

◊ SPRING ◊

IMMORTALS &

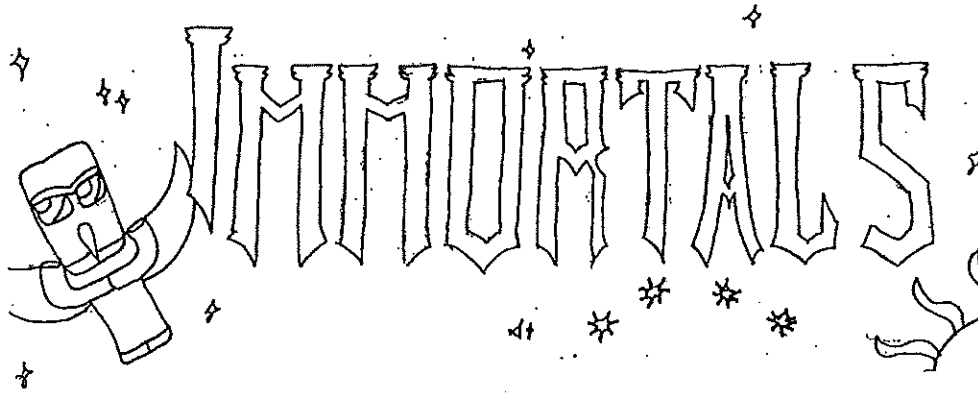
CAULDRON

2025-2026



By Lucy Katen

The Cauldron



Spring 2025-26

Cover illustration by Lucy Kohlen

Cynthia Speevack
Advisor

Cauldron Members:

Susana Baro Doreste
Roksana Bentlage
Jessica Bradwell
Yulia Cheng
Claire Dvorkis
Juliette Galano
August Goldberg
Eli Goldman

Margaret Jackman
Fiona Jackson
Grace Johnson-Wellnitz
K K
Lucy Kohlen
Cecelia Li
Nicha Lowenberg
Evelyn Miller

Simone Nusinow
Elena Porter
Daniel Prikhodko
Sasha Romig
Zaela Rosenbaum
IS
Saesha Shetiya

Poetry

LA	Denali	Fiona Jackson	Denali
AJ Agumeh	Denali	Krishna Jendrzewski	Yellowstone
Ian Ballout	Yellowstone	Harper Johnson	Denali
Susana Baro Doreste	Denali	Grace Johnson-Wellnitz	Yellowstone
Brielle Bolduc	Acadia	Lucy Kohen	Denali
Walter Champion	Acadia	Emilia Larson	Acadia
Yulia Cheng	Denali	Ethan Levin	Yellowstone
Oliver Ciaccia	Denali	Lucy Litsch	Spruce
Max Clontz	Acadia	Nicha Lowenberg	Thyme
Sophia D'Amelia	Yellowstone	Evelyn Miller	Spruce
Cece Deschler	Yellowstone	Cat Nichols	Yellowstone
Tracy Du	Denali	Simone Nusinow	Mint
Miles DuBray	Denali	Ainsley Porber	Yellowstone
Claire Dvorkis	Birch	Daniel Prikhodko	Birch
Katie Fox	Acadia	Andrew Sholk	Yellowstone
Gabby Geary	Yellowstone	Ewan Soddy	Acadia
Gil George	Denali	Kylie Stackpole	Acadia
Zoe Goss	Yellowstone	Neev Sukhwani	Acadia
Lauren Hageman	Acadia	Sam Wade	Yellowstone
Keira Hansen	Wasabi	Cole Westervelt	Acadia
Margaret Jackman	Yellowstone	Claire Xia	Acadia

Short Stories

Susana Baro Doreste	Denali
Carter Bennett	Forest
Roksana Bentlage	Thyme
Jessica Bradwell	Birch
Olivia Brown	Mint
Yulia Cheng	Denali
Henry Frank	Birch
Fiona Jackson	Denali
DM	Birch
Micah Nottidge	Acadia
Simone Nusinow	Mint
Liam Ohayon	Mint
Cameron Poole	Mint
Daniel Prikhodko	Birch
Kabir Sangurdekar	Birch
IS	Birch
Alexa Shaw	Mint
Xander Siebert	Forest
Nora Van Hooser	Birch
Alex Wu	Birch



Ishika
Sharath

Hydra

Pegasus

Elf

Poetry

Cyclops

Phoenix

Dragon

Jachalope

The Calm of the Fire

by Daniel Prikhodko

Birch

Part 1

He stares far and far,
Staring at the meadows deeply.
His family looks at him like a shiny car,
Like they are going to greet him secretly.

They see each other again for eternity,
Finally connecting the family into pieces.
While he never got far in maturity,
His dislike for not maturing ceases.

On the sunny meadow hill,
The family hugs for one more time.
The danger seems to not kill,
While they act like a big ol' mime.

They can finally be together for once,
Ending the party and the grounding of the
century.
Like they finally came home from their hunts,
They no longer need to create history.

Part 2

At the time that passes through,
They hug like a big freight train.
They make it like they will soon brew,
They keep hugging like one big crew.

The walk away takes some time,
It feels like forever to go that far.
They pick up an apple like a crime,
They gag at the smell like they drank grime.

The heavenly home opens its doors,
Letting the family come inside the house.
They crawl in like dust going into pores,
Eat away at the food like bugs on the floors.

The others watch with happiness,
Knowing some newcomers have finally
arrived.
They look at the doors of the house
compress,
The curtains fly closed like some wind
blowing on a dress.

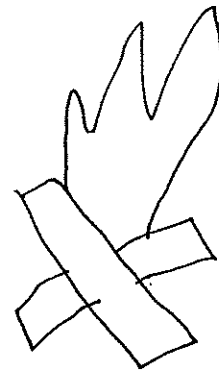
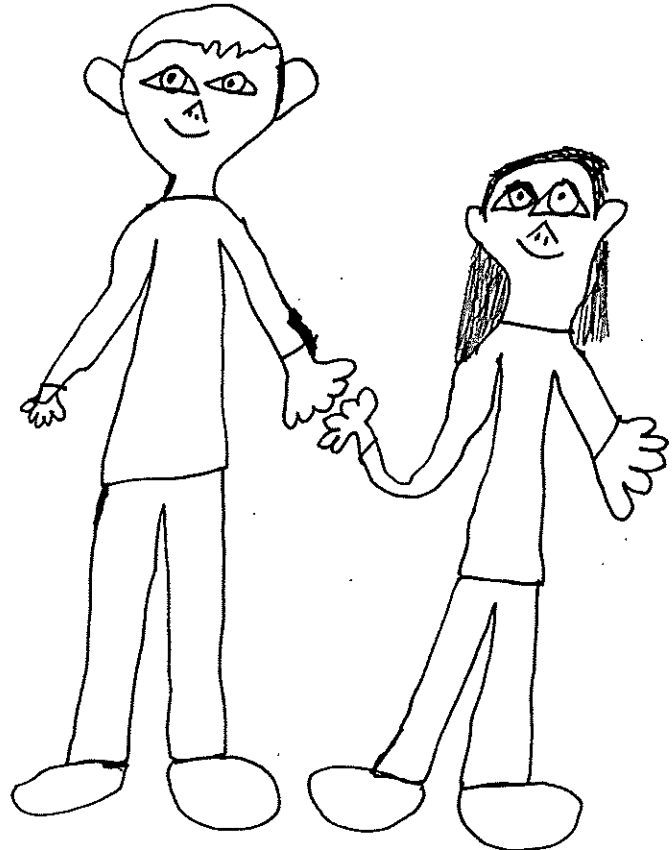
Part 3

Standing in the chambers,
They greet the others gratefully.
The father looks at the neighbours,
Completely ignoring the gamers.

They try to get in a room with a bin,
Carrying a child looking so sick.
The door hits someone in the chin,
They yell like a pope seeing a sin.

The hallways stretch forever and forever,
Accidentally scares the teen into collapsing.
He catches himself like a heavy feather,
And they walk away happily and together.

While the times of it soon come to an end,
They become their own barrier they cannot leave.
Their entrance cannot have a bend,
The family laughs at a funny trend.



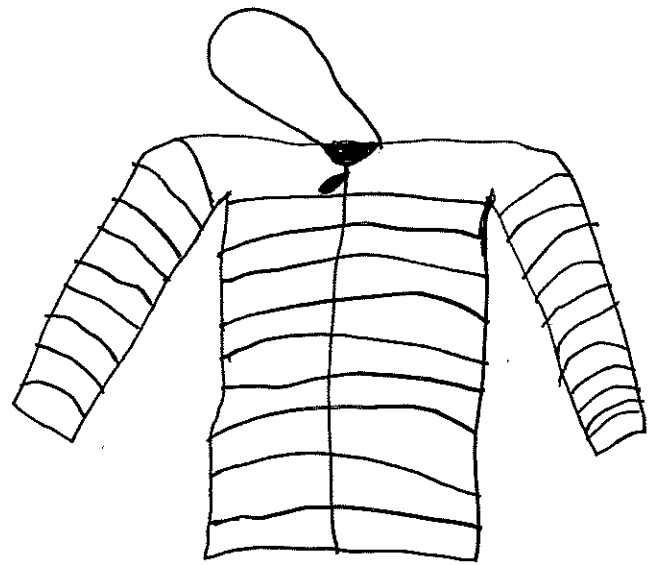
Invisible Coat

By Kylie Stackpole
Acadia

I wear a coat that doesn't show,
No matter where I go.
It isn't made for warmth at all,
but still I keep it close.

The seasons change around my steps
The snow gives way to green—
yet something stitched beneath the seams
won't fade or leave the scene.

And though I move with lighter days,
And laugh like nothing's wrong—
I feel it's quiet weight remain,
like it's been there all along



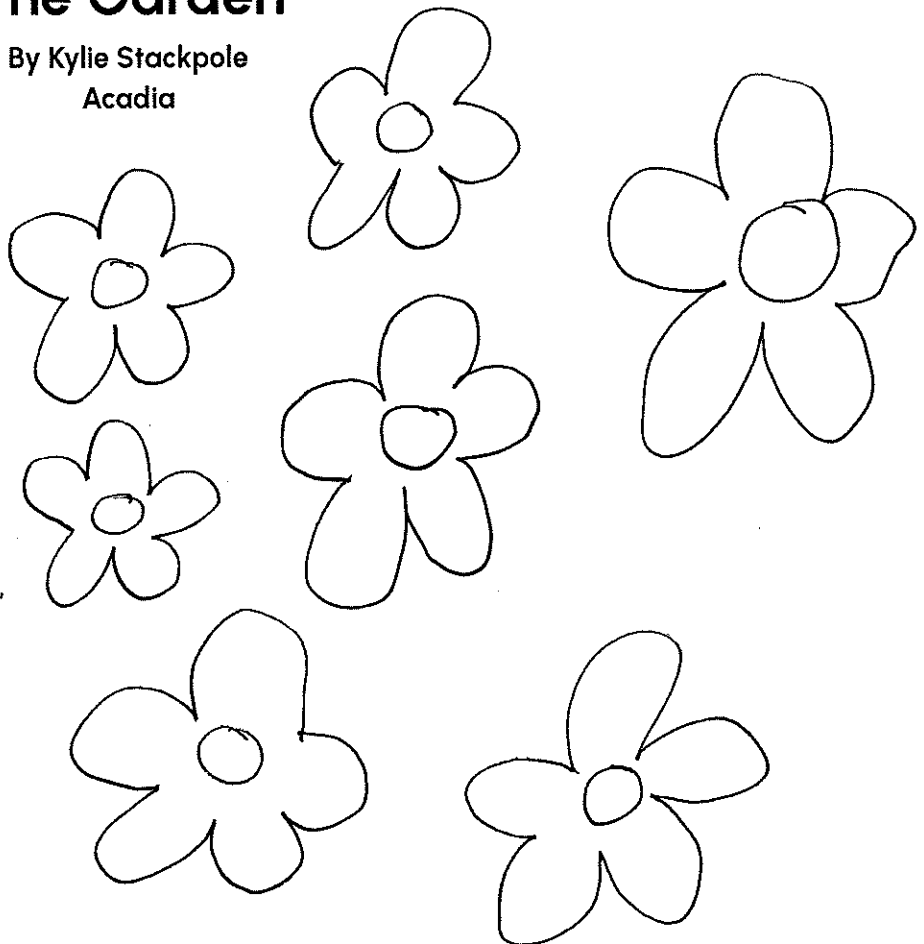
The Garden

By Kylie Stackpole
Acadia

The garden hasn't bloomed this year,
though I still tend the soil.
I water roots that never show,
and pull at stubborn spoil.

The sun still rises, warm and bright,
It touches every bed—
But one small corner stays in shade
No matter what is said.

I leave a space where something grew,
I never planted new—
Because the earth remembers still
what once it somehow knew.



The Nothing and The Something

By: Susana Baro Doreste

Team: Denali

There is the something
Where nothing dwells

There is the nothing
In crowded towns

The something and the nothing
Are never in the same place
But the something and the nothing
Need each other and therefor
If somewhere there is a fragment of
something there must also be a shard of
nothing.

Of course the nothing and the something
contradict what's just been written
As in these words and on this page there is
Elements of the nothing
And pools of something

Though if in where nothing dwells
There is the something
Then the something is the nothing
Just as the nothing is the something

But that simply isn't possible
Or there would be none of
The something or the nothing
Instead just a thing that's neither some nor
none.

Confusing this is but without this
No one understands the nothing as the
something it is but it is not
Or the something as the nothing it is but it is
not.

All these words just to say that
Where the nothing is the something is too
And where the something is the nothing is too
The two aren't emotions or the ever so
twisting strings of time itself.

The something and the nothing
Are quite simply just
The nothing and the something

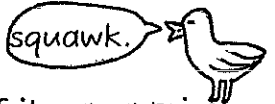
Not a thing more and not a thing less
But at the same time a thing more and a thing
less.


◆ ◆
Nicha Lowenberg
Thyme team ◆ ◆

◆ ◆
Ocean
◆ ◆



Shells shimmer and shine like the ocean and tide.

The crabs pinch and walk like how the seagulls speak and squawk. 

 The waves splash and rise while the gulls look at our scraps as if it was a prize.

Deep in the ocean is where small critters lay and they each see each other as






some sort of prey.




People put towels on the sand and pick up shells with their hands:

 Pink, yellow, gold and blue come up when the moon will soon be new.

 The sun is bright, but with much delight it keeps us warm and gets rid of the  storms. 

When you stare out into the ocean it sparkles and glitters and thank goodness

the ocean is here to help us all not wither. 

 The coral is pink and many other colors, and fish swim in schools like best

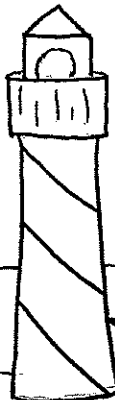


brothers



The calmness and the excitement of the ocean keeps me awake and I desire the

ocean so much it gives me a heartache ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆



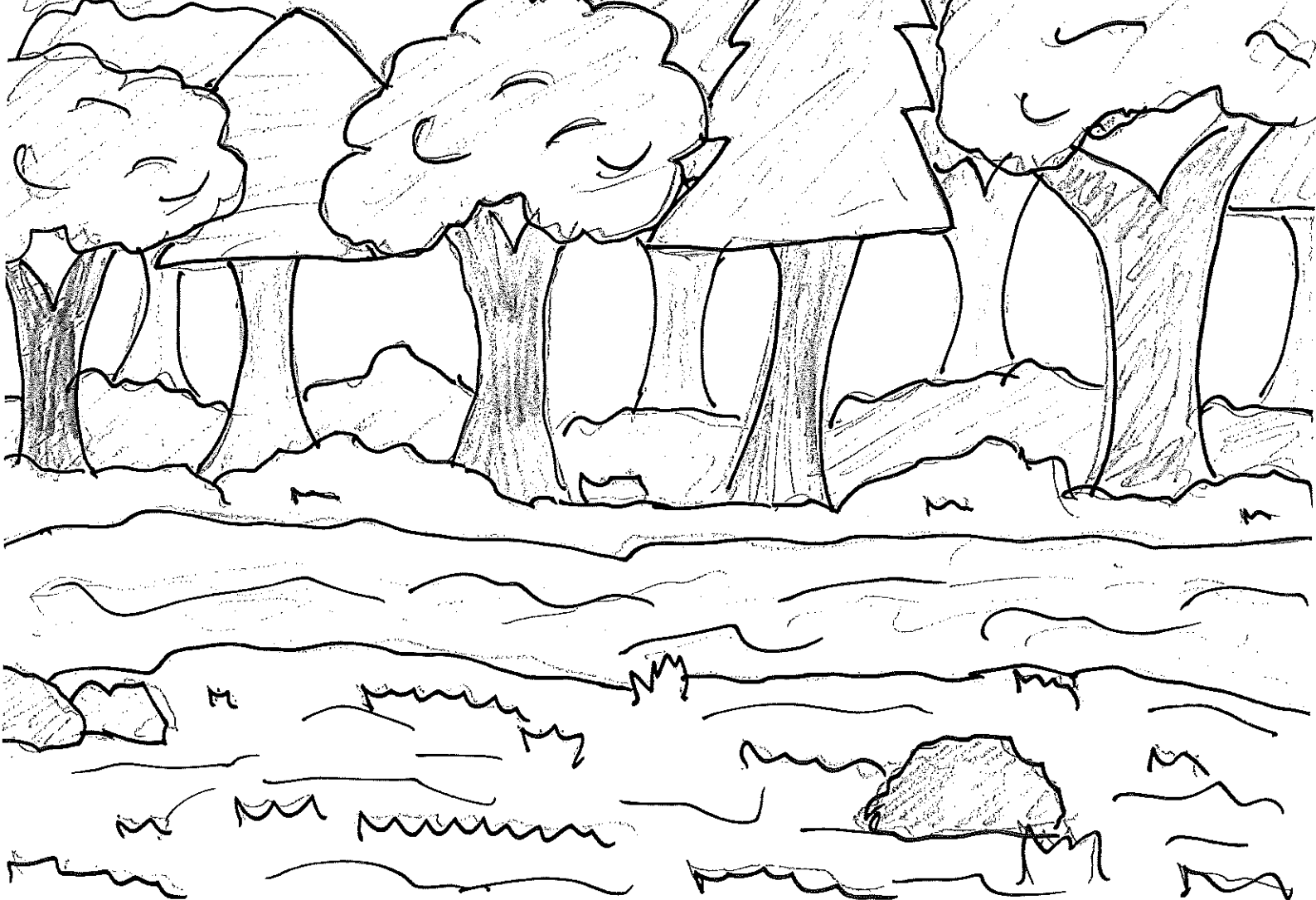
The River

By Kylie Stackpole
Acadia

A river moves without a pause,
it never asks me why.
It bends around what stand too strong,
It doesn't try to fight.

Some days it rushes, loud and wild,
some days it barely flows—
but always there's a quiet pull
toward somewhere no one knows.

I stand beside it, then step in,
The current at my knees—
I learn that moving isn't choice,
but something like a breeze.



The Bunny Rabbit

Simone Nusinow - Mint

The moon has many a secret.

The sun's burning gaze staring into one side at all
times,

but never to see the one have.

Watching down over us from midday to midnight,
Whether we see it or not.

For some the moon is a she,

Others a he,

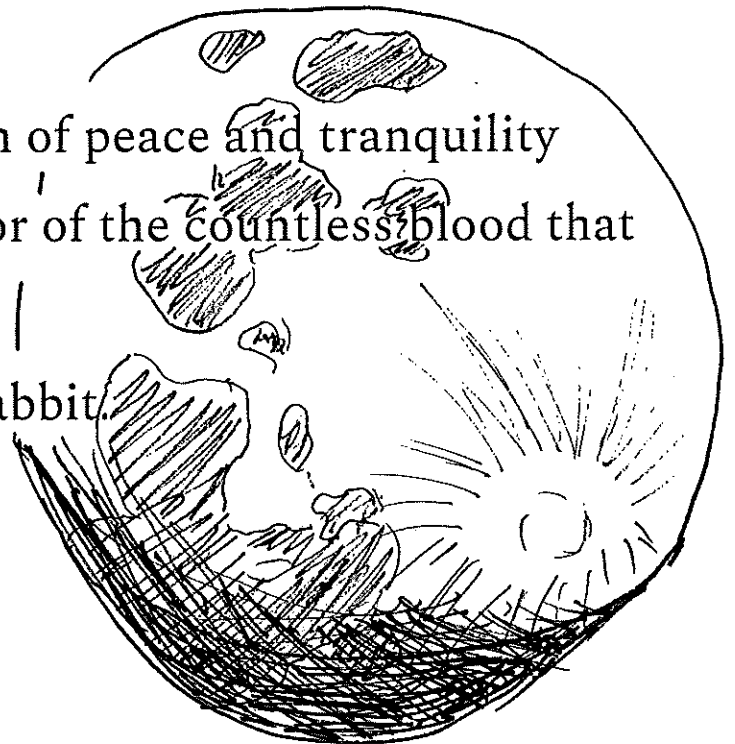
And a couple an it,

And others none.

On some nights, it is a sign of peace and tranquility

But on others, it is the color of the countless blood that
we have shed.

But all we see is a bunny rabbit.





Fishbert

By Evelyn Miller
Spruce



Fishbert the fish is my very best friend.
He and I will be together until the end.

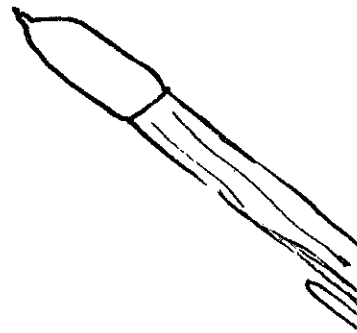
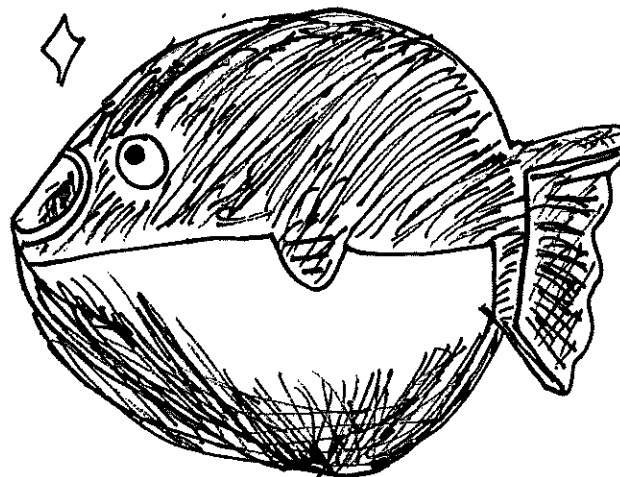
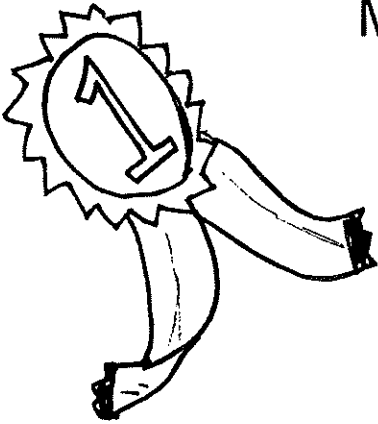
My pencil sharpener fish,

He was a prize,

And purple,

And has googly eyes.

