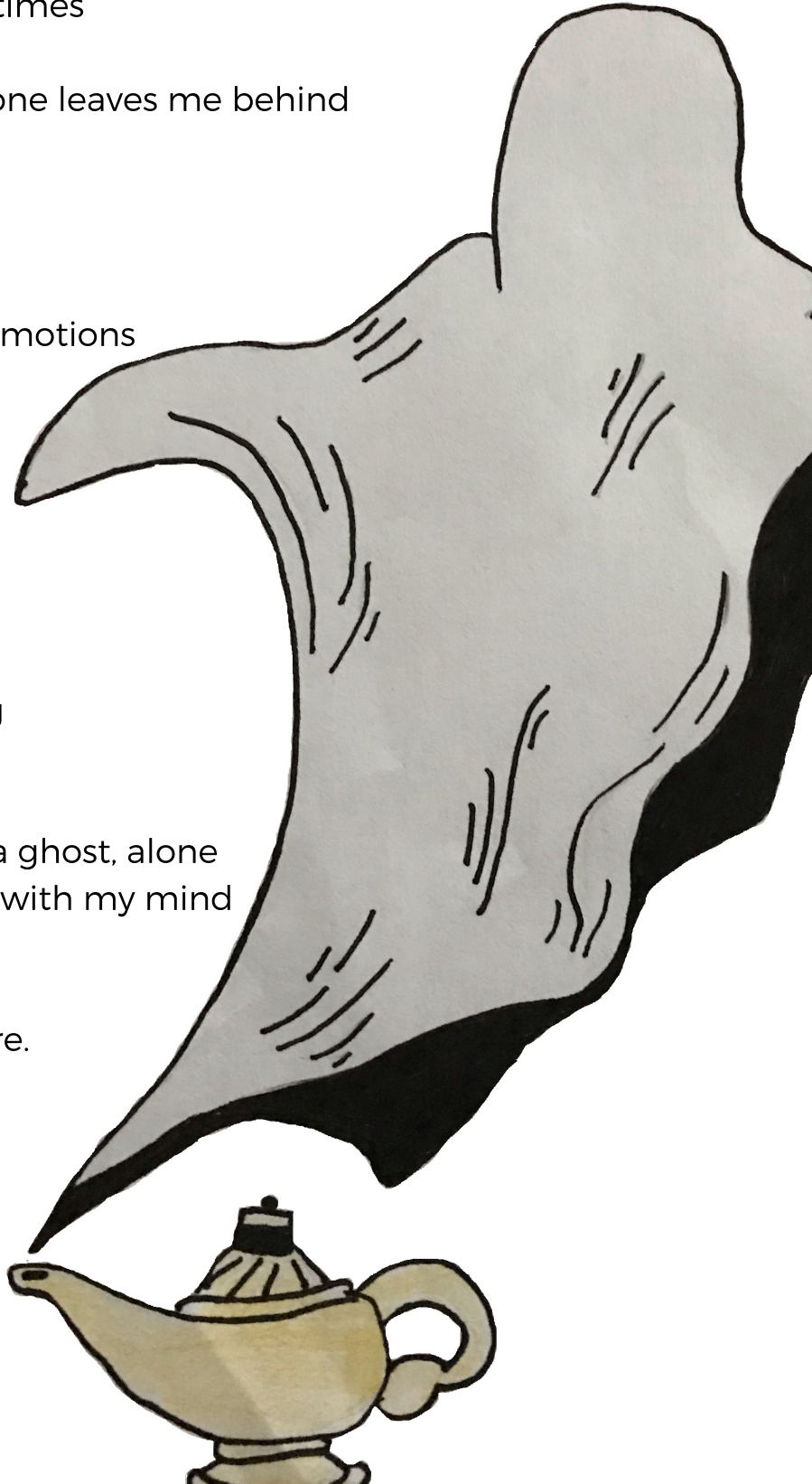
"Greed."

# Ghost in a Ghost Town

*Madelynn Cook*

I feel like I live in a ghost town sometimes  
I hear the wind howling my name  
But no one is there  
I feel I am a ghost in this town sometimes  
Everyone is living  
And I am stuck in limbo while everyone leaves me behind  
I feel I am a ghost in this town  
No one seems to really see me  
And I cannot see myself  
I feel I am not myself  
I am floating and going through the motions  
But who am I really  
I don't feel like me  
I don't feel anything  
Am I even being seen?  
Can anyone hear me?  
I am screaming!  
I am pleading!  
Why am I here? What is the meaning  
Of all of this?

I wonder around this ghost town as a ghost, alone  
I search just to find I was left behind with my mind  
My fears run wild. They eat me alive.  
And what is my greatest fear?  
No one will know I was ever even here.



*Illustration:  
Sarah Sorensen*



# To Be Beautiful

*Caroline Steed*

I want to be beautiful. They always say that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder but I know that isn't true. Beautiful is what you see in the weight loss commercials and on billboards on Highway I-80. That's who I want to be. I want to be beautiful. Everyday I stand in front of my mirror and it tells me I'm not beautiful. I cake my face in makeup and pretend to be beautiful, putting on the illusion of confidence. I am not beautiful, I am an illusion.

I went to sit with the prettiest girl in my grade. "I want to be beautiful like you." I asked her to show me her secrets after school. Now I look just like her whenever I want. Now I am beautiful. I sought the prettiest girl in the grade above me. "I want to be beautiful like you." I asked her to show me her secrets after practice. Now I look just like her whenever I want. Now I am beautiful.

