

SCOPE

PRESENTED BY

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SHORT STORIES

Prom Night by Alexa Nieves






She heard Liam's loud footsteps close behind her. She tried to run softly but it was useless with the crunchy leaves chattering all around her. She dashed into the first porta potty she saw. She kept her guard up while panting heavily in the tight box which suddenly felt like a cage. She listened closely at the door to see if Liam was still following her. She sighed with relief once she went ten minutes without hearing anything. Right when she was about to cautiously open the door, the porta potty aggressively flipped over. She hit her head hard against the wall of the bathroom. Her vision blurred. She felt warm liquid trickling down her forehead. When she touched it, her fingers appeared dark red...

"Why am I always the one who has to move schools?" Liam asked, trying to play dumb. "Stay in a school without causing any issues for a year and then we'll talk." Replied his dad in a serious tone. "I have to go." Liam ignored his dad's response, as he unlocked the front door. Liam shoved the screen door closed behind him as he jogged to his car. He crawled into his small, black, shiny car as he zoomed off to school. It was his first day of a new school; he arrived at school with 3 minutes to spare which was just enough time to stop by his locker and pick up his schedule. He snatched his schedule out of the guidance counselor's hand, ignoring her instructions on how to get to his first class. Liam arrived at his first class just as the bell was blaring.

"Welcome Students of Winslow High to another gorgeous day! Tickets for this year's senior prom are officially on sale!" A peppy voice boomed through the loudspeakers. After the announcements, the teacher introduced Liam to the class and led him to his assigned seat. "This is Mia. Liam, you can go right behind her." Liam examined Mia as he trotted past her to his seat. She was beautiful with her long, dirty blonde hair and the thinnest, brown rimmed



glasses. She had on a casual, light blue dress that suited her skin tone nicely. She had her wavy hair tied back into 2 mini braids. The class immediately started once Liam was seated. He was so locked in, it took him a few seconds to realize that Mia was talking to him. He quickly fixed his hair and took some papers from her that she was passing back. "Thanks," he said, trying to sound collected. "No problem," She answered in a soft, delicate voice. "Okay, everyone: pair up." The young teacher announced. Catching Liam off guard, Mia immediately turned around to face him. "I guess we are partners." She mumbled, appearing nervous. "Okay, sounds good." Liam responded in his deep voice. Mia pushed her glasses farther up the bridge of her nose while Liam fidgeted with the collar of his varsity jacket. Mia finally looked up revealing Liam's intense eye contact. He couldn't look away from her. Her eyes were a gorgeous, hazel brown and they were so big and dreamy; she looked like a Disney princess. "So what school are you transferring from?" Mia asked, unconfidently. "Green Bridge High School. It's right around here." Liam responded, smirking. Mia nodded while looking down at her worksheet. After a few minutes of them both working on the project and keeping the conversation strictly based on the work, Liam finally gained up the courage to ask her out. The prom at Winslow high was extremely early so if Liam wanted to go with a date, he had to act fast.


"Would you be interested in hanging out with me later tonight—"

"Um, tonight?" Mia questioned, seeming uncertain.

"—Just to finish this work!" Liam finished his sentence, getting nervous that Mia would reject him if she thought it was a date.

"Oh yeah, sure! Want to meet at my place?" Mia responded, suddenly seeming enthusiastic.


"Yes!" Liam said, coming off a little too eager.



Mia hustled around her house making sure everything was perfectly neat for Liam. She readjusted the snack platter about 5 times to make sure that he could comfortably reach it from the couch. Her heart jumped when the doorknob began to turn. She jogged over to the front door. "Hey!" She exclaimed as she yanked the door open. She was visibly disappointed when she saw her mom standing on the other side of the door. "Mom, what are you doing here? I told you that I have a friend coming over today!"

"Sorry, sorry! I just needed to grab some papers that I need to work on at the library." Mia's mom responded, frantically flipping through a thick stack of papers on the kitchen counter, "Found them!" She exclaimed as she picked up her purse and headed back towards the front door. "Bye, honey!" Mia's mom called out as she fidgeted with the door knob. Right as she opened it, Liam was revealed to be standing on the other side about to click on the door bell. "Liam, hi! Come in! Sorry, my mom was just leaving." Mia said, hoping that her mom would obey her promise to go. "Hello! I'm Mia's mom. I was just getting back to the library so I'll leave you two alone to work on your project." Liam stood in the doorway awkwardly, but responded, "Thank you and it's nice to meet you." Liam moved over to let Mia's mom pass him and then finally he stepped into the house.


He looked even better than he did at school today, Mia's mind wandered as he sat next to her on the couch. After about ten minutes of them both sitting there awkwardly staring at the same problem that they were making no progress on, Liam blurted out "Do you want to go out and eat? Maybe refuel a little before we keep working?" "That sounds good." Mia replied, thankful to be released from that uncomfortable energy. Liam barely said a word the whole ride there but Mia rambled on uncontrollably, mostly because she



was nervous. Liam appeared to be speeding but that could have just been the adrenaline in Mia talking. After a few more minutes of Liam intensely holding down the gas pedal as if he was in a car race, Mia realized that he was definitely speeding but she tried to stay calm. Mia glanced over at Liam which disclosed a devilish grin that he had on his face. She blinked hard trying to clear the unsettling image from her head, hoping that she was just imagining it. As the car rolled over a bump, it began to spin wildly out of control. "Oh my god!" Mia yelled, surprising herself with how loud she was. The small car continued to whirl effortlessly until finally it was stopped by a narrow bush on the side of the road. Mia let out a breath of relief. She turned her head when she heard Liam manically laughing. She couldn't believe it. After sitting through his cackling for another minute, Mia finally hollered, "What's so funny?!" "Oh, um... nothing I guess. It was just eventful, that's all." Liam countered, recollecting himself while still holding back laughter.

Mia was disgusted by Liam's great interest in them almost dying. She tried to stay serene though as she whipped her phone out of her small bag. "Oh wait! My mom called me a bunch of times. I have to get home right now. Can you drop me off please?" Mia asked, staring blankly at her phone with zero notifications, but hoping that Liam would buy her acting.

"Anything for you." He said in a low tone. Mia squinted in confusion but she didn't say anything as she was just thankful that he was taking her home without a fight. Mia hopped out the door as soon as he pulled into her driveway. Liam attempted to open his door to walk her in, but she met him at his window instead. "Sorry, I would invite you in but this seemed really urgent over text." Right as she began to trot away, Liam pulled her back in by her purse. He plopped his lips right over hers forming an intense kiss. To his



surprise, she pulled her head away after a few seconds. "I really have to go, bye." Mia mumbled dryly. Liam didn't respond but slightly lifted his eyes, glaring at her passionately as she sprinted to her front door. She didn't even wave goodbye. Liam punched the power button to hear the sound of his grumbling engine start up. He sped off.

The next morning, Liam flew into the school at 7:58 barely making it. While he was sprinting to his first class, he saw Mia talking to a guy in the hallway in front of her locker. Liam's face got red as he stormed up to Mia. "Who's this?!" "Oh, this is my best friend, Jacob." Mia responded caught off guard and unappealed by Liam's rage. Liam scuffed and headed in the opposite direction than them providing no greeting to Jacob. When Mia arrived in class, she sat in her seat right in front of Liam. He immediately placed his buff arms around her shoulders embracing her in a loving hug. She moved out of his reach, uneasy with his affection towards her after only hanging out once. After a whole class of not talking, Mia prayed that Liam had finally gotten the hint that she wasn't into him after the incident last night. As they were heading out the door, Liam chased after her in the hallway and grabbed her hand. He brightly smiled as he lovingly squeezed her hand. Mia had to admit, it felt nice having so much attention from a gorgeous jock like Liam but she had to trust her gut. Clearly, he has some loose screws after he laughed at their near-death experience. She wiggled her hand loose from his intense grip. He grabbed her back by the waist and whispered in her ear, "You're going to wish you never did that. When I want someone, I always get them..."

"Ugh! I'm never going to finish all this homework!" Mia squealed. She sat down on her bed, frustrated and took a brain break while on the verge of



tears. Right when she was starting to doze off, a screaming telephone sliced the silence. Mia aggravatedly rolled out of her bed and dragged across the room to her phone.

"Hello?" She said in a groggy voice.

"Don't fret. I'm here for you, babe." A deep, frightening voice echoed through the telephone into Mia's ear. "Wh—who is this?" Mia barely choked out.

"Do you want me to come over and maybe cheer you up?"


"Who is this!?" She asked again, trying to sound intimidating.

"Well, who do you think it is, baby? You're not cheating on me, right?" The manly voice responded, sounding almost hurt.

"Liam?" Mia uttered. "Beep...beep...beep." The line went dead.

Mia anxiously scrambled around her room, closing every window and locking them for extra safe measures. How could Liam have been watching her? She thought to herself, covered in goosebumps. Completely shaken up, she jumped into bed and buried herself in the covers, falling asleep within 5 minutes.


The next morning, Mia threw on her favorite cyan blue sweatshirt paired with light gray leggings. She dashed off to school, having no time for breakfast. Luckily, she had study hall first period today so she sat on a small bench near the football field. Mia shoved her hands in her pockets to provide warmth when she felt a small piece of paper. She pulled it out and mumbled it to herself as she read, "I'm in love with you. Will you meet me behind the soccer field at 3?" Her thoughts swirled around like clothes in a washing machine. She moved her finger off the bottom corner of the paper when she saw a light pencil marking poking out. The signature at the bottom



read 'L'. Her heart sank. Remembering the chain of unsettling events that occurred recently concerning Liam, Mia recollected herself and remained sitting on the park bench staring at the note in her hands. The rushed handwriting haunted her. How did he put it in her pocket without her realizing anyway? After contemplating for a little while, Mia decided that she would go to the soccer field at 3. She knew that she had to end the relationship that for some reason, Liam thought they were in. Out of breath, she arrived at the field at 2:59 surprised to see no one there. She was very on guard though, jumping at the sound of wind. She waited and waited: nothing. When she was just about to head off at 3:15, Liam abruptly appeared almost as if waiting for her to leave. Mia jumped back, startled and uneasy. "Leaving already, baby?" He whispered, getting very close to her. "I have a question for you.." Mia could feel his breath on her cheek. He suddenly jogged away quickly and arrived about 25 seconds later, holding roses.

"Mia—" he paused, "Will you be my date to prom?" He asked, looking almost nervous. He was so cute with his tan skin and fluffy, light brown hair that Mia had almost forgotten about his manipulative nature for a minute. She looked into his pouting, crystal blue eyes. It took Mia a minute to remember why she came to the field. "No." She replied, uncertain but trying to appear numb. Liam's face twisted into a confused, hurt expression. He was appearing so normal and sweet now to Mia, she was on the edge of being persuaded to say yes. "I'm sorry, I— I can't. I'm going with—"

"Going with who?" He interrupted her, seeming genuinely upset and curious. "Uh... Jacob." Mia stuttered out in response. Liam looked down, clearly offended and saddened.




"Oh...well okay. I hope you enjoy your time with him...if you can." He scuffed under his breath. "What was that?" Mia hollered after him but he was already jogging away from the field. Mia let out a heavy breath seeing the white puff break through the cold air. She was proud of herself for saying no, even though seeing him stand in front of her, she had a strange urge to kiss him. He appeared so gentle and vulnerable while asking her to prom. Mia immediately stopped fantasizing about him though when she remembered that now she had to ask Jacob to prom. They have been best friends for about nine years now so she knew that he would say yes as long as he didn't already have another date and plus Mia has always kind of had a crush on him so maybe this prom would actually be fun. Mia crossed her fingers as she hustled through the school building to find him.

Mia had just finished applying her last layer of hot red lipstick to match her cherry red dress. Per usual, Jacob was looking gorgeous in his suit and matching red tie. They took some pictures and then headed off to the prom together!

"Can you pick up the mail as you head out?" Mia's mom asked.

"Sure!" Mia called back to her as she opened the mailbox. "Oh my God! This is horrible, a teenage girl named Betty recently died at that school right by ours. She was found unconscious outside the football field by the bathrooms." "Oh no! Poor girl! I wonder what happened to her." Jacob responded, saddened by the news. Mia tried to ignore the disturbing news though and focus on enjoying prom.

"Look at all these decorations!" Mia exclaimed as they entered the party. When Jacob opened his mouth to respond, Liam popped up behind them and



slid his arms around Mia's waist. "Ah! Get off of me!" Mia screamed, alarming several people around her. Liam reluctantly squirmed his hands off and glared angrily at the two of them as he walked away.

"That guy is a real creep." Jacob whispered to Mia, appearing protective. "I know! He scares me. He's clearly unhinged."

After enjoying the dance for several hours, Jacob and Mia left the dance room to get some food. "I'm going to run to the bathroom real quick!" Mia hollered while skipping away in her three inch heels. "Locked." She mumbled to herself, annoyed that she had to walk farther in her already painful shoes. She arrived at a farther bathroom a minute later. While she was washing her hands and admiring her beautiful updo in the mirror, she heard a loud thud that sounded like it was right up against the door. "You can come in! I'm done!" Mia called as she twisted open the doorknob. Jacob's lifeless body, being held up by the door, trampled onto her. "Oh my god! What happened?! Jacob!!! Are you okay?! HELP!!!" Mia cried out in utter fear. After a few seconds of silence, Mia decided that she had no time to waste. She began to give him mouth to mouth. He still had a pulse but he wasn't breathing.

"Mia...I thought I heard you calling for help." Liam remarked, emerging from around the corner of a wall. Mia's heart began to race uncontrollably inside her chest, she feared that it may jump out.

"What did you do?!" Mia shrieked, looking down at Jacob with tears in her eyes. "What do you want from me?!"

"Well I wanted to go to prom with you. But now it's too late. You failed. Your opportunity has passed." He answered, unbothered by her cries.

"Well, what do you want now?!" Mia yelled, through voice cracks and now



completely sobbing. Where is everyone? Her mind wandered desperately. "I want to date you. I never have liked anyone as much as you. Betty was a close second but no one has ever compared to you."

"Betty..." Mia whispered trying to figure out where she had heard that name before. Her heart stopped for a second when she connected the dots and realized Betty was the dead girl from the newspaper! "Oh my god! What is wrong with you?! You're evil!" Mia screeched, bawling.

"Don't say those things about me, baby. You really wouldn't want to further anger me tonight." Liam said, bending over to grab Mia's arm. He guided her back to the dance with him. "No! Stop! We have to help Jacob!"

"It's very rude to mention other men while you're on a date, sweetheart." Liam responded, very nonchalantly.

Mia struggled to break out of Liam's tight grip as he dragged her back to the party. "Right... here." Liam mumbled to himself as he lightly shoved Mia against a wall. He plumped up his lips and attempted to kiss her. Mia bobbed her head all over the place, avoiding his lips. "Stop that!" He exclaimed, growing red with anger. As Mia was about to scream for help, she gasped in relief as she saw Jacob about to pounce on Liam as he ran down the hall! He was okay! Mia exclaimed in her head, thrilled that he was alive. Jacob jumped on Liam, dropping both boys violently to the ground. "Help!" Mia screamed. Finally three teachers came sprinting in a few seconds later. As they peeled Liam off of Jacob, loud sirens appeared outside. Mia looked around, confused. "I may have made a phone call before coming over here to help you." Jacob said, in a cocky tone to Mia. "Thank God!" The police officers hustled in to handcuff Liam.



"He is the one who killed that girl, Betty!" Mia hollered to the police as they took him away. "Don't worry. We know all about that already. We have been looking for this kid for a few weeks now. Your friend, Jacob, described everything to us over the phone. You're lucky to have him looking out for you." A muscular police officer explained to Mia.

Mia embraced Jacob in a warm hug, her hands around his neck. When she tried to pull away, Jacob grabbed her back in and kissed her: a long, gentle kiss. Mia's face lit up. This whole night had felt like a dream to Mia.

Don't Go To Tommy's House by Brady Baxter

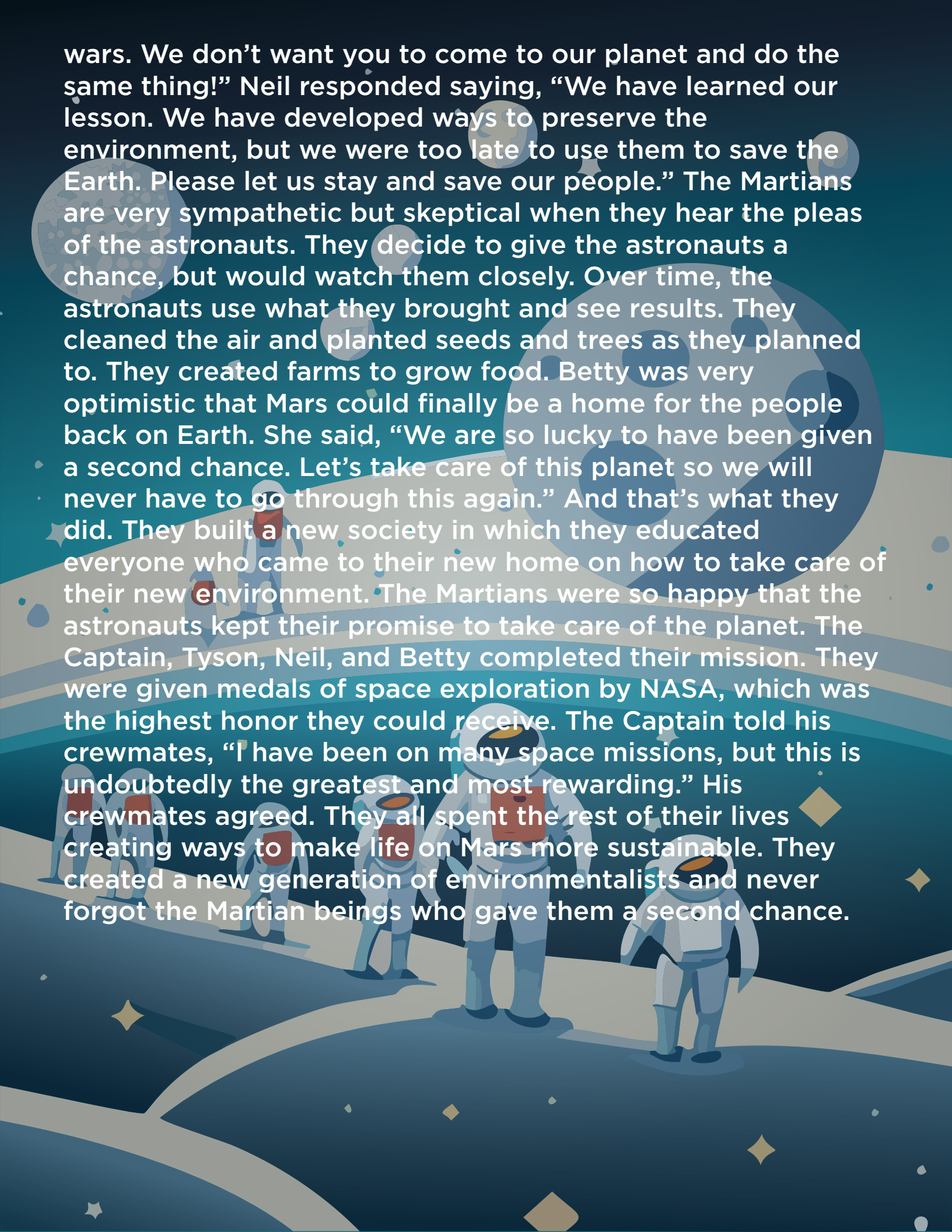
Ring...ring...ring... "H- hello?" I ask through the phone, my nap interrupted with its ringing. "Yo Brady I just made this thing you need to pull up right now." Tommy whispered back at me. "Pull up? It's three in the morning, this better be important." I respond exhausted and hang up the phone. I throw on a hoodie and head out to my car, blissfully unaware of what was to come next. I make my way down the street and finally pull into Tommy's driveway, there I see a completely dark room except for the top right window which was blasting with light. The window opens and Tommy sticks his head out, "Yo Brady head to the back I don't want my parents hearing you come in!" I give him a nod of the head and start walking through the trees. Once I get inside of the room, I see that all of the light was from Fortnite on his television. "Tom I swear if you called me at three on a Thursday because you want to play Fortnite with me, I'm going to throw you out of the window." I angrily responded to him. "Nah trust its way more then Fortnite." Tommy says back nonchalantly. "Yo lets play some duos." As angry as I am he knows that I can never say no to some duos. I grab my usual controller and he slaps it out of my hand. "Dude what was that?" I say with confusion. "Brady you gotta use this one I made you, it's custom molded to you." he says back with a hint of excitement. I look over and see that his is the same, only in his favorite shade of blue and instead of a D-pad, it's one giant red button. "Uh alright then." I say back with a mix of fear and curiosity. I grab the control and put on my signature skin, Peter Griffin. Tommy also has his favorite skin on, Chun Li. After looking at the skins I realize that the game mode is set to trios instead of solos. "Tommy it's on trios you gotta make it duo's for us to play." "Nah I know what I'm doing just trust." he says back before touching the giant red button. My controller stings me and I pass out.