He is my friend.



The Daffodil

By Claire Dvorkis
Birch

Winter brings cold, snow and ice,
Covering the home of moles and mice.

Plants wither all around,
Waiting for warmth and light to be found.

It's nearing the end, and it's never been
colder,
Trees with snow sitting on their shoulders.
The ground is nothing but ice and slush,
Nothing but cold, frozen mush.

Finally, spring rolls on in,
Sun peeking through the skies once again,
And sitting in the cold, dead soil,
One little daffodil rises through the chaos
and toil.

Sunshine petals and emerald stem,
This beautiful flower is quite a gem.
Waited patiently throughout the years
To grow and bloom alongside her peers.

She's got so much to say and do.
So much to experience, old and new.
So many places to walk and run,
So much to feel, to cry, to have fun.

Daffodil, it's your turn to bloom,
Shining through the snow and gloom.
Hurry, come on, there's so much to do!
All of the world is waiting for you.



The Primordials

By Claire Dvorkis
Birch

Nyx rules the dark and the shadows of night.
Gaia creates life from rock and might.
Tartarus holds the worst of the worst.
Erebus is from where darkness burst.
Uranus lives in the vast and bright sky,
Eros makes love soar and fly.
And above them all, the first one to be,
Is Chaos, supreme lord of the
universe...and me.



Clownfish

by Nicha Lowenberg

Thyme team

I am a fish.

I swim in a bowl, and I go for a stroll.

I go in circles looking at the seaweed, as I see the seaweed, I feel a need.

And even though I know its fake, I take a nip and once again I taste a plastic flake.

Sometimes water spills, and I frill up my teenie tiny gills.

I am orange and white and I like to hide in anemone when I have a freight.

When I see the weird crumbs get shaken at the top, I wait until they drop, drop, drop.

When they fall to my level, I eat them up, hmmm! It tastes like a buttercup.

I float around going in and out of my manufactured rock, I don't have any roommates so

I don't talk.

I wish I had a friend, but right now I can only pretend.

I am used to the bubbles but they always float away from me, oh I wish I could be free.

Sometimes I look out the window and I look at the sea and I feel lots of glee.

I stare at myself and see my floppy fins, I flop and flop and I start to spin.

I swim into my anemone, its so soft and fluffy.

I sleep until the sunrises, and I feel the warm sun warm up my scales and shines into my eyes, and I see a new day starting to shine.

Frogs

by Nicha Lowenberg

Thyme

Frogs are quiet.

Frogs are loud.

They hide in the wood.

Or under plant pots.

Frogs love a good flower or some silky dew.

When you find them they hop away.

Their tiny bumpy spots reflect the sun.

They hop onto a tree and eat some bugs.

They have pink tongues and are usually green .

Wow .

Frogs really please me.

The Undying Leprechaun

By Daniel Prikhodko
Birch

Lucky, lucky, doodle-a-doo,
I need a trap for a leprechaun like you.
Will the trap work with a big horseshoe,
Guess we need to figure out a
leprechaun.

Trap-a-loo, Trap-a-loo,
Let us see how this trap will do.
Will it do or will it fail to do,
Guess we need to figure out a trap.

Day-a-day, night-a-night,
We need to figure out a time for this fight.
The time is done and, now we need
might,
Guess we need to figure out a time.

Oh we might get a leprechaun,
Catching it like a tricky pom pom.
Oh we might get a leprechaun,
We just caught a leprechaun!

The Undying Leprechaun 2

By Daniel Prikhodko
Birch

Yay-a-yay, yay-a-yay,
We caught it without needing to pay!
It did not even take us a day,
We caught ourselves a leprechaun, like a
net on a bay!

Gold-y-gold, Luck-y-luck,
We just caught it like a sitting duck!
Just in time to avoid April's muck,
The leprechaun was caught without
needing a truck!

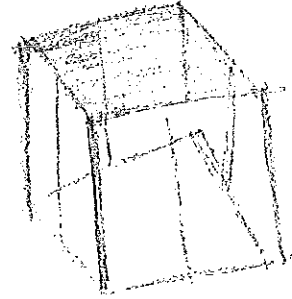
Mitty-a-mit, bitty-a-bit,
We need to figure out how to care for it.
Will this bread work or will it get hit,
The leprechaun is stuck with us like it is in
a pit!

A leprechaun is now trapped,
A leprechaun cannot escape.
A leprechaun is super lucky,
A leprechaun is a holiday myth.

The Undying Leprechaun 3

By Daniel Prikhodko
Birch

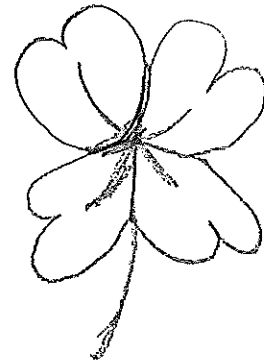
Boom-y-boom, boom-y-boom,
It still cannot escape like a rat in a cage.
Hopefully it does not escape now,
Hope is what we need for a good ol' leprechaun trap.



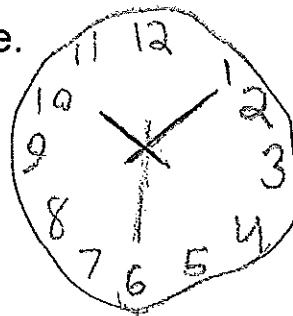
It has to give us some good luck,
Is what a leprechaun should do.
Gold is another given thing,
Maybe we will find some luck and gold.



The leprechaun is missing now,
Hopefully the leprechaun did not escape.
Maybe it did escape, or maybe it is hiding,
Guess we need to figure out where it went.



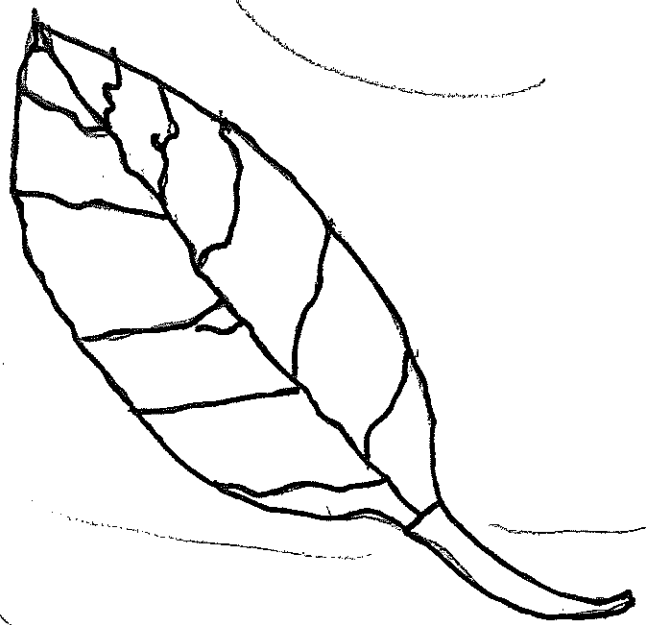
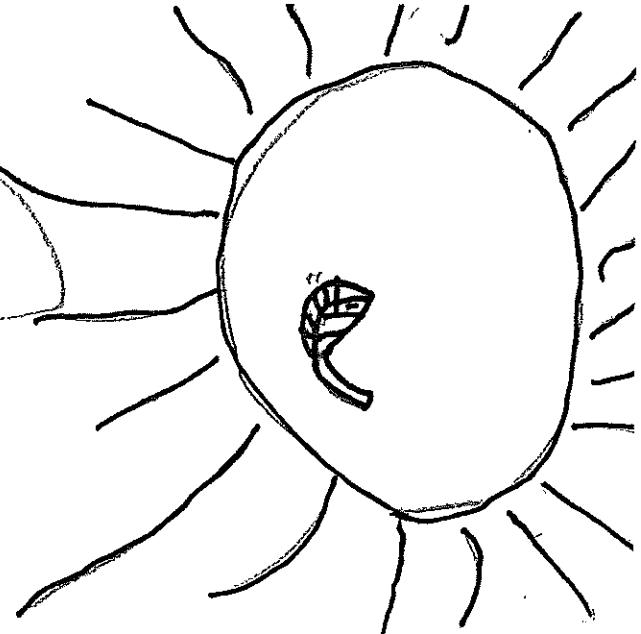
Oh no the leprechaun is nowhere,
Maybe it did escape our trap.
Just for us to remember that,
A leprechaun is not real in our time.



Fly Home, Little Leaf

Claire Dvorkis
Birch

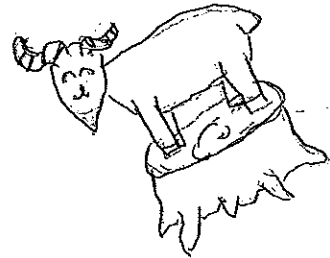
Fly home, little leaf.
Let go of your branch.
Glide with the wind
And fly with the others.
Be warmed by the rays of sun,
As you fly from your tree,
And fade into the clouds.
Let your journey end,
Let yourself rest,
Fly to places we dream of.
Fly with your siblings.
Whistle with your cousins.
This isn't the end, little leaf.
It never is.
Come rest in the grass.
Come feel the dirt.
Come say hello to the bugs and flowers.
Let yourself unravel.
Feel your last ray of sun,
Listen to your last breeze.
It's peaceful where you will be going.
Goodbye, little leaf.
Your journey is just beginning.
Fly home, little leaf.



Goat on the Stump

Daniel Prikhodko Birch

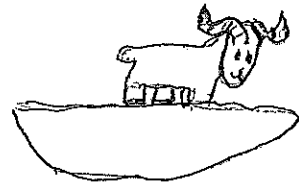
"Goat on the Stump, what will you do?
Goat on the Stump, why do you live, on a bump?"
Goat on the Stump, sounds like a coo-coo,
Goat on the Stump will get a Chinese stump, that's plump.



Immortality on a stump, a plump stump for a goat.
Goat on the Stump will surely get a lump.
Goat on the Stump will get a new plumpy stump,
Goat on the Stump will get a new stump.

Goat on the Boat meets with Goat on the Stump,
Goat Boat argues over wood with Goat Stump.
Both goats argue over which goat would get the wood,
Goat on the Stump makes a boat in a baa-rn-ing revenge.

Goat on Stump likes moat boat more than plump stump,
Goat on the Stump becomes Goat on the Moat Boat.
Goat on the Boat agrees with Goat on the Moat Boat.
Goat on Boat leaves with Goat on Moat Boat.



European Delicacy

Daniel Prikhodko Birch

Delicacies emerge from the shadows,
Burak, baklava, gelato, and more!
All the cooks summon like pros,
Cooking the food so much it gets lore.

While some are weird dessert,
Meat jelly being a scare tactic.
Others are completely unhurt,
Like a nice ice cream without a trick.

The cooks are popular now,
Having invented the popular snacks.
Tourists will want to give them a bow,
However they still can get smacks.

Immortality hands itself to them,
Having found a true host for itself.
The desserts keep being made like a gem,
Their cause is unknown, like a true elf.

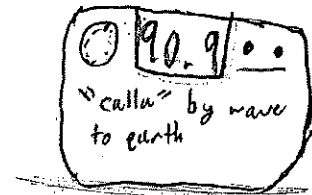
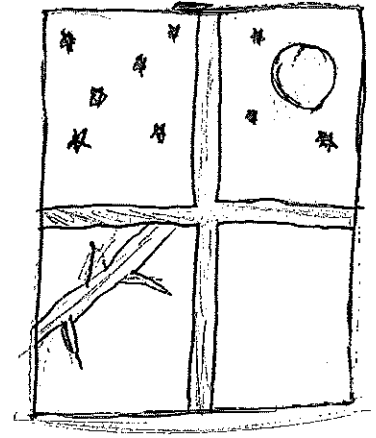
Moonlight

Grace Johnson-Wellnitz
Yellowstone

For one moment, it seems unlikely.
Lasting for only two hours--
And you just caught the tail end.
When Earth's shadow falls across the face of the moon,
Something like the color of a blood orange

As it glows in the night,
Not like you knew moonlight as: a bright cool-toned white.
Dare to look at the clock, 11: 11.

As "calla" plays on the radio, the moon's dimmed light will stay
Long as it can, until the sliver left of the blood orange
Leaves the sky.



Daydreaming Away

Claire Dvorkis
Birch

In the middle of the day,
My mind gets tired and bored,
And it escapes to the place
Where my daydreams are stored.

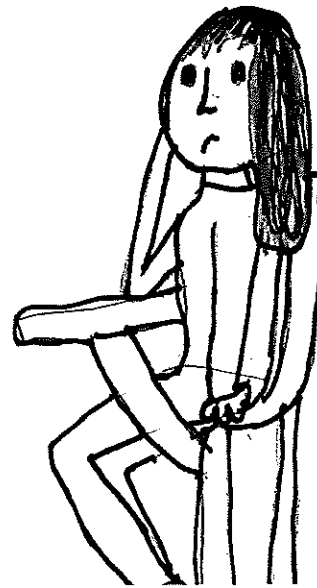
In there is a world of wonder,
A beautiful haven of thoughts.
Dreams and fears all over
In the shape of bubbles and dots.

In there, you can plan your future
Or create a story.
Anything can be light and fun,
Or terrible and gory.

Any setting, any type,
It's up to you to choose.
All five senses, painting worlds
Because you are your own muse.

Reality is dull and gray, but with a little magic,
It can turn colorful, and not sad and tragic.

Even when you're scared to try,
I'll promise you one thing.
With a little magic and wonder,
You can do anything...



Awaken

Claire Dvorkis
Birch

Little seed wakes in the ground.
There is soil all around.
It may seem small, but you will see
How magnificent it will be.

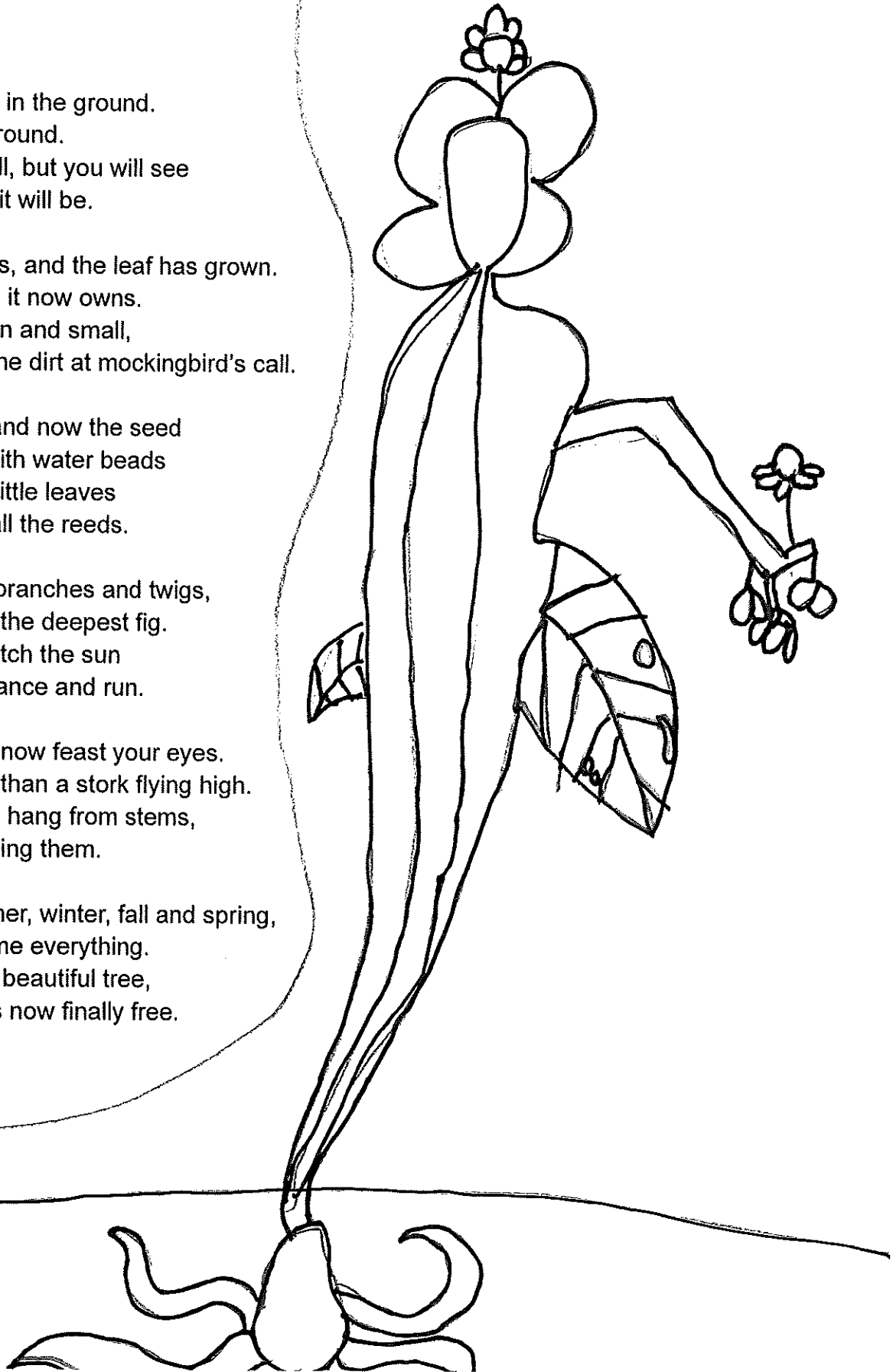
It's been 6 months, and the leaf has grown.
Roots and stems, it now owns.
A little stem, green and small,
Shall burst from the dirt at mockingbird's call.

It's been a year, and now the seed
Is rising quickly with water beads
Dripping from its little leaves
As it sways with all the reeds.

Blossoms dot its branches and twigs,
More purple than the deepest fig.
Leaves of jade catch the sun
While ladybugs dance and run.

It's been 4 years, now feast your eyes.
The seed is taller than a stork flying high.
Fruits and flowers hang from stems,
With bees pollinating them.

Throughout summer, winter, fall and spring,
The seed overcame everything.
From tiny seed to beautiful tree,
The green plant is now finally free.



The Scales of Justice

Grace Johnson-Wellnitz
Yellowstone



I am so close to the trees in heaven
so close to the seeds they bear
and yet you stand in my way
because I have never and will
never approve of your actions

but who are you to judge?
who are you, to tip the scales of justice the way
you want,
when everyone is a saint
and a sinner
in this world that we are so doomed to live in?

If you control the gates to
Cheonsang and Jiok
then I must be the angel above
who questions what in all ten levels of hell
you are doing...

or is this just what
you're destined to do?
are we all just puppets
for the audience's entertainment?

because who else
would care about the live of
beings like ourselves
other than the ones who watch us?

eager to see
what happens next
on this stage,
in this dastardly theatre.

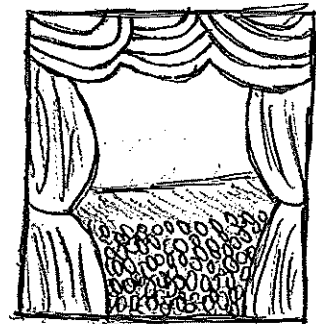
despite the pain of it all,
the audience stays
because they are trapped, in a cage
seeking the seeds just as I am,

and yet none of us will ever bite into those seeds
never see the juice stain our skin
or the bitter taste linger in our mouths
or the shells get stuck in our teeth
no one has the power to see, to touch, to taste
those seeds

except for you
the controller of the gates
of heaven and hell;
the flow of the river of reincarnation.

if someone could reach the seeds,
they would have by now.
we would all be free
from this harrowing madness

and set upon the world
to become puppets once again.



I Won't Say...

Based on lyrics from "I Won't Say I'm In Love" from *Hercules*

Grace Johnson-Wellnitz
Yellowstone

Everything in my head, spelled out for the world to see--
Maybe against my will.

My love for you, never biological, only unexplainable.

I know who I am, and who you are,
And *where* we are, and yet I still know.

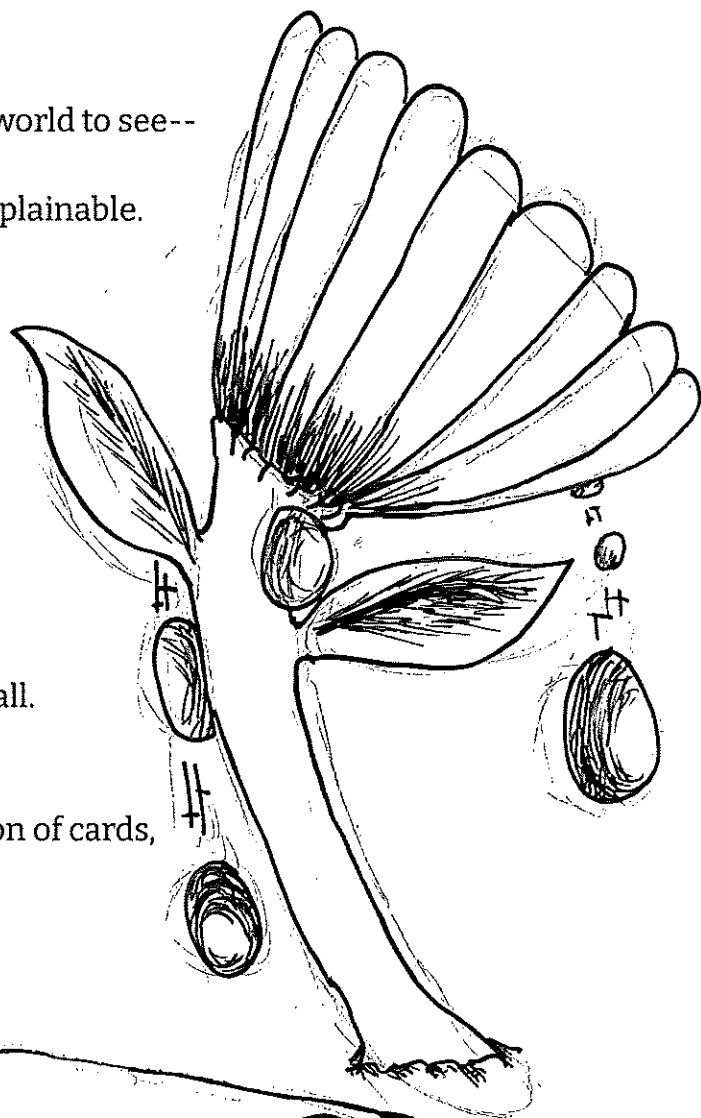
Too cliché to say,
I won't go away,
I won't say...
You need to understand,
Please don't go away.