I stayed after school with the most beautiful teacher. "I want to be beautiful like you." She told me that beauty comes from within and outward appearance doesn't matter, but I told her I didn't care. She showed me her secrets and now I look just like her whenever I want. Now I am beautiful.

It's not enough. It's never enough. I have to be more beautiful. I have to be the most beautiful.

A new girl started at school. She's beautiful. I became her friend. I pretended to be beautiful. I surround myself with things that are beautiful. Friday I invited her to my house for a sleepover. We hung out and played games. I dared her to walk in the woods alone after dark. She agreed, but I followed her to make sure she stayed safe.



*Illustration:*

*Willa Dahms-Kleffman*

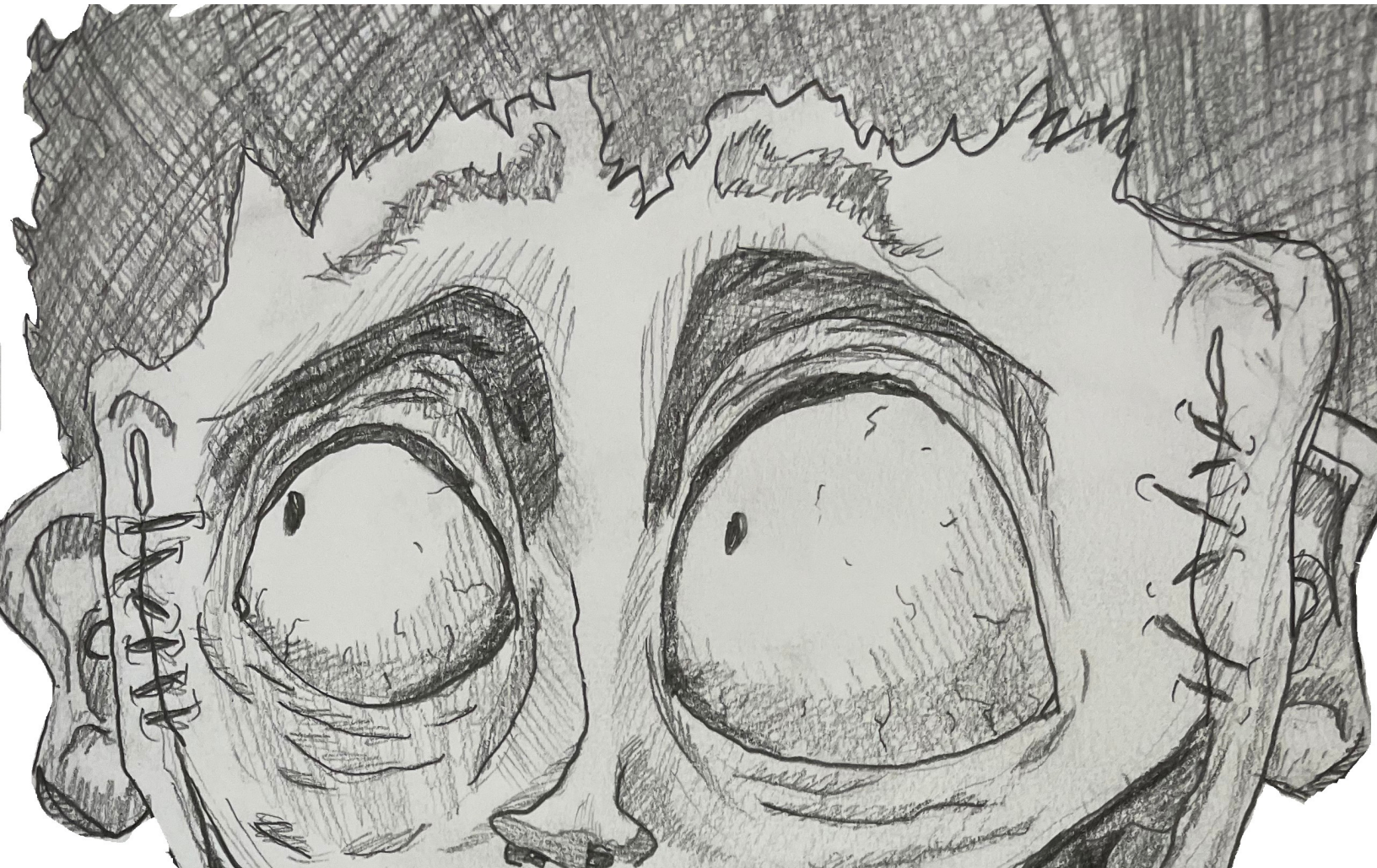
I made sure she stays safe. Something rustled in the branches above her and she paused. It was the perfect time to strike and I jumped out from my hiding spot with a cleaver I carried with me to make sure she stayed safe. She struggled a little but I had done this enough times to strike true and strike once. She was dead in moments and I was giddy with excitement as I took out my silver knife and started tracing her face with it, telling her and myself "I am beautiful, you made me beautiful, I am beautiful, you made me beautiful" until the job was done. I peeled her skin away from her skull and the stringy muscles pulled up with it, I had to cut them off just like the other times, taking care to not get her eyeballs stuck in the lids. I removed her lips from her jaws and teeth. A little blood got on her face, and me, but that's ok, I'd wash it off.