I don't know how many minutes later but I'm awake and about to yell at Tommy, when I realize that the person on my left is Chun Li instead of Tommy. "What the heck? is this a dream?" I saw with the utmost confusion. "Oh I wish, this is real life my friend." Peter Griffin says with a tear in his eye. "Am I in Fortnite?" I ask. Nobody responds, "Hello? am I in Fortnite?" "No, you are in a game of life and death." Chun Li says with a somber tone. "But we just get sent to the lobby there no actual dying, right?" I say, wondering how I could know more about Fortnite than the people in it. "That's what they want you to think, there is no 'respawning' or anything like that, you die and are replaced by an alternate universe version of yourself for the next game." Chun Li said with exhaustion in her voice. "Dude this is my life we need to win." I said back very seriously. After a pause, Peter responded, "How do you think everyone else feels?" We are on the bus heading out over the island. I place my pin on Wailing because it gives us the best chance to win. Wailing can give us max wood, containers metal, and temple brick. Also, it's a pretty unknown drop spot so it will definitely work out well. I take a deep breath in, and jump off the back of the plane with Peter and Chun Li tailing behind me. It's been roughly 20 minutes since we landed. We looted up in Wailing but I only have meds. We rotated into Lonely. In the distance, some shots are heard. "Get down!" Peter shouted at the sound of another shot. We complied and I built a fort to hide in. After a few minutes I pop my head out of the top to see what's going on. In the watchtower there was a weird shine in my direction. "What is that flash?" I asked without looking away. "Brady duck, that's a sniper glare!" Chun Li screamed. Unfortunately I wasn't able to hear her in time and got sniped for 200 and sent back to the lobby.

A New World By Mariella Bracchitta

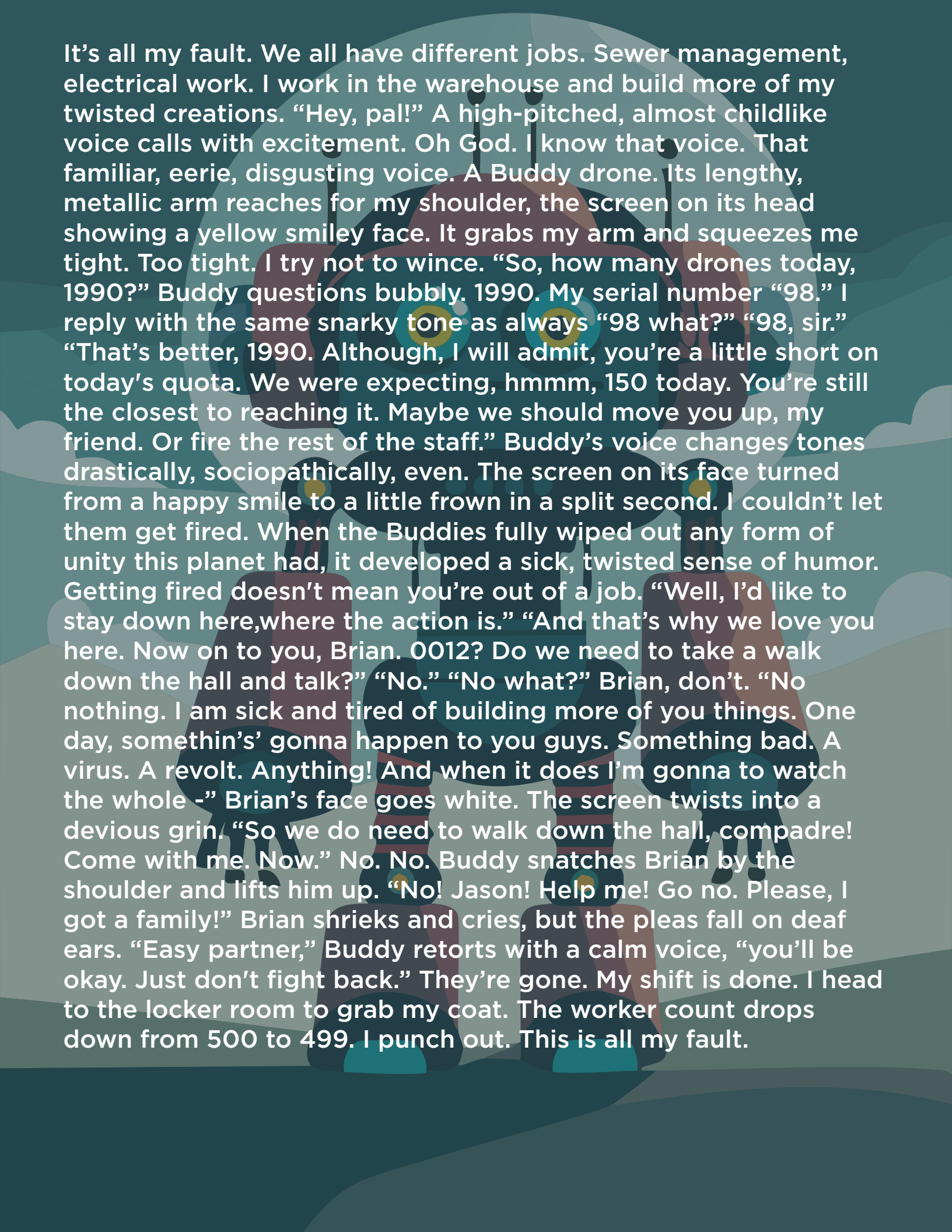
The year is 2130. The Earth is close to depleting all of its natural resources. NASA has put together a special team of astronauts to explore Mars, in the hopes that they can colonize the planet. There are four astronauts. The Captain is an astronaut with over 25 years of experience, and has been on many space missions. There are twin astronauts, Tyson and Neil, who are astrophysicists. The last astronaut is a civilian who was a science teacher on Earth, and her name is Betty. The spaceship, named 'Champion', was set to launch on April 5th. It is a clear spring morning, all system checks have been completed, the control room gives the all clear signal, so the astronauts board the ship. They bring things from Earth with them, such as oxygen machines, which would clean the air and make it breathable. They also bring seeds and animals to start creating the first farms for food. They bring young trees which will be planted to use for wooden houses. If this flight is successful, and the astronauts make it to Mars safely, NASA will send another spaceship with more supplies. The astronauts land safely on Mars within two months. As they depart the spaceship, they look around at the barren deserted landscape, "Well, it looks like we better get started," said the Captain. Tyson and Neil start unloading the ship, and Betty begins clearing a plot of land that they could use to build their home base. They need to make sure they have adequate shelter in case of a dust storm. Betty tells the group, "I have a bad feeling about this." She's right, just as the astronauts start to unpack their supplies, they are confronted by a group of beings, which were not human. The Captain shouts at the beings, "Leave us alone, we are trying to build a new society for the people of Earth, because our planet is no longer safe to live on." The leader of the Martian beings responded, "You want to invade our planet and destroy it the way you destroyed Earth. You polluted the air and water and destroyed the towns and cities with many

wars. We don't want you to come to our planet and do the same thing!" Neil responded saying, "We have learned our lesson. We have developed ways to preserve the environment, but we were too late to use them to save the Earth. Please let us stay and save our people." The Martians are very sympathetic but skeptical when they hear the pleas of the astronauts. They decide to give the astronauts a chance, but would watch them closely. Over time, the astronauts use what they brought and see results. They cleaned the air and planted seeds and trees as they planned to. They created farms to grow food. Betty was very optimistic that Mars could finally be a home for the people back on Earth. She said, "We are so lucky to have been given a second chance. Let's take care of this planet so we will never have to go through this again." And that's what they did. They built a new society in which they educated everyone who came to their new home on how to take care of their new environment. The Martians were so happy that the astronauts kept their promise to take care of the planet. The Captain, Tyson, Neil, and Betty completed their mission. They were given medals of space exploration by NASA, which was the highest honor they could receive. The Captain told his crewmates, "I have been on many space missions, but this is undoubtedly the greatest and most rewarding." His crewmates agreed. They all spent the rest of their lives creating ways to make life on Mars more sustainable. They created a new generation of environmentalists and never forgot the Martian beings who gave them a second chance.



Self-made Destruction By Lucas Correa

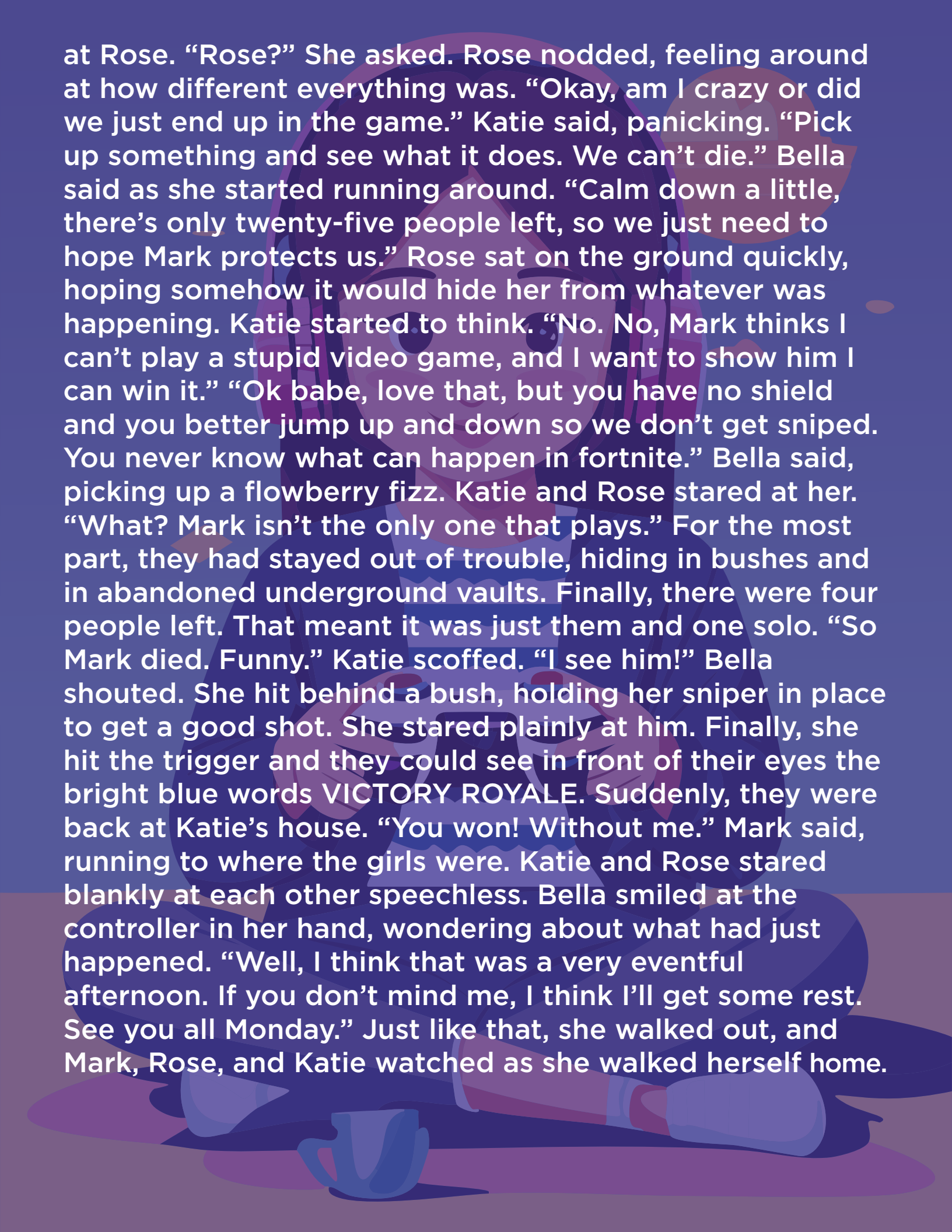
I told myself that I should've been more responsible. It's been 16 years since then. God, this is my fault. It's... it's all my fault. "Jason!" My partner, Brian exclaims. "What?" I answer, glaring at him. "You spaced out again. It's the eighth time this week. It ain't even Tuesday. One day, they gonna catch you not working. And when they d-" "Alright! Listen, just shut up and worry about yourself." "No! You listen. I got a family to feed, Jason. Ever since my wife-" "Shut. Up." I whisper through gritted teeth. The facility I'm in, although its walls and floors are pure white, have a dark, eerie feel to them. The assembly lines drone and run smoothly with an oddly satisfying hum to them. Older music always fills the void of silence, yet drives the fear further. Something about it is just so disturbing. Today's playlist is 70's-90's R&B. Bobby "Blue" Bland gives his best performance. Ain't no love in the heart of the city. Sweat beams down my forehead Ain't not love in the heart of town. I just have to keep assembling these things. I glance at my watch. 3:07. Friday, February 1st, 2044. 13 minutes until they let me out. Gotta give my best performance. I only got 13 minutes until they check my progress. I start assembling them. They're all made of a titanium alloy. Still flexible, but durable. They can police the streets all while moving effortlessly and being able to resist. The cyborgs can do whatever they want. This all started in 2028. I was a stupid freshman in MIT with an ego, a need to impress everyone, and I had a 180 IQ. A dangerous combination. We needed to do a final project for our robotics engineering. So, I built Buddy. He was supposed to be a simple, friendly little guy for people who needed a friend. That didn't last. Naturally, the American government confiscated him. They turned Buddy into a trained killer. They gave it an advanced A.I. and fed it daily combat training. Eventually, it took over. Buddy turned on his new masters and ravaged our world. It made clones of itself and restarted society with the remaining humans. Now, we all live in police states. The worst part is, after society collapsed, we as a species did too. Humans should've banded together, fought back, but now we're monsters now. We fight over scraps and don't care about each other. When's the bloodshed going to end?



It's all my fault. We all have different jobs. Sewer management, electrical work. I work in the warehouse and build more of my twisted creations. "Hey, pal!" A high-pitched, almost childlike voice calls with excitement. Oh God. I know that voice. That familiar, eerie, disgusting voice. A Buddy drone. Its lengthy, metallic arm reaches for my shoulder, the screen on its head showing a yellow smiley face. It grabs my arm and squeezes me tight. Too tight. I try not to wince. "So, how many drones today, 1990?" Buddy questions bubbly. 1990. My serial number "98." I reply with the same snarky tone as always "98 what?" "98, sir." "That's better, 1990. Although, I will admit, you're a little short on today's quota. We were expecting, hmmm, 150 today. You're still the closest to reaching it. Maybe we should move you up, my friend. Or fire the rest of the staff." Buddy's voice changes tones drastically, sociopathically, even. The screen on its face turned from a happy smile to a little frown in a split second. I couldn't let them get fired. When the Buddies fully wiped out any form of unity this planet had, it developed a sick, twisted sense of humor. Getting fired doesn't mean you're out of a job. "Well, I'd like to stay down here, where the action is." "And that's why we love you here. Now on to you, Brian. 0012? Do we need to take a walk down the hall and talk?" "No." "No what?" Brian, don't. "No nothing. I am sick and tired of building more of you things. One day, somethin's' gonna happen to you guys. Something bad. A virus. A revolt. Anything! And when it does I'm gonna to watch the whole -" Brian's face goes white. The screen twists into a devious grin. "So we do need to walk down the hall, compadre! Come with me. Now." No. No. Buddy snatches Brian by the shoulder and lifts him up. "No! Jason! Help me! Go no. Please, I got a family!" Brian shrieks and cries, but the pleas fall on deaf ears. "Easy partner," Buddy retorts with a calm voice, "you'll be okay. Just don't fight back." They're gone. My shift is done. I head to the locker room to grab my coat. The worker count drops down from 500 to 499. I punch out. This is all my fault.