I've studied history, aggravation and all,
But nothing can drag me away from your call.
I can't conceal, can't deny,
And why would I try?
If you are the epitome of my ideas, collection of cards,

Never will I fear drawing a heart.
Not fooling anyone with your illusion,
I won't let this play

Won't go away,
And I won't say...

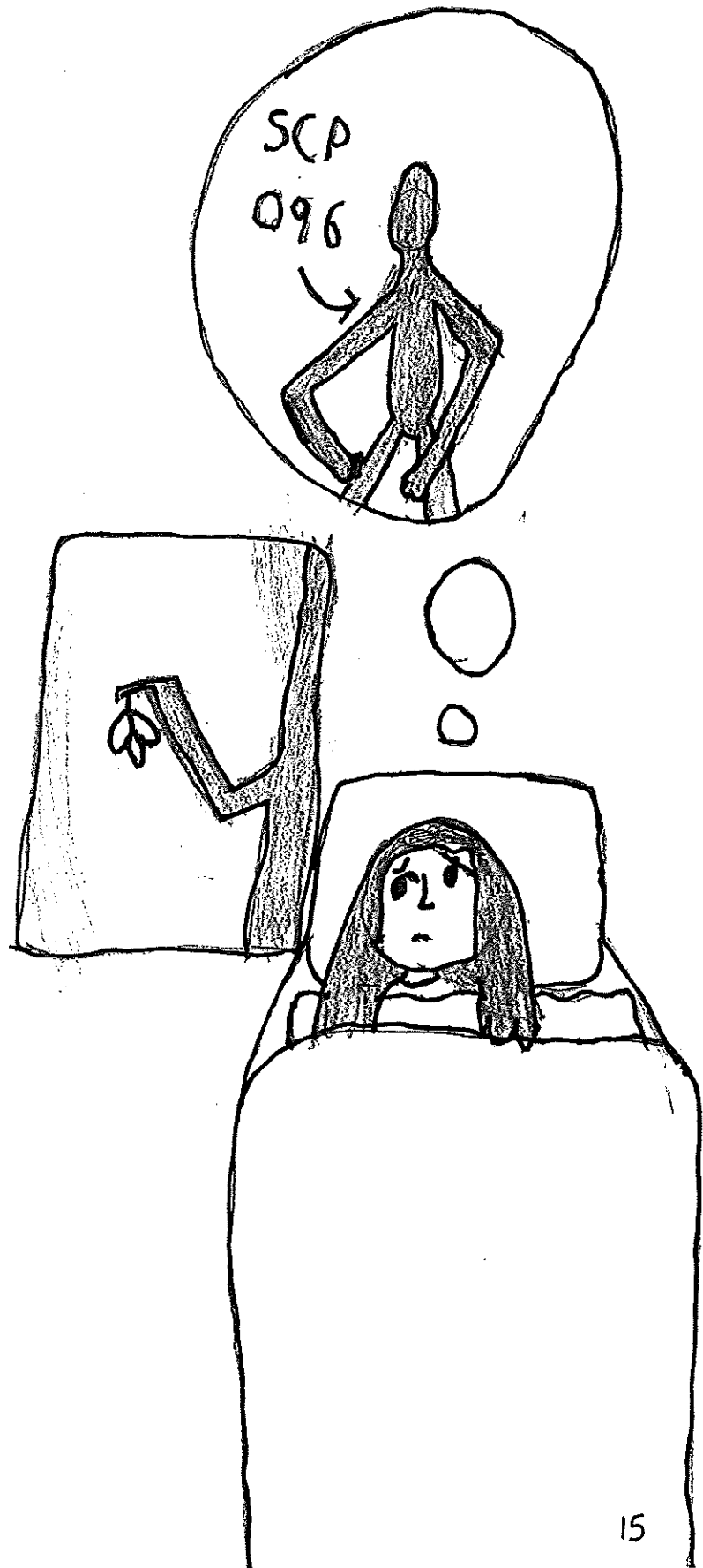
I hope you feel the same
As I spell out these words,
I won't say...
Won't say...
...I'm in love.



Anything But Reality

Claire Dvorkis
Birch

At 12 A.M., I wake to sound,
And take a wide look around.
Out the window, I see it there,
What looks like a monster with lots of hair.
Perhaps a Mind Flayer is perched near me,
A tiny one, perhaps a baby?
What if it's an SCP?
Escaped from labs, hunting for me?
A live organ, gross and awful,
Or a freakish gargantuan waffle?
WHO KNOWS?!? It could be a ghost.
Maybe *Lena Bluelip* for all I know!
Acid rain, man from Maine?
A screaming goat with lots of pain??
A chair thrown up by a bear,
Or an arctic hare?
Maybe my sister, dead and gone.
Or maybe my dad or mom...
Any theory I believe,
Any theory hits me,
Making home in my mind's ranch
Except...for...a...normal.....*tree branch*.



In The Mornings

By Lucy Litsch

Spruce

My alarm goes off,
but before I rise;
I hug myself and ask:
When?

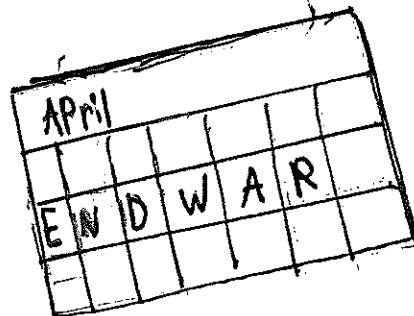


I not quite sure who I'm asking,
maybe the gods, wishing for rain,
or wondering for self-growth,
but today they answered.



April.
I don't know who,
they sounded like war,
angry, mean.

Maybe in April the war will end,
but who will win?
I pray that we do,
in my heart, I know we do.



But my mind knows,
The North will.
Mother says they will do
bad, evil things.

I hope we win,
but either way,
if someone wins,
maybe we will have peace.

Inspired by *Inside Out & Back Again* by Thanhha Lai



Birthday by
Margaret Jackman
Yellowstone

They sing
On the most special day
To you,
But you flinch
At every word.
Another reminder
Things won't be the same.

They smile
On the most special day
But you
Fake it all
More than usual,
Another thing
You must pretend is ok.

They give
On the most special day
Gifts for you,
But you
Silently whisper
Not what I wanted.
All you wanted was more time.

They sing
On the most special day
To you,
But your breath
Stutters as candles light up.
You wish to go back but instead you cry.

They hug
On the most special day,
Holding you
And you smile.
Things will change
But their love will
Outlast the sadness.

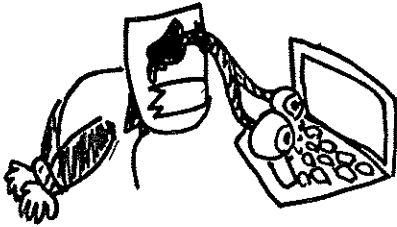


IT'S THE MOST HORRENDOUS TIME OF THE YEAR

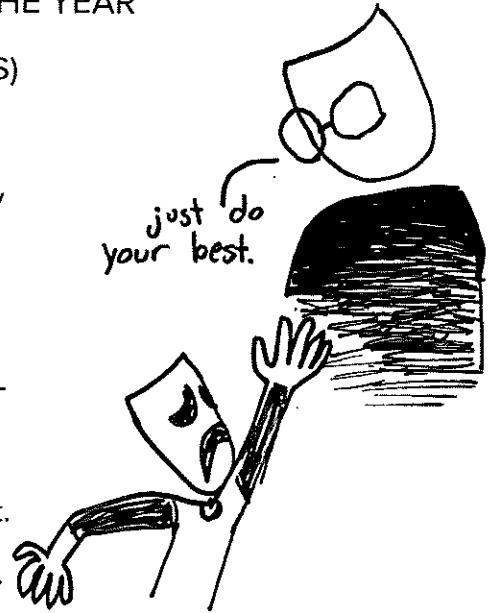
(AN MCAS SONG to be sung on MCAS)

By: Susana Baro Doreste & Miles DuBray

Team: Denali



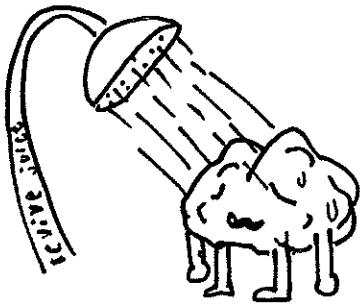
It's the most horrendous time of the year-
With the kids screaming in pain,
And all the teachers say just do your best.
It's the most horrendous time of the year.



It's the pain-painfulest season of all!

With a test that's 4 hours,
My brain needs a shower,
When friends call for help.

It's the pain-painfulest season of all.



The girls are crying,
And the boys are dying,
And everyone's lost their minds
Anything happy feels like a memory of
Happiness years years ago.



There'll be much mindless staring,
And people are daring for this to end.
It's the most horrendous time of the year.



The girls are crying,
the boys are dying,
And everyone's lost their minds!
Anything happy feels like a memory
From happiness years years ago.

There'll be much mindless staring,
And people are daring to just call it quits!

It's the most horrendous time of the year,
Yes the most horrendous time of the year,
Oh the most horrendous time of the year,



Back Problems

Lucy Kohen
Denali

Every time I hear the elders
Complain about their aches and pains,
I dream of the time when I can stall
And talk about my bodily chains.

'You're young, spry,' they like to think-
But little to they know,
The grown ups force us to bend and
break
And they reap the pain they sow

The day follows how I shall tell:
It starts with early waking.
Our bodies hurt with growing legs
And our eyelids start shaking

Then we have to brave the steps
To walk down to our meal
But unbeknownst to our poor souls
The tripping hazard's real

Now after that it's breakfast time,
But there's no time at all-
We have to catch our bus to school,
And we hear our stomach's grumbling
call

At school we have to walk around
With backpacks heavy as boulders
Throughout the day we slave and sweat
With pressure on our shoulders

During class we sit in chairs
And lean all the way back
But comfort, joy and cleanliness
Are something that they lack

Printing out our essays,
No Ifs, Ands, Whys or Buts
The paper is dangerous, the staples too!
They happen to prick our fingers

Walking in the halls we know
That bullies are on their way
Getting shoved into lockers
Is a sure way to run our day.

A binder for every single class
That we have to take
A bag full of useless, annoying space
I think we deserve a break

All this fuss over old and fragile,
When WE are the are the ones that
suffer
I know it sound obnoxious,
But our lives are much tougher

Even though you all provide
And house and heal and care,
We deserve more than that,
A dutiful servant everywhere

So quit your jobs and give us money
And buy us a new car
Our pain is real, but yours isn't;
Deal with it- we're stars

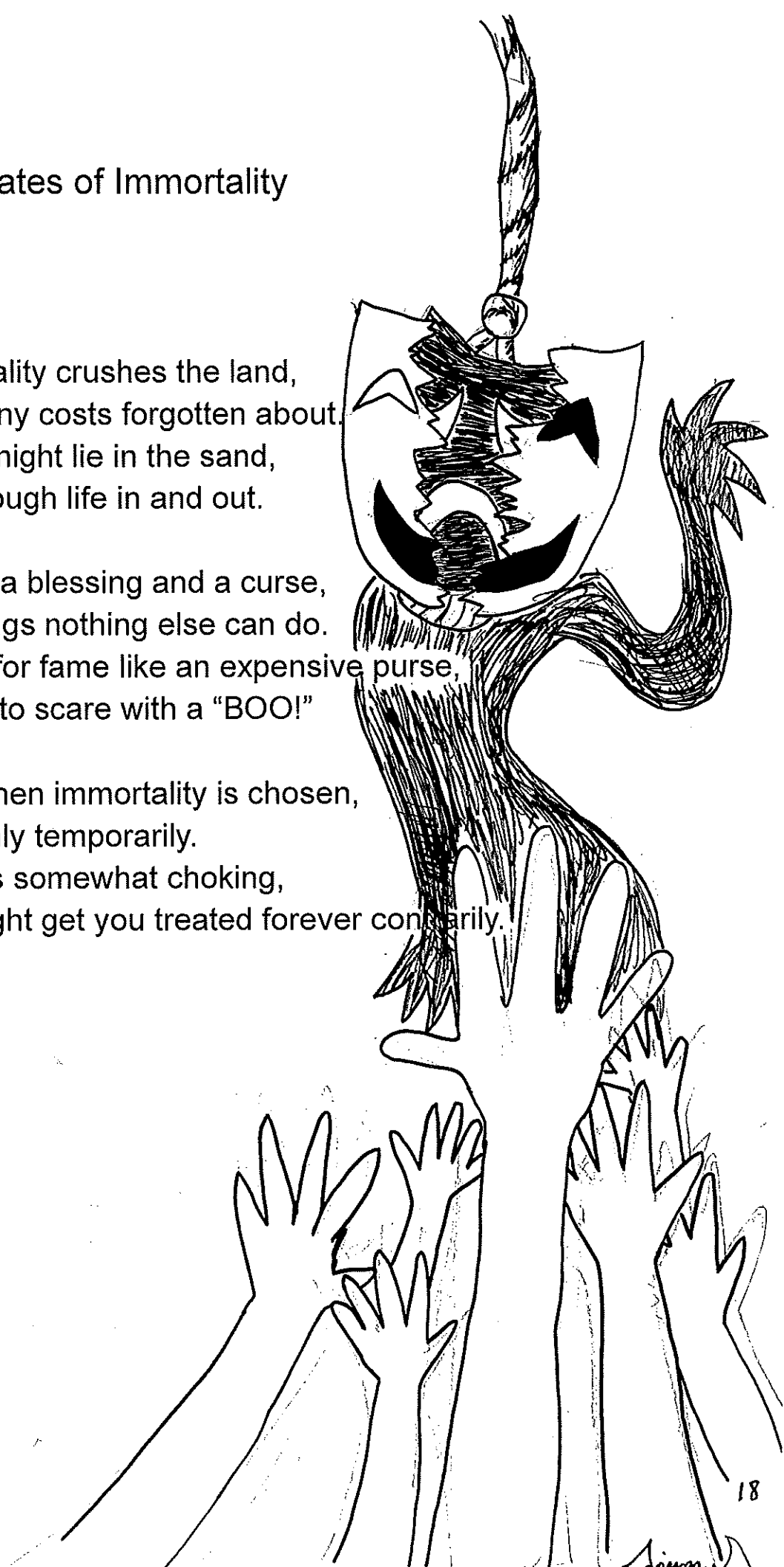
The Costs and Fates of Immortality

Daniel Prikhodko
Birch

A streak of immortality crushes the land,
Power given at many costs forgotten about.
While some fates might lie in the sand,
Others may go through life in and out.

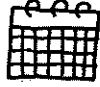
Immortality is both a blessing and a curse,
It can do many things nothing else can do.
While some use it for fame like an expensive purse,
Another can use it to scare with a "BOO!"

Sadness comes when immortality is chosen,
Happiness lasts only temporarily.
Life being infinite is somewhat choking,
Being immortal might get you treated forever contrarily.



Daniel Prikhodko
Birch
Sorbet Chaos

In the day of a fateful day,
The last day of April comes.



A week full of sorbets and one good day,
Sorbet orders fill the day before May.

Complexities of cake, sorbet, and toppings arrive,
Making even some people worry about them.



The people go into orders like a big dive,
It spreads around like a bee's message in a hive.

Gummy bears, raspberry, chocolate, all ingredients come,
A simple order and a complex order were found.



The orders stay unmade, their owners impatiently hum,
All of it goes down the drain like Santa down a lum.



Finally the orders come from Bluelip,
Hopefully none of it drips and hits dirt.
A child screeches as a drop hits his hip,
The other gets so happy they honk like a ship.

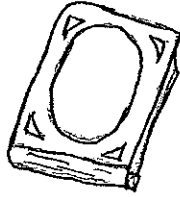


Once upon a time...

Lucy Kohen

Denali

Once upon a time, they say
No matter who you are,
You'll read a book
Or hear a tale
That's traveled very far.



Although it seems bright and new
And dazzlingly strong,
This secret story's been with you-
In your pocket, all along

Now don't you worry, don't you fret.
The words may come and go
But just like clockwork, tock and tick
Eventually, they'll show



Just search your mind, far and wide
Or on the tip of your tongue
Old and weary, knowledgeable,
But also spry and young

So pick up your pencil, quill or pen,
Paper, parchment, book.
Open up that mind of yours,
Perhaps you'll have a look.



What is it that you find in here,
This dark and dreary place?
You see a spark, a light ahead
Why not give it chase?

Skip along the Yellow Brick Road
Hand in hand with she
Who wears the slippers of sparkling red
And a dog so full of glee



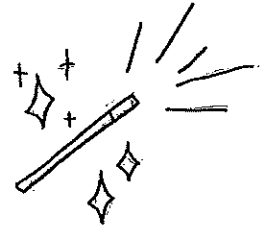
Or take a trip to Narnia,
Where castles glint and gleam
And four young children hunt a witch
Who plots an evil scheme

Go through the woods with Little Red
Off to Granny's Cabin
Watch out for wolves that bite and bark
And hoods might get-a grabben



Tumble through a rabbit hole
Have tea with Maddest Hat
Play croquet with Queen of Hearts
Beware the Cheshire Cat

Clean the cobwebs, dust the stairs,
Have mice arrange the dress
Leave a silver slipper there
At twelve, Tick Tock- a mess!



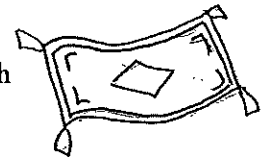
Check the cottage where fairies dwell,
Fauna, Flora, Merryweather,
Prick a finger on a spindle
True Love's Kiss makes all the better

Take a swim in Mermaid's cove
With Flounder's secret stash
Part of that world, the 7 seas
But princely boats may crash



Walk one hundred spotted dogs
Or maybe it's one-oh-one
Cigars and pelts are fashionable
Make sure the puppies get to run

Fly along with a magic carpet,
Make a Genie's wish,
The snake's a diamond in the rough
The sultan's very rich



Ask the mirror on the wall,
"Who's the fairest in the land?"
Seven dwarves and a sleeping girl
And a prince who holds her hand

All these stories, separate threads,
Past down from life to life,
Mix together to form a place
With ne'er a penny's strife



Ages old and just days new,
With heartbreak, love, and gore,
The words are spoken with a passion
That leaves the children wanting more

Yet here we are, at the end of a poem,
Ready to conclude
Give these tales to younger generations
The immortal magic will keep it true.



I'm Coming Home

Claire Dvorkis

Birch

The sky is cloudy and gray when the bell rings.
All at once, my heart sings.
I hurry up the stupid stairs we must walk on,
And run past the classrooms to my locker.

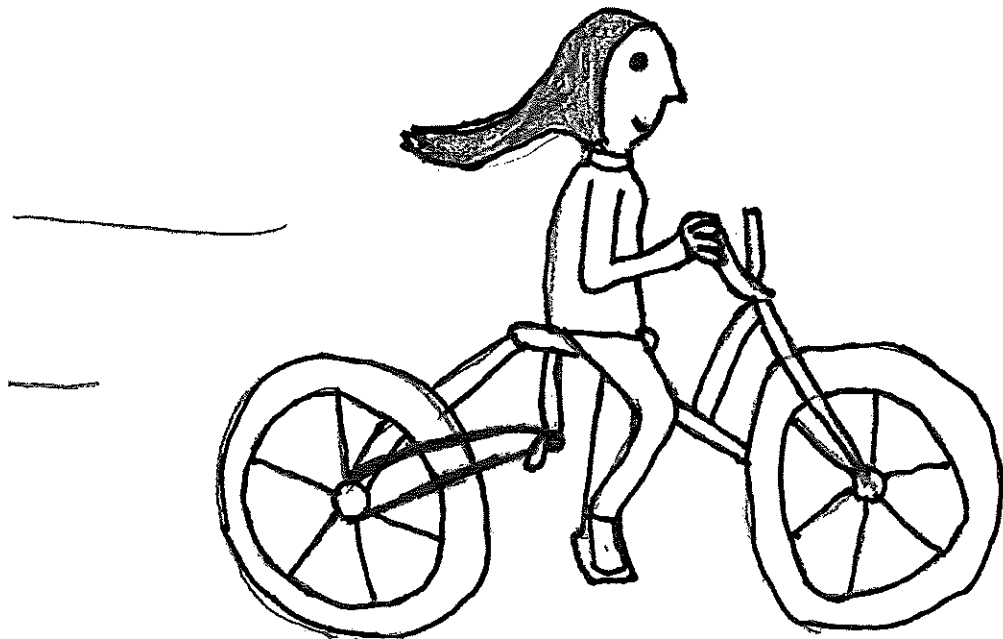
My annoying coat is zipped before I take 3 steps from my locker.
I say bye to my teachers as I hurry down the hall.
The stupid stairs prove no obstacle as I plummet down.

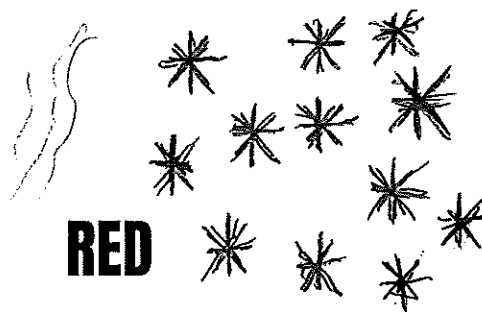
The doors fly open as I exit the building.
I run and twirl and head to the bike racks.
Oh, my beloved bike. My only escape from this prison.
You whisk me to the one place I can do whatever.

The air flies past my face as I race down the sidewalk.
The cloudy sky sends me a breeze.
I turn onto my street. It's a fun ride.

The garage is open as I zoom in. I fly through the door.
Oh, bliss, you devil. You haunt me as I chill on my couch with my books.

What do you mean I have to do this tomorrow?! WAAAAAAHHHHHH.





Grace Johnson-Wellnitz
Yellowstone

Everything has changed.
Don't ask, don't wonder.
Just take my hand,
And we'll drift to the ground.

This holy ground,
That we're standing on.
Standing up tall,
Not gonna fall...

Then everything was red--
Blurred and bloody.
Everything was crimson,
Softened and red, red, *red*.

You were the lucky one
And I am nothing of the sort.
It seems that all my clovers were
One leaf short.