Her body is was warm and lets off steam in the cool night air as I shaped her ears how I like and disconnected her chin from her neck. I shaped my new mask to my face and then hid her body where only I can find it and went home. I put up my new mask with the others and smiled to myself.

Now I can be beautiful like her whenever I want.

Now I am beautiful.

*Illustration:  
Max Peters*



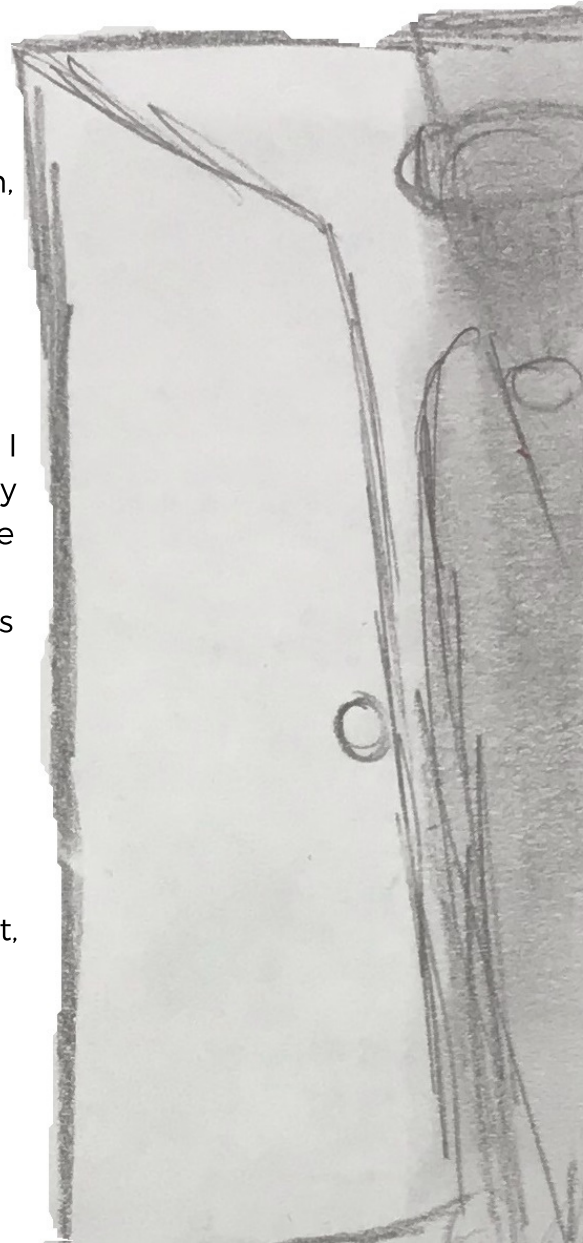
# Crimson Eulogy

*Joshua Johnson*

It was approaching. Through the veil of night, it was slowly encroaching on me. I yelled into the night, calling for help. But my cries were only met by darkness.. I tried to get up and run, but I couldn't. There was no escape. There was only the pitch black void that covered all. I turned to face it, and it met me with hands outstretched: reaching, begging, yearning.