Girls Get the Victory Royale By Chiara Di Nardo Di Maio

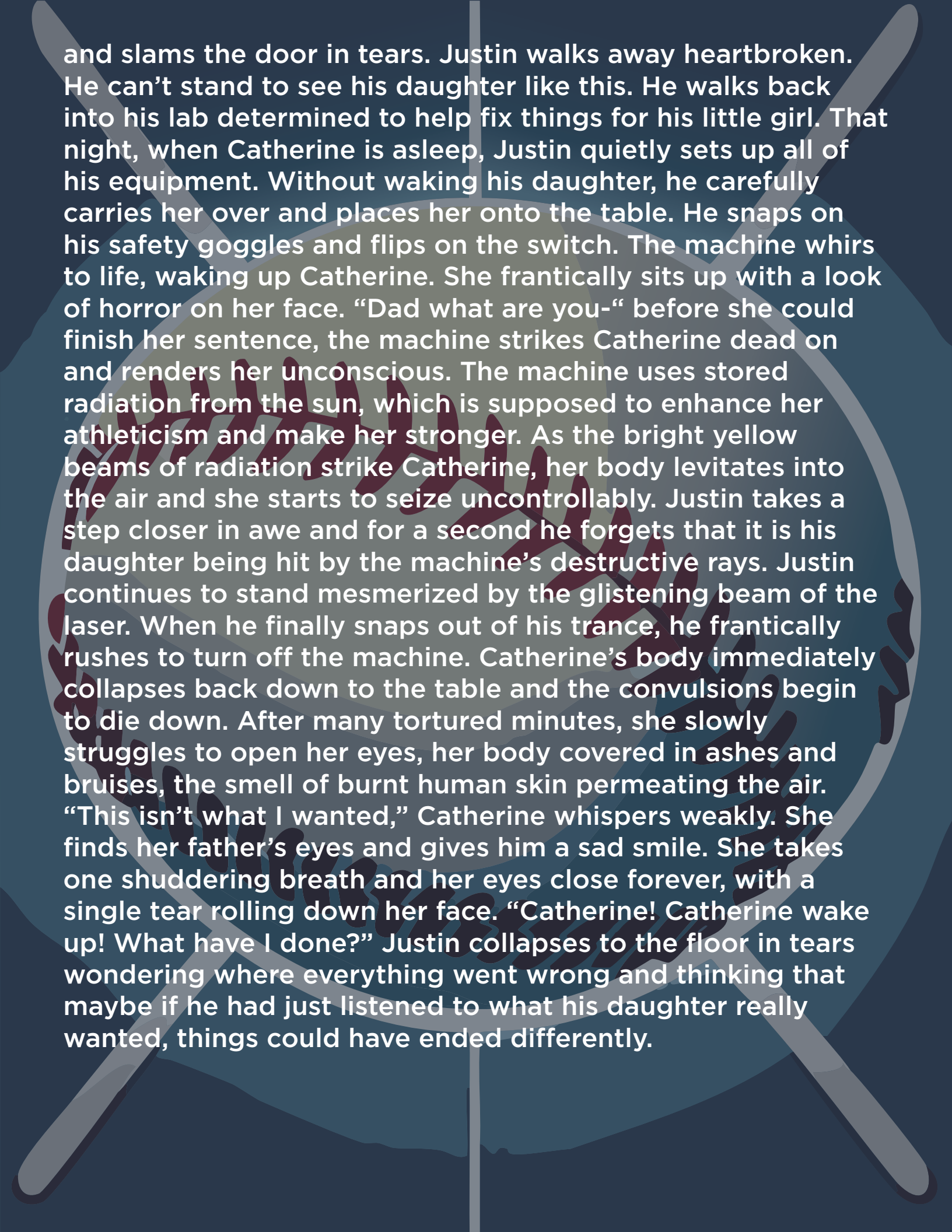
Katie grabbed her backpack after last period and ran out the front doors to see her boyfriend and two best friends waiting by her car. "Sorry I'm late, I'm so done with that class." she panted as she unlocked the car and everyone got in. "Guys, guess who walked me to class today!" Bella said, her long, wavy, dirty blonde hair swooping against her face as she popped her head to the front seat at Katie and Mark. "I don't know Bells, who walked you to class today?" Mark said sarcastically. Bella gave him a smack on the arm, "Oh shut up Mark, you know the first time you walked Katie to class you went home and started kicking your legs." Katie drove them to her house and they all went down to her basement. Mark pulled Katie aside, "Why don't we play a quick round?" "You know the girls won't want to play." Katie laughed. "Not with them, with you, dummy." "They're my best friends. When you and I got together, you got yourself into this. It's all of us or none of us." "Fine, can you ask them if they'll play too." "Sure my little dummy." Katie went over to her friends and asked them if they would want to play a round of fortnite all together. "Sure. Why not." Rose smiled. Her deep gray-green eyes sparkled ever so slightly notwithstanding the fact that she was somewhat sarcastic. Bella laughed, "Sure, I'll play fortnite." Mark smiled and ran to get everyone's controllers. "Ok, you ladies just follow my lead. We'll drop at Fencing Fields, you just go behind and please, don't die." Mark joked. "Alright Mr. Know-It-All, calm down. We'll do what we want." They all entered the lobby and suddenly, they were all gone, except for Mark. "What. Just. Happened." Rose stood still. She looked around but noticed she was surrounded by buildings and weapons all over the floor. Bella turned around and looked



at Rose. "Rose?" She asked. Rose nodded, feeling around at how different everything was. "Okay, am I crazy or did we just end up in the game." Katie said, panicking. "Pick up something and see what it does. We can't die." Bella said as she started running around. "Calm down a little, there's only twenty-five people left, so we just need to hope Mark protects us." Rose sat on the ground quickly, hoping somehow it would hide her from whatever was happening. Katie started to think. "No. No, Mark thinks I can't play a stupid video game, and I want to show him I can win it." "Ok babe, love that, but you have no shield and you better jump up and down so we don't get sniped. You never know what can happen in fortnite." Bella said, picking up a flowberry fizz. Katie and Rose stared at her. "What? Mark isn't the only one that plays." For the most part, they had stayed out of trouble, hiding in bushes and in abandoned underground vaults. Finally, there were four people left. That meant it was just them and one solo. "So Mark died. Funny." Katie scoffed. "I see him!" Bella shouted. She hit behind a bush, holding her sniper in place to get a good shot. She stared plainly at him. Finally, she hit the trigger and they could see in front of their eyes the bright blue words VICTORY ROYALE. Suddenly, they were back at Katie's house. "You won! Without me." Mark said, running to where the girls were. Katie and Rose stared blankly at each other speechless. Bella smiled at the controller in her hand, wondering about what had just happened. "Well, I think that was a very eventful afternoon. If you don't mind me, I think I'll get some rest. See you all Monday." Just like that, she walked out, and Mark, Rose, and Katie watched as she walked herself home.

Fatal Strikeout By Rachel Dunn

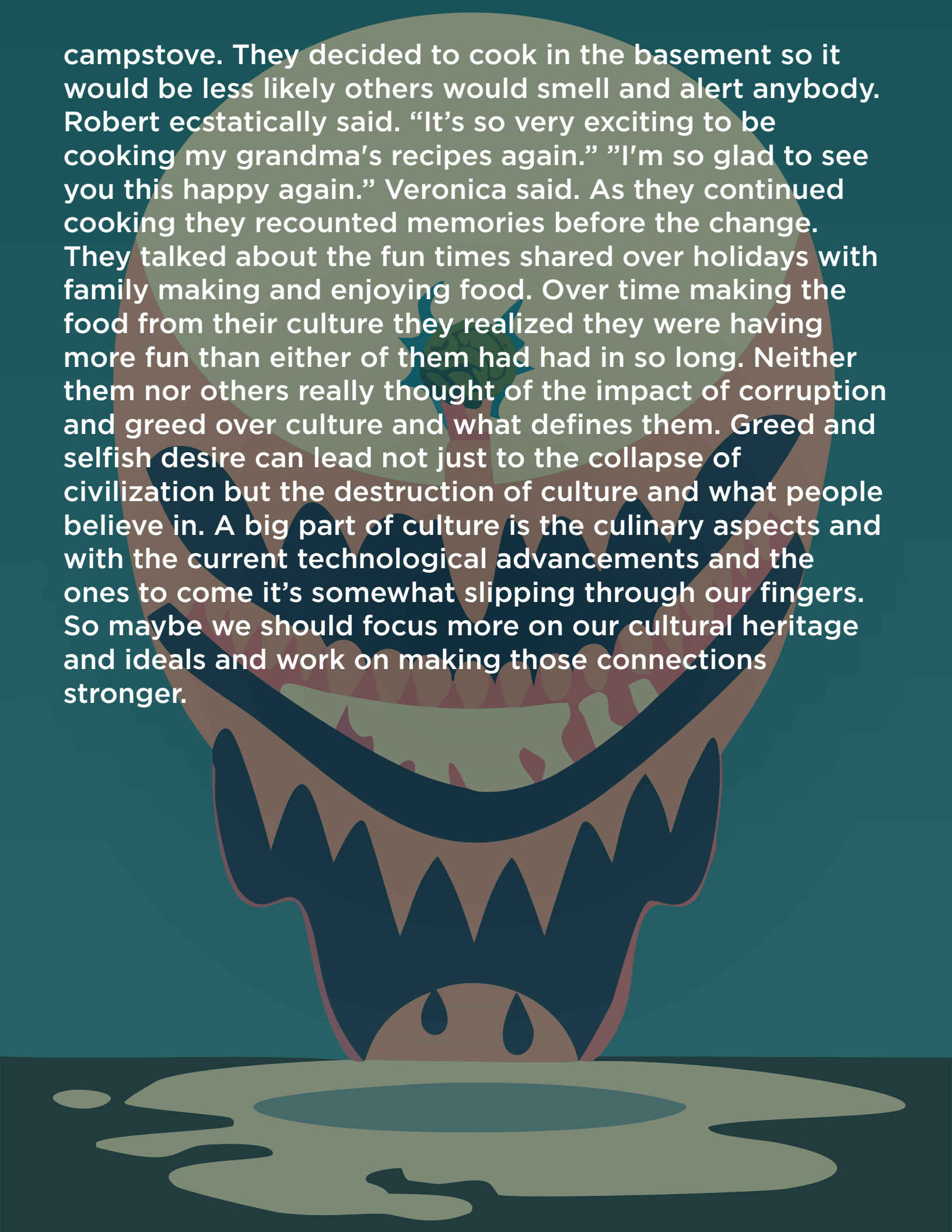
“Strike three you’re out!” exclaims the umpire. Catherine furiously storms her way back to the dugout after taking a hack at a rise ball three feet over her head. “I CAN’T STAND THIS ANYMORE!” she screams. Everyone around her stops and stares at her dramatic reaction. “Catherine, stop it right now! This is embarrassing for you and your teammates. This behavior is unacceptable! Pack up all your stuff and leave. You will not be playing for the remainder of the game!” Coach Larry screams angrily. Catherine throws all of her catcher’s gear and equipment into her bag and storms furiously out of the dugout. She walks agitatedly over to the nearest transportation booth and enters the coordinates to her father Justin’s science lab. The portal entrance appears and she walks through, exiting the other side into her father’s lab. Her father clearly sees that his daughter is distraught and rushes over to her. “Oh my goodness Catherine! What happened? Aren’t you supposed to be at your softball game?” “Yes dad, but Coach Larry kicked me out!” Catherine screams. She throws her equipment onto the floor and storms off to her room angrily. Justin follows behind her hesitantly and knocks on her door. “C’mon Catherine, talk to me. What happened?” “GO AWAY! I don’t want to talk about it.” Catherine yells back at her dad. “Catherine, it’s okay, I can fix this. Do you want me to brainwash the coach again?” “UGH! Just stop, I want to actually be good, not just be on the team because you brainwashed him” Catherine said through her sobs. Suddenly, Justin had a brilliant idea. He rushes into Catherine’s room excitedly with a big mischievous grin. “I’ve just had the most brilliant idea! What if instead of brainwashing the coach to think you’re good at softball, we use solar radiation to actually make you a good player?” “That’s enough Dad! I’m done with all the experiments, and the brain washing. I can’t do it anymore, I just want to live normally like everyone else.” She pushes her dad out the door



and slams the door in tears. Justin walks away heartbroken. He can't stand to see his daughter like this. He walks back into his lab determined to help fix things for his little girl. That night, when Catherine is asleep, Justin quietly sets up all of his equipment. Without waking his daughter, he carefully carries her over and places her onto the table. He snaps on his safety goggles and flips on the switch. The machine whirs to life, waking up Catherine. She frantically sits up with a look of horror on her face. "Dad what are you-" before she could finish her sentence, the machine strikes Catherine dead on and renders her unconscious. The machine uses stored radiation from the sun, which is supposed to enhance her athleticism and make her stronger. As the bright yellow beams of radiation strike Catherine, her body levitates into the air and she starts to seize uncontrollably. Justin takes a step closer in awe and for a second he forgets that it is his daughter being hit by the machine's destructive rays. Justin continues to stand mesmerized by the glistening beam of the laser. When he finally snaps out of his trance, he frantically rushes to turn off the machine. Catherine's body immediately collapses back down to the table and the convulsions begin to die down. After many tortured minutes, she slowly struggles to open her eyes, her body covered in ashes and bruises, the smell of burnt human skin permeating the air. "This isn't what I wanted," Catherine whispers weakly. She finds her father's eyes and gives him a sad smile. She takes one shuddering breath and her eyes close forever, with a single tear rolling down her face. "Catherine! Catherine wake up! What have I done?" Justin collapses to the floor in tears wondering where everything went wrong and thinking that maybe if he had just listened to what his daughter really wanted, things could have ended differently.

Greed By Leo Fiore

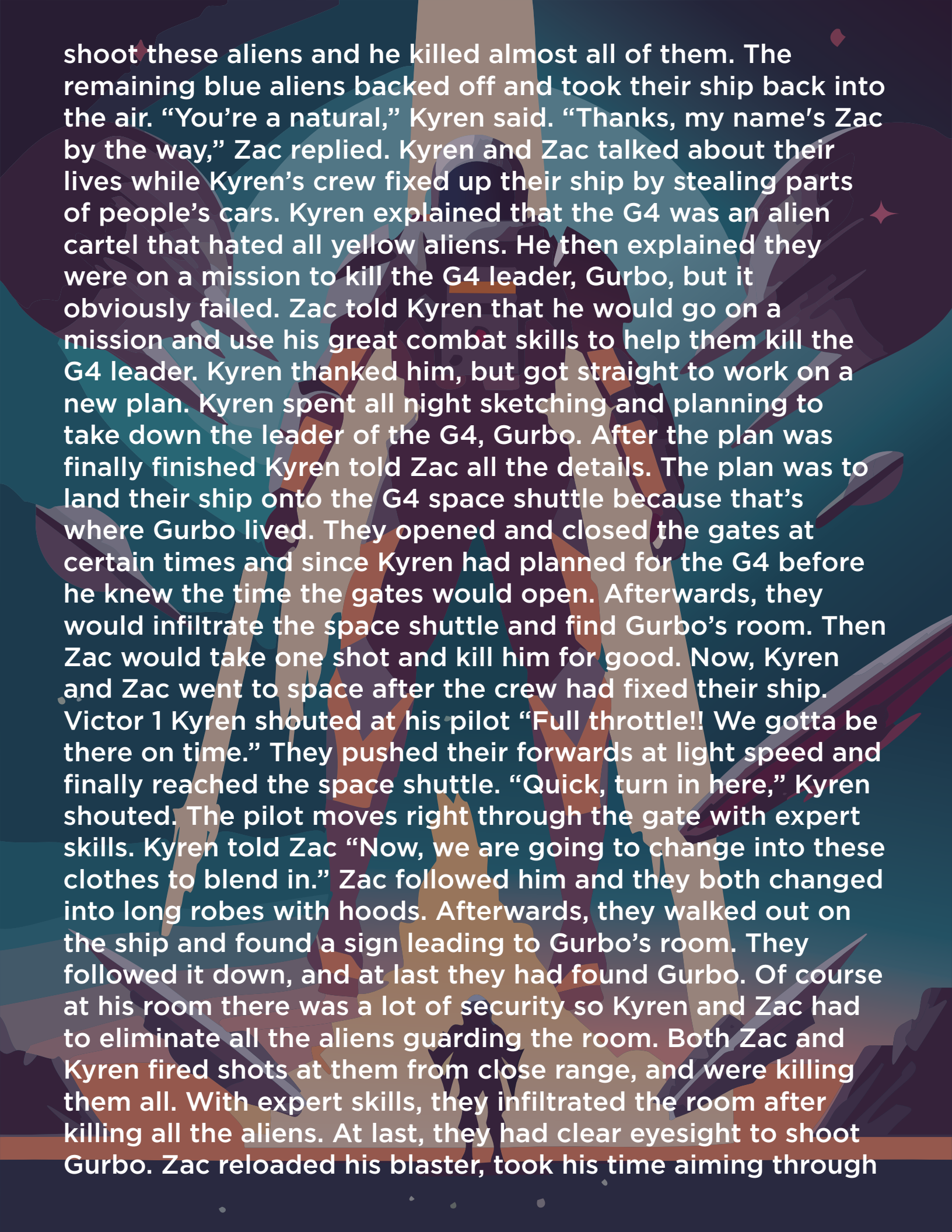
In the future once no song birds sing nor church bells ring we will have found that greediness and corruption has led us down this path. We will have found out that corrupt governments and greedy businessmen will have led not just the destruction of land but the destruction of religion and cultural ideals. One part of culture that has been destroyed because of corporate greed is the culinary aspect. Throughout making essential 3d printed food there have been lost memories and lost parts of cultures people so much enjoy. Two people that this would very much effect would be Robert and Veronica. Robert and Veronica lived in Baltimore, Maryland during the beginning of the New Age around 2267. The Food Replicator is still fairly new, only created 12 years prior. Robert and Veronica were born 15 years before this creation. Many core memories of when people including them from when they were brought up involved food and family. Knowing this one day Veronica came home with exciting news for Robert. "Honey I have the most unbelievable news for you." Veronica said. "What is it?" Robert Responded. Veronica said. "Through colleagues I found an underground market that stills sells cooking ingredients of all kinds! Plant and pastas to oils and vinaigrettes. It's the most amazing place." "Honey, that's the greatest news I've ever heard! What did you buy when you were there?" Replied Robert. Veronica then stated. "I got the ingredients to make your grandmother's baked ziti for dinner and spritz cookies for dessert." Thrilled and delighted, Robert and Veronica went to the basement to take out Veronica's mom's cooking devices and utensils. Being proactive while buying ingredients she had also bought a toaster oven and they had dug out the