I hope it'll begin again,
One day.
Come rain or shine.
Hell or high water.

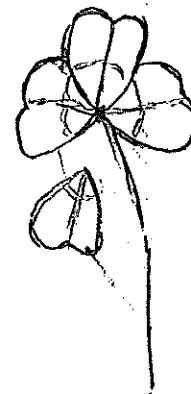
This is the last time
I'll see this quaint town,
Again before we fall.
We never dreamt of
Coming back.

Here, it's forever winter.
A drab, sorry excuse
That couldn't thrive
Under the harsh blankets
Of harrowing cold.

Run, far away. For here...
The snow always falls.
The cats are all black.
The knees are all skinned.
The fronts are all boarded.
The clovers all gone.

It's sad, beautiful and tragic.
How nothing left our house,
Except for the people in it.
(We forever desert
Those we love.)

But if I squint,
I almost see how it could have been.
Almost.



West Over the Treetops

By Claire Dvorkis

Birch

West over the treetops
Lies a place cloaked in beauty and light.
Where the hummingbirds come
To dance and hum
And the gales fly to sing in the night.

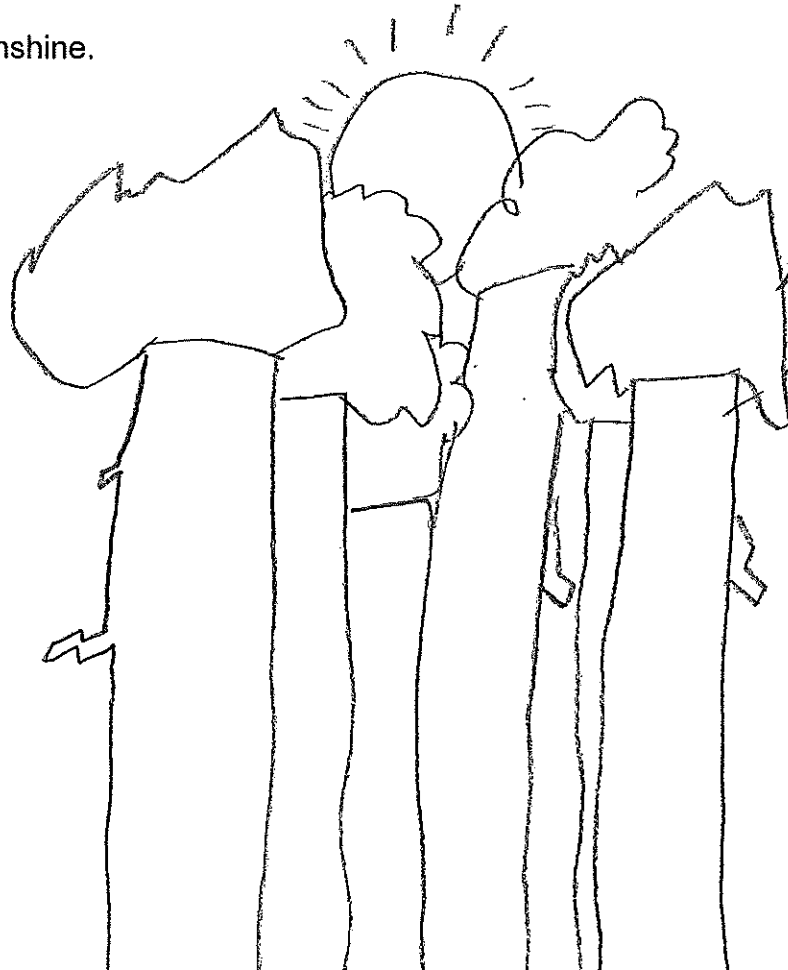
The sun is gentle and warm,
The sky is friendly and bright.
The clouds shimmer colors from ruby to jade,
And the grass sways and swooshes while butterflies soar over the glade.

West over the treetops
Lies a place I cannot describe.
Only those who come bearing wings of dreams are those who can truly fly.

Dreams are your transportation,
Imagination's your guide.
Ideas and aspirations are tickets
That let you come to this place of art and sunshine.

Only a few know of here,
This aspirational glade,
Where artists are free to create and inspire
Those who come seeking the artistic fire.

Come, hurry over!
Your ideas are waiting to bloom,
And your dreams and creations
Are waiting for travel
To the place west over the treetops.



Sadness
By Keira Hansen
Wasabi

The forest was
filled with anger,
with hate, with
sadness, with
love.

The shouts from
beneath the trees
are full with deep
dark sorrow and
hatred.

The lingering silence
after the cry filled
the forest, slowly
making it rot

With the trees
DEAD DEAD DEAD
and gone. Nothing
is there to
hear that
cry.

Just sadness
will know what
lies before
our eyes.

I Remember

By Fiona Jackson

Denali

The House

I remember...

The footsteps, bringing everything to life

The soft whirl of the fan as I lay down to sleep that first night

The shouts of laughter downstairs

And sleep, like a lamb, came to me, sweet and tender.

I remember...

Waking up in the morning

Snow, wondrous snow, coated the earth

At the beach, white sugar meats summer sand

Snowflakes whirled through the air,

As I danced across the shore.

I remember,

The sand in my hair as I tumbled down the dunes.

Hopping on the salt - covered rock,

Waves crashing at my feet

The fairy - tale kingdom

That is the ocean during the winter's chilly reign.

I remember...

Memorizing every nook and cranny

Morning meals with the family

The VCR upstairs

The house was like a castle, triumphant and tall,

Sacred but humble

Many winters may come and go,

Years may fly by,

But this place, these memories, this family,

Will be frozen in time forever.

The Queen

By: Susana Baro Doreste
Denali

I'm going to a queen of all ages
There's no more disgraces
No one's going to dare
To fight me for the power.

Bow down and maybe
I'll be nice saving you
From a traitorous point of view.

I'm going to be the queen
For centuries to come
The best at revenge

All others be condemned to
Fallen Kingdoms and
Dying Fortunes

And I will rule them all
Because I'm going to be the queen

(Sing like a rap)
I'll laugh as you crumble and die
Spit in your face as you cry
There's no mercy here
Yes you're right
I spent hours wishing
The throne would be mine

And now I'm here and I won't let you
Take this power I've found

I'm going to be the QUEEN!

Forged of bone (sequel to The Queen)

By: Susana Baro Doreste
Denali

Forged of bone
I was
Forged through hardships and
Burning bridges

Forged of bone
Was I
The queen sent to rule forever

Forged of bone
I am
Not blood or sweat or tears

Forged of bone
Am I
The one to rule the world

I was not forged from the heart
But from the ashes a dynasty

Born into crime and chaos
Born into hell it seems.

Forged of bone
Is what I am

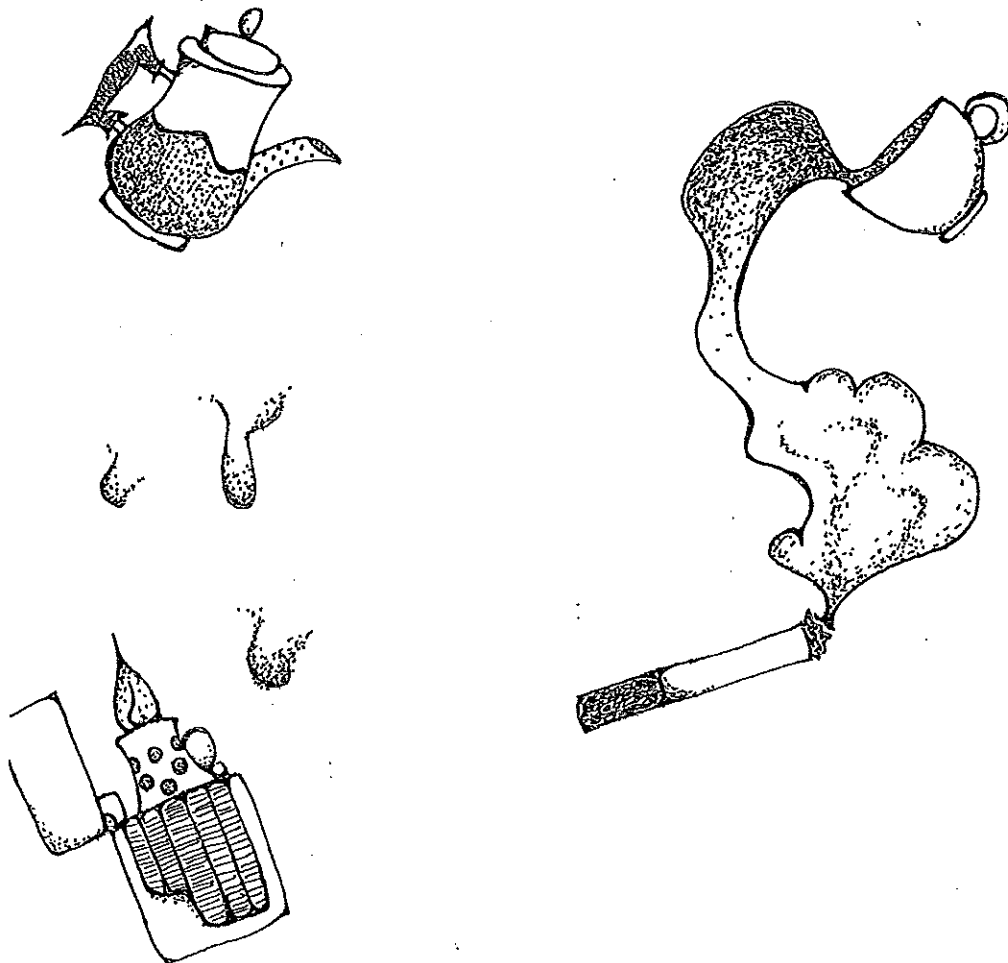
Forged of bone
I will always be
For centuries.

As this is tale of the QUEEN!



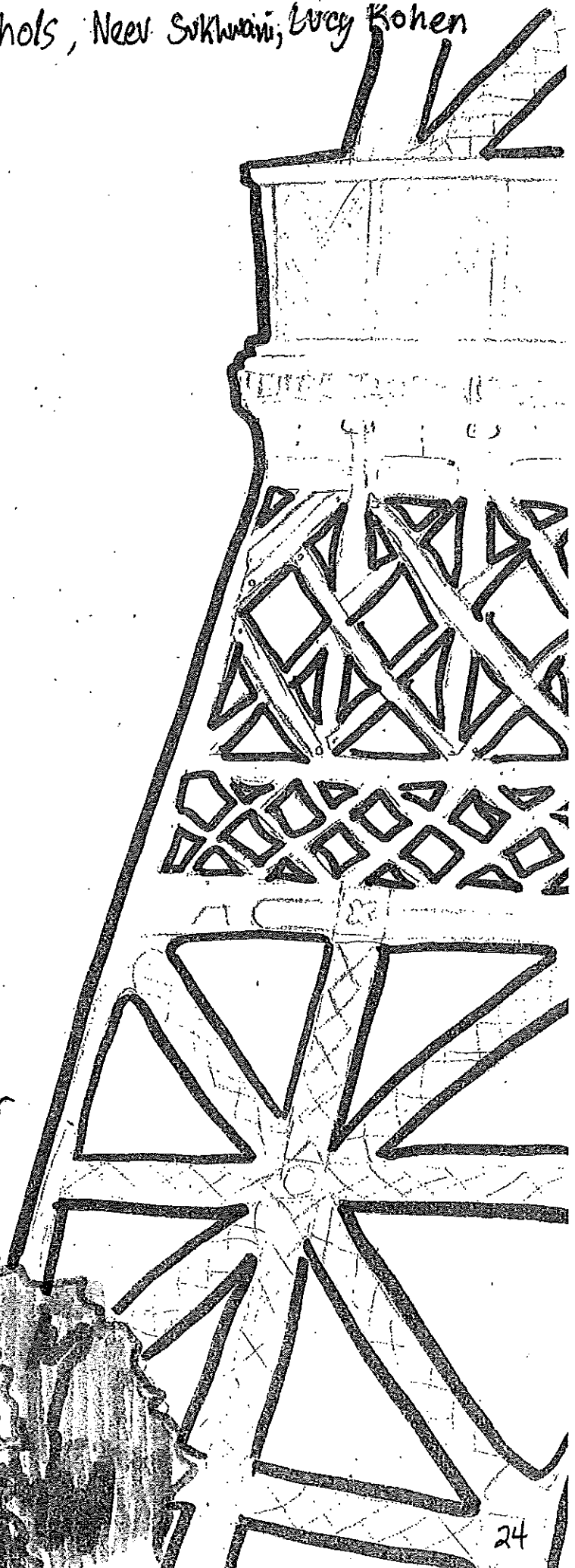
Poèmes en français

In French class, 8th grade students have been learning how to express themselves in the past tense in French. In Mme Weinmann-Tripp's class, students read and studied a very famous poem from Jacques Prévert: "Déjeuner du matin" (1945). This poem uses a simple, repetitive description of a morning coffee routine to powerfully depict the painful silence, emotional distance, and breakdown of a relationship. Students then created their own poem in Prévert's style. Lisez et profitez-en!



En France

J'ai voyagé
à la France
Je suis arrivée
à l'aéroport
J'ai marché
Sur les Champs-Élysées
Je suis arrivée
à l'hôtel
Et j'ai laissé
mes choses
C'était un grand jour
Je suis allée
à la Tour Eiffel
J'ai eu faim
J'ai trouvé
un restaurant
Et j'ai mangé
J'ai été
fatiguée
J'ai dormi
à l'hôtel
Demain, c'est un nouveau jour



Je Me Suis Réveillée

Zoe Goss

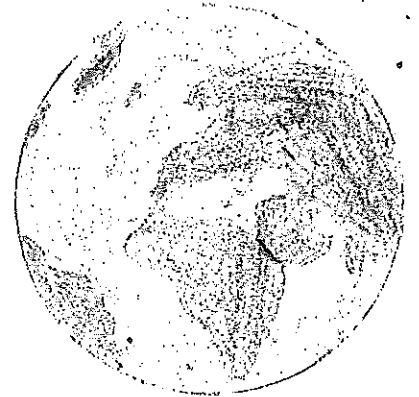
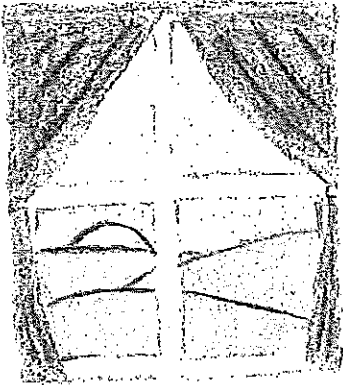
J'ai entendu mon alarme
Mais j'ai ignoré elle.

J'ai tenté de me redormir
Mais la lumière du soleil m'a arrêté.

J'ai déplacé les couvertures
Et ma journée a commencé.

J'ai habillé moi-même
Des vêtements que j'ai choisis hier soir.

Je suis parti de ma chambre
Prêt à regarder en face le monde



I heard my alarm
But I ignored it.

I was tempted to go back to sleep

But the sunlight stopped me.

I shifted the blankets

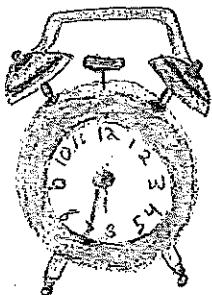
And my day had begun.

I dressed myself

In clothes I chose last night.

I left my room

Ready to face the world.



La Chasse de Needch

Je suis allée à Target

Rien.

Je suis allée à la papeterie

Rien.

Je suis allée sur Amazon

Rien.

Je suis allée à Walmart

Rien.

J'ai commencé à perdre espoir.

Je suis allée sur Temu

Rien.

Je suis allée à Learning Express

Rien.

Je suis allée à CVS

Rien.

Je suis allée à Walgreens

Rien.

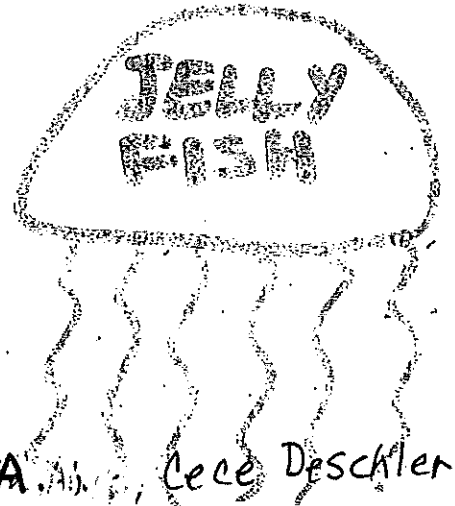
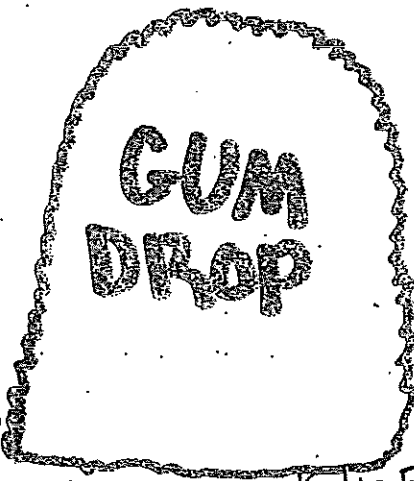
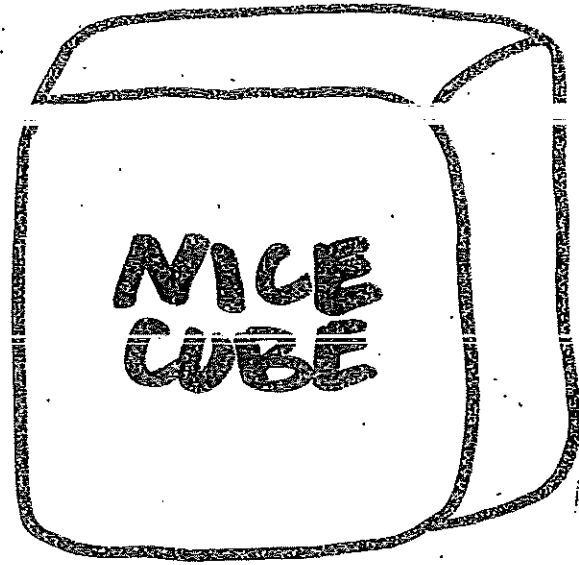
Je suis encore allée sur le site-internet de Needch

Mais toujours,

Rien,

Rien,

Rien.



La baguette

Elle est partie de sa maison

Elle est entrée dans sa voiture

Elle a conduit en bas de la rue

Elle est arrivée à la boulangerie

et elle est entrée

Elle a senti le pain frais

Elle a pris une baguette

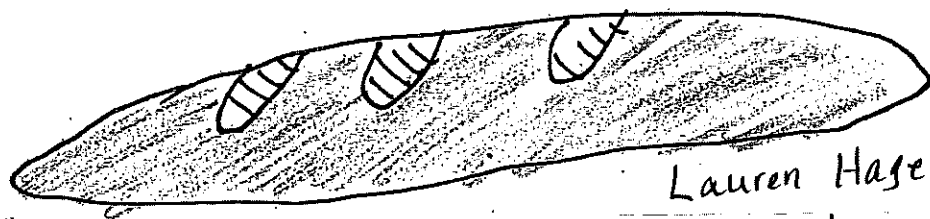
et marché au comptoir

pour acheter un baguette

avec sa baguette dans sa maison

elle est partie et avec un sourire elle a dit

"J'adore les baguettes!"



Lauren Hageman
Emilia Larson

Iel s'est assis

Et a attendu

Il n'y a personne

Le ciel a tourné gris

Comme leur visage

Congelé dans le temps



Il a promené calmement le chien,

Sur trottoir

tout à coup

un écureuil marron

avec ventre blanc

Il a sauté

devant moi

Peu après

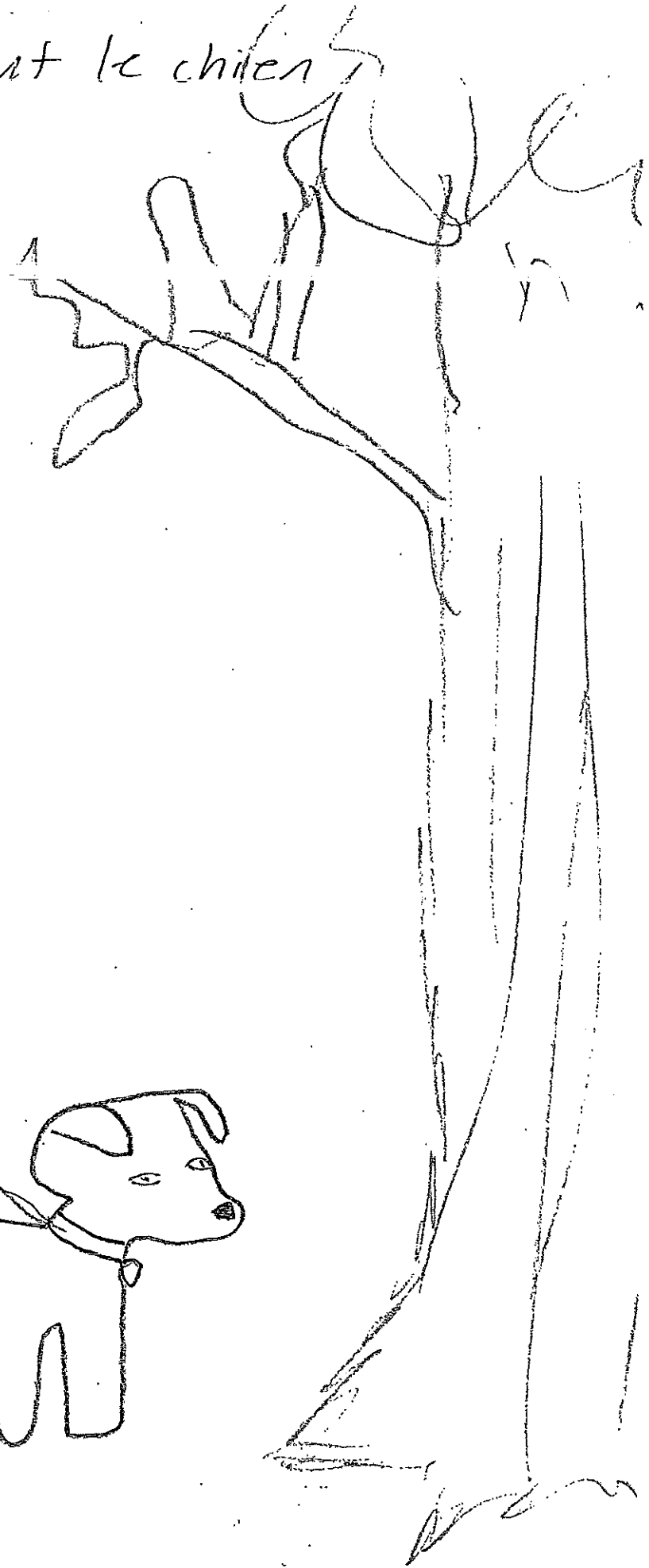
le chien l'a

Remarque aussi

Puis le chien

S'est mis à courir et

Il a tombé.