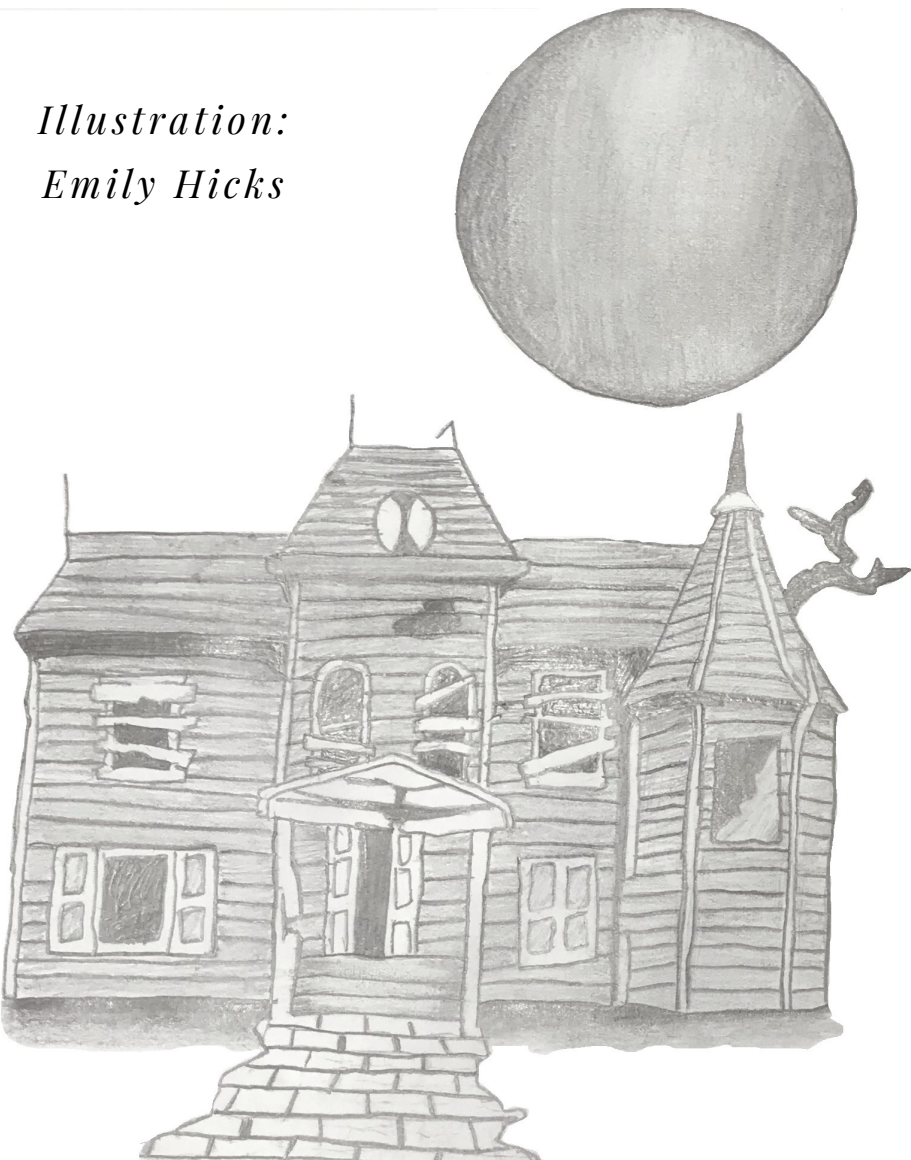
I awoke in my bed, drenched in sweat. I jerked my body upright and frantically searched around the room. I did not know what I thought I'd find, but I was glad there wasn't anything out of the ordinary. I looked towards the giant clock that was hung on the northern wall-5:50. It was almost time to get up. I attempted to lie my head back down and enjoy around ten more minutes of serenity. But I couldn't will myself to fall asleep; I was already far too shaken by the nightmare. These nightmares started around a month ago, they start off relatively tame. I would be in a darkened room, I could see the outlines of the wall and the chair that I was tied to. And then, out of the darkness, it came. The Hand Man, the one plaguing my slumber, would manifest out of the void. And once it saw me, it started to approach, stretching out its one hand towards my face. The dream would end as the hand was mere inches from my face, and I would suddenly awaken, soaked in my own sweat. But every time I went back to sleep, the nightmare would worsen. The room would get darker, the Hand Man would have more hands, I would sweat even more through my nightmares. As of now, the nightmare was at its worst. I couldn't see any indication that I was in a room, it was far too dark to tell. It appeared to be even darker than dark. The void began to stretch into my heart, I was unable to differentiate my own body from the darkness around me. But the Hand Man, he was by far the worst part of the nightmare. It was pitch black, the only thing I could see was an eternal void, and yet, I knew he was still there. I could sense him growing each time, gaining more power, more hands, more control over my cognitive state. As of late, the line between my dreams and reality, seemed very thin.

*Illustration:  
Melissa Hermenejildo*



Through my reminiscing, I almost neglected to watch the time. I quickly turned my head towards the great clock, 5:59, and then, 6:00. An eerie bell toll echoed throughout the walls, signifying our awakening. All around me, heads snapped awake from the many beds that made up the sleeping quarters. Children rose from their beds, almost in unison. I did my best to follow suit, climbing out of my bed, and moved towards the dressing room. There, we changed out of our dark red sleeping clothes, and into bright crimson uniforms. Long red coats that were decorated with black buckles. After that, we began to walk out of the sleeping quarters, and into the hallway. Not a word was exchanged throughout all of this. We exited the room, and began into the long hallway that separated the sleeping quarters from the main building. The grand hallway was coated with an intense hue of red, much like everything else. It was lined with many grand pictures that hung on the wall, pictures of past winners, with their brilliantly shining trophies sitting directly under their photographs. The pictures seemed to only get larger and more frequent as we neared the end of the hallway. At the very end, stood a grand door. Standing at either side of the door, were two Assistants. Upon our approach, they each grabbed a massive door handle, and opened the great scarlet door. Light poured into our eyes as it came into view. Our home, our prison, the Orphanage.

*Illustration:  
Emily Hicks*



The two Assistants led us across a great stone pathway, surrounded by fields of roses and red poppies. At the end of the pathway, was the Orphanage. A grand cathedral-like building that was populated by towers and walls alike. The architecture was pristine, delicate curves and patterns of blood red stone complimented the grand stained glass windows that displayed the passage through life and death. Smaller castle-like structures surrounded the main grand cathedral, giving it an aura of an ancient stronghold. As I was admiring the view, we had reached the back entrance. Assistants stood on either side of the door, each one opening a separate side. As the door swung open, a blood-red light filled my eyes.

As my eyes adjusted to the new light, it became more clear-the dining hall. A grand hall that spanned almost twice the length of the flower garden, the walls painted a fiery shade of red, with paintings and pictures on every side. The middle of the room housed the largest table known to mankind, a grandiose velvet table that stretched almost as long as the room itself. The Assistants led us to the table, seating each of us at a different chair. As I sat down, I noticed that there was already food on the table. A moderate pile of eggs alongside two slices of cooked ham. Looking around the room, I noticed that everyone else had food as well. But upon looking to my left, I saw someone who didn't. A young boy was seated to my left, twelve years of age, by the looks of him. His face was as pale as the moon, and the rest of his skin followed suit. His limbs had the width of a toothpick, and his torso wasn't much wider. He looked like a stick figure you'd find in cartoons. His appearance mortified me. From the looks of him, he'd been like this for several weeks now. There was only one explanation-he hasn't been winning. My train of thought was interrupted by the skinny boy; I saw him eyeing my food, very eagerly. I tried to whisper to him, to warn him, to tell him it wasn't worth it. He hasn't been winning in the competitions, so he is not allowed to eat. And besides, the headmistress hasn't arrived and started eating, so he wouldn't have been able to eat even if he had his own food. My hand reached out to stop him, but it was too late. His hand had already snatched a piece of my ham, and he started to tear into it. He devoured it in mere seconds, but as he reached for the second piece, an ear piercing sound rang throughout the room. The skinny boy instantly stopped, he tried to look up, to see what had happened. But it was already too late. A wide hole had appeared on his forehead, leaking blood and bits of his head. He collapsed onto the table, spilling his blood all over the velvet lining. I jerked my head around, one of the Assistants stood staring at me, with a gun pointed at the body of the skinny boy.