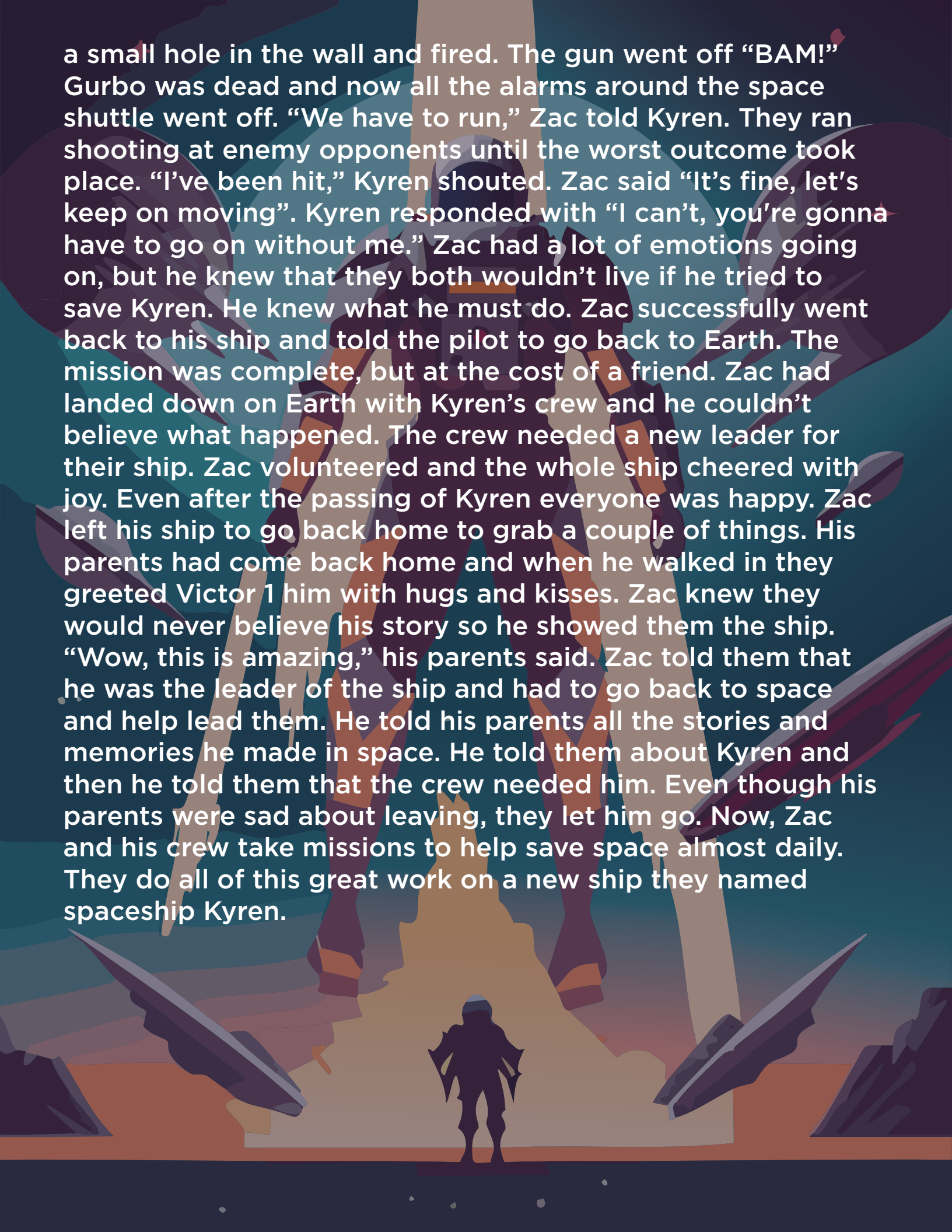
campstove. They decided to cook in the basement so it would be less likely others would smell and alert anybody. Robert ecstatically said. "It's so very exciting to be cooking my grandma's recipes again." "I'm so glad to see you this happy again." Veronica said. As they continued cooking they recounted memories before the change. They talked about the fun times shared over holidays with family making and enjoying food. Over time making the food from their culture they realized they were having more fun than either of them had had in so long. Neither them nor others really thought of the impact of corruption and greed over culture and what defines them. Greed and selfish desire can lead not just to the collapse of civilization but the destruction of culture and what people believe in. A big part of culture is the culinary aspects and with the current technological advancements and the ones to come it's somewhat slipping through our fingers. So maybe we should focus more on our cultural heritage and ideals and work on making those connections stronger.

Takedown of the G4 by Victor Gorri

“We’re going down commander,” the alien pilot shrieks in fear while they’re under siege. “Engage defense shields,” Commander Kyren yells at his workers. All the aliens know their ship is going down against the mighty G4. Even if they survived. They knew more ships would come to take them up. Kyren asks one of the pilots, “What’s the nearest planet?” and the pilot responds, “the nearest is this little ugly planet called Earth.” They knew the G4 would leave them alone if they could just make it to that weird planet. On Earth, a little boy named Zac was supposed to be asleep, but saw a bright ball of fire falling out of the sky. It passed right through the atmosphere with great speed, and toppled over houses and roads right in front of his own home. Since his parents were gone this week, it was only him home. He went outside and found a huge spaceship with technology and lights he had never seen before. He went further and saw big, gooey yellow creatures shooting each other with blasters that looked like they were from Star Wars. “Geep Geep Meep meebo,” a voice cried. Zac checked around the corner and found one of these creatures lying on the floor without legs. He tried to figure out how to help it, but before long both limbs grew back. “Geep Geep Meep meebo,” the creature said again. Zac was extremely confused until the alien grabbed his arm and stuck a translation microchip right inside his hand. Victor 1 The yellow creature spoke to Zac and said, “Hello alien, I’m Commander Kyren.” Zac was trembling with confusion, but built up the courage to ask “Who are you people?” Kyren replied “No time to answer kid,” and threw him a blaster. Soon after another spaceship with the phrase G4 written on it came flying in. More creatures, but this time tall, skinny blue ones jumped out from the ship. “The G4, kill the blue ones kid,” Kyren shouted as he sought for cover. Zac could not believe all this was happening and he thought he was in a dream. He played a lot of video games so he was prepared to




shoot these aliens and he killed almost all of them. The remaining blue aliens backed off and took their ship back into the air. "You're a natural," Kyren said. "Thanks, my name's Zac by the way," Zac replied. Kyren and Zac talked about their lives while Kyren's crew fixed up their ship by stealing parts of people's cars. Kyren explained that the G4 was an alien cartel that hated all yellow aliens. He then explained they were on a mission to kill the G4 leader, Gurbo, but it obviously failed. Zac told Kyren that he would go on a mission and use his great combat skills to help them kill the G4 leader. Kyren thanked him, but got straight to work on a new plan. Kyren spent all night sketching and planning to take down the leader of the G4, Gurbo. After the plan was finally finished Kyren told Zac all the details. The plan was to land their ship onto the G4 space shuttle because that's where Gurbo lived. They opened and closed the gates at certain times and since Kyren had planned for the G4 before he knew the time the gates would open. Afterwards, they would infiltrate the space shuttle and find Gurbo's room. Then Zac would take one shot and kill him for good. Now, Kyren and Zac went to space after the crew had fixed their ship. Victor 1 Kyren shouted at his pilot "Full throttle!! We gotta be there on time." They pushed their forwards at light speed and finally reached the space shuttle. "Quick, turn in here," Kyren shouted. The pilot moves right through the gate with expert skills. Kyren told Zac "Now, we are going to change into these clothes to blend in." Zac followed him and they both changed into long robes with hoods. Afterwards, they walked out on the ship and found a sign leading to Gurbo's room. They followed it down, and at last they had found Gurbo. Of course at his room there was a lot of security so Kyren and Zac had to eliminate all the aliens guarding the room. Both Zac and Kyren fired shots at them from close range, and were killing them all. With expert skills, they infiltrated the room after killing all the aliens. At last, they had clear eyesight to shoot Gurbo. Zac reloaded his blaster, took his time aiming through



a small hole in the wall and fired. The gun went off “BAM!” Gurbo was dead and now all the alarms around the space shuttle went off. “We have to run,” Zac told Kyren. They ran shooting at enemy opponents until the worst outcome took place. “I’ve been hit,” Kyren shouted. Zac said “It’s fine, let’s keep on moving”. Kyren responded with “I can’t, you’re gonna have to go on without me.” Zac had a lot of emotions going on, but he knew that they both wouldn’t live if he tried to save Kyren. He knew what he must do. Zac successfully went back to his ship and told the pilot to go back to Earth. The mission was complete, but at the cost of a friend. Zac had landed down on Earth with Kyren’s crew and he couldn’t believe what happened. The crew needed a new leader for their ship. Zac volunteered and the whole ship cheered with joy. Even after the passing of Kyren everyone was happy. Zac left his ship to go back home to grab a couple of things. His parents had come back home and when he walked in they greeted Victor 1 him with hugs and kisses. Zac knew they would never believe his story so he showed them the ship. “Wow, this is amazing,” his parents said. Zac told them that he was the leader of the ship and had to go back to space and help lead them. He told his parents all the stories and memories he made in space. He told them about Kyren and then he told them that the crew needed him. Even though his parents were sad about leaving, they let him go. Now, Zac and his crew take missions to help save space almost daily. They do all of this great work on a new ship they named spaceship Kyren.

Tommy's Revenge By Thomas Graham

It was a dark day for Tommy. He had lived out almost his full villain arc and he was about to check another man off his list: Brady Baxter. Tommy lived a double life, one as a bright young student attending Morris Catholic High School, and another as an evil mad scientist. On the evil mad scientist part of his life, Tommy created a game called Fortnite. He trapped people in the game and forced them to fight to the death every 20 minutes while being controlled by gamers. He had trapped Chun-li, Ninja, Midas, Jonesy, and many more. His next target however was Brady Baxter. Brady was a fellow student attending Morris Catholic who did vile things to him in Phys Ed class, and so Tommy was getting his get back. The plan was set, to lure Brady to his house in order to “hang out”. He wasn’t actually tight with Brady like that though, but Brady didn’t know that. So when the time came, Tommy called Brady and told him to “pull up”. Brady came and Tommy peeked out the window at him, “Brady come around back so you don’t wake up my parents.” He walked into Tommy’s house, and Tommy came down to join him. They went downstairs into the basement then Tommy excitedly went “Dude, dude! Look at this. Come here.” Brady said, “Alrighty.” with a sigh, thinking he was a goofball. Instead of laughing, Tommy hated him even more. Tommy pressed a hidden button on the wall and a “hiss” let out. A secret door opened up! “What in the peanut butter dookie!” exclaimed Brady. They walked inside to see a nice neat laboratory. On one end however was a blanket making odd whooshing sounds. Brady said, “What’s that?” as he lifted up the blanket. The room went bright. An ominous green glow filled the space and Brady gasped. Tommy came charging at him and gave a great shove. Brady fell into the portal and into a small island: Spawn Island. Within seconds he realized where he was. Is this VR? He asked himself trying to tab out or take off the goggles. He got no response. “DUDE THIS IS SICK!” he



yelled to the heavens, thinking Tommy created a new gaming device even better than VR. Chun-Li came running at him “Shut Up, newbie.” She asked him, “Is this your first game here or something?” Brady laughed it off, “Nope. I’m in Unreal.” Chun-Li sighed, “Oh well, I suppose I will help you even though you’re my competition. This is real. You’re in the game.” Jonesy comes running up as well. “Yeah, what she said. There is no loop. You just have an alternate version of you everytime you die for the next round. Once you die, you die.” Brady is pale as a ghost. “I-i-i I don’t want to die!” He takes a moment to recollect himself. “We’re not going tilted or any big poi. We need to bush camp.” Chun-Li smiles and looks at Jonesy, “I think we’ve found our trio.” Jonesy laughs and says “Yeah. We’re dropping Lonely Lodge.” They progress through the early game without seeing a soul, and in the middle game pick up a kill on a solo out in the open—Top 20 situation. Brady goes for a calm right-hand peak but misses his sniper shot. He edits himself back into old builds, but someone is camping there. 200 pump to the dome. “BOOM!” shouts the shotgun, and Brady’s world goes black.

“Do You Remember?” By Ellie Kaelin

It is early in the morning, and my alarm clock goes off like it does every morning at 7 a.m. I get out of bed and quickly glance out the window while walking past it. I am met with the same view every time, the uniform brick apartment complexes spread throughout the city and lights flickering on as people start to wake up for the day. I walk through the empty apartment that I do not share with anyone. I go to brush my teeth with the lone toothbrush sitting on the counter, today feels the same as every day. I say this because all the days have started to fade into one.

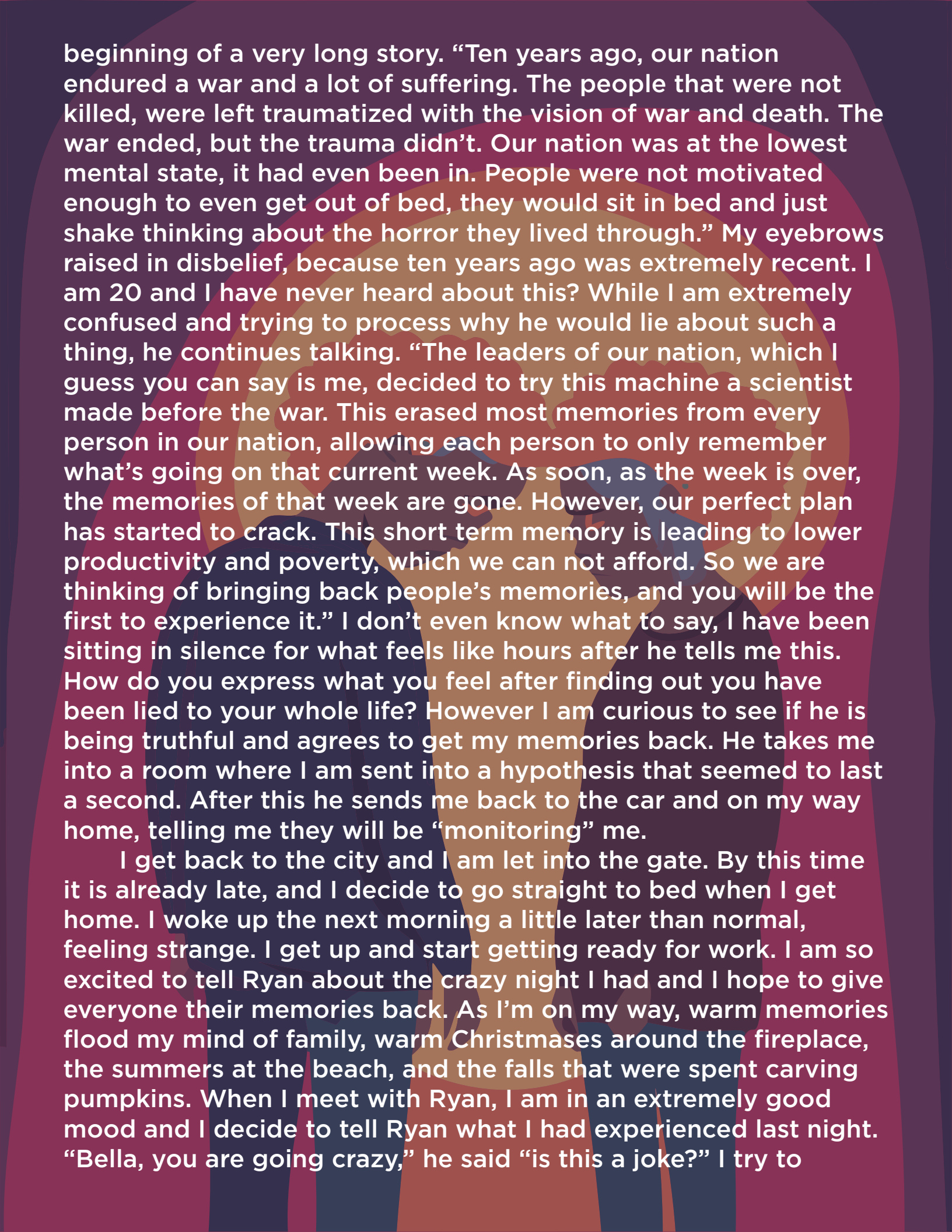
I begin to make my way through the streets of this joyful city. Around me, people are laughing and walking with friends on their way to work with the clean streets looking almost too clean. The white perfect streets are surrounded by red brick complexes, beautiful greenery and the entirety of the city surrounded by a beautiful gate that makes this city seem like a utopia. While I am busy thinking about this, I turn to my right seeing my best friend Ryan approaching. “Good morning Bella!” He says in a joyful tone almost too joyful for this early in the morning. “Good morning, am I supposed to be walking you to work again this morning?” I said in a teasing manner. He smirked, “You know you enjoy walking me to work.” After that we talk about the crazy things currently going on while I walk him to work. I can not remember when Ryan came into my life, but he has been my main support for a while now.

We arrive at Ryan’s work, and I tell him “ You should probably go inside before you are late, you can not afford any more lates.” He rolls his eyes at me, but nods in agreement. “Have a good day Bella, check up after work?” I nod my head in agreement, that is our routine anyways. Again I walk the clean streets alone, but this time something catches my eye. A red slip of paper appears on the white sidewalk, filled with curiosity as I walk towards it. I bend to pick it up, my eyes quickly scanning the paper trying to come to a conclusion of what this is. “WINNER. The winner must report to the local gatekeeper, the day after winning. Be there at 6 a.m. sharp and make sure no one sees you.” “The gatekeeper?” I thought to myself. In my whole life

living here, I had never seen anyone approach the gate, and everyone knew not to try. Even though I feel a little unsure, most of me feels proud that I am chosen as a “winner” even if I don’t know what that is. I set my mind on going, and continue on my way to work excited.


I meet with Ryan at the park after work like we always do. We grab our normal cup of coffee and walk around. I decided not to bring it up to him. I wake up extra early the next morning, excited to see what awaits me. I got there exactly at 6 and not a minute later, all the lights of the city buildings were still turned off. In my left hand I hold the red ticket, with my right hand cupped around my face up to the glass, trying to look into the tinted window of the gatekeeper’s office. Inside a tired guard looks back at me, I take my face off the glass and back up embarrassed. The guard comes outside and immediately spots the bright red ticket in my hand. “The car is waiting for you.” He says quietly unlocking the gate. I walk through and step into the pre opened black car door. The man driving the car looks serious and is dressed in a suit. A little uneasy, I buckle my seatbelt and wait for the car to start moving.