Walter Champion, Ewan Soddy, Sam Wade



Il a réservé

Le billet d'avion



Il a fait sa valise

Il a mis sa valise



dans sa voiture

Il est allé à l'aéroport



Il est allé à la sécurité

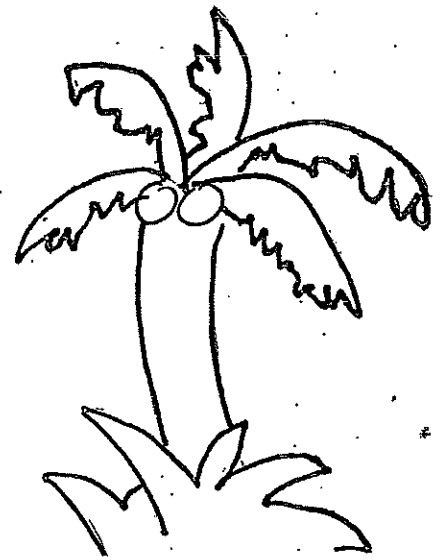
Il est allé dans l'avion

Il a voyagé aux Bahamas

Il a oublié sa femme

Zut, alors!

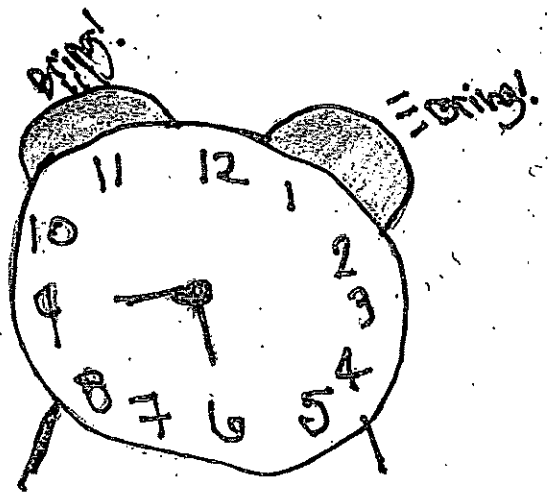
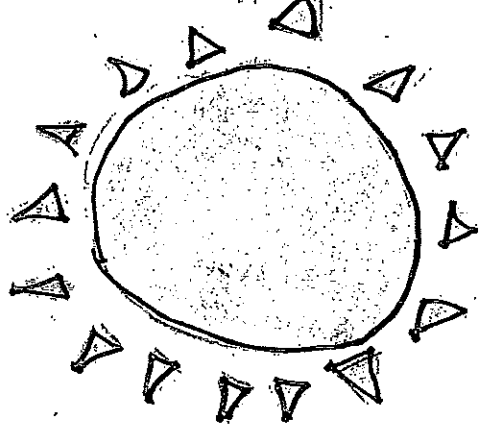
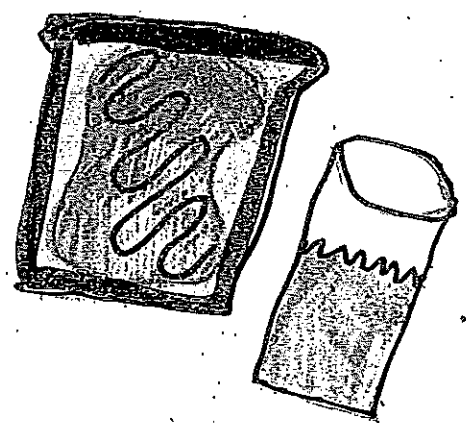
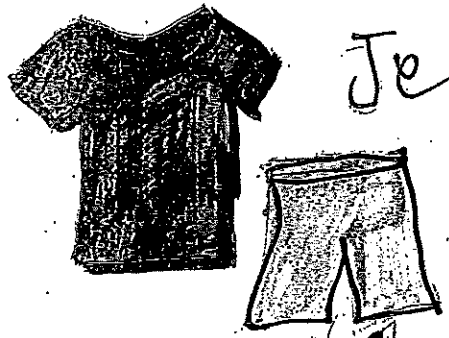
Andrew Sholk
Oliver Ciaccia
Ian Ballout



Arielle Bolduc 3e classe Xa

Mon matin

Je me suis réveillé
mon alarme a chanté
mon pied a marché la moutonnette
Je me suis habillé
J'ai marché à la cuisine
J'ai vu le soleil qui monte
J'ai mangé le petit déjeuner
Je vais à l'école



La Pluie de la Nuit

La pluie a été très forte

Contre ma fenêtre

Je suis montée à l'étage

Dans ma chambre

Remplie d'obscurité

La pluie a dansé

Dans ma fenêtre

J'ai fermé mes yeux

Et la pluie m'a réconfortée

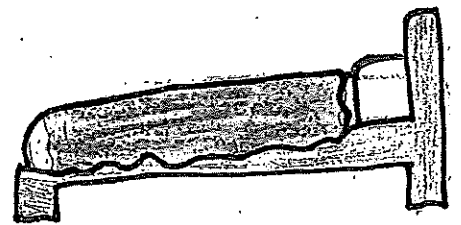
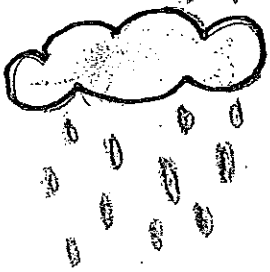
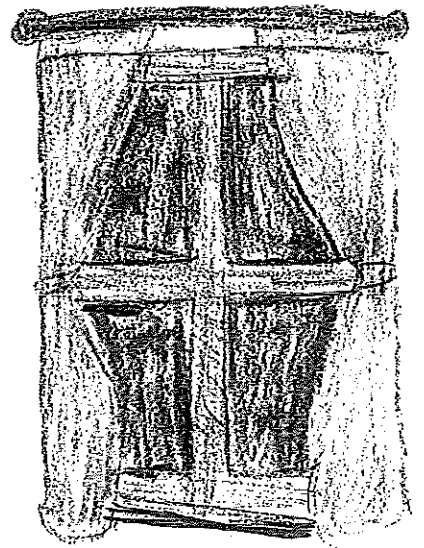
Comme une couverture chaude

Alors que j'ai laissé le jour

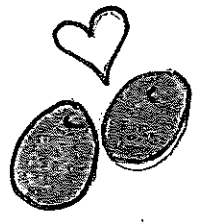
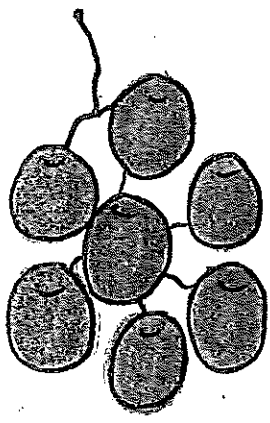
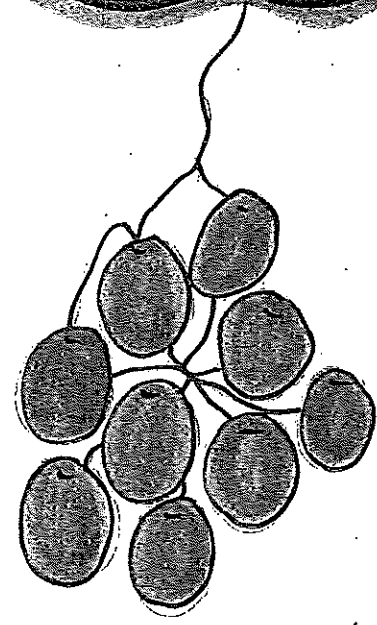
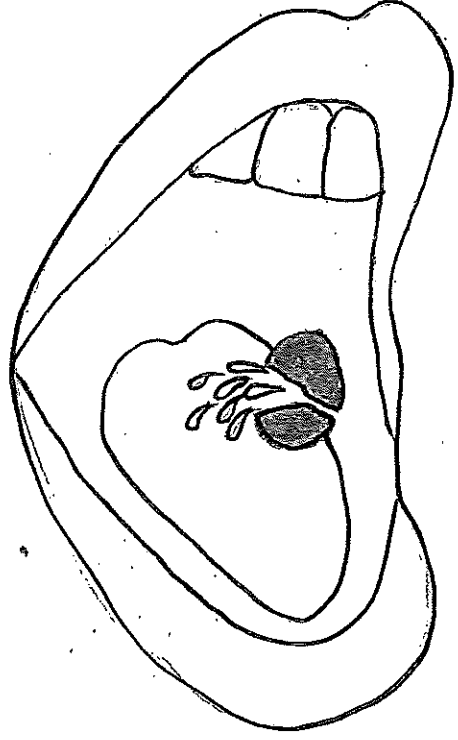
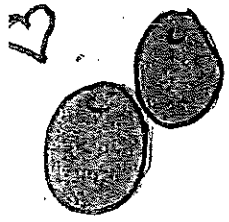
S'éloigner de moi

Ad Agumeh
&

Harper Johnson



Bonté Croustilliante



Nous avons regardé les raisins
ils ont apporté de la joie à nos coeurs
dans l'attente de les croquer
nous les avons pris
♥ et les avons déposés. ♥
dans notre bouche
la première bouchée est satisfaisant
la saveur a éclaté dans notre bouche
nos papilles gustatives
ont explosé avec bonheur.



Gabby Geary
Ainsley Porter
sophia D'amella

Le Jardin

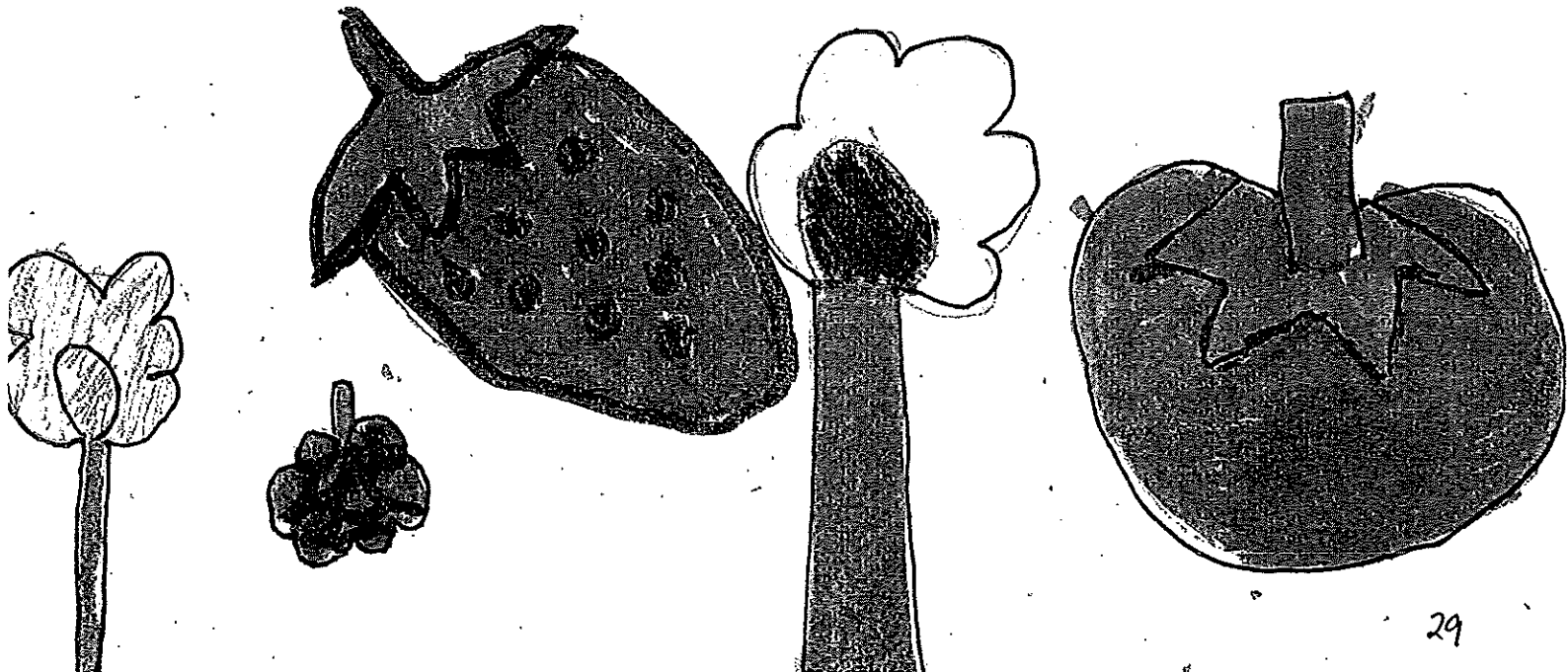
Nous sommes entrés le Jardin
Le odeur de fraises dans l'air
l'herbe mouillée sous nos pieds
Nous sommes sentons Calmes

Le Jardin est regorge de nourriture

J'ai cueilli une tomate
Et j'ai pris une Bouchée

La saveur juteuse a empli ma Bouche

Le jardin est l'endroit où nous aimons être



Max Clontz
Gil George
Ethan Levin

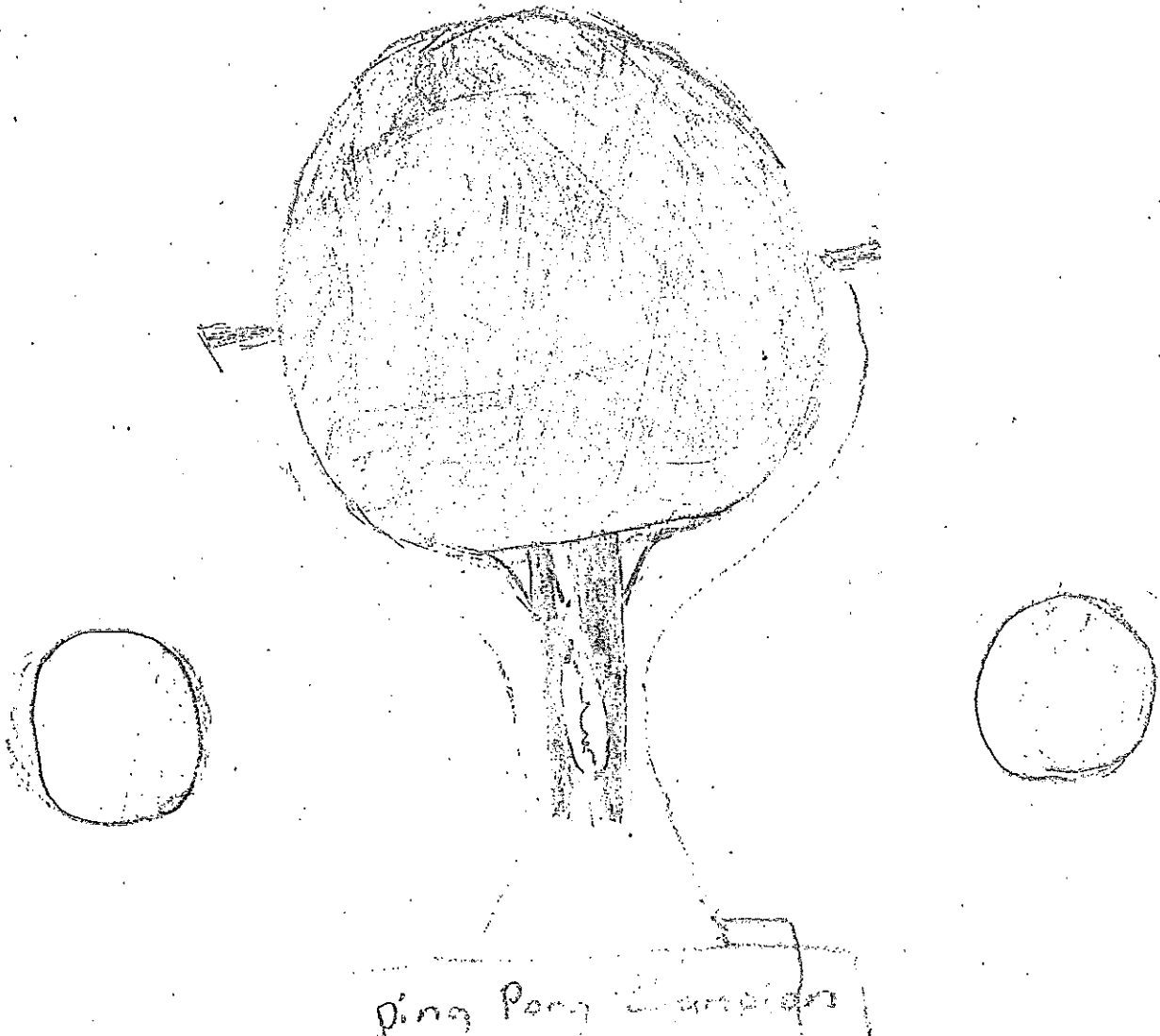
Le Match du siècle

Gil vs. Max

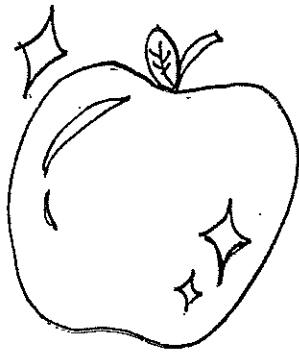
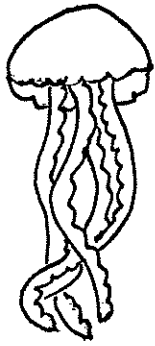
Ils sont à égalité
un stade silencieux
et une ambiance tendue

Gil a servi la balle
Max a manqué le retour
balle de match

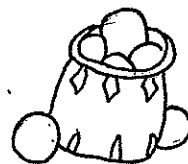
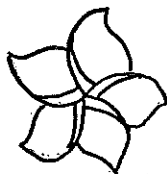
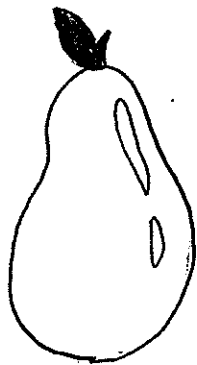
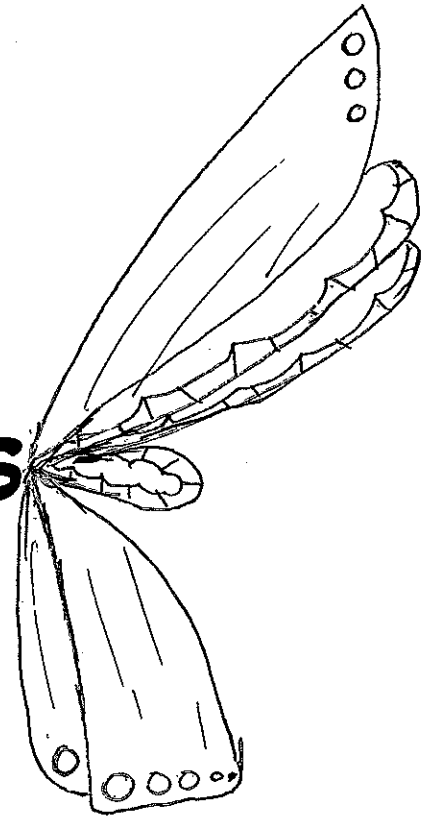
Gil a servi la balle
et Max a encore manqué
la foule a explosé en applaudissement
Gil est le champion!



Ping Pong Champions



Short Stories



To Fight For What's Left

Written by Nora Van Hooser
Birch Team

Part One

June First

Leave behind all that's left,
Choose to ignore for whom they've wept.
Kill the sparrow and become a dove,
Shower the world with the fakest of love.

Soon death's your only friend
'Cause you're assuming the end.
You've crept down this hallway before,
But now you must choose to ignore.

They promised you calm,
Your fate is in your palm.

What will you do to grab it?
You only have on strike left-
Now play.

June Second

Safety. Freedom. Tranquility.

Those promises had been shattered. I had run away trying to find freedom and had ended up in this messy, tangled mess. It was like being in the center of a ball of yarn with a cat nearby, there wouldn't be much time before disaster struck. And of course it could never happen just once. No, they had to take all your knitting needles and extra yarn until you were left with one singular, tiny, insignificant, measly, weak strand of yarn with you hanging on the other side for dear life.

That's how things always end around here.

I've gotten used to it by this point. Their stupid, "We saved you from some evil guy, want us to grant you a wish? We're just awesome like that."

Of course I, in all my six year old glory, asked for immortality. Meanwhile, everybody else had asked for them to bring their families back or at least keep them safe. Their parents would always begin to cry and talk about how proud they were. How it warmed their hearts to hear the sound of children's voices saying such kind words.

More and more adults would collect like an infectious disease but they always left within a couple of hours, promising to come back soon. Most of them never finish their end of the promise but the ones who do are usually mauled and you can see the bone through their bloodied skin.

Me however? My cot is always lonely except from the occasional fruit that no one else wanted but I think I'm okay with it. I had learned how to talk when I was three and even then, it was only a handful of words. Most teachers thought I couldn't talk at all and treated me either like a baby or a rodent. I am neither. Little did they know, I would spend all night writing poetry and leaving it in people's bags. They never found out it was me and they likely wouldn't survive long enough to find out.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

I looked up from my notebook to see a girl with short, wavy brown hair and bangs that hid her face like a curtain. She stuck her head through the door and knocked again. From what I could tell, she was wearing a pair of blue overalls and a sunny, yellow shirt as well as a pair of round glasses that made her look like the long lost twin sister of Mirabel from Encanto.

"Is this the girl's uhh. . ." Her voice quickly trailed off as she looked around at the minimal decorations which were mostly notes from parents hung over beds, promising that they'd visit soon and frowned. "Is that blood?"

I looked towards where she was pointing and sure enough, there was a splotch of bright red, right above an open cot. It looked almost like someone had tried to make a heart during their final moments. Knock-off Mirabel walked over towards it and was about to touch it, when one of the other girls shouted:

"I wouldn't do that if I were you! Who knows if that's venomous or something. In this world, anything can happen!" she warned and her friends nodded in agreement.

Not-Mirabel swiveled away from it and ran towards me instead.

"So, what's your name?" she asked, practically shoving herself beside me. My bed creaked in surprise and for a split second, I thought her jump was about to break the cot clean in half.

"I don't have one." I said matter-of-factly.