After what felt like years of uncomfortable silence, the headmistress finally arrived. She walked to the head of the table, her crimson long coat decorated with buckles and bells trailing behind her. She delicately pulled the chair out from under the table and sat down. She cleared her throat and stared at us with her burning red eyes.

"It has come to my immediate attention that one of you has unfortunately failed. It appeared that he wasn't educated in the principles of our institution, that is why he made such an unintelligent decision." Her eyes trailed towards the body of the skinny boy, still collapsed onto the table. "Now, I do hope all of you have learned something today, a lesson you have hopefully taken from this failure."

I silently gulped as her eyes scanned the room, seeming to grow bright red every time she passed over the skinny boy.

Although I do wish I could believe that, truly, that you will all learn a lesson from this. But I do realize that some of you are just too stubborn to learn, so I will administer another lesson.” She snapped her fingers on her left hand, and four Assistants appeared from behind her chair. “You all have once dined with this unfortunate boy before, so I don’t see any reason why you should cease to do so.”

The Assistants carefully grabbed the body of the skinny boy, blood and bits of brain staining the spot where his head had lain. They propped his body up in the chair that he had once sat upon, making sure to not let the body fall over. The headmistress did not look satisfied, however. And then, she turned to look at me, and a small smile grew across her face.

“You”, she said to me, “I have heard that it was you whom the failure stole food from.”

My heart skipped a couple of beats, my hands went cold and clammy, and my head began to ache. “Y-ye-ye-yes, ma’am, th-that w-w-was--”

“Speak up, young one, I have old ears, so I do not hear quite as well as you young children.”

I swallowed my fear, I decided that it would be far worse for me if I continued to speak quietly.

“Y-yes ma'am, he t-took my ham, ma'am.”

The headmistresses silently smiled, “Well, then unfortunately, I see this all as your fault.”

My heart dropped, I couldn’t breathe for a second. This was it, she was going to execute me.

“Since you weren't strong enough to stop even a malnourished failure like that boy from stealing your food, you got him killed.”

My eyes widened. She was right, this was all my fault.

“So, as is such, I suppose you should perform some type of repentance for this poor little failure of a child. I do believe that would put his troubled soul to rest.”

I held my breath, she’s going to kill me. She’ll kill me, and use my body alongside his as an example of what not to do, and why you shall never challenge the principles of the Orphanage. I’ll be remembered as a failure to all of these poor children, that’s all I’ll ever be.

“Don’t worry, young one, I won’t kill you” She stared at me and smiled, maliciously. “I’ll do something far worse.”

The Assistants had strong grips on both of my wrists. They led me down a set of stairs, through some locked doors, down a couple more sets of stairs, and through one final door. After all that descending we were finally at the containment rooms. I tried to resist, to fight back, to escape, but I was far too weak and out of energy to do anything. Besides, even if I was, they would have not hesitated to dispose of me on the spot if I tried to get away. They ushered me into a cell, handed me my plate of food, and closed the door.

As the lights shut off and filled the room with pitch black darkness, I started getting scared. In order to prevent myself from thinking too hard about my nightmares, my mind trailed back to the dining hall, and what the headmistress had said to me as I was taken away. She told me that I needed correction to atone for my actions. I was to dine in a containment cell. I assumed she would have added alone into the phrase, in order to scare me more. But she didn't, which I thought was rather strange. She typically puts as much detail as she can when describing the conditions that will be met inside containment cells, in order to effectively terrify anyone being subjected to them. As I was pondering what she had said, a sliver of light peeked in through the lone window outside the cell, and I saw that she made no such error in her phrasing. It wasn't a lot of light, but it was enough to get a fair guess at what was in front of me. A pale white face with a bloody hole in the forehead doesn't leave a lot to interpretation. I jumped out of my chair, screaming, and pinned myself against the furthest corner of the cell. Another beam of light passed through the window, illuminating his broken jaw from where he had violently fallen on the table. Tears consisting of pure raw fear started to well up in my eyes. I curled into a ball, unable to bring myself to look up again.

Then, all of a sudden, my head moved on its own. My head snapped towards where the body was, and even though it was pitch black inside of the cell, I could see the body, sense the body. Or should I say, sense him. I screamed as the Hand Man got up from the chair where the body was. It was as if the Hand Man had taken over the body of the skinny boy. The pale, malnourished body was leaking darkness just as much as it was leaking blood. Long limbs coated in darkness were protruding from the mouth of the body, ending in long wide hands. The body started to slowly shuffle over to me, its hands writhing in my direction. It stretched its hands towards me, grasping at my face. I tried to get up and escape, but I found myself stuck against the wall, but was it really a wall? Was I really in a room? All I could see around me was a pitch black darkness, a never ending night that was stretched all around me.