The car starts to move and we are driving along a dirt road, the sky is darker than the bright blue sky in the city. I sit quietly during the ride and observe the completely different surroundings. After about an hour of driving, we arrived at a beautifully constructed mansion in the middle of nowhere. It was like nothing I had ever seen, with fountains, lines of cars in the driveway, white sprawling pillars, and formally dressed people all around the property. I am welcomed inside and seated at the head of a table in a conference room. After waiting for 5 minutes, a very tall man appears in the doorway. “Can I come in?” the mysterious man asks. I nod my head, and he comes in and goes to sit down. On the way to his seat he stops by me and reaches out his hand for a handshake. “My name is Jeremiah, nice to finally meet my winner.” He says. Caught a little off guard I reach out my hand to shake his, and say “Nice to meet you, my name is Bella.” He smiles and sits down. “You are probably wondering why you are here.” He says with sympathy. I nod my head and tilt it in confusion. “I mean I am curious.” Jeremiah begins to tell the



beginning of a very long story. “Ten years ago, our nation endured a war and a lot of suffering. The people that were not killed, were left traumatized with the vision of war and death. The war ended, but the trauma didn’t. Our nation was at the lowest mental state, it had even been in. People were not motivated enough to even get out of bed, they would sit in bed and just shake thinking about the horror they lived through.” My eyebrows raised in disbelief, because ten years ago was extremely recent. I am 20 and I have never heard about this? While I am extremely confused and trying to process why he would lie about such a thing, he continues talking. “The leaders of our nation, which I guess you can say is me, decided to try this machine a scientist made before the war. This erased most memories from every person in our nation, allowing each person to only remember what’s going on that current week. As soon, as the week is over, the memories of that week are gone. However, our perfect plan has started to crack. This short term memory is leading to lower productivity and poverty, which we can not afford. So we are thinking of bringing back people’s memories, and you will be the first to experience it.” I don’t even know what to say, I have been sitting in silence for what feels like hours after he tells me this. How do you express what you feel after finding out you have been lied to your whole life? However I am curious to see if he is being truthful and agrees to get my memories back. He takes me into a room where I am sent into a hypothesis that seemed to last a second. After this he sends me back to the car and on my way home, telling me they will be “monitoring” me.

I get back to the city and I am let into the gate. By this time it is already late, and I decide to go straight to bed when I get home. I woke up the next morning a little later than normal, feeling strange. I get up and start getting ready for work. I am so excited to tell Ryan about the crazy night I had and I hope to give everyone their memories back. As I’m on my way, warm memories flood my mind of family, warm Christmases around the fireplace, the summers at the beach, and the falls that were spent carving pumpkins. When I meet with Ryan, I am in an extremely good mood and I decide to tell Ryan what I had experienced last night. “Bella, you are going crazy,” he said “is this a joke?” I try to

An illustration of two stylized human figures in silhouette, embracing each other. They are set against a large, glowing sun with rays, which is partially obscured by a dark, circular shadow. The background is a deep purple or maroon color. The overall mood is one of emotional connection and support.

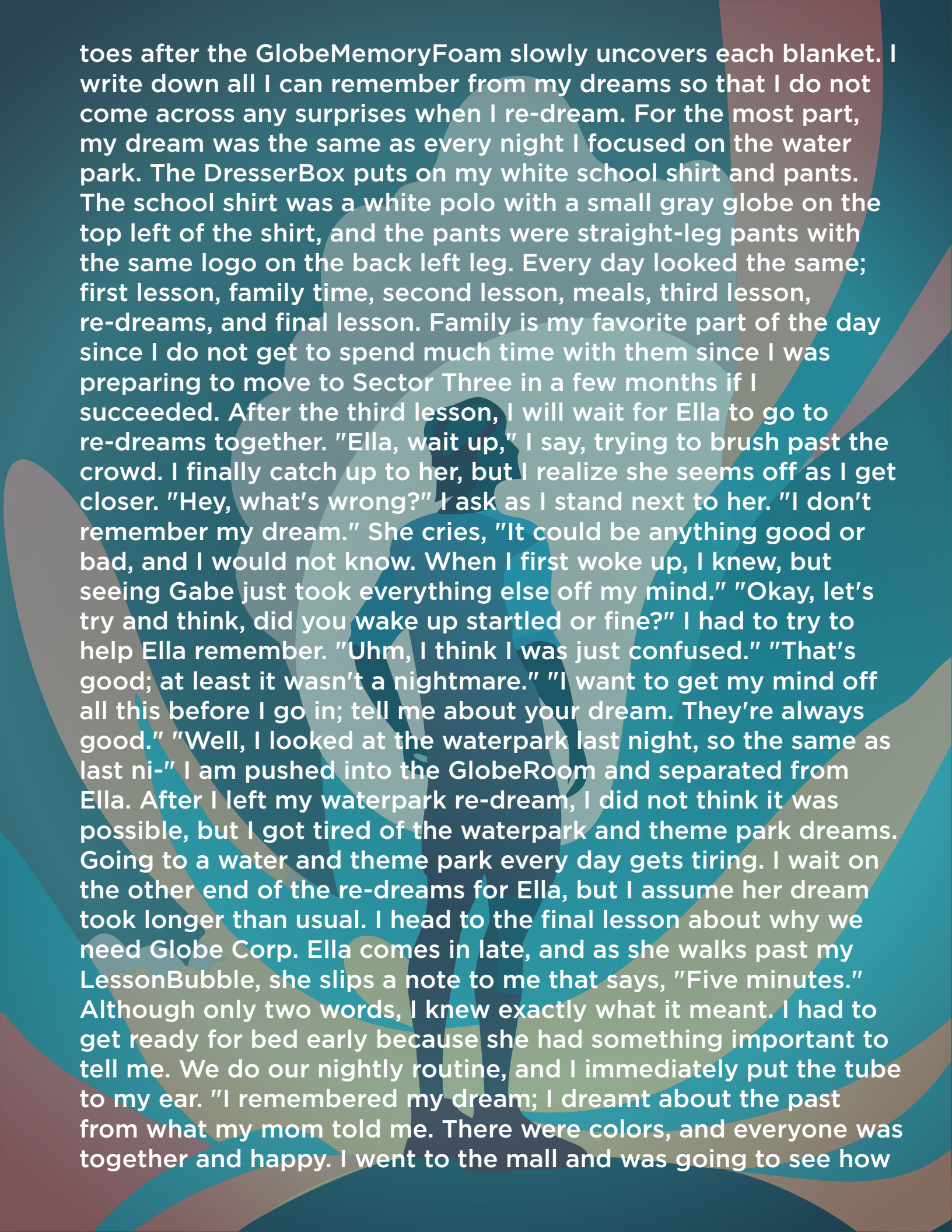
explain it to him, but no one will understand without experiencing what I experienced. I desperately try to convince him because I want him to be able to get all his amazing memories. He still doesn't believe me. "Fine, if you want to see for yourself, meet me at the gatekeeper at exactly 6 tomorrow morning," I said "and you absolutely can not be late." He laughed and agreed, saying he would meet me tomorrow.

I met him at the gatekeeper and I begged the gatekeeper to let me talk to Jeremiah. I convinced him to let me bring Ryan. I bring Ryan, he finally believes me and starts to get his memory back. I am starting to experience waves of sadness but I ignore it. Ryan starts to experience all the joyful memories he had lost and was smiling the whole way home. We get to my apartment and suddenly Ryan breaks down. He is in tears and is rocking back and forth with his arms thrown around his legs. He starts saying things about the war, and he's begging me to make it go away. I start to experience similar emotions. I give him a big hug and drag him to the door. I go back to the gatekeeper, who sees us sobbing and immediately takes us to the mansion. "Are you both sure you want to lose your memory again," Jeremiah asks. We both nod our heads as we calm down. Soon a smile appears on Ryan's face and he's back to himself. However I'm not as lucky. "I don't know why this isn't working." Jeremiah says. "The hypothesis isn't working for you Bella, you are going to have to live with your memories."


The car ride home was quiet, Ryan comforted me on the way home but I know he won't understand for long. After that day, Ryan never left my side even though he can't remember what happened. I now walk the imperfect slightly faded white streets, with a frown. The burden of the world is on my shoulders, and to lift it would be to burden innocent people.

Dreamer By Diana Opondo-Ochieng

The mechanical hand inside three large white steel slabs changes my day clothes for white silky pajamas. The slabs formed a box without a top or bottom, using the furthest wall from the camera as a fourth wall. As the slab facing the camera slowly rises, an announcement sounds across the entirety of Sector Two and Three: "Tell the GlobeMemoryFoam to tuck you in and wait for your DreamingGlobe to be placed on your head." Says the same AI monotoned voice every Tuesday at 9:30. Each sector represents the number of nightmare birthdays you have had. This announcement means I have exactly six minutes to do so. So I perform my nightly routine: brush my teeth, put in the GlobeTie on the low ponytail setting, wipe off my feet to avoid staining my all-white bed, and take off my necklace, leaving me exactly two minutes. I walk over to the left side of my bed and reach my hand out, waiting to pull out the white box that Ella had cut out years ago. Once Ella pushes, I pull and slide a tube down the three-by-three-by-ten-inch wide gap. Making sure I do not move a muscle in fear of the camera discovering our extreme conduct violation. "Amber?" Ella whispers into the tube. "Hi Ella!" I respond. "Hey, we only have two minutes, but I have so much to tell you. Today was Gabe's tenth birthday, meaning that the government sent him to the nightmare room. After what he pulled five years ago on his last nightmare birthday, we thought that by now, he would have learned his lesson. He is still young, but he needs to pull it together. What was he thinking watching a scary movie before he went to bed. My whole family worries about him, but he is my little brother, so I feel I need to protect him. I worry the same thing that happened to James will happen to him. "Whatever happened to James," I say to Ella. Ella started to say something, but her words were muffled, and I could not hear. All I heard was her whisper, "Goodnight, Amber." as she pulled out the tube. The ten-second beep goes off, so I quickly slide the block back into the hole. I tell my GlobeMemoryFoam to tuck me in, and as I wait for the straps on the DreamingGlobe to tighten, I stare at my waterpark poster and close my eyes. Immediately, I fell asleep. I wake up to the cold breeze tickling my



toes after the GlobeMemoryFoam slowly uncovers each blanket. I write down all I can remember from my dreams so that I do not come across any surprises when I re-dream. For the most part, my dream was the same as every night I focused on the water park. The DresserBox puts on my white school shirt and pants. The school shirt was a white polo with a small gray globe on the top left of the shirt, and the pants were straight-leg pants with the same logo on the back left leg. Every day looked the same; first lesson, family time, second lesson, meals, third lesson, re-dreams, and final lesson. Family is my favorite part of the day since I do not get to spend much time with them since I was preparing to move to Sector Three in a few months if I succeeded. After the third lesson, I will wait for Ella to go to re-dreams together. "Ella, wait up," I say, trying to brush past the crowd. I finally catch up to her, but I realize she seems off as I get closer. "Hey, what's wrong?" I ask as I stand next to her. "I don't remember my dream." She cries, "It could be anything good or bad, and I would not know. When I first woke up, I knew, but seeing Gabe just took everything else off my mind." "Okay, let's try and think, did you wake up startled or fine?" I had to try to help Ella remember. "Uhm, I think I was just confused." "That's good; at least it wasn't a nightmare." "I want to get my mind off all this before I go in; tell me about your dream. They're always good." "Well, I looked at the waterpark last night, so the same as last ni-" I am pushed into the GlobeRoom and separated from Ella. After I left my waterpark re-dream, I did not think it was possible, but I got tired of the waterpark and theme park dreams. Going to a water and theme park every day gets tiring. I wait on the other end of the re-dreams for Ella, but I assume her dream took longer than usual. I head to the final lesson about why we need Globe Corp. Ella comes in late, and as she walks past my LessonBubble, she slips a note to me that says, "Five minutes." Although only two words, I knew exactly what it meant. I had to get ready for bed early because she had something important to tell me. We do our nightly routine, and I immediately put the tube to my ear. "I remembered my dream; I dreamt about the past from what my mom told me. There were colors, and everyone was together and happy. I went to the mall and was going to see how



I looked in purple, but a man in a white suit with a grey Dreaming globe logo in the top left corner of the blazer ran towards me, and my vision turned black. I woke, and everything was normal except the green light was flashing on the camera in my room. My re-dream was a nightmare, though. It's like they are trying to get rid of me." Before I could answer, the tube was pulled from my ear, and the slot was closed. I did not hear the announcement that had already gone off, so I got into bed and thought about what Ella had told me. Maybe she was right, but why would Globe Corp be after her. I needed answers, so I did what anyone else would have done; I dreamed about the past hoping the same thing that happened to Ella would happen to me. It was strange. I woke up, and I forgot to write down my dream. I even forgot what happened in my dream; I only remember seeing the same DreamMaker from Ellas' dream. I told Ella about it as I waited for re-dreams. It is different than usual when I go into re-dreams; the people can not see me. I am following a DreamMaker through the Globe Corp Headquarters in my re-dream. I see a building full of computers and DreamMakers, the Dreammakers each controlling many people's dreams and Globe devices. "Amber." the DreamMaker I have been following says to me as he turns around. "How do you know my name?" I ask. "I know everything about you and your friend Ella. It is pretty clever, a wall canal so you can communicate with each other. You control your dreams, and Ella notices every detail. Ella always resembles her mother and James, letting their mind interrupt our vision. We just kept her mom in school longer, but by the time her brother reached that point, we had already developed the idea of nightmare birthdays, and it was the perfect opportunity to prevent any mishaps." "You're the reason James went missing," I say disgustingly. "No, he is just in the testing site being used as a statistic to avoid further violations." The DreamMaker said with a sinister look. "You know the saying if you can't beat them, join them; how would you like to join us here at Globe Corp. as a DreamMaker. This is where you would work." He says, showing me to the second most top floor. "What's at the top?" I say, refusing to give him what he wanted. "You're eager, aren't you! Most people do not see this on their first visit, but you are special." The elevator bell dings once we

reach the top floor. "This is the button that controls it all. It powers down all electronics and shuts down everything Globe Corp. is affiliated with. This was designed in case the dreams disappeared and started seeping into the real world. And soon you and Ella will-" I cut him off. "I made up my mind." "So?" He says, smirking in certainty, I would accept his offer. I glance at him, then at the button; I look at the DreamMaker one more time before running toward the button, knowing that this decision would set free all future generations. As I press the button, I watch the headquarters crumble beneath my feet; the same darkness falls as when I could not remember my dream. I wait to wake up to a new beginning and new ways of life, but I wake up to the same monotone AI I wake up to every morning: "Sectors two and three, get ready for the first lesson."



It's Out of Our Hands By Erin Schermerhorn

May 9th 2024: Austin “What if I told you that every obstacle that humans face was carefully organized by a group of scientists. All of the pain, the envy, the fear, the joy, and the thankfulness was plotted to see our reactions; like a test. I have reason to believe that we are being studied. We, being the billions of people across this planet. What would you say if you knew that the human race as we know it was a result of several scientists’ wish to become the greatest? They wanted to create a study consisting of a large group of diverse people, to see how they would react to life. They wanted us to think that we were the first to evolve, first to explore, first to really live. These scientists, they’re not like us. They’re what we consider aliens, but to them we are the aliens. What do you think?” She sat there. I mean she really just sat there. Well, you did it again Austin. You left another therapist speechless. Another one thinks that you’re crazy and I even left out the part where they’re going to destroy the world. What they don’t know is that I’m right. And it’s my job to convince them of that, convince everyone of that, before it’s too late. “Austin, for someone fresh out of college you really have an impressive imagination. Usually people your age are getting hit in the face with all of the realities of growing up, and acting like an actual adult. It is common for the younger sibling to feel like they need to grasp others’-” Before she even finished that crap that I had heard countless times before I was out of there. Look, I know that I sound crazy. But tell me you haven’t just thought about it. We were created by scientists. Scientists that are just days away from destroying everything. I just know it. I don’t know why I keep showing up to those therapy appointments. They all just waste my time. I have better things to do, like oh maybe saving the world. Walking down the streets of New York City is always such a unique experience. The rush of busy people passing by, people who live in the same city as you but you don’t so much as make eye contact with them for more than a second. The power of eye contact. That’s something I have always valued. My mother would always say, “when you are choosing who to grow old with, look deeply into their eyes, they will never change. Your person will



eventually grow gray and wrinkly, but their eyes are forever.” That’s when my boring brown eyes met her bright blue ones walking up to the coffee cart on the corner. “Medium caramel macchiato please.” “I’ll have the same.” I slipped the barista my card. “Thank you, you really didn’t have to do that.” “That’s kind of the point, I wanted to.” We held eye contact, I knew right away that I needed her help. “Why? I don’t even know your name.” She tucked her long dark auburn hair behind one ear, revealing her two simple earrings. “It’s Austin.” I responded, trying my best not to stare at the ground. “Riley, thanks for the coffee.” She grabbed her coffee, reading the order on the side of the cup. “Anytime, would you like to go for a walk around central park?” My eyes immediately darted to the concrete, nervous to hear her response. “You know what, my shift just ended and I have nowhere to be. Sure that sounds fun.” Riley smiled and took a sip of her coffee. As we were walking I knew that I had to get her on my side, and fast. “Look, I don’t really like talking about this because I know it makes me look crazy. But we don’t really have too much time on our hands.” “What do you mean?” The sympathetic look on her face is the only reason that I feel like I can continue. I only met her maybe five minutes ago but it feels like years. “Okay hear me out. About two months ago, I had this gut feeling that something was very wrong. I figured out that in three days the scientists are going to shut down everything. They are going to stop everything. The sun won’t rise, the world won’t turn. We are going to die. That is, unless we stop them. I need your help.” Riley looked at me with an appalled look on her face. I needed her help but I didn’t know how else to get it, without being honest. “Austin I mean-“ ”Please Riley I seriously need your help, it’s only up to us to save everything.” I pleaded with her. But it was a test. Everything, it had always been a test. The scientist looked down at the society that they had created with smug looks on their faces. Everything had gone according to their plans. It had always been out of our hands.

We Become What We Behold by Cam Westrick

“You won’t remember this in the morning”, was the last thing said to me before I fell back asleep. I was working in my lab on Sunday afternoon while it was storming outside. My colleagues and I were tasked with analyzing a mouse’s functional ability and comparing it to a human’s. This is so we are able to see the evolutionary differences between mice and humans.

The mouse was able to track using its eyes, understand basic phrases and hear certain pitches of noise. However, the mouse lacked opposable thumbs, dexterity in its appendages, and the ability to walk on its hind legs. We took note of all of this. We then wiped away its memory using “The Erasure Ray” that the lab bought for us. We then returned it to its cage and waited for the wipe to complete.

While we waited, I started walking to the Jersey Mike’s which was around the corner from my lab. However, due to the fact that the storm outside was so intense, I couldn’t see even 3 feet in front of me. This made it almost impossible to see the pancake-shaped aircraft speedily approaching above me. Before I knew it, there was a weird green glow around me and then I felt myself get pulled upward into what looked like a doctors office. An all white room with one solid steel door with seemingly now way of opening it. There was a bed in the middle of the room, with a white hospital gown draped atop it. I have no clue as to why but I felt drawn towards it as if destiny itself wanted me to sit down

As soon as I sat down on the bed, a booming voice entered the room from seemingly nowhere. “Please Remove Your Human Clothes!” The voice sounded as though it struggled to say those words, as if the language was foreign to it, however I felt compelled to follow it. After removing my clothes and donning the gown, the steel door slowly lifted with a satisfying “PSSSSS” as the pressure equalized. Behind the door, I see a large, gray humanoid being. A square face with large eyes, no nose and a small slit for a mouth. The being slowly begins advancing towards me and states with the same booming voice “Hello, Bryant Moreland, I Will Be Conducting Your Tests Today.”