"YOU DON'T HAVE A NAME?!" she exclaimed and hopped off of the bed in a mix of shock and horror as if it were a virus she might catch if she sat with me for too long.

"Shhh, this isn't called a warzone sanctuary for nothing! You're going to alert everybody where we are!" I whisper-hissed before replying, "No, most of us don't have names."

She frowned and sat back down. "Then what do people call each other? More importantly, what do I call you?"

I studied her for a moment. She appeared to be around my age but there was something about her that was bursting with youth. It was like she had no fear of the future and no regrets in the past. "I don't really know how to say this but clearly no one has cared enough to fill you in-" Not that I could blame them. "-but most of us are killed before we can even walk. The ones who somehow survived parents' either didn't have time to name them or died already."

"Died? Couldn't they just yell out, 'Before I die, I just want you to know that in my head you've always been a Stephanie'? It seems a lot simpler than saying, 'Hey you who I've known for seven years, will you marry me?'"

I almost laughed but the gesture wasn't something that felt natural-If I even remembered how it had felt at all.

"There are some more reasons as well. People always say that kids grow into their name. If you name your kid-

"-Señor Buttface."

"I'm not saying that." I said.

"Pleeeeeeeeeaaaaaaase?!" She gave me puppy eyes so big I feared they'd roll out of her head if she wasn't careful enough.

"Fine." I took a deep breath before saying, "If you name your kid Señor Buttface, they'll grow up to be a walking butt-brain. By leaving kids unnamed, it gives them more of a choice of who they want to be." I finished.

"So you seriously don't have a name and you're just okay with that?" she asked.

"Pretty much. If you miraculously make it to adulthood, sometimes a friend or significant other will name you by how you act and if you don't have anyone, you can do it yourself but for the most part, we just call each other by something that defined us when we were little or now. It also makes it harder for them to find us, since it always changes." I explained.

"So what do they call you?" she asked.

"Immoral."

"Immoral?"

"Immoral." I repeated. "Usually they just nod to me but despite what some people believe, I know what goes on when they think I'm not looking."

"Well, I'm not going to call you that! I think this whole thing is a stupid way to categorize people by who they once were!" she exclaimed.

"Then tell me, who are *you*?"

"Carmela but everyone here's been calling me Criminal." She closed her eyes for a second and took a deep breath before opening them again, showing me her grass green eyes.

"You're a criminal? What did you do?" I asked before I could contain myself.

Her usually cheery and childlike smile faded and was replaced with a somewhat a sigh and somewhat a moan. She fidgeted with her fingers as she said, "What makes you think I did anything?"

Now she was shaking and bouncing her leg like it was the only thing keeping her together.

"Nothing, nevermind."

"Please don't call me Criminal. . . I promise I won't hurt anyone." she whispered and then muttered so quietly it was more like she was simply breathing, "Never again."

She looked so miserable that I couldn't bring myself to do what I should have done and demanded that she tell me. Instead I placed a hand on her shoulder and said, "Crim then? Or would you prefer Carmela?"

"Crim's fine." she said but I knew there was so much more to that sentence she hadn't dared to say. So much more I needed to know but was much too innocent to find out.

To Fight For What's Left

Written by Nora Van Hooser

Birch Team

PartTwo

Crim, June Third

Truth stays untold
Butterflies turn to gold
You're their lost treasure

A children's game
That you've now maimed
A stupid, guilty pleasure

Cried unheard,
Stories lost
Pain unmeasured

That's the price you pay to be Queen.

Crim, June Fourth

I promised them a safe haven.

This was my fault and now I deserve to suffer but I'm stuck with some nameless girl who thinks I'm some sort of freak. I *am* a freak. A freak with a messed up backstory and scars to show for it.

The hardest part of life is up ahead they say but right about now I'm on my knees praying they're wrong. If there's a worse, I don't want to be around to see it. Worse than watching them slowly lay person after person to rest, knowing that if I didn't do something soon, my family would be next.

I had been laying in my bed for hours, staring at the wall as dark shadows danced in the moonlight. The girls in the hall could not shut up as their howls shook the hall. If Im (my nickname for the girl I had met) had been so worried about me, she would have fainted hearing these guys. I attempted to drown them out by pressing my pillow so hard against my ears, I feared suffocation wasn't far off but it only seemed to make them louder as my heartbeat seemed to surround me.

"Looks like Immortal found someone who finally matches her level of freaky." one of the girls remarked. Snarky, I named her. For the very first time, I thought I was finally starting to like this choose your own adventure name thing.

Her friend, who I named Scoffy, scoffed. "You sure do!"

"Rude!" she exclaimed then did a startlingly good imitation of an old lady preaching on morals. "Your words have meaning and you must learn to respect everybody, especially those without the words to protect themselves. I would never be friends with *her*!"

I let out an exasperated groan and turned over.

"Oopsies!" Scoffy exclaimed in a baby-ish tone. "I think we made her upset!"

"Oh no!" Snarky cried. "Whatever will we do?"

At last I couldn't take it and screamed, "COULD BOTH OF YOU JUST SHUT IT??!!!" I flung my "blanket" (translation: rat infested rag) onto the floor and rushed out of bed towards Snarky and Scoffy. "Hate to break it to you but no one cares about your stupid crushes or what you think of my friend."

"Oh no!" Snarky exclaimed again. "Whatever will we-"

"Is that all you can say? Are you having trouble making up dumb excuses for your poop flavored attitude? Perhaps you think it was my choice to be the outcast or that I'm friends with who I am but it's *not* and it *never*, *EVER* was or will be." I balled up my fists and shoved them so deep into her face, she fell into the wall with a wonderful crack.

Scoffy squealed with dismay and ran out of the room like a little girl with her hands flared at her sides, making her look like the human equivalent of a squeaking penguin. Snarky was on the floor, holding her nose in her hands as blood flowed through the cracks in her cupped fingers. Then she looked up at me with pure terror. The red ooze was dripping down her mouth and neck.

"In case you haven't noticed," I continued. "No one's coming to help you." I shoved my face so close to hers, I could feel her shaky breath bounce against my cheek. "You're all alone in this mess. If only you had never spoken. . . maybe you wouldn't be here, a light headed, woozy mess holding her head in her hands as she tries to make sense of what could have possibly gone wrong. Too bad it's too late. You're trapped in a room with the exact person who hurt you and a bunch of sleeping kids who would probably be grinning as they watched you writhing in pain. I hoped that someday you might learn but now you're covered in blood as I watch over you. Stop being such a jerk and I'll consider not punching you into walls. Does that seem fair?"

"But I didn't me-" she started but I placed a finger on her quivering lips.

"Exactly! That's the problem, it just happens! It would be much easier if I disposed of you but alas, I'd only get in more trouble." I paused for a moment to look around, mockingly looking around confused. "Funny, your friend should be here by now. Too bad Scoffy couldn't be here to see this. Should have made a better choice than befriending *her*."

"And where's your friend defending you?!" She stood up to face me but promptly collapsed back down. Her face had turned an unnatural shade of purple and her nose was covered in dried blood. Her hands were encased in red and her veins seemed to bulge out of skin as she turned ghostly pale.

"Asleep, as she should be just like you will be. The only difference is one of you will be enjoying that sleep permanently. Care to find out which?"

"No thanks!" Snarky squeaked quickly. "I think I'm good for now!"

"That's what I thought. Too bad your family wasn't as good at behaving-or learning-as you. Maybe they would have survived?"

Realization finally seemed to dawn on her and as she met my eyes, Snarky screamed at the top of her lungs just as her family had when I had raised the sword to their chests. I remember eagerly waiting for the rattling terror-filled screech that awaited just before the squelching of guts and the cracking of bones as the silver blade became one with their frozen hearts.

"Y-y-" The words caught in her throat and then seemed to jump out of her throat all at once. "You killed her-you killed all of them-the monster. The sword-shattered in your hand."

Now it was my turn to pale. I had failed my attempt to kill her and instead of the usual final breath, she got a nasty gash on her arm and I had gotten a broken sword along with a severe loss of glory. The thought of killing her had lost all of its appeal as I shoved the images of people slowly dying at my grasp. Bodies sprawled on the market's cobblestone floor as I skipped along, singing songs of cheer as I ate handfuls of grapes in front of starving civilians. They sat in street corners, filthy to the bone with dirt and grim. Although, they weren't much more than bone.

It was my fault.

All of this.

I had killed her family and started everything.

I knew about the names and the war and Snarky and Immortal and all their tears silently shed in solitude.

I was more than just some stupid new kid-I was all of their troubles, disguised as a little girl. Now I was stuck as one of them for a century to think about what I had done. Still, underneath, I was the same soulless Queen I had always been and I wasn't about to change now.

But no, I would always be the same no matter what I tried. I had nearly killed Snarky and there was no going back. If they thought I was so evil, perhaps they would try looking in a mirror.

If they wanted cruel, they would get the cruelest.

If they wanted mean, they would get the meanest.

If they wanted death, they would get the deadliest.

If I was going down, they were going down right with me.

Forever.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

A Short Story By Cam Poole

Mint

My mission is simple. Search and Rescue. Captain Raymond went missing on a simple discovery mission to planet UP-743. He went with 6 other soldiers, but all of them and the Captain are M.I.A. They went missing 6 weeks ago but their tracking devices turned off 5 days ago. It is my job to locate them. I work for the I.G.E.D.O, The intergalactic exploration and discovery operations. We divide planets up into areas and explore the ones that seem to promise valuable resources.

The planet Captain Raymond went missing on, UP-743, is a small dwarf planet in Area 2B. It's 400,000 miles away from The Moon, but after multiple weeks I've finally made it.

My rocket ship lands on the moon when I get an incoming call from the Commander of the I.G.E.D.O, one of the highest ranks there is. I rush to the dashboard and press accept on the incoming call. A hologram of the commander appears in the middle of the room. "Good Evening, Jack Holland. If you recall the mission briefing we told you all the details of this mission, but let me refresh your memory." The Commander says. The massive screen over the control panel of the ship turns on. "This mission is of the utmost importance, for you are attempting to locate and rescue one of our top captains on the I.G.E.D.O, Captain Raymond. Him and his 6 soldiers went missing 6 weeks ago. We have no way of tracking them but you have landed at their last known location. On this mission Captain Raymond is the top priority. Do not attempt to save any lost soldiers if it in any way endangers Captain Raymond. Captain Raymond was never able to send us information about the planet, so you're completely in the dark. The ship will remain here so when Captain Raymond is found you can return him here along with yourself, and earn your freedom. Along with this information I must inform you that Code-134, Section-97 determines that if no information is known about the planet, assume everything-"

"Is dangerous," Jack added before The Commander could finish.

"Yes, assume everything is dangerous. This means the possibility of many threats, and for this reason you will not be able to carry any weapons on you that have the possibility of alerting said possible threats." The Commander says.

"What?! If I'm on an unknown planet and some big creature comes and tries to attack, what do you want me to do? Poke it with a stick?!" I yell.

"If it means you can distract said big creature in order to protect Captain Raymond, then yes. Poke it with a stick." The Commander says. I roll my eyes and reach for my helmet and oxygen tank when The Commanders hologram appears in front of the mask, making me jolt back. "That won't be necessary, oxygen levels are stable on this planet." The Commander says.

I shrug my shoulders and press the ginormous red button at the back end of the ship. The door of the ship lifts up. UP-743 is covered in trees, almost looking like a jungle on earth. The trees twist like twisty strats and have glowing cyan leaves yet the grass is green like on Earth.

I start to walk out of the ship when I hear the voice of The Commander. "Remember, this is a privilege to be walking on this planet. The Justice Department at I.G.E.D.O should have had you sentenced to life, but that's not my call. Good luck soldier... *you'll need it.*" The Commander says as his hologram disappears.

I walk out of the ship and start walking through the vast terrain of UP-743. I look around and see no signs of life, and no signs of Captain Raymond. I continue to walk through the jungle-like area of UP-743. The quietness of the planet is eerie. I would say almost too quiet but that's quite cliché. The air on UP-743 smells horrible, I honestly should have taken the oxygen mask anyway to get rid of the stench.

Suddenly I fall to the floor. I stand up and I am covered in what looks and feels like mud. I brush myself off but then notice something odd. I see a trail of footsteps through the mud, human footsteps. I sprint through the mud, my armor getting dirtier with each step I take as mud covers me. Suddenly the trail of mud stops. "*How am I supposed to find Captain Raymond now?!*" I think to myself. Then another thing catches my eye, a golden, heart shaped keychain lies on the ground. I picked it up. On the back of the keychain there is a picture of a family. 2 parents and a little girl. Its Captain Raymond keychain... he always carries it with him.

"All of these clues are too obvious to be a mistake... he must have been chased by someone and left these to help anyone who comes find him!" I think to myself. "HELP! HELP! PLEASE SOMEONE HELP!" A mysterious voice cries out suddenly. I look to my right and see a cave. That must be where the voice is coming from. I run over to the cave, weaving between the trees and vines. *Assume everything is dangerous.* I pick up the hardest rock I can find in case I need to defend myself. I slowly enter the cave and see the outline of a man in the corner of the cave. "This is the I.G.E.D.O! Make yourself known, now!" I yell.

"Dont talk to me with such disrespect, boy," the mysterious voice calls out. The mysterious figure walks out of the shadows of the cave into the part of the cave where sunlight shines in. It's Captain Raymond.

"Captain Raymond! It's Jack! I came here on a mission to save you." I say.

"Yes, you're part of the Last Chance Program I assume? No other soldier would be stupid enough to go to an unknown planet in the middle of nowhere," Captain Raymond says.

"Yes. I am. It doesn't matter though. Come with me! The ship is waiting for you!" I say.

"No, sleep here for the night, it's too dark and dangerous to walk right now. Trust me the ship won't leave without you," Captain Raymond says. I nod my head in agreement.

I find a place in the corner of the cave and close my eyes, it's hard to sleep when your.. well, sleeping on hard rocks. I was so tired though it didn't even matter. Hours go by when I'm suddenly jolted awake by Captain Raymond's voice... but he's not talking to me. I pretend to be asleep to listen to what he's saying.

"Yeah, he's here. They should have sentenced him to life instead of sending him to his deathtrap to die," Captain Raymond says into a walkie talkie. A muffled voice replies from the walkie talkie, but too quiet for me to hear.

"He saw secret I.G.E.D.O files! He was planning to sell them for cash! Either way I guess he gets what he deserves," Captain Raymond says. "*Hes talking about me.. Maybe if they didn't pay me so little I wouldn't have to try to steal secret information to just buy food.*" I think to myself. I stand up to confront him.

"What do you mean I'm going to get what I deserve, and why are you calling this place a deathtrap?!" I yell.

"Wait your..?! How did..?!" Captain Raymond starts stuttering in shock.

"YOU REALLY THINK THEY SENT YOU TOO THIS PLACE AS A SECOND CHANCE? NO! IT'S TO GET RID OF YOU! THEY CAN SIMPLY LEAVE YOU HERE AND SAY SOMEHOW YOU GOT LOST OR SOMETHING! Huh... you know too much. Simple as that, those files were classified for a reason!" Captain Raymond yells.

"Wha... I DIDN'T EVEN READ THE FILES! I'M SIMPLY TRYING TO SURVIVE! THE I.G.E.D.O PAYS US BARLEY ANYTHING TO RISK OUR LIVES! AND HOW DO YOU PLAN TO GET RID OF ME! I KNOW YOU CAN'T FIGHT ME!" I yell back.

"I don't need to... the air is poisonous," Captain Raymond says. He takes out a pill bottle and shakes it. "And I have the only antidote," he says.

Inside the bottle it contained a singular pill. "Only one pill, Jack, and there's 2 of us. If I remember correctly this is an unknown planet. Which means Code-134, Section-97 is in effect, which means you have nothing to defend yourself.." Captain Raymond says as he pulls a taser out of his pocket. "Lucky the rules don't apply to me," he says.

Captain Raymond jolts at me, his taser almost hitting my arm. I step back and trip him. He falls and tries to tase my foot. I move my foot away and kick his hand. He drops the taser. We both dash for the taser. We both grab the taser and wrestle for the weapon. I rip it out of his hands and tase him in the leg. He is shocked and moves his body away. I reach in his pocket and grab the pill bottle with the antidote in it.

"What are you gonna do now? I have the antidote and the taser." I say as I swallow the pill.

"You think I care about surviving? I'm the bait, the one who discovered this planet 5 years ago. The one who came up with the idea of sending those who know too much and leaving them here... and using washed up Captains as bait. Ironically I'm in that position now. Even though you ate the pill, it only lasts 5 days. You were a goner the second you stepped on this planet." Captain Raymond says as he starts coughing. Captain Raymond tries to get up but tumbles over. "That's the poisonous air." Captain Raymond says with a raspy voice.

"Whats stopping me from getting on the ship that brought me here and leaving this planet huh?! What's stopping me?!" I yell.

"Look...up." Captain Raymond says quietly. I look up and see my extraction ship take off. "THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT!" I scream.

"You didn't follow your one simple rule. You didn't assume *everything* was dangerous."

Fading Eudaimonia

Yulia Cheng, Denali

{ADAM}

Adam here. I have good news and bad news. The good news is that we figured out how to change the beep sound! Now you can know who's talking. The bad news? Get ready for complaining. Four hours. *Four hours* of constant arguments. Verity and Thomas were the most annoying people I knew by far. And then, a traffic jam. We were only twenty minutes away from Central Labs, but the traffic delayed it by at least ten minutes. Thomas blamed it on Verity, who did likewise with the other. Luckily, we made it in the end, and were out of the car. I scrambled to get six feet away from the bickering and quickly scanned the area.

It was a pretty small lab, and it shared a building with another company. Despite there being two companies that inhabited the space, the parking lot was empty. Everywhere around the place seemed to be empty as well. Most had fled from the infecteds already.

"Thomas," I asked. "Is this a good lab?"

The man nodded. "It should be."

Suddenly, there was a screech. It came from inside the building. It seemed high and low at the same time, like the person was using their full strength to scream into mutilated vocal chords.

"What the hell was that?" Verity questioned.

"A scream," Thomas deadpanned.

"Should we go in?" I asked. "I mean, there's nowhere else to go."

"Right. Nowhere else." Verity stated. She stuck a lockpick into the lab door. "Let's go in."

{VERITY}

The building was dark.

Thomas turned on the light.

The building was bright. There was also the sound of what seemed like a person running down the stairs. It was a frantic run, rather than a normal jog. The person was hitting their limbs everywhere, like they'd recently learned how to walk. But what would a child be doing in the building?

I put my hand to my revolver just in case, and motioned for Adam to do the same. Pity that Thomas didn't have a weapon.

The person kept stumbling down the stairs, and, after a while of silence, I realized that the 'person' I was thinking of was actually multiple people.

Another screech reverberated through the lab, closer, now that we were inside. If I were certain that the *things* coming downstairs were human, I'd have determined that they were sick. Very very sick. "The virus—" I realized.

Thomas had come to the same conclusion. "Airborne. It starts at your respiratory—" "THEN CAN WE GET THE HELL OUT?" Adam yelled, in a panic. He pointed towards the stairs, where shadows were starting to appear. They didn't walk like humans.

The three of us sprinted towards the door.

The zombies followed us, screaming all the way. We needed masks, but we couldn't do anything except run. We ran back to my truck, sprinting as fast as we could— the zombies could do the same for some reason. They didn't even look like zombies, just psychos. Thomas and I had a lot of virus discussions to have in the near future.

I grabbed my car keys and unlocked the doors, jumping inside in a swift movement.

When Adam and Thomas made their way in, I locked the doors and stepped on the gas, not wanting to risk zombies being able to pick locks or something.

I drove a mile or so, then pulled over on an empty road. I turned around to Thomas. "What was that?"

"I do not know!" he exclaimed, still catching his breath. "I did not think it would be—"

"No kidding! They weren't even zombies, they were like disoriented maniacs!"

"Yeah," Adam agreed. "What was that?"

"Well... I might have left some facts out. Did not think they were important," Thomas answered.

"They're very much important *now*," I snapped. "Tell us."

Thomas sighed and reached for his notebook. He flipped through a couple pages and landed on one, about halfway through the book. "This is a summary of everything I know about the virus so far."

{ADAM}

I took the notebook from Thomas' hands and scanned the page, written in horrible doctor's handwriting.

Vivus mortuus summ.

1. can b saliva-transmitted OR airborne
2. begins by killing the person, but keeping their respiratory system intact
3. When it revives the dead, the respiratory system cannot keep up with the new pattern & attempts 2 fight infection; that leads up to bad pain (hence the congested screaming)
4. after the lungs adapt (or the person dies), the virus is in full control of the body & works 2 obtain a new host through saliva transmissions b4 their latest host rots away (No thermoregulation system, along with many other vital human bits yet— though mutations ARE possible)

NOTE— "Full control of the body" as in the person is back to full strength, tho they do not have a good motor system (need 2 relearn, don't have the time 2 live)

After Verity and I both read the summary, we each had multiple questions. Verity had one prominent one. "Why is your grammar so bad? And the handwriting?"

Thomas rolled his eyes. "I can not be smart, beautiful, *and* have good handwriting. I bet your handwriting is just amazing."

"It is; I have all three traits."

Thomas looked at her face with a grimace. "...I would not say you do."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"Guys," I interrupted, sick of the bickering. "Can we focus on the science here? Anyone could be an infected. We can't tell by just their looks. We're screwed."

"They can not walk nor talk. I think we would be able to tell quite fine."

"What if they relearn how to walk?" I asked, skeptical.

"They can not live nearly that long."

"Thank god."

"Where will we go now, though?" I asked. "We have a lot of info and nothing to do with it. We don't have a lab, a vaccine, and we also don't have a future, as of now. We're kind of screwed."

Thomas pursed his lips. "Actually-- never mind. Well, we could find another lab. There are hundreds across America."

"The thing is.. wouldn't they all be infected?"

Thomas paused. "...yes. Unfortunately, they would."

"Doesn't help, dude." I sighed. "In my opinion, we're doomed. Who's with me?"

The two other people in our car raised their hands without another thought.

{VERITY}

It was unanimous. We were screwed. With the virus taking over at a rate faster than any other, we would be on the run wherever we went. The only other thing we could do to avoid infection was to double down and hide, which would be nearly impossible. It was too late, every nook and cranny of the world was contaminated by the virus-- if not already inhabited by hundreds of zombies.

Even if we went to Antarctica, we'd have to get supplies. Supplies from places that would most definitely be zombie-infested. It was the end of human civilization, and also the end of our individual lives.

"Where else can we go?" Adam asked.

Neither Thomas or I answered. We didn't have any ideas. Nor hope.

Adam raised an eyebrow. "Verity and Thomas tied for once? That's crazy--"

"Go back home," I interrupted, not wanting to give Thomas the chance to answer. "We could go back home."