The body of the skinny boy started to shudder and shake, cracks appearing all over its body, with long hands poking out of the cracks. Soon, the body was reduced to a mass of shadowy hands and arms. The congregation of limbs began to writhe in place, it then seemed to shuffle towards me, with each individual arm stretching towards me. I tried to retreat backwards, away from the monstrosity, but I fell. I fell into a deep abyss that had manifested beneath me. I fell for what felt like hours through a pitch black tunnel. Eventually, I stopped falling, and I was caught by something. I looked around, I couldn't see anything through the darkness, but I could feel something beneath me. Whatever had grabbed me, was squeezing tighter. My back began to ache with pain as the grip tightened. Suddenly, I felt immense pain on my arms and legs. Something had grabbed onto them as well. As the grips tightened, I could sense a presence approaching from a distance. I strained myself to look towards it, a futile effort since I could still see nothing. But, I could still see it, not through my eyes, but through my brain--which meant that it was more than likely the Hand Man.

My fears were confirmed as the Hand Man violently limped closer to me. For some reason, I could see it more clearly than other times. Although it was still mostly shrouded in darkness, I could see its outline. It was more humanoid than I originally assumed, which was surprisingly unsettling. The Hand Man got incredibly close to my face, I stared into its eyes, which did not seem to properly exist in this world. Instead of the typical pupil, it had an endless chasm of nightmares seeping from its eye sockets. I could hear its shallow breathing on my skin, it wasn't hot like most breaths. But it was cold and chilly, making goosebumps arise all over my skin. It seemed to stare at me for an uncomfortably long time. All of a sudden, it opened its right eye. Its eye was pale white, but at the same time, it was an unending void. I was partially entranced by the eye, it had some sort of strange twisted beauty to it, when all of a sudden, a hand emerged. A shadowy limb extended out from the eye of the Hand Man. The limb made its way closer to my face as the limbs holding me down tightened their grip. Unlike other occurrences with the Hand Man, its hand actually reached my face. It placed its palm onto my face, and squeezed. Its hand was cold and clammy, but at the same time, it burned like a white hot fire. I quickly discovered that I was unable to breathe, and as I struggled and gasped for air, I heard a resonance coming from my head, the Hand Man was speaking to me.

"I've finally found you. Now, we can finally begin."

And that was the last thing I heard before my world faded to black.



I awoke back in my chair. When I did, my plate with my breakfast went flying against the wall. I looked around. It was too dark to be certain, but I thought I was still in a containment room. I tried to get up from my chair, but I found that I was tied down. Strange, I don't recall being tied down when the Assistants brought me in here. Maybe the thought slipped my mind, I was probably too busy worrying about my punishment. Oh yeah, I was punished, that would explain why I'm in a containment room. And then, suddenly, I remembered everything. I remembered exactly why I was punished, and how I was punished. Moonlight shone through the window, revealing the body in the chair in front of me. The body of the skinny boy was still here. Dried blood and unrecognizable matter decorated its forehead. Its hair was messed up and falling out, revealing the gaping hole in its forehead. Its head leaned back in the chair, almost to a breaking point. Its jaw was broken from the impact on the hard table, and the jaw was dangling far below the rest of its mouth. A good chunk of the skin was gone from the body, with bones and muscle tissue showing in some areas. How long have I been down here?

After what seemed like several more days, I heard noises coming from outside of my cell. The door swung open, and there were three Assistants standing in the doorway. They motioned for me to follow them, and I did so. I followed them back up the many flights of stairs that I descended down so long ago. I had trouble keeping up. I was very hungry, and very tired. As we reached the top of the final set of stairs, I felt a sudden pain in my stomach. I doubled over in pain, clutching my throbbing stomach. I looked up at the Assistants through tears, I tried to say something, but I couldn't find my voice. I grasped for the Assistants, silently begging for help. They just stared down at me, waiting for me to get up and continue following them. After struggling to find my voice, I managed to mutter at the Assistants.

"...Hungry..." I croaked.

Suddenly, one of the Assistants lost their footing. They violently slammed into the ground as something dragged them out of my field of vision. The second Assistant jerked their head towards where the previous Assistant was standing, they then looked towards me and backed away, horrified. My body froze, I knew there was something horrifying behind me. Why else would the Assistant look so scared? I reached my hand out towards the remaining two Assistants, begging for help. I noticed that the third one was visibly shaking with fear. I looked towards them, yearning for help. The Assistant, with shaky hands, unholstered their gun from their belt, and pointed it at me.

Why? Why would they do that? I was in pain, I was scared, why would they point their gun at me? There was a monster behind me, something that wished me harm, that wished them harm. Why waste their time with me? I needed them to help me, not to hurt me, why would they do this? I suddenly became very angry. A feeling of hatred and malice welled up within me. I wished to do harm, to administer harm upon these miscreants who would dare to harm us. We began to rise into the air, we were too angry to think much of it, all we could think about was causing harm to the one that pointed a gun at us. The third Assistant that held the gun was violently shaking with fear, to a degree where they almost dropped their weapon. Our mind was only focused on one thing, every fiber of our consciousness had a collective aim, to dispose of those who would wish us harm. With collective thought, something new awoke from within us. We felt a sharp pain in our chest as a pitch black tendril darted towards the third Assistant. They yelped in fear as it wrapped around them. The Assistant, screaming in fear, was taken close to our face by the tendril. We felt a strange burning sensation in our throat. After the feeling subsided, there was another strange feeling in our stomach. It felt strange, unwelcome, but also at the same time, fulfilling.