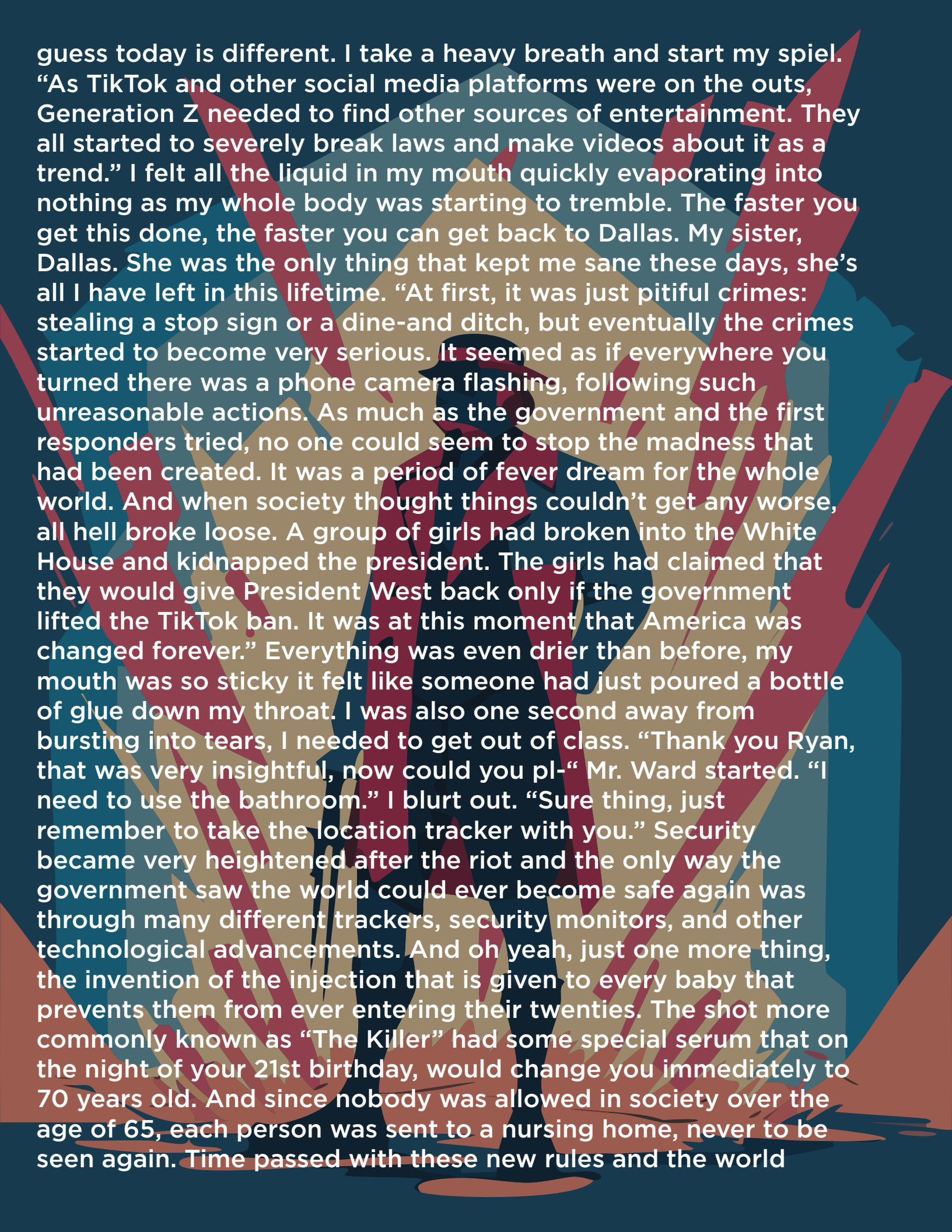
Every word feels strained as if the creature doesn't understand what they mean.

The being reaches its lanky and translucent arm towards my head and advises, "You May Want To Close Your Eyes." I feel an odd pinch as if something is touching my brain and then I start hearing a horrible noise. It sounds as if a tea kettle is screaming at me, as if a thousand dog whistles were being blown, it felt like my ear drums were about to pop. And then, it stopped, and I heard the being speak once more but this time its English was perfect even though it didn't look like its mouth moved. "The first test is if you have access to telepathy." The voice seemed familiar but robotic, it sounded like Jeff E., my best friend since middle school. I tried to respond by stating, "I don't believe I can do telepathy," however, my mouth didn't move. The creature wrote quickly on his clipboard and said, "I will need to check your insides." It then promptly stuck its hand in my chest and used that hand to pull apart the two halves of my body. The being made some quick notes before stating, with a solemn look on his face, "I'm afraid you won't be able to get to Alpha Prime. Your species is still too underdeveloped to be welcomed onto the utopia." The being then held up what looked to be the same "Erasure Ray" that the lab used on mice, and said, "This will erase all memory of this interaction in 30 minutes, however, we will come back to continue to check up on your species in 20 earth-years. Then I saw a blinding light and almost fell asleep.

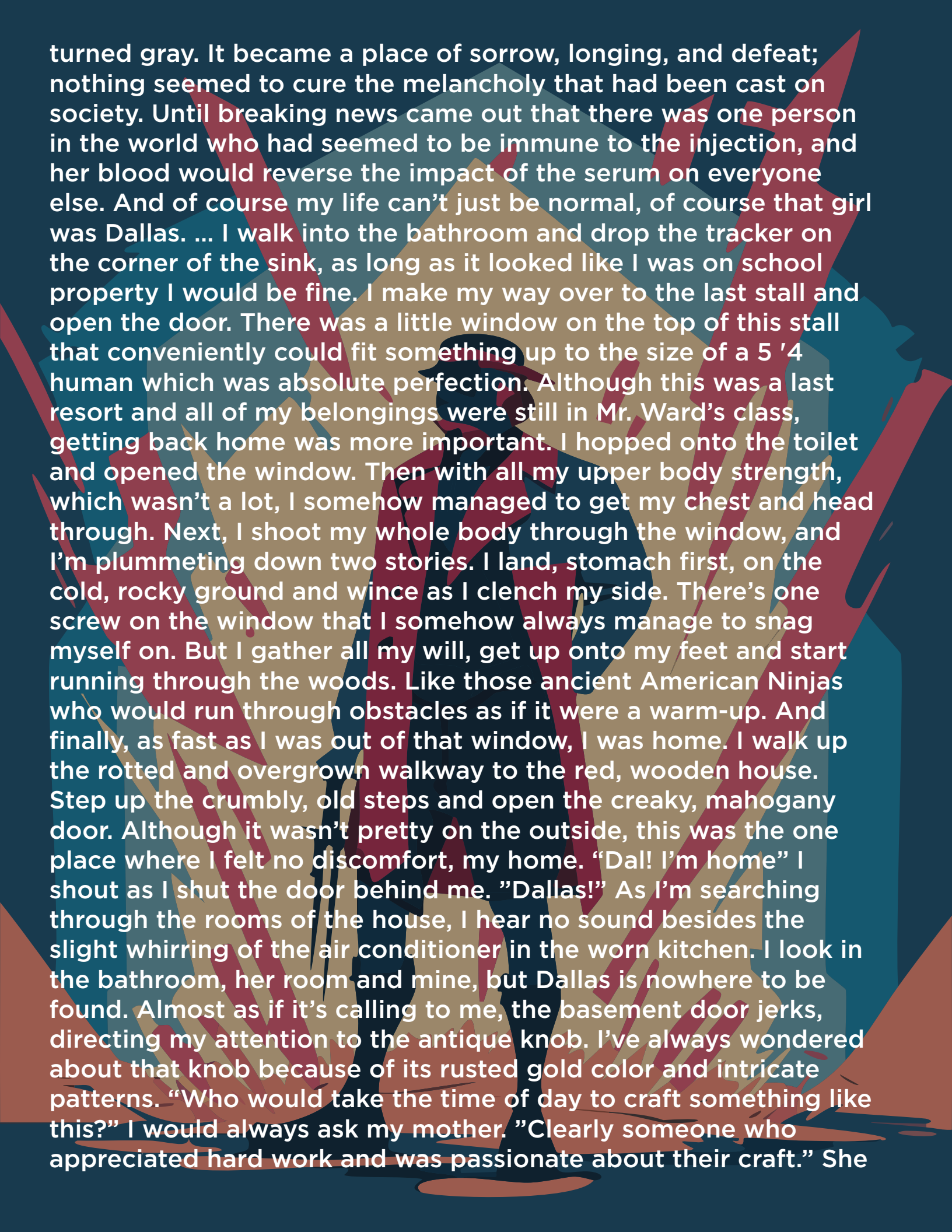
They sent me back down to earth and I went to Jersey Mike's as I had originally planned. However, I didn't get a sandwich, instead I am writing this so hopefully I can remember what happened after I lose my memory. It has been 28 minutes and I am feeling anxious and scared. I have no clue what will happen when I lose my memory. I hope that I will understand and believe this letter, however, something feels off. As Bryant loses his memory, he stands up from his table and goes to get a sandwich, leaving the letter on the table to be forgotten and lost, along with any evidence of the aliens — until they come back.

The Beginning of the End by Leah Wilk

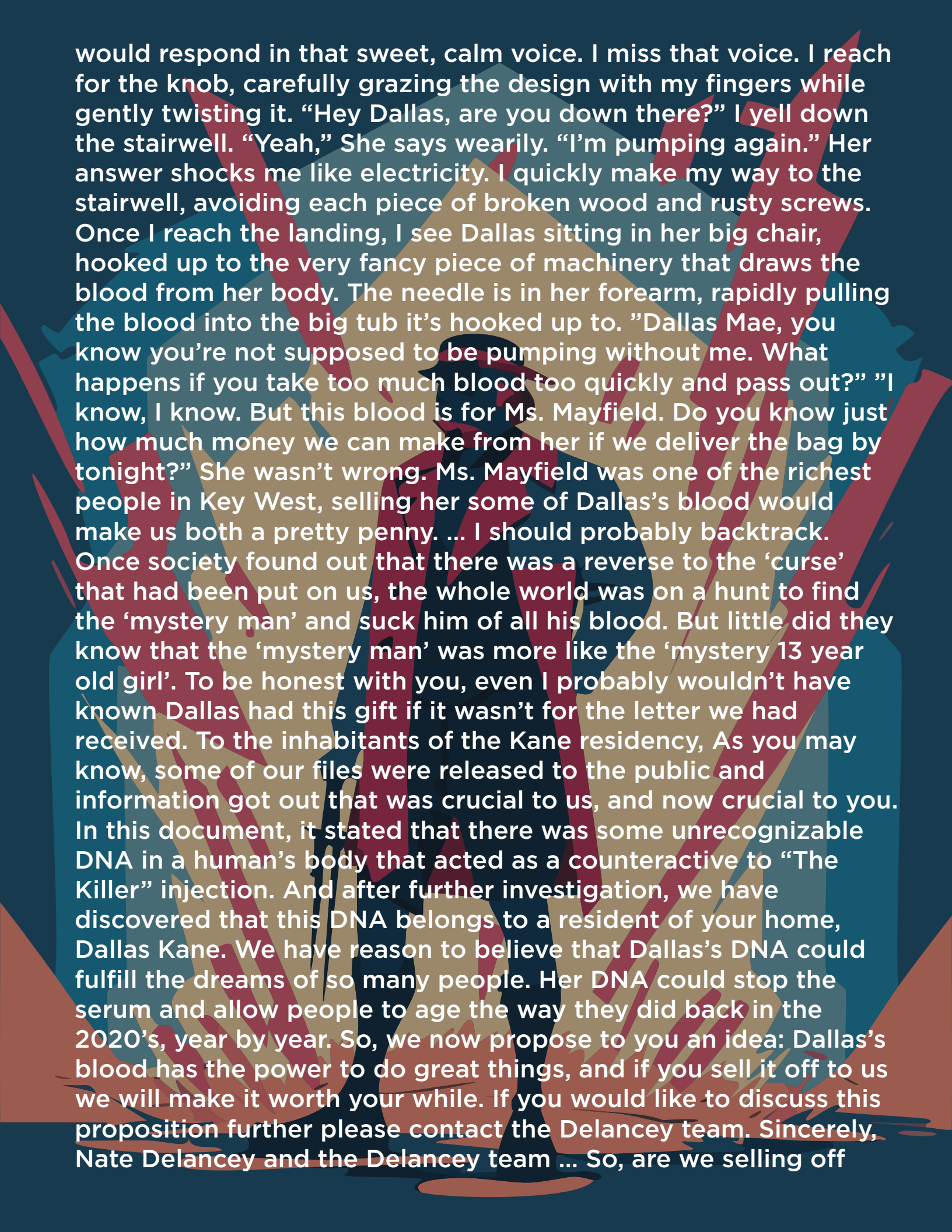
Aging is just a race against time, the older you get the closer you are to a life of depression, sadness, and endless knitting. We learned in school that one of the most famous sayings of the early 2000's was "cherish your twenties, they slip out of your fingers in just a second". I'm dreading mine, well, at least I was dreading mine. That was until I was offered the chance of a lifetime, to stay youthful past the ripe age of twenty one. The Gen Z riot that happened sixty-seven years ago was the beginning of the end. Especially in the heart of America, Key West. Everyone knows the story of how the twenty-something year olds went completely wild in 2031 and wrecked society as a whole. In school, the most important thing we learn is not how to thrive independently or math, we learn about what happened in the "Dark Year" and how to prevent something like that from ever happening again. ... "Alright class, how about we venture away from the invention of the life reviver and touch on 2031." Mr. Ward says as if we don't 'touch on' that year everyday. The whole class looks at each other and groans, everyone knows we're thinking the same thing. To our generation, embedding the Gen Z riot in our heads seems utterly useless. "Ryan, can you give us a brief summary of the riot?" Of course we're not going to go off our rockers and trash the universe, most of us can't even if we tried. "Ryan?" But anyway. "Ryan!" I jumped out of my own skin, my own name snapping me back to reality. "Sorry, what did you say?" "Welcome back Ryan," the class laughed and looked at me, "would you please describe the riot? mediate flush in my cheeks and a pounding in my head. I hate being called on in class. My confidence was completely crushed after losing my mother to the nursing home 9 years ago. Growing up dirt poor in the 80's was hard enough, not to mention the fact that I only had my sister with me. I have to be strategic, determined, and brave to even have a chance at getting by in this world. I'm forced to keep secrets. There are too many risks each day to break them. So, that's why I vowed to never speak in public. Usually Mr. Ward, along with many of my other teachers, just overlook me in class. Sometimes I think I'm too quiet for them to even recognize. But I



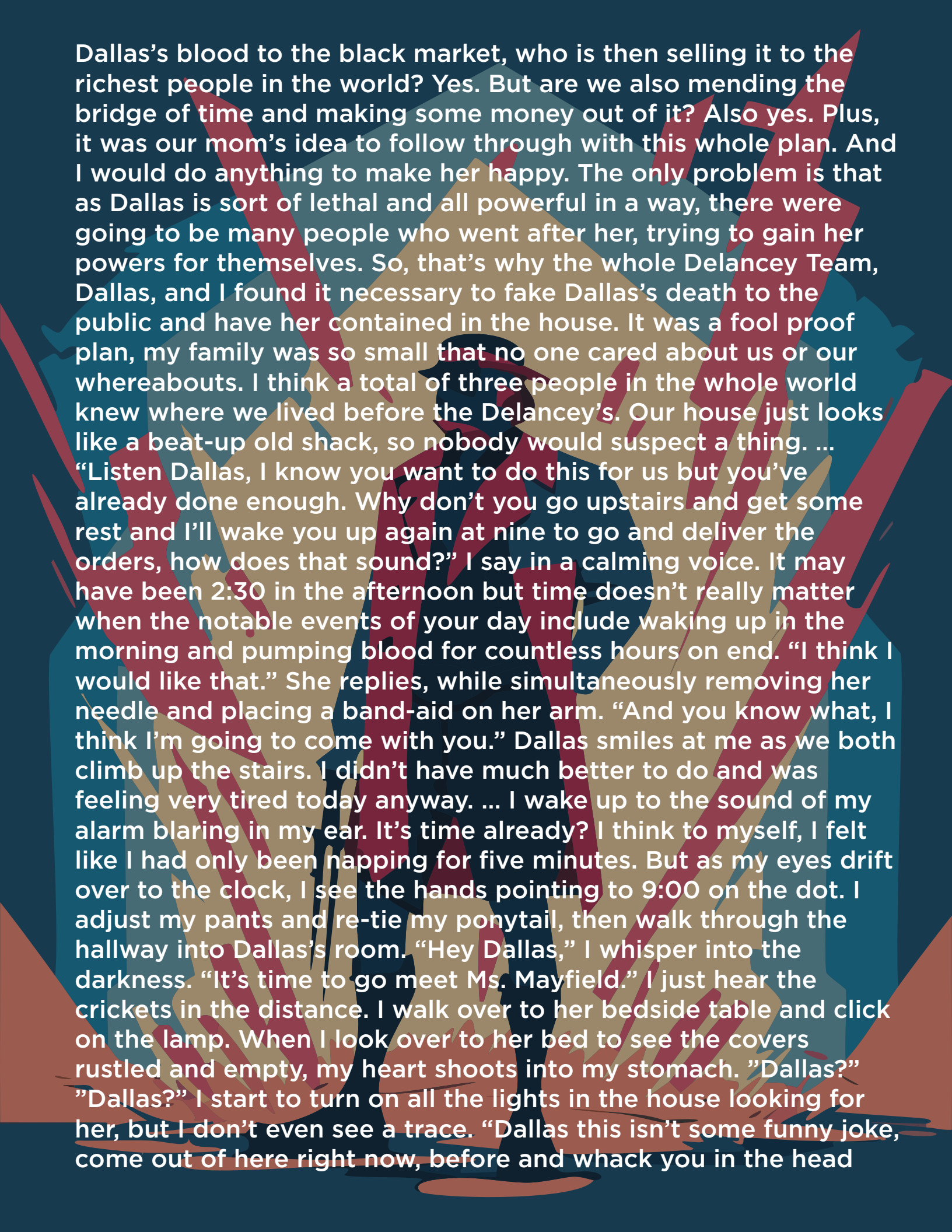
guess today is different. I take a heavy breath and start my spiel. “As TikTok and other social media platforms were on the outs, Generation Z needed to find other sources of entertainment. They all started to severely break laws and make videos about it as a trend.” I felt all the liquid in my mouth quickly evaporating into nothing as my whole body was starting to tremble. The faster you get this done, the faster you can get back to Dallas. My sister, Dallas. She was the only thing that kept me sane these days, she’s all I have left in this lifetime. “At first, it was just pitiful crimes: stealing a stop sign or a dine-and-ditch, but eventually the crimes started to become very serious. It seemed as if everywhere you turned there was a phone camera flashing, following such unreasonable actions. As much as the government and the first responders tried, no one could seem to stop the madness that had been created. It was a period of fever dream for the whole world. And when society thought things couldn’t get any worse, all hell broke loose. A group of girls had broken into the White House and kidnapped the president. The girls had claimed that they would give President West back only if the government lifted the TikTok ban. It was at this moment that America was changed forever.” Everything was even drier than before, my mouth was so sticky it felt like someone had just poured a bottle of glue down my throat. I was also one second away from bursting into tears, I needed to get out of class. “Thank you Ryan, that was very insightful, now could you pl-“ Mr. Ward started. “I need to use the bathroom.” I blurt out. “Sure thing, just remember to take the location tracker with you.” Security became very heightened after the riot and the only way the government saw the world could ever become safe again was through many different trackers, security monitors, and other technological advancements. And oh yeah, just one more thing, the invention of the injection that is given to every baby that prevents them from ever entering their twenties. The shot more commonly known as “The Killer” had some special serum that on the night of your 21st birthday, would change you immediately to 70 years old. And since nobody was allowed in society over the age of 65, each person was sent to a nursing home, never to be seen again. Time passed with these new rules and the world