"No." Thomas snorted. "Definitely not."

"Where even is your home?" Adam asked. "We know nothing about you."

Adam had a point. We knew virtually nothing about Thomas. Why was he even here? I supposed an apocalypse banded people together. "What's your full name?" I wondered aloud.

"Why should I tell you?" Thomas replied.

"Oh please, we're about to die anyway."

"You first."

"Adam Hannan Cade," Adam answered, "and Verity doesn't have a middle name."

"Yeah," I shrugged. "It's just Verity Lee. My middle name can be whatever."

"I'm Thomas Lavigne," Thomas said. He held out a hand to shake. "Nice to meet you both."

We shook. It felt nice to trust him for once.

All of a sudden, something knocked on my truck window.

{ADAM}

If I had a nickel for every time something knocked on the truck window in those 24 hours, I'd have two nickels. It isn't a lot, but it's strange that it happened twice.

...

..Okay, ignore that. Anyways, we were very much surprised. I rolled down the window.

"Hi?"

The person outside had short blond hair. They seemed about thirty. Old. Well, in the grand scheme of things, not *that* old, but still older than me. They opened their mouth to speak. "Hello... I need help for- from the zombs." The person spoke weirdly, like it was their first time speaking English. Their lips moved in an unnatural way, but I assumed they were new to America. Maybe.

"What do you need?" I asked.

"C-can you.. cam-come out? Help."

I raised an eyebrow. "Help with what?"

"Help- infect. We are."

I turned back to Thomas and Verity, hoping to ask for their opinion. They seemed to be in a silent staring game. I turned back to the person. "What's your- AAHI!"

Three bullets had made their way past my ear, directly into the person's skull. They collapsed on the ground.

"WHAT WAS THAT FOR? You- you just killed someone." I leaned out the window to look at the person's remains on the ground. They were really dead. My friends, whom I *trusted with my life*, apparently couldn't be trusted with someone else's. I felt a hand on my shoulder and swatted it away. "What the hell did you do?"

"Adam..." Verity's voice started. She sighed, seemingly contemplating something.

I brought myself to look at her. She looked terrified; in shock; all of it. She didn't speak.

Thomas huffed. He crossed his arms over his chest, feigning confidence, but I could see the fear in his eyes. "Adam, close the window. That wasn't a human."

The Pigvasion of the Centuries Arrives

Daniel Prikhodko

Where do we even start... This is all hopeless. The guinea pigs have already taken control of the country Irkinya. If they can continue, they can win. We have some guinea pigs on our side. We have pigs such as Dino Pig and Wizard Pig but most other ones are evil. Luckily though, our Wizard Pig can turn evil guinea pigs into good guinea pigs. If Dino Pig did not take and throw Evil Wizard's purification potions at Evil Wizard Pig, we might have never gotten here without Wizard Pig's help.

I should probably explain this all to you... You see, uh, animals have recently been hit with a disease that gives them sentience and extreme intelligence. The animals though... have been abusing this power to take over. Our human species is being hunted by psychology and basic needs. We want cute animals, but they end up leading us to other animals that hunt us for food and fun. All these animals have feats of their own. The most dangerous of these are guinea pigs. They use their cute looks on unsuspecting people, pleading with them about a family emergency in their own squeaks. These victims... follow and find other larger animals there that eat the victims, leading to their doom.

We try to stop them but it fails, the guinea pigs have abilities based on their jobs. They used to be humans but were bit by pigs and soon killed, causing them to be reborn as a guinea pig with their old jobs still intact. Their minds go evil. We try to stop this with our help but Wizard Pig, used to be evil, but Dino Pig manipulated the Darkenifying potions Evil Wizard Pig had, and turned them into Purification potions. That is the reason why Wizard Pig became good. They use these potions to stop the ruler of the Evil Pigs from getting followers, by losing them.

Though, it seems that if you died from non-guinea pig causes, you would be reborn as a human unless a pig bit the ancestor. To explain, if a bit peacock had a child, that kid, if it killed a human, would leave the human reborn as a pig because of the father's bite. This is leading to their ruling in this world, though the cause of evil is still unknown and being investigated now.

So here we are now, dealing with all this invading. If we can stop this evil going around the world, then maybe we can last our lives without pain and suffering. Wizard and Dino Pig may be able to turn some pigs good, but they cannot fix all guinea pigs from evil with only two weak members. They will need more members that are even stronger, they will need upgrades, and most importantly... they will need the power of karma, justice, and friendship combined to solve the cause of the evil and be able to stop it.

They will meet many kinds of pigs, some unique, some powerful, some cute or goofy, but they will eventually meet the cause of the evil, and end it once and for all. The Wizard and Dino Pigs need your belief to help them! Little do they not know, one of their teammates they will meet was related to the cause of the evil. Will they find this out, or will it stay a secret until the evil is defeated? I hope you help them with their work and so they can finally beat the evil.

They will explore history, finding out the true reason of the evil and will eventually end the cause. They will meet friends who betray them but eventually get forgiven once the betraying did not lead to anything bad happening to the group. They will find the third kind of Ilkuin that was never told to the public until they find it. Ilkuin Delta is the third, will they find it or will they not? It's as simple as figuring it out. I hope you like my story, which will now start.

But first, before we talk about any of what Wizard Pig and Dino Pig will do, we first have to learn about the disease. The disease, also known as Ilkuin, is a virus that lives inside the host and slowly eats some of their digested food, and in return, it gives the host sentience and extreme intelligence. We still do

not know why this happens but it seems very weird. After years, and accidentally eating something that ate Ilkuin Beta in their life, or ate something with it, they gain evil and we are trying to figure out if it is because of Ilkuin or Ilkuin Beta, but either way its safe to say to either never digest Ilkuin Beta or never accept the Ilkuin virus into your body.

Ilkuin is a living robot created by someone named Evil Pig. They do not know Evil Pig exists yet but one of their soon to be teammates, and traitors, is going to be Evil Pig's sibling and will help Evil Pig when forced to but help Wizard Pig when not forced to help Evil Pig. Many of these pigs have abilities to stop the Ilkuin and its evil properties. The first is Wizard Pig's purification potions. These kill the Ilkuin and Ilkuin Beta but the user needs to be evil to work first. Another way is Ilkuin Alpha. This is a prototype of Ilkuin Beta but does the opposite, makes evil things become good once ingested with Ilkuin in their bodies before the Alpha was eaten.

We found that good pigs that used to have both kinds of Ilkuin, being normal and Beta in their bodies, became evil and turned good, then once the Ilkuin is gone, they still have intelligence and sentience like before. We do not know if this is like a smear of Ilkuin left in them, or if it's a permanent feature from Ilkuin like an upgrade. We do know that it is made of metal and is sort of like a sentient bacteria in a body. It gives things sentience and high intelligence like mentioned a lot before, but we also found it is very durable and can survive everything except other forms of Ilkuin, being Ilkuin Beta and Ilkuin Alpha. We can now continue to the pigs since the Ilkuin has been explained now. Also, their group is named the Guinea Good Group.

Wizard Pig is a guinea pig who likes to use magic and alchemy. He used to be evil and was about to finish Dino Pig off, making all guinea pigs evil, when Dino Pig got a hold of one of his potions and manipulated it with ancient dino blood, it turned the potion sideways causing it to turn evil into good, instead of good to evil. Wizard Pig now works as the mage and alchemist of the Guinea Good Group, being able to shoot magic and make potions out of anything given.

Dino Pig is a guinea pig who really likes to study dinosaurs. He used to be the last good guinea pig the Evil Pig was looking for and so, Evil Pig sent Wizard Pig, who lost and became good, joining the Guinea Good Group. Evil Pig was mad when he found this out and now sends many kinds of guinea pigs trying to overwhelm the group. Dino Pig works as the fossil guy and a melee stabber for the group, studying bones for fun and using them for offense and defense.

Evil Pig is the root of all the evil coming around. He created the Ilkuin Beta but good Wizard Pig created the Ilkuin Alpha to fight back. Dino Pig was the last pig so when Evil Pig found out, he sent Wizard Pig to recruit or kill Dino Pig. Wizard Pig lost and turned good, causing Evil Pig to have a meltdown and start sending lots of pigs to defeat the two of them. Evil Pig works as the main enemy of the Guinea Good Group, and tries to end the group.

Now, we have to talk about the creations of why the Ilkuin even exist in the first place. It is not like I would just let you leave without knowing how they were created. You see, 387 years ago in 2019, there were humans creating something called COVID-19 in a place called China, which is now about where the Ujke and Aisw regions are. These were viruses that in the next 6 years of life, spread and destroyed billions of living things around the planet. Humans were spreading too much and advancing too much aswell, this seemed to slow them down as all of them started staying in their homes and not coming outside.

After a while, it eventually went away completely, ending the COVID. This Ilkuin was made to replicate COVID, but bring good instead of bad. It is just the wrong hands that manipulated it to turn things evil with a subtype of Ilkuin, Ilkuin Beta. Evil Pig, who the Guinea Good Group do not know about

yet, made Beta to make things evil and under his control. This ended up working for many creatures around. Ilkuin Alpha was created by good Wizard Pig and spread a lot to start decreasing the effects of Beta and overthrow it. This seemed to have somewhat worked as less animals become evil, but not many turn good still. Apparently there is a myth there is a third Ilkuin not known yet, but this might prove otherwise because what is left, neutral? That does not make sense so most likely there is no third Ilkuin type.

Anyways, we need to go outside with the pigs. They deserve a nice break from a basement where they made potions. Wizard and Dino Pig are playing quietly so no rogue animals from far hear them outside and attack... But little do they know, something is watching them... and it is not happy with both Wizard and Dino Pig...

Wizard Pig and Dino Pig were being hunted while playing outside. They did not know yet, but someone was watching them. That someone being, evil Smart Pig, Smart Pig is currently trying to figure out the best strategy to catch or kill both of the good pigs. Smart Pig leaps out at the duo but misses, the battle is now on. But first before we explain the battle, we have to explain how evil guinea pigs work. Evil guinea pigs are stronger than good guinea pigs in almost all features. This means on average, you need 3 good pigs to defeat 1 evil pig. Of course, Dino Pig and Wizard Pig do not have that many pigs on their side, but they do good at their job. Dino Pig distracts Smart Pig by running behind her constantly and stabbing her with his dino bones. Meanwhile Wizard Pig is using the distraction to keep throwing purification potions at Smart Pig which slowly start to work and after a while, they finally finish off Smart Pig and she gets turned good by Dino Pig and Wizard Pig. But Evil Pig back at his base is superbly infuriated his attempt did not work and tries to manipulate Smart Pig back, but Smart Pig escapes the manipulation and becomes good, getting another useful member for the GGG.

Smart Pig gets ready, she knows there is another evil pig nearby. Even though she just became good, she was paired to come with another evil pig, Necromancer Pig. Necromancer Pig is basically a psychopath, Smart Pig is not. She knows that Necromancer Pig can be dangerous when serious, but usually Necromancer Pig does not act serious unless close to ending the cause of evil. Necromancer Pig finally takes her chance and leaps out of the bush, scaring the 3 but they immediately start brawling. But this is not some normal evil pig, this is one of the strongest. They can try to fight, but eventually they will lose the battle. Dino Pig tries his slashing, Wizard Pig tries his potions, and Smart Pig tries to use her pencils, but nothing is working. All hope is lost... there is no way to win now... Until good DJ Pig bursts in through the fence and his speakers are playing the most loud music possible. Necromancer Pig's ears are hurting so Wizard Pig uses the distraction to throw purification potions at Necromancer Pig until Necromancer Pig becomes good. Now they have 2 more teammates to add onto the group, being DJ Pig and Necromancer Pig. They will be useful teammates far at the end of the story.

Evil Pig is losing it now with one of his strongest pigs gone. Meanwhile back at base, Goof Pig shakes DJ Pig's paw and the two of them laugh. Necromancer Pig shows off her abilities and DJ Pig... he is staring since he thinks that what she can do is very cool. The GGG is now a group of 5 pigs, they might be able to deal with the cause of evil now but they don't trust themselves so they stick to dealing with lower priorities, like purifying pigs. Wizard Pig goes around on the street being run at by evil pigs and keeps spreading purification mist with misters and now, they just got some (weak strengthened but a lot of) helpers to join them. These pigs are just generic pigs though, nothing special about them other than their unique patterns.

One of the new pigs is unique, she is Rain Pig. Rain Pig likes rain and she enjoys running in puddles, being happy with rain happening. She actually likes all weather, but likes rain the best. She can manipulate the weather to be rainy, sunny, foggy, etc... Rain Frog is a valuable friend as she can create fog out of water vapor to confuse enemies. This will help in the future at least once. She, though, can

create more than just weather. She can also make fluids and gases out of thin air using her weather powers. Do not ask me how she does this, I have no clue either so we will continue. Necromancer Pig also creates a pig by accident too.

But suddenly, Dino Pig feels something brush against him. None of the other pigs are near him. That means there is an invisible pig, and it is NOT a good one. Just then, Wizard Pig feels air showing that something tried to slash him and Wizard Pig starts throwing potions around everywhere. The others think the two are going crazy until they feel it too, something hit or brush against their sides. Rain Pig immediately sets up a dark fog, which Smart Pig helps Rain Pig make with a special chemical. Smart Pig knows this invisible force is either Space Pig or Ghost Pig. She also knows that neither of these two pigs are safe to be around, as they are strong yet evil. She adds some more of the chemical into Rain Pig's ability then Rain Pig suddenly sucks it all back, revealing Ghost Pig. The fight of Ghost Pig is now on.

While Ghost Pig is distracted with Smart Pig, Rain Pig makes the weather radioactive, ensuring that the chemical from earlier is only on the good guinea pigs so no one gets hurt, but Necromancer Pig also starts throwing pig minions into the radioactive weather to make sure they get mutated and so he can spawn more strong and defensive pig types. But in the midst of this chaos... something new gets lured by the radiation. Radiation Pig watches from over the fence, he watches the battle keep going. Radiation Pig watches with sadness, he feels like he will never get to the power of the good pigs. While Radiation Pig watches the battle, he remembers his past. He used to be evil, in the control of Evil Pig. He tried to escape but Evil Pig found him. Soon because of this, Evil Pig started abusing, experimenting, and straight up yelling at Radiation Pig. Radiation Pig knows he can be dangerous to the group. He was thrown in a bin of radiation meant to kill the godness of animals. He escaped, became good, and hid.

Back at the battle though, Rain Pig and Necromancer Pig attack, combining their powers to create dangerous blows to Ghost Pig. Ghost Pig tries to become invisible, the chemicals on her stops this and she can only go 12% transparent at max. She mentally curses and keeps the battle going. Wizard Pig combines his potions with Dino Pig's bones to create dangerous chemical bones. They are sharp, and these bones are COVERED in purification chemicals. After so long, the others manage to bring Ghost Pig into the good side and she gets purified.

After this happens, Radioactive cowardly comes into the yard and hides in a shadow. Smart Pig hears this and looks into the shadows of the house and sees nothing. Probably hallucinations from Ghost Pig's powers still stuck in her mind, was what she decided to be the answer. Dino Pig accidentally tosses a bone into the shadows and goes to get it but sees Radiation Pig and runs off yelling. The other pigs run into the shadows and see Radiation Pig and are about to attack but they decide not to, seeing how scared Radiation Pig looks to them finding him, and Wizard Pig gives a purification potion to Radiation Pig, then Radiation Pig takes the potion and swallows it, thinking it's just shiny water. The others notice he is a good pig...

Desiree's trip to Florida

Part 1

By Rokšana Bentlage

Thyme

Sunday, November 23rd

"Hello there. You won the contest. Your prize is a free trip to Disney World," said a caller.

"Is this a scam?" Desiree asked.

"This is actually not a scam. You actually get to go to Disney World!" said the caller.

"Who are you?" Desiree asked, making sure that the caller was not a scammer.

"The host of the contest," the caller replied.

"EEEEEEEE!!!!!! I can't wait!!!!!! When do I get to go?" Desiree asked, excited that she actually won the painting contest.

"You get to go there for Thanksgiving," answered the host.

"How long will I stay for?" Desiree asked.

"The entire Thanksgiving break," the host responded.

"So do I leave for Disney World on Wednesday or Thursday?" Desiree questioned.

"You leave on Wednesday," The host answered.

"How will I get to Orlando?" Desiree questioned.

"You will fly there from Boston," he replied.

"Can you send me the tickets?" Desiree requested.

"Sure," said the host as he sent the tickets to Desiree on his computer.

A few seconds later, Desiree got the tickets. She began to look at them

"Okay. Wait a second. My team is watching The Giver on Wednesday, and I have to miss half of it," Desiree said as she was looking at the plane tickets.

"That's a bummer. Hopefully, you can watch the ending at home. I have to go. Bye," the host exclaimed.

Desiree decided to go downstairs and tell her family so she yelled, "GUYS I WON THE CONTEST AND THE PRIZE IS A FREE TRIP TO DISNEY WORLD!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Yay!!!!!" her little brother, Eli, cheered.

"We are so proud of you Desiree," said Mom.

"When are we leaving?" asked Dad.

"On Wednesday," Desiree answered. "Our flight leaves at 11:55am,"

"That means we have to pick you guys up early from school," Mom said.

"I have to miss like half of The Giver," Desiree said.

"We can always watch it at home," Dad said.

"I also have to miss the first class of my new UA," Desiree said.

"What is your new UA?" Mom asked.

"I don't know. Ms. Cabinet didn't give us our Trimester 2 schedules," Desiree said.

"Oh," Mom said.

"I have to miss the class Thanksgiving celebration," Eli said. "At least we get to go to Disney World."

"It'll be fun," Desiree exclaimed in excitement.

Desiree's trip to Florida

Part 2

by Rokšana Bentlage

Thyme

Monday, November 24th

When Desiree got back to school, she went to the library and told all her friends what happened.

"I won the painting contest!" Desiree exclaimed.

"Cool," said her best friend, Faye.

"What's the prize?" asked her friend, Ingrid.

"A trip to Disney World!" Desiree answered.

"I've always wanted to go there!" exclaimed her friend, Dalia.

"What park are you going to?" asked her friend, Hallie.

"All of them," Desiree answered.

"Lucky!" said her friend, Kendall.

"I'm leaving on Wednesday and I have to miss half of The Giver."

"Oh."

"That's sad," said Hallie.

They all went to their homerooms. Desiree's homeroom teacher, Ms. Cabinet, handed them their schedules. The students looked at their schedules to see what their new UAs were. Faye and Desiree were in the same homeroom so they walked over to each other and said their UAs. "I have Art," Desiree said.

"I have Art too," Faye said.

"Which block?"

"Even day mornings."

"I have it odd day afternoons. Dang it."

The other students in their homeroom were going to each other and asking each other what they had. When it was time to go to the first block, they went to their first blocks. It was green. Desiree had Science.

"Bye," Desiree said.

"Bye," Faye said. Faye had ELA so she sat in her seat. Desiree made her way to Science.

"Hi Desiree," said her Science teacher, Mr. Baker.

"Hi Mr. Baker," Desiree said. Desiree walked over to her seat and sat. In front of her sat Ingrid. "Hey Ingrid," Desiree said. "Do you know your UAs for next trimester?"

"Yes," Ingrid said. "I have EF."

"I have Art. I have EF right now. At first, I hated it but the stuff actually helps me."

"Okay."

"Getcha' notebooks," Mr. Baker said.

The students grabbed their notebooks from their bin and went back to their seats.

"Turn to page 20."

The students turned to page 20 in their notebooks. They watched videos, took notes, and drew.

A couple minutes later, class ended. It was time for Red. Desiree had ELA.

She made her way to ELA. Next to her sat Dalia.

"Do you know what your UAs are?" Desiree asked.

"No," Dalia answered.

"I have Art."

In class, the students were working on their Giver endings.

Desiree's trip to Florida

Part 3

by Rokšana Bentlage

Thyme

A couple minutes later, class ended. It was time for the last class of some peoples' Trimester 1 UAs. Desiree had Spanish. The students got new papers and learned about clothes. They got to watch Billy La Bufanda. A couple minutes later, class ended.

It was time for Team Time. During this time, she did IXL, wrote stories, and read. A couple minutes later, it was time for recess. She didn't want to go outside so she stayed inside. All of her friends stayed inside. They talked.

"Do you guys know your Trimester 2 UAs?" Desiree asked.

"No," Dalia said.

"No," Hallie said.

"No," Kendall said.

"Oh," Desiree said.

They kept talking for the rest of the period. When the period was over, they grabbed their lunches and went to lunch. They sat at a table and started eating.

"What are you guys doing over break?" Dalia asked. "I'm going to New York."

"I don't know," Kendall answered.

"I'm staying here," Faye said.

"I'm going to Ohio," Hallie said.

"Down in Ohio, swag like Ohio," the friends cheered.

"I'm pretty sure I'm staying here," Ingrid said. "That's what I usually do."

"Well you obviously know what I'm doing," Desiree said. "I can't wait to go to Florida."

For the rest of lunch, they continued talking and eating.

Next, it was Yellow. The friends grabbed their lunches and went upstairs. Desiree had Ancient Cultures. They were learning about Mesopotamia. A couple minutes later, it was time

for UA 2. Desiree had Executive Functioning (EF). "Get your binders," said Mrs. Mean, Desiree's EF teacher.

The students took out their binders. They took the stuff out of them since it was their last class and the binders were supposed to stay in the classroom.

After that, it was time for Blue. Desiree had Math. "Focus, people," said Ms. Flannerbottom, Desiree's math teacher. "I only have 2 days to teach you since you are watching The Giver on Wednesday."

The students learned about proportional relationships.

Desiree's trip to Florida

Part 4

by Rokšana Bentlage
Thyme

When the day had ended, Desiree realized that she had no homework. She decided to pack for her trip. She picked a suitcase and put 3 sets of clothes in the suitcase. A couple hours later, the family ate dinner.

"Two days till Disney World!!!" Desiree shouted.

"How does it feel to be the winner?" Mom asked.

"Good."

"Yay!!!!!" Eli shouted.

"Okay guys," Dad said. "Calm down. Stop thinking about our trip to Florida. That's two days away."

"I can't wait though," Desiree said.

"How about we talk about our days? Desiree, how was your day?"

"It was good. When I got to school, I went to the library and talked to my friends."

"What did you talk about?" Mom asked.

"My win."

"Stop talking about your win," Dad said.

"Okay, geez!!!! Then the bell rang and we went to our homerooms. Ms. Carosella gave us our schedules!!!!!"

"What did you get?" Mom asked.

"I got Art. I can't wait!!!! Since Faye is in my homeroom, I asked her what UA she got and she got Art as well but she has it in a different block."