After the feeling passed, the third Assistant had disappeared. We looked back towards the second Assistant, they were frozen in utter terror. The never-ending anger that had once consumed us, had subsided. In its place, was a feeling of dread and terror. The unknown monster had taken another Assistant, would it take us next? In the corner of my eye, we saw the tendril. Overtaken by fear, but also a shred of misplaced curiosity, we turned our head towards the black tendril. But as we did so, the tendril moved out of our vision. We jerked our head around, the tendril flashed out of our vision, and there was nothing behind us. We turned our head some more, and every time we did, the unknown monster seemed to elude us all the same. After finally giving up, we turned back towards the Assistant, who had also un-holstered their weapon.

The familiar rush of anger and confusion took over our body once more. Why was the Assistant pointing their gun at us? We were all in danger, threatening us would do nothing to ease the situation. Yet another pitch black tendril darted towards the Assistant and lifted them in the air. The Assistant was brought close to us, and we glared at them angrily.

“Why would you do that?” We said, “All of us are in danger of the monster, the least you could do is stop apprehending me as a prisoner and help to dissolve the situation!”

The Assistant was enveloped in fear, their face covered in terror. "Please, please, I beg of you, spare my life, I only did what she told me to do, I never wanted any of this!"

The rage momentarily subsided. If what the Assistant said was true, then they were only acting on the Headmistress's orders. We turned back towards the Assistant, only to be met with a gunshot. I felt like I should've flinched, I should've braced myself for the bullet's impact. But instead, we never faltered. A void-black tendril shot in front of our face and negated the bullet's trajectory. We thrust our hand at the Assistant, and three tendrils darted towards them. The first one slammed into the Assistant's chest. The other two wrapped around the Assistant's arms. The tendrils lifted the Assistant up to us, and we stared them deep in the eyes.

"You insignificant stain on humanity, this could have all been very simply avoided. You could've just helped us, you could've helped us to safety" This did not feel correct to say. It felt as if there was something else speaking for me. Another voice emanating from my mouth, dictating what I did and didn't say. But it no longer mattered to us. Everything that had once held significance in our life was replaced by a single burning desire: to kill the Assistant. We lifted our left arm. As we did, two more tendrils rose behind us.



*Illustration:  
Charlie Brinkhof*

"Wi-will, will it be quick?" the Assistant weakly questioned. We began to laugh. A deep, booming sound that filled the hollow stairwell of the Orphanage. Pitch black tendrils splintered from out of our body, black ooze ran down our face as it leaked from our eye. Our legs and arms twisted and turned in unfathomably painful angles, our body jerked around violently as tiny hands sprouted from our chest. Our arms were pushed off of our body as multiple new pitch-black arms took their place. I felt like I should've been screaming in agony throughout all of this, at the horror and pain of what my body was going through. But I didn't, for it wasn't my body anymore, after all. It was ours. Our mouth opened at an angle that would only be possible with a shattered jaw. From within, came yet another hand. The hand worked its way to the Assistant, grabbing onto their face. We locked eyes with the Assistant as we raised them up into the air.

"Oh my," we spoke, "that just depends on how exactly you perceive time." I felt all of the power drain from my body, wait, that's not right. It isn't my body anymore, it isn't even ours anymore. It's his. The Assistant's screams of hideous pain echoed throughout the halls of the Orphanage. It was so immense that almost everyone in the Orphanage heard it, including the Headmistress. Assistants were sent in to locate the sound, and once he was found, they were tasked to take him down. But they failed, and the Headmistress was next. She tried to run, she tried to fight back. She became so utterly desperate that she ordered all of the children of the Orphanage to stand in between her and him, hoping that would stop him from proceeding. But she was wrong. A demon feels no remorse, no reverence or regret. And once the children were but an afterthought, he went straight to the Headmistress. While she had a small dagger, she stood no longer than the children did. In the end, the Headmistress fell, and the Orphanage did with her. All the while, I was restricted to merely a bystander. I had a sliver of hope, that someone, somewhere, might stop him. But it was a false hope. In taking my body, he took my soul, my emotions, my ability to feel. As such, I sat by in indifference as I watched him take the world by storm. No one anywhere stood a chance against him, not any individual, any army, any government. Nothing could stop his abrupt reappearance. Although I had held onto a sliver of hope, I was truly expecting nothing less than what had transpired. For nothing in this world could stop the Hand Man.

*Illustration:  
Charlie Brinkhof*



# The Girl on the Bench

*Bronwyn Jackson*

The sound of digging filled the air around the cemetery, causing birds to explode into the icy air. A little girl sat on the bench near the man with the shovel, swinging her legs and humming a tune. Her boots scraped the ground rhythmically, and her small, cold hands were clothed in red gloves that matched her coat. The man with the shovel looked over at the peculiar girl, not sure when she had gotten there. He mopped the sweat from his forehead and continued deepening the now sizable hole in the ground. The girl's wide blue eyes watched the man as he worked.

"My friends will be here soon," she said to him, pausing her humming.

"Really," he murmured, not stopping his task at hand.

"Yes," the girl replied cheerily. "Why, Jimmy told me he'd be here mid-afternoon."

She's been here that long? wondered the man. But he had no recollection of her arrival, much less that early. She began humming once more.