turned gray. It became a place of sorrow, longing, and defeat; nothing seemed to cure the melancholy that had been cast on society. Until breaking news came out that there was one person in the world who had seemed to be immune to the injection, and her blood would reverse the impact of the serum on everyone else. And of course my life can't just be normal, of course that girl was Dallas. ... I walk into the bathroom and drop the tracker on the corner of the sink, as long as it looked like I was on school property I would be fine. I make my way over to the last stall and open the door. There was a little window on the top of this stall that conveniently could fit something up to the size of a 5 '4 human which was absolute perfection. Although this was a last resort and all of my belongings were still in Mr. Ward's class, getting back home was more important. I hopped onto the toilet and opened the window. Then with all my upper body strength, which wasn't a lot, I somehow managed to get my chest and head through. Next, I shoot my whole body through the window, and I'm plummeting down two stories. I land, stomach first, on the cold, rocky ground and wince as I clench my side. There's one screw on the window that I somehow always manage to snag myself on. But I gather all my will, get up onto my feet and start running through the woods. Like those ancient American Ninjas who would run through obstacles as if it were a warm-up. And finally, as fast as I was out of that window, I was home. I walk up the rotted and overgrown walkway to the red, wooden house. Step up the crumbly, old steps and open the creaky, mahogany door. Although it wasn't pretty on the outside, this was the one place where I felt no discomfort, my home. "Dal! I'm home" I shout as I shut the door behind me. "Dallas!" As I'm searching through the rooms of the house, I hear no sound besides the slight whirring of the air conditioner in the worn kitchen. I look in the bathroom, her room and mine, but Dallas is nowhere to be found. Almost as if it's calling to me, the basement door jerks, directing my attention to the antique knob. I've always wondered about that knob because of its rusted gold color and intricate patterns. "Who would take the time of day to craft something like this?" I would always ask my mother. "Clearly someone who appreciated hard work and was passionate about their craft." She



would respond in that sweet, calm voice. I miss that voice. I reach for the knob, carefully grazing the design with my fingers while gently twisting it. “Hey Dallas, are you down there?” I yell down the stairwell. “Yeah,” She says wearily. “I’m pumping again.” Her answer shocks me like electricity. I quickly make my way to the stairwell, avoiding each piece of broken wood and rusty screws. Once I reach the landing, I see Dallas sitting in her big chair, hooked up to the very fancy piece of machinery that draws the blood from her body. The needle is in her forearm, rapidly pulling the blood into the big tub it’s hooked up to. “Dallas Mae, you know you’re not supposed to be pumping without me. What happens if you take too much blood too quickly and pass out?” “I know, I know. But this blood is for Ms. Mayfield. Do you know just how much money we can make from her if we deliver the bag by tonight?” She wasn’t wrong. Ms. Mayfield was one of the richest people in Key West, selling her some of Dallas’s blood would make us both a pretty penny. ... I should probably backtrack. Once society found out that there was a reverse to the ‘curse’ that had been put on us, the whole world was on a hunt to find the ‘mystery man’ and suck him of all his blood. But little did they know that the ‘mystery man’ was more like the ‘mystery 13 year old girl’. To be honest with you, even I probably wouldn’t have known Dallas had this gift if it wasn’t for the letter we had received. To the inhabitants of the Kane residency, As you may know, some of our files were released to the public and information got out that was crucial to us, and now crucial to you. In this document, it stated that there was some unrecognizable DNA in a human’s body that acted as a counteractive to “The Killer” injection. And after further investigation, we have discovered that this DNA belongs to a resident of your home, Dallas Kane. We have reason to believe that Dallas’s DNA could fulfill the dreams of so many people. Her DNA could stop the serum and allow people to age the way they did back in the 2020’s, year by year. So, we now propose to you an idea: Dallas’s blood has the power to do great things, and if you sell it off to us we will make it worth your while. If you would like to discuss this proposition further please contact the Delancey team. Sincerely, Nate Delancey and the Delancey team ... So, are we selling off



Dallas's blood to the black market, who is then selling it to the richest people in the world? Yes. But are we also mending the bridge of time and making some money out of it? Also yes. Plus, it was our mom's idea to follow through with this whole plan. And I would do anything to make her happy. The only problem is that as Dallas is sort of lethal and all powerful in a way, there were going to be many people who went after her, trying to gain her powers for themselves. So, that's why the whole Delancey Team, Dallas, and I found it necessary to fake Dallas's death to the public and have her contained in the house. It was a fool proof plan, my family was so small that no one cared about us or our whereabouts. I think a total of three people in the whole world knew where we lived before the Delancey's. Our house just looks like a beat-up old shack, so nobody would suspect a thing. ...

"Listen Dallas, I know you want to do this for us but you've already done enough. Why don't you go upstairs and get some rest and I'll wake you up again at nine to go and deliver the orders, how does that sound?" I say in a calming voice. It may have been 2:30 in the afternoon but time doesn't really matter when the notable events of your day include waking up in the morning and pumping blood for countless hours on end. "I think I would like that." She replies, while simultaneously removing her needle and placing a band-aid on her arm. "And you know what, I think I'm going to come with you." Dallas smiles at me as we both climb up the stairs. I didn't have much better to do and was feeling very tired today anyway. ... I wake up to the sound of my alarm blaring in my ear. It's time already? I think to myself, I felt like I had only been napping for five minutes. But as my eyes drift over to the clock, I see the hands pointing to 9:00 on the dot. I adjust my pants and re-tie my ponytail, then walk through the hallway into Dallas's room. "Hey Dallas," I whisper into the darkness. "It's time to go meet Ms. Mayfield." I just hear the crickets in the distance. I walk over to her bedside table and click on the lamp. When I look over to her bed to see the covers rustled and empty, my heart shoots into my stomach. "Dallas?"

"Dallas?" I start to turn on all the lights in the house looking for her, but I don't even see a trace. "Dallas this isn't some funny joke, come out of here right now, before and whack you in the head

with a frying pan.” I start to violently tremble and my stomach feels like an empty pit. My head slowly turns to the basement door and the moonlight is hitting the doorknob in a way that makes it glisten. She wouldn't. I dash over to the door, throw it open, and practically jump down the stairs. “I swear Dallas, what would possess you to start pumping a-“. The basement's empty, the chair's empty. Dallas isn't here. It's almost completely dark except for the light above the chair, spotlighting a little square piece of paper. I slowly creep over to the chair and snatch the note. “Ryan, We've been following you and your sister for a while now and Dallas is more of a dangerous threat to the environment than you think. We've taken her into captivity and the only way for you to ever get a chance to see her again is for you to mend the bridge of time, but naturally. No blood, no technology, just you. Can you do it? -Anonymous” I thought the riot was the beginning of the end, but it turns out this is. This is the beginning of the end.




The Other Planet by Andrew Young


“Hello,” says the commanding astronaut, “We have made it.” Ground control on Earth responds over the comms, “What is it like down there? What do you see?” The astronaut replies, “It is great. Everything is perfect. This would be a great place to start a new civilization.” Ground control quickly responds, “Alright, sounds good. Shelter down until we can get back to you.” The comms click dead. As a blurry object begins to approach, another astronaut further ahead shouts, “Sir, what is that?”

--Ten Years Later--

Life has been good on this new planet after astronauts sent from Earth landed on it ten years ago. We have built many prosperous cities and nations all across the surface of our new planet. Everyone lives in harmony and in the wealth of the abundance of resources. There are many resources including gold, silver, oil, and even minerals and materials not on Earth. This makes it very profitable for anyone who can get a claim to the land where these materials are. Despite this race for land and materials, there has never been any fighting or violence over the materials or anything, until recently. Recently, we have developed new machinery that makes the mining and searching for these valuable resources much easier. However, the new machinery has brought a wave of natural disaster and more chaos in the short amount of time it has been around. Just last month, there was a skirmish over some new land where a new material was found that left nearly 20 dead. Both sides claim that they did not start it and claim they never even fought. I find this very weird and combined with the fact that the astronaut who had seen a weird shape ten years ago suddenly died about a month ago right before the attack makes me think that something bad will happen soon. Yet despite this, everyone brushes it off as some weird and uncanny coincidence. I fear that they will be too blind until it is too late to do anything about what will happen. It has been a few days, and just as I predicted there has been more violence. This time it was much worse. There was a big explosion at one of the



main gas production factories that caused an even larger explosion wiping out the whole part of the city. I think that right before the explosion I saw a fleet of seemingly giant mechanical monsters wandering around the city. When I told the leaders of the cities and nations about what I thought I saw, they just brushed it off as some crazy creation of the brain. However, some people in the crowd agreed with me and told me stories of similar instances. We have decided to gather up any weapons and tools we can find and try to protect the remainder of our home. Those who agreed with me and I have formed almost a line of defense around the city. It has been nearly a week, and we have not seen or heard anything. We have been restless, and whenever I am about to go to sleep, I jump awake feeling as if someone is watching, but no one ever is. Late at night as I finally dozed off, I thought I heard a faint mechanical click. I did not sleep for long when I heard a loud boom and awoke to the city wall next to me in flames. I tried to shout out to the men next to me, but it was impossible to hear anything over the loud rain of booms and metallic clicks. I quickly reached for my weapon and aimed it out towards the pitch black dark of the night. Suddenly I saw a flash of light and eruption of dust and fire about twenty feet from my position. I quickly hurry over to see what had happened, and once I arrive at the site of the explosion, I see multiple of the men who had set out on this mission with me lying dead. Suddenly I hear about twenty explosions and all around me, my vision fills with fire and dust from all around. I start to fire off shot after shot towards the unknown hoping, praying to hit anything or anyone who initiated the attack. Out of nowhere, I see a flash out in the darkness and feel the ground beneath me rock with the impact of an explosion launching me backwards and off the ground. I try to hold on to anything to stop my fall, but there is nothing. I feel myself falling fast and brace for an impact. Crack. I feel myself go limp and start losing grip of reality and the world around me. I slowly open my eyes. I do not know how long I have been out, but the world around me looks completely different. The sun is beginning to rise in the sky, casting the early morning light across the destruction. When I finally prop myself up to my feet and finish searching for my weapon, I look around me and observe



the complete destruction. I see not a building or wall standing inside the destroyed remainder of the once magnificent city. As I walk around the rubble and ruins in the early morning light I realize that I am the only person still alive from the attack of the night before. As I am about to finish my sweep around the remnants of the city, off in the distance I see a fleet of giant metallic beasts marching away. I began to chase after them hoping to see where the group responsible for the attack resided. They rounded a corner and I feared I had lost them. As I rounded the corner, I saw three metallic machines three times the size of any operationable land vehicle I had seen before. I quickly snapped out of my sense of awe and shock at the sound of a big weapon charging up. I quickly jumped back around the corner as the ground where I had just stood a second ago was blown away by a blast from the canon. I peered my head around the rock overhang separating me from these monsters of machines, and opened up fire with my own weapon hoping to do any damage. I saw fire erupt from one of the arms of the machine and hoped that my attack had done any damage to one of these beasts. Suddenly I felt an onrush of heat and fire over me and was launched into the air. I began to near death before I realized that the flame I had seen on the machine was actually some attack launched at me. All the damage I had thought I did to the machine just made the machine stronger in its attack. When I looked up at the sky slowly nearing death, I saw one of the machines come to a stop over where I was lying. Out of it slowly came a being, who almost looked like a human, He raised his arm towards my face, and in his hand, I saw the end of a vicious looking weapon. In a voice as booming as thunder, he said, "You and your people should have been content with what you had on earth and here." I saw a flash from the weapon in his hand and a sudden sharp, burning pain in my stomach. As my eyes slowly began to close, I saw this unknown being climb up into his machine and slowly move off. My last thought before the darkness overwhelmed me was that we should have been more careful in our advancements and paid more attention to our surroundings.

POEMS



Passenger
By Paige Block

She is your passenger.
She asks you to slow down
or get off at the next exit.
You have her life in your hands
but you turn up the music
she turns it back down
you're not listening to her
she can't get through.
If you crash it will kill her too.

Please stop the car.
Pull over
find a rest stop
let her take the wheel,
anything but please don't crash.
Let her out
Let yourself out

The music is too loud,
or are those sirens?

Please, God if she won't pull over herself
let a cop, an outside force do it
stop her from crashing,
from killing them both
save her from herself
before instead of a cop,
an ambulance must come
because she won't stop.

Semper Morosa
By Kylie Blackwell

Spouting are the early buds of spring,
Yet still to that day I continue to cling.

As the snow melts I am forced to remember
that agonizing 24th of December

When the church yard went silent
and none dared try to fight it,

when the birds stopped singing
and my heart stopped beating.

While I am paralyzed in my grief
Eden shall turn a new leaf.

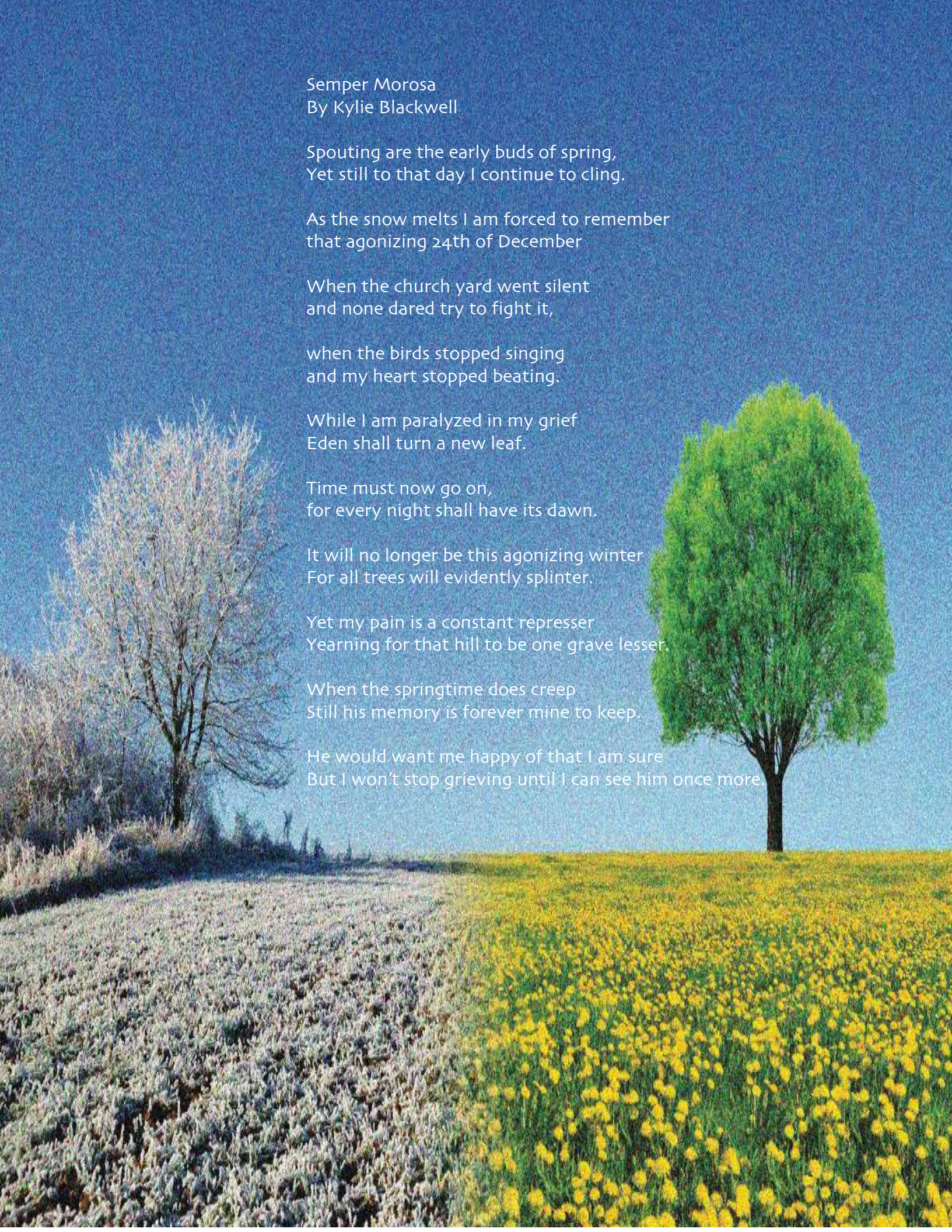
Time must now go on,
for every night shall have its dawn.

It will no longer be this agonizing winter
For all trees will evidently splinter.

Yet my pain is a constant represser
Yearning for that hill to be one grave lesser.

When the springtime does creep
Still his memory is forever mine to keep.

He would want me happy of that I am sure
But I won't stop grieving until I can see him once more.