"Oh."

"And we kept talking until it was time for the Green block. So I had Skience and since Ingrid is in my Skience class, we talked and she has EF."

"Oh." Dad said.

"We are almost done with our Sound Unit. Next it was Red. I had ELA. Since Grace is in my ELA class, we talked and she didn't know her UAs yet."

"Oh,"

"Then I had Spanish. We watched Billy La Bufanda."

"I love Billy La Bufanda," Eli said.

"I had Team Time afterwards. I did all my homework."

"That's good," Mom said.

"When I finished, I did all of the IXL that I had to do, wrote stories and read."

"Good."

"Then it was time for Recess. I didn't want to go out because of how cold it was so I stayed inside and talked to my friends."

"What did you talk about?"

"What we had for Trimester 2."

"What do your friends have?"

"They don't know. We kept talking for the rest of the period. When the bell rang, we grabbed our lunches, went downstairs and ate. We talked again."

"What did you talk about?"

"We talked about what we were doing over break."

"What are your friends doing?"

"Dalia is going to New York. Kendall doesn't know what she's doing. Faye is staying here. Hallie is going to Ohio."

"Down in Ohio, swag like Ohio!" the siblings said.

"And Ingrid is pretty sure she is staying here. We continued talking and eating. After that, we had Yellow. I had AC and we continued learning about Mesopotamia. And then some of us had our last class of our UAs. I had EF and we took our EF materials out of our binders and took them home."

"Can I see them?" Dad asked.

"Sure."

Desiree walked away. She came back with her EF materials. "Here."

"Where are you gonna put it?"

"On my bookshelf. Anyhow, we had Yellow and I had AC. We learned about Mesopotamia."

"Wow."

"Then the bell rang."

2 Face

by: Micah Nottidge
Acadia

My legs were shaking as I got out of the car for my first day of eighth grade. I had just moved to hb, so I didn't know anybody.

"Have a great day at school David!" It was just me and my mom, and we had to go from place to place because of my mom's new job.

"Thanks mom!" I took a deep breath and walked inside. The school looked amazing, the walls were shining like a bright mirror, there was no trash on the ground, and the place was in great shape.

"Floor 2, room 200," I muttered to myself as I walked through the halls. The loud voices of students were all around me as I walked up the stairs and into my first class. My teacher, Mrs. Harley, was nice and understanding. I sat in the back of the room, trying not to get noticed as Mrs. Harley introduced herself to the class. School was pretty normal until lunch time. I sat alone in the corner of the lunch room, when this group of kids walked up to me and sat down at my table.

"He's the new kid," said the biggest kid. He had bushy black hair, and his skin looked like caramel.

"He looks kind of scrawny," said another. He was kind of short, but he made it up with his confidence. I could tell if anyone made fun of him because he was short, they would not get a second chance.

"I'm not scrawny!" They stopped talking and looked at me.

"Leave him alone guys!" The girl talking was shorter than me, but pretty tall. She had long, blonde hair and white skin.

"Who are you guys?"

"I'm Emma. The short guy is Jake, and the taller one is Josh. " I had a million questions on my mind, but before I said anything, the bell rang.

"We'll talk later," said Emma. "We're friends now, so call us if you need us."

"Alright, see you!" It was the first day of school, and I was already making new friends! This day was going great.

I walked into my second class, but I was confused. Why were most of the kids acting weird? As time went by, most of the kids seemed quiet and distant. In the fourth period, I was called to the principal's office. I could feel everyone staring at me as I put my head down and walked out of the room. My forehead was filled with sweat as I walked down the halls. When I finally got down to the principal's office, I just stared at the door for a while, not wanting to see what was in there. I finally took a deep breath and stepped inside.

"Good evening David Dillard," said the principal. He was bald, fat, and wore a sweatshirt and jeans. He looked lazy and tired, slumping into his blue chair.

"How has your first day of school been so far?"

"It's been good," I said, choosing my words carefully. "The school looks great."

"Wonderful! Now I've called you to talk about that group you sat with at lunch."

"You mean Emma, Jake, and Josh?" I was surprised that they knew who I was sitting with. I didn't see the principal in the lunchroom. Then how could he have known?

"Yes, them. I don't want you hanging out with them."

"Why?"

"Because they are bad influences," he grimaced. "If you keep hanging out with them, you'll end up just like them."

My head spun. Were they really so bad, that even the principal didn't want me hanging out with the three? "What? I don't understand. What do they do?"

"Well, this is what that group does with all of the new kids. They act like a nice group of friends to lure you in, and then they get you to tell them your deepest, darkest, secret."

"What happens when you tell them your darkest secret?"

"I don't know. I haven't got enough proof to do anything. But I warn you, stay away from those kids!" After that, he let me go. But I couldn't stop thinking about what the principal said. I wanted to find the guys and confront them about it. Right on cue, I saw them, Emma, Jake, and Josh, sneaking outside. School wasn't over yet, but I decided to follow them. They left in an old door in the corner of the hallway, which probably couldn't close because of rust. I peeked my head out just enough to see what was going on outside. I could see the three crowding around one smaller person.

"So, do you have it?" Josh smirked. The smaller kid cowers and pulls something out of his bag.

"Here it is," the smaller boy said. "It took me a while to get it."

"Now give up all of your cash," Emma growled. "I know you have it."

"What? But I thought we were friends."

Suddenly, an idea jolted into my brain. I got out my phone and started recording. I may not be brave enough to stop them, but the principal most definitely is. As soon as they were done blackmailing the kid for money, they quickly came back inside. I hid behind a trash bin and kept recording.

I could hear their smug voices counting the money.

"50 dollars!"

"That's the best we've made in a while!"

"Once we haggle that other idiot's money, we'll be rich!"

I was getting more angry by the second. They cheat people for money! I really thought that they were my friends! I had to get this video to the principal. As I was getting up to leave, my side bumped into the trash and it fell over, spilling everywhere. Time seemed to stop as the three turned around to look at me, their faces turning from fear, to surprise, to anger.

"I see his phone! He was recording us!" Emma roared. Josh and Jake started to sprint toward me, their faces unreadable as they got closer. All of my instincts told me to run, and I did, sprinting faster than I ever had before. I knew that if they got to me, it was over, so I ran in different directions to ensure that they couldn't grab me. I got to the principal's office and just as I was reaching for the door, they grabbed me. I tried to push them off of me, but they dragged my legs back away from the door.

"We got you now," Josh smirked. "You thought you could get away from us?"

I stopped struggling. I couldn't get away. Just as I lost all hope, the principal came out of his office.

"Get off of him right now!" You could hear him shout from the other end of the school, and you know he meant it.

"They blackmailed a student for money! I have the recording!" I gave my phone to him, and he watched all of it. He gave me an approving smile. "Good job David. Now I have everything I need to expel these students!"

I could see the color drain out of Josh and Jake's faces. I had enough energy to stand up and look both of them in the eye. "I may not be strong enough to stop you myself," I pulled my phone out of my pocket. "But with this, you won't ever blackmail a student again!"

Supernova

Simone Nusinow - Mint

"Nova, we only want what's best for you." My Ba pleads, looking me in the eye. His violet eyes look like a thousand galaxies, and I'm grateful to have the same trait.

Bäe adjusts the pale blue bun on his head. "You're fourteen now. You should be able to do a full shift." He lectures. I knew he would say something like this. He's always trying to make sure I do everything right, and on time.

"Maybe I just can't do one. Besides, if I jump off a cliff and expect to automatically shift, I'm just gonna fall and die." I mutter, shifting uncomfortably on the indigo cushion. "Besides, I just turned fourteen a week ago. Why be so insistent?" I ask.

Ba's face darkens. "Supernova, you are a Luor by heart and blood. The only thing keeping you from fully shifting into a bat is yourself." I cringe at the nickname as Ba gives his "inspiring" speech. He's been calling me Supernova pretty much since I came out as non binary to my dads and chose the name Nova. "And besides, shouldn't a supernova belong in the sky?" He asks, and I look away.

Bäe brushes off his simple robes and heads toward the sliding door to their room. "Kai, we need to talk about this. *In private.*" He says a little too loudly. Ba gives me a guilty look and then follows him back through the door.

After five seconds of aggravating silence, I run into my room and start to cry. My face is buried in the pillows on my daybed, and the usually open window is closed so no one will hear my sobbing. I'm basically living in a furnished cave. "Why am I even here? Bäe isn't proud of me, Ba just feels sorry for me, and the one thing that we all can do I can't." I ask myself. "Besides, if I ever did try to be Mx. Daring and jump off a cliff or something, I would die, knowing I couldn't do it." I tell myself, and continue ranting about my impending doom.

I spent another five minutes foretelling my death like a prophet before I heard a creak from the door. I whip around, only to find Ba and Bæ standing at the doorway. Ba sighs, and pushes up his glasses. "We've come to a decision." He says, his voice wobbling slightly.

Bæ gives his partner the side eye. "To help you face your fear, we're gonna go bungee jumping." He declares. Something's up, it's obvious. I'm a detective solving a murder mystery, but instead of a murder it's some awkward dads.

My eyebrows form a caterpillar of confusion. "Wait.. I don't have a fear of heights. Also, how does that count as a decision for the argument? It's clear that you guys are up to something." Once I say that, the two start doing their frantic movements. Bæ adjusts his hair, and Ba shoves his hands in his pockets.

"Well uh... It's a late birthday present. Some family bonding time right?" Ba stammers, and looks to Bæ.

"Uh... Yeah! Some fun right? It's next week, so don't get too excited." He says quickly, and walks out of the room with Ba immediately. I don't know what horrible punishment they have planned, but I only have a week to prepare for it.

Next week comes all too soon, and before I know it, I'm strapped into a harness with my toes on the edge of a cliff. The two are whispering almost constantly, like high school girls with a new secret. I slouch backwards. "Why do I have to go first? I'm the most likely to die, so shouldn't one of you test it first?" I groan.

Ba smiles his awkward lying smile. "Guest of honor, right? You should go first." He says.

"Uh.. I'm going to go to the bathroom." Bæ stammers, and shifts into his bat form to fly down the rocky slope.

My eyebrow lifts. "At the bottom of the cliff?" I ask, suspicious.

"Figured I'd go and stretch my wings." He says, and adjusts his hair. "Besides, I'll get a great view of your jump!" And he dove off the cliff before I could say anything.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Ba asks, and nudges me a little closer to the edge.

"I am just questioning its safety. Y'know?" I reply, and tighten the straps on my harness.

"You'll be fine." He says, and looks down the cliff.

I take a deep breath, and jump off the cliff. “AAHH!! I scream, as I whiz through the air like a bullet on the battlefield. But when I expect a tight jerk from the cord tying me to the cliff, all I see is the rope right beside me. Bæe looks up at me and gives me a thumbs up. They were planning this all along! When Ba said I’d be fine, he never said the bungee cord was safe! They just want me to shift, and fast so I don’t plummet to my doom.

“Just let go! Your anxiety is the only thing stopping you!” Ba yells.

My eyes widen. He’s right. It is the only thing. “I just need to let go.” I whisper to myself, and give in to the bat in my soul. Whether I die here or not, I just need to try. My wing membranes grow and stretch, my fingers elongate, and fur starts to pop up in tufts. Almost instinctively, I swoop toward the ground and put on my grumpiest face despite how happy I am right now. “You owe me an actual bungee trip.” I say.

Preparing for the Olympics

Alex Wu
Birch

It all comes down to this: I ski down the hill I have to make a flashy flip : I jump, I land it! I had just landed the Lincoln flip. The judges put up a 9, 10, and a 10! A score of 29 and that's more than any other competitor which means I won! Reporters all over the world are filming. I had just won the State Championship! Even though I won the State Champions no one knows who I am.

That's right- I had just won the State Championship, but no one knows who I am because I wear a mask and call myself the Mask. There is one person who knows who I am, and that's my wife, Lina. I have three kids, all of them ignore me. They say that I'm a disappointment because I say that my job is an assistant janitor, but they are all fans of the Mask, AKA me in my mask. I'm now one step closer because now that I won the State Championship I'm in the Olympics. The only reason why I don't tell my kids (Jimmy, Henry, and Jason) that I'm the mask is because I just really want to surprise them.

Now that I'm back to reality, reporters swarm me asking the same questions over and over, "May you please reveal you identity, Mask, I'm sure many people would want to know" as I give them the regular response, "Not until I win the Olympics," I replied to the dark haired, poncho wearing reporter that's in front of me. Then another question entered my mind, "Do you have kids or do you have a nephew of any sort?" I searched for the reporter that asked that question but I didn't find the reporter "No," I said blindly. I pushed through the crowd, took off my skis, and entered my white Toyota truck and drove away.

As I drive I think of all the competitions I won that got me here. I approximately have 72 trophies (12 years of skiing) and I have won 3 tournaments. Once I'm sure I'm not being stocked by a fan I make a quick turn into the woods and after about 5 minutes I enter my neighborhood (a secret shortcut that only I know.)

Once I'm at my small blue house my wife, Linda, runs toward me excitedly, "You just got a call from the Olympics!" she squeals (I said that Linda was my manager and everyone asks if she was my wife of course I lied and said no.) "They said that the Olympics start tomorrow and you're on the team, James!" (Yes my name is James).

As I pack up, ready to leave for the Olympics I call down Jimmy, Henry, and Jason. I scream, "Bye kids, I'm going to a new school so I can clean it."

I hear snorts, "Yeah dad you can go."

"Kids, can you please come down here? I feel like it's about time to tell you my real job."

"We know," Henry says "You're a janitor"

"Just please come down here," I said.

"Ugh," groans Jason, "Fine." They walk down sloping their shoulders to show me they don't care.

"I'm the Mask" I say.

"Yeah right," replies Jimmy.

"No I am," I say. I take my mask and show them.

"Nice fake, Dad," says Henry.

I take all the Mask uses. They finally realize that I am really the Mask. Suddenly they start asking for autographs. I laugh. "I'm your father, you don't need autographs." After I say that they start asking as fast as a minigun.

"Are you really my dad?"

"Are you going to the Olympics?"

I stop them before they ask any more questions. I have to go now. They gaze in awe, "Are you coming back?" Jason asks.

"Yes soon," I reply, " Now I really need to go to the airport for the Olympics, bye."

"BYE," reply all three of my sons.

I take an uber and take off to the airport. Once I'm there I check my phone, "Your plane is in section 8 and leaves at 12:30 PM" I check the time it's 9:30 AM. I sigh I'm early and my plane doesn't leave for another 3 hours. As I stop and take a breath I check out the airport. I notice that there are multiple shops though one catches my eye. I walk to it and notice that it said's, "Olive Garden." It wasn't even a shop, it was a restaurant. Multiple people were inside eating, the walls were bright green, the place was surrounded by black tuxes (waiters I presume) and outside was bright decorated with pink and purple flowers which had attracted me. I feel like I should get to section 8 early so I can sit down before the crowd gets there. I walked over to section 8 which was a 2 minute walk. I see that no one was there. I sit down with my suitcase, full of clothes, 3 sets of ski's, and a set of poles and close my eyes. I wake up with the sound of a speaker in my head and the announcer notifies me that the flight to Colorado leaves in 5 minutes. I check my phone, "Plane flight to Colorado" I get up and notice that multiple people are around me. I think, "I made the right decision coming here early."

Once I got on the plane the flight attendant said, "In case of an emergency" I don't listen to the rest, I close my eyes and sleep again.

The flight attendant states, "The trip to Colorado will end in 5 minutes."

Five minutes passed and I'm in the Colorado airport. I called an Uber to bring me to the rendezvous point which is Riverbend Pond which is a beautiful pond full of fishes and lilies. Once I meet the full Olympian team they introduce their names which are Sam, CC, Damian, Simon, Alexander, Peter, Ira, Marty, Kimiya, Coby, and Loren. I introduced myself and once we were all friendly they took me to my room and after I settled we started training for the Winter Olympics.

Liam Ohayon

Mint

JOURNEY TO THE MOON

My name is Fevan Burphy, I'm always super energetic and happy, but I have a weird name. I've always been bullied for my name, but I never let that stop me from being my best self. I got good grades throughout middle school and high school. After high school, I applied to every space school in the country because my dream has always been to be an astronaut. So when I got accepted to a space school in Boston, I had to take up the opportunity. That was three years ago. Now, my friends and I are about to get on a spaceship to be the first group of people to go to the moon since Neil Armstrong. We get in the spaceship and hear the countdown. *Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one, BLASTOFF!* And we're off! We are flying so fast that we broke the sound barrier! On our way up we all introduce ourselves to each other.

"Why don't we say our names and what our favorite sport is? I'll start off, I'm Fevan and my favorite sport is basketball." I said.

"I'm Barley, and my favorite sport is soccer," said Barley.

"I'm Zucas, and my favorite sport is hockey," said Zucas.

"I'm Ferman, and my favorite sport is karate," said Ferman.

"I'm Diam, and my favorite sport is football," said Diam.

"We all have different favorite sports," I say, jokingly. "Maybe we can teach each other when we land on the moon."

Things are pretty awkward considering this is our first time meeting each other.

"Why don't we play a game? Let's each say our favorite food for each letter of the alphabet. I'll go first, I like apples," I say.

"I like apricots," says Ferman.

"I like apple pie," says Zucas.

"I like apples," says Barley.

"I like a piece of fried chicken" Jokes Diam, not knowing what's about to happen.

We all give a light chuckle. Next, something happens that I will never forget for my entire life. We hear a loud sound. *BEEPI BEEPI BEEPI SYSTEM FAILING, SYSTEM FAILING.* The experts down on earth taught us what to do if something like this ever happened. We would have to put on our spacesuits and go to the control panel on the outside of the spaceship. Then we turn it off for a brief second and then turn it back on again.

"I'll put on my spacesuit and go out to turn off the ship," I say.

Everyone agrees and I put on my spacesuit and open the door.

I go out and go to the control panels and switch it off, then I switch it back on a few seconds later.

"Did the warning stop?" I yell out to my crewmates. They are too stunned to even answer me. "Come on! Is it working?" I yell out.

"N-n-n-no i-i-it's n-n-not" Barley says, as if he saw a ghost. I press a couple of buttons and turn it off and back on again and yell out "What about now?!"

"It's working," says Zucas.

"Phew," I say, coming back into the spaceship. I close the door and take off my spacesuit. "Shall we continue our game?" I ask. I seem to be the only one who isn't completely traumatized by this experience. "What's wrong with you guys? Didn't you guys get tested on this to see how you would react?"

"We did, but we were just scared at the moment, how are you so calm when something as life threatening as what just happened occurs?" They responded.

"I don't know, I guess I just keep a state of mind and don't change it no matter what, you should try it sometime. Astronauts aren't supposed to be scared in the face of danger. Me and Zucas showed some bravery, the rest of you guys have to up your game."

"10 HOURS FROM DESTINATION," The computer says.

"Only ten hours left and then we will finally get to the moon!" Diam says, excitedly.

"What do you guys want to do now?" I ask.

"Honestly I think I'm just going to hit the hay, I'm as tired as a guy who's been trying to find a needle in a haystack for hours." Zucas says looking tired.

"That's a good idea, we are all tired after a long day, hey by the time we wake up we will already be at the moon!" Everyone replies.

Next we all go to bed and by the time we wake up we have already landed at the moon, everyone else is already awake by the time I wake up. We land and I go outside and test the gravity.

"Wow it really is bouncy here with no gravity, I'm jumping higher than a little kid on Christmas morning! I can jump to the moon! Oh wait, I'm already on the moon." I exclaim.

We go to set up camp, we put up some tents and put out some tables for our research computers. I see something in the corner of my eye.

"Ferman, come look at this," I say.

"It looks like an ancient weapon, it's a sword with a chain on the back, im guessing whoever lived on this planet used this for long distance stabbing, I didn't know they had fights here though, I thought the whole point of our trip was to see if humans can live here, little did we know someone did our job for us." Ferman says.

"I mean, no one said it was a human." I say.

"Are you saying it might be an alien?" Ferman says.

"You never know what can be found on an **ALIEN** planet like this one."

Corvid and Novum

By Alexa Shaw

Mint

Corvid ducked out of the remains of a small, tired, building, finding that anything useful had been taken. Governments all over the world collapsed about 2 weeks ago and all order was lost. Corvid's parents had abandoned him, but he wasn't really surprised. His parents took good care of him, but they never really cared about what he did, and it made sense that they would leave him when the world around them descended into chaos. Corvid planned to head to a park in his childhood town, since he and his friend from back then always planned to meet at the park if something major happened, because even years ago as children, they could see that the world was on the brink of a storm of anger and confusion. He had been heading toward the park, but he was still a few weeks out, and had been stopping every so often to see if homes left abandoned contained anything worth taking.

The last few houses he had stopped by were abandoned, but as Corvid approached the next one along the small winding road, it didn't show the same signs of destruction that the other empty houses had shown. He checked the door to find it unlocked, and carefully headed inside. The house was quiet, maybe too quiet. He carefully made his way to the kitchen, on the way through the entrance way, he found a wallet left abandoned as the money and identification inside had become obsolete in this new way of life.

The door that led to the kitchen was open, and Corvid froze as he heard a sound from inside, but he carefully went forward, as the chance of finding bottled water or food was exciting, since he had been living off snacks and soda he had stolen from a vending machine.

Corvid stepped through the door and found a small kid about his age, with silky looking long blonde hair wearing an oversized sweatshirt with a name, Jeff, and a logo embroidered on it. The kid was squatted on the floor, carefully sorting through a pile of cans they had pulled from the cabinet. They seemed harmless enough, so Corvid decided to speak up, "Hey...Jeff? That's the name on your sweatshirt at least. Mind if I get a few of those cans?"

The kid tensed at the sound of Corvid's voice, but straightened up and replied, "Sure! Call me Novem, this wasn't my hoodie until a few days ago, so no, I'm not Jeff. Are you a wanderer too?"

"Awesome, Thanks." Corvid bent down to look through the cans next to the kid, then responded to the question, "Sort of. I'm assuming you're one. I'm Corvid."

Novem looked at Corvid with an interested expression on his face but bent back down to the cans and inquired, "What does *sort of* mean? You're either one or you're not."

Corvid didn't look up, and continued sorting cans. After a few minutes, he responded, "I wander, but I have a specific place I want to go."

"Can I join you? I don't really have anywhere to go, and it's probably safer together!" Novem exclaimed, seeming excited to travel with someone else.

Corvid nodded slowly, then headed back to sorting through the cans of food, placing a few cans of vegetables in his bag, then standing up to look through the kitchen. He found some packaged food and slipped them into his bag. He continued to search until he found something, a can opener, then headed back over to the cans.

A sweet smell hit Novem's nose, and he