"When did you get here?" he asked her. The quiet tune paused. The shovel noises continued.

"Hm... I suppose...well... it's been a while!" The man glanced to see her, but said nothing. "Why're you digging that hole?" she went on.

"It's my job," was his answer, pausing to wonder if he should tell a child why he was working on this particular grave. A family in the town lost their little girl a few days ago, tragically. He didn't know the girl, but he knew the parents from around town over the years.

"Oh..." the girl whispered. "Gosh, when will Jimmy and Mary get here?" He heard the shuffling of her turning around to look at the deserted road and woods behind the bench.

"Why are you trying to meet your friends at this time? It's getting late. You should go home now."

"Oh...well I can't do that yet. My parents won't see me right now."

The man had set down his shovel and was watching the little girl who was turned away with her knees propping her up against the back of the bench.

“They won't see you? Why?” he questioned, his brow creasing.

“Don't know. They just keep crying and pretending like I'm not there”

The man froze. He could feel the hair on the back of his neck stand up. The girl slowly faced him again, her blue eyes wide and icy. The red of her petticoat was dark and wet with blood, and her small body was twisted unnaturally to one side. The man gasped, unable to move. The cold, dark air felt like it was seeping into his veins as he looked upon her bent, dead body. However, she seemed oblivious to the deathly state she was in. The moonlight shone upon her peaceful, happy face, and then she was gone.



*Illustration:  
John VanValen*

# Her Bloody Body In My Mind

*Asha Brown*

I try to live a normal life like nothing ever happened. I've never had the desire to kill a person nor did I desire to kill her but I had to. I only had two choices: kill Sooyoung or have my identity exposed. With my double life, I couldn't risk having myself exposed. I lured her into the woods late at night, convincing her I lost my cat, Eva, earlier that day. As she walked ahead of me, I pulled my gun out and shot her in her back. I left her body there and ran away. Eventually her body was discovered by a couple in those woods one day. Police and ambulance sirens blared as they rushed to get to her body. Her death still haunts me, and I hate myself for doing it.

The warm water poured over me as I took a shower, and the glass door showed my reflection. Sooyoung's dead body stirred in my head, and so did the gunshots. The brilliant flashing police sirens dragged through my brain.. I let the steamy water run over my face to bring myself back to reality, but the crystal water soon turned red. I looked down at my arms as the red liquid poured over them, and panic ran rapidly through my body as I tried getting it off. Rubbing my arms as fast as I could failed me. I backed away from the strange substance until my back hit the cold shower wall. Quickly, I jumped out of the shower and grabbed my towel. Breathing heavily, I walked towards my sink mirror with weak legs and glanced back at the shower. The red liquid no longer poured from my shower. I quickly scanned my body for any red residue, but there wasn't any on my body. Fast breathes escaped my mouth as I leaned over the sink. I slowly calmed myself down, but the bathroom door suddenly creaked loudly. I glanced over to see the door now open wide. I slowly approached the door, and felt a pair of hands wrap around my neck. The hands squeezed my neck tightly, choking me. I reached for the hands in an attempt to free myself, but the strong grip on my neck tightened. As I tried to push my body away from the grasp, my feet slipped from under me, causing my knees to pound into the marble floor. The hands released my neck, and I sucked in as much air as I could. Once my breathing slowed down, I stood up and opened my eyes. I was no longer in my bathroom or in my bath towel. The new environment was too familiar. The trees stood tall in the night sky, and the later night creatures hissed. I looked down at the clothes on my body and noticed them covered in blood. My white v-neck was covered in her deep red blood from that night. I had the same leather jacket on with the same black denim jeans. A cold breeze moved the dead autumn leaves away from my feet, and I noticed I was barefoot.

How does it feel to kill a person?" a voice whispered. I turned my head quickly, scanning the woods around me. Nobody was near me but I knew that voice. I stayed silent and tried finding a way back home.

"Why are you leaving my dear? We just started, have we not?" she said, satisfied with the amusement she caused herself. I picked up my pace through the woods, looking for an escape. The dirt and leaves burned against my bare feet.

"You will never forget about me!" her voice boomed. My feet were moving faster than I realized, and I tripped over a thick tree root in the ground. I fell into the ground aggressively, my face rubbing against the dirt. High pitched laughs pierced my ears as I pulled away from the ground. I reached to rub the dirt off my face but noticed a thick dark red liquid on my hands. What is happening? I jolted back, scared by the blood dripping from my hands. My feet tripped over something again, but this time it was not a tree root. In front of me was her bloody body with a gushing stab wound. Her back faced me, and her body shook violently. She slowly turned her head to completely face me.

"Look what you did to me," her voice now weak and fragile. My breath quickened its pace. I started to feel dizzy and turned away from her dying body. Stumbling my way through the woods, my vision started to fade away. My body slammed into the ground again, but I was too weak to move. I turned my head to see her bloody body hovering over my body.

"Sweet dreams," she softly whispered, and I went into a deep sleep. I suddenly jolted awake, breathing heavily. Sweat poured down my face as I rapidly scanned my surroundings. I was no longer in the woods, but instead, I was in my bedroom. I lifted the heavy covers away from my body and looked around my room. Everything seemed normal. Maybe it was just a bad dream. I turned my head and noticed something next to me in my bed. I slowly lifted the covers to see what it was. It was her.

"We are just getting started," she said laughing while blood poured from her mouth onto the white sheets.