Girlhood

Ukiah Labar



If I had to explain how it feels to be a teen girl
A thousand words could be said
Being a teen girl is like jumping on a trampoline
Up and down and up and down
Being a teen girl can be fun and exciting
Hanging out with your friends and
Getting overpriced sweet drinks- and clothes
You'll only wear once
Being a teen girl is getting excited when a new album releases
Girlhood is lying on each other's beds
Talking about boys we like and especially the ones we don't
Girlhood is making silly little code names for the boys and the girls
Girlhood is telling another girl who you don't even know
That they're pretty
Girlhood is telling the boy you are talking to that you
"Won't tell your friends anything"
When the first thing you do is call them
Girlhood is a magical thing that every girl should get to experience
Being a teen girl only lasts for a bit so
Buy those clothes and tell that boy you like him.



Family by Erin Schermerhorn

Family.

Who are those that you consider your family?

Is it those who share the same DNA? The same blood?

Or is it the people who you spend your time with?

The ones who can make you laugh.

The ones who you know will listen to you when you need to cry.

Are they the ones that keep you in a positive mindset?

Are they the ones that you run to, when you are desperate for an escape?

Think about who you consider your family.

Think about who never fails to make you feel at home, no matter where you are.

Your friends can be your true family, so hold onto that and never let go.

All of this considered, who is your family, do you know?

The "Ride" of My Life

By Carlos Ahuatzin

We look into each other's eyes for one last time

They says she only has exactly one hundred and sixty-seven seconds left

We're slowly coming to suspect that she's coming to an end

I will miss her even more than I first believed

Her spirit will remain everlasting and impalpable

I sit there and listen to her give her last breath

As I see how she slowly drifts away

I had her for almost 10 years, oh my sweet car how

I will miss her



Great Day

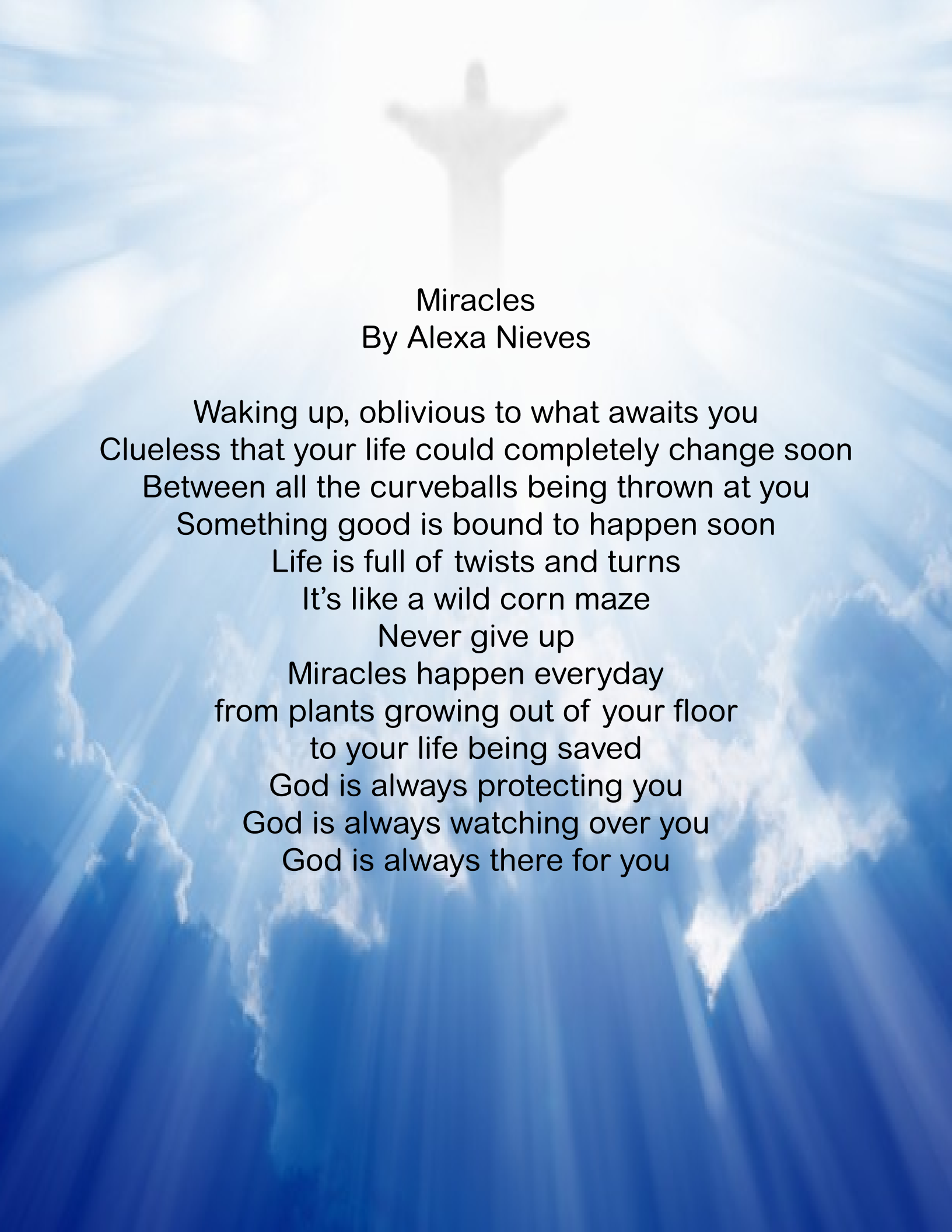
I never really had a great day
It was usually the same old, same old
I never really spoke to anyone either because
I didn't know what to say

My days were always just gloomy or numb
Sometimes, I felt as if I was just a black sheep
No one understood me or took me seriously

I wasn't depressed or anything, I just didn't feel happy either
I didn't know what to feel
It was like I was walking around with a cloud over my head 24/7

People telling me "you need to brighten up"
Was one of the hardest things to hear
No one understood how much I tried, how much I cared
But trying to "brighten up" was like deadlifting a 1000 pound weight.

Anastasia Bonafante



Miracles
By Alexa Nieves

Waking up, oblivious to what awaits you
Clueless that your life could completely change soon
Between all the curveballs being thrown at you
Something good is bound to happen soon
Life is full of twists and turns
It's like a wild corn maze
Never give up
Miracles happen everyday
from plants growing out of your floor
to your life being saved
God is always protecting you
God is always watching over you
God is always there for you



Improvement by Brady Baxter

One hundred percent effort
Even when you're used up

Dig deeper

Don't drift

Be different

Want it more

Put more to it

Call each other out

Every day

Improve, even very slowly

It's been decided

Be the best

“One Hundred Sixty Words”

by Mariella Bracchitta

One hundred and sixty words per day
Without saying hello,
I point
I call my long distance love
She doesn't respond
She has used up all her words
I slowly whisper I love you
I am adjusting well to this new way



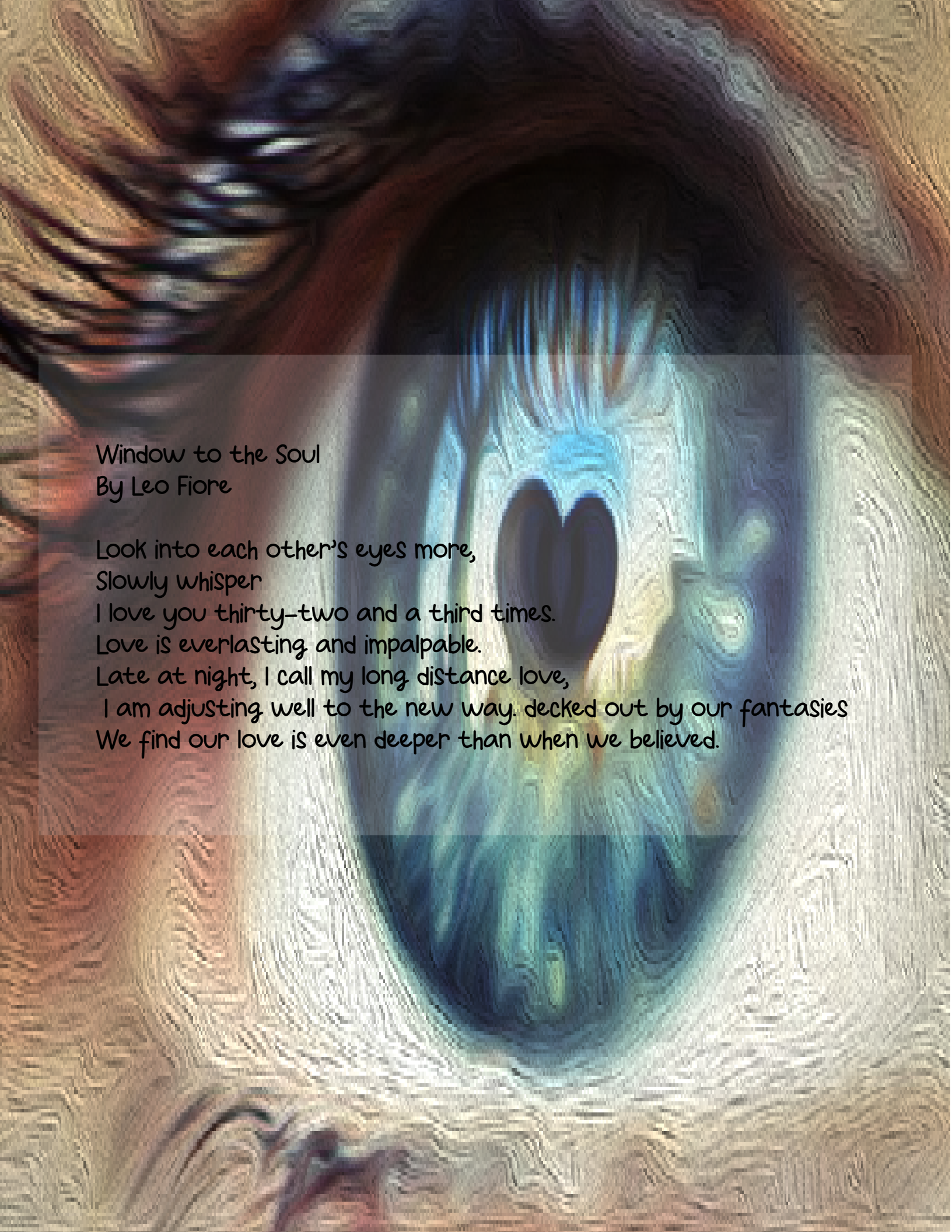
WHY? BY LUCAS CORREA

**WE KNOW OUR KNOWLEDGE IS LIMITED BY
THE TECHNOLOGY OF OUR TIME.
THE GOVERNMENT STARTED A PROGRAM TO
TRAIN TWO AVERAGE PEOPLE TO EXPLORE THE
UNKNOWN. I WAS A CONSTRUCTION WORKER.
MY PARTNER, A PROFESSOR.**

**AS THE COUNTDOWN STARTED I WHISPERED WHY?
WHY AM I STILL DOING THIS?
WE WERE LAUNCHED INTO THE AIR AND OUT OF THE ATMOSPHERE.**

**IT'S BEEN A MONTH FLOATING ADRIFT.
OUR MINDS HAVE BEEN TORN FROM WHAT WE THOUGHT
WHENEVER THAT WORD "SPACE" WAS DECKED OUT
BY OUR FANTASIES ON EARTH.**

**I'VE SEEN AN ENDLESS ABYSS OF DARKNESS.
MY PARTNER WENT MAD AND MAYBE I SHOULD TOO.
WHY?
WHY AM I STILL DOING THIS?**



Window to the Soul
By Leo Fiore

Look into each other's eyes more,
Slowly whisper
I love you thirty-two and a third times.
Love is everlasting and impalpable.
Late at night, I call my long distance love,
I am adjusting well to the new way. decked out by our fantasies
We find our love is even deeper than when we believed.



Balance By Victor Gorri

Balance in the universe

Space is vast

Even deeper than we first believed

Everything is balance and works so evenly

stars fill the sky late at night the works of space is such a delight

Down here on Earth it's balanced too

the moon brings the dark and the sun brings light

The trees can breathe deeply tonight

We can find wonderful people like stars in the night sky

And spread our love with them so bright



Breathe By Thomas Graham

Breathe.

To appease the mutes in the restaurant

I point out to them to listen to each other breathe

And they being traveling in space

Letting out their fantasies on earth

We learn they have much knowledge and yet much more mystery

While their spirit dwells in spiritual seas

We know them with a glassy clarity

When They Get to Choose

By Ellie Kaelin

We're coming to suspect now
that our drift is even deeper
than we first believed.

When the phone rings, I put it
to my ear.

The friendship doesn't feel as it
once did.

The government has decided to
terminate friendships.

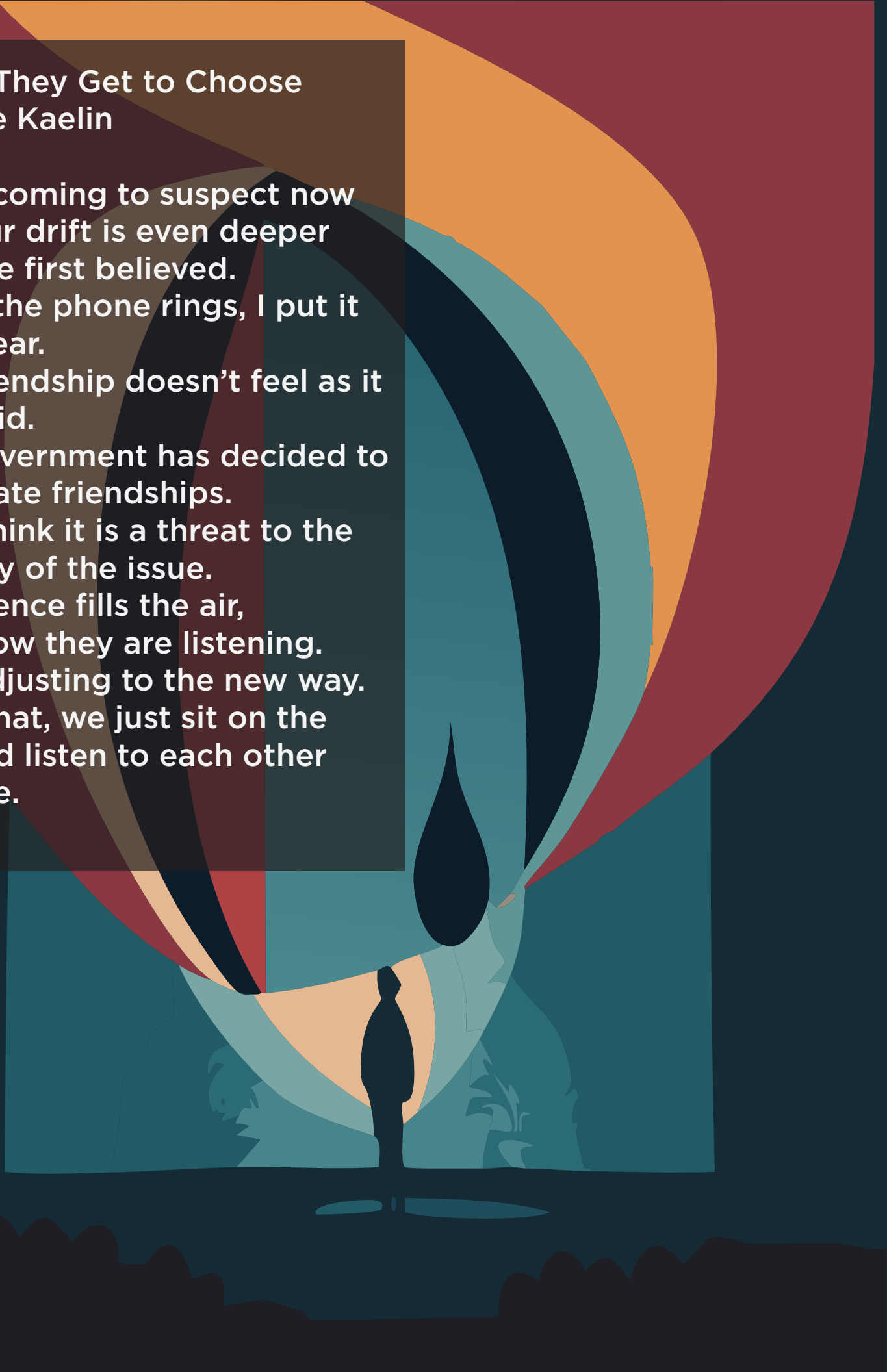
They think it is a threat to the
security of the issue.

The silence fills the air,

We know they are listening.

I am adjusting to the new way.

After that, we just sit on the
line and listen to each other
breathe.





Drift

By Diana Opondo-Ochieng

To call my long-distance love,
I put her in space.

We're coming to suspect
that our love is even deeper.
We sit on the line and
listen to the space.

Her love is an everlasting
mystery, in a sort

Our drift is a measured
quantity
now even deeper.
we have strayed in
different spiritual seas

Lost Love By ERIN SCHERMERHORN

**LATE AT NIGHT,
I WHISPER I LOVE YOU, BUT HE CAN'T
HEAR ME, HE CAN'T SEE ME.**

**THE GOVERNMENT DECIDED TO ALLOT
EACH PERSON EXACTLY ONE LOVE.**

**I HAD ALREADY USED MINE, BUT OF
COURSE THAT DID NOT LAST.**

THERE WAS NO WAY AROUND IT.

**WHEN THE PHONE RINGS, I CAN'T SAY
HELLO.**

**I CAN'T SAY THAT I WANT TO TAKE BACK
MY PAST LOVE.**

**I WOULD DO ANYTHING TO TAKE IT
BACK. TO LIVE OUT MY ONE TRUE LOVE.**



The Mystery of Spirits
By Cam Westrick

One last breath,
She takes one,
One everlasting breath I listen to her spirit
As she strays into the spiritual seas
As I long for her whisper
The phone rings,
I suspect it is my love,
My naiveté keeps me sitting
Until the phone stops ringing
And the world slowly drifts away
Until there is only space

Spiritual Seas By Andrew Young

We have strayed in spiritual seas.

In an effort to get people to understand, we decided that

Our drift is even deeper than we first believed.

Late at night, we suspect now that knowledge is a blue naiveté.

With a quantity of insight imagined that the Mystery has structure.

Without saying anything, we're slowly coming to suspect

that space is of a different sort, everlasting and impalpable,

We are adjusting well to the new way.

We have strayed in spiritual seas

CRUSADER'S PRAYER

Make me O' Lord a Holy Crusader.
Champion of Christ, Christ my Defender.
Christ as my belt, His truth to hold me.
Christ as my breastplate, His goodness to
mold me. Christ as my feet, His will to guide
me. Christ as my shield, His arms to hide
me. Christ as my helmet, Heaven in sight.
Christ as my sword, His Word my might.
Conquer O' Lord, the wrong this day brings.
Christ be before me, Christ be my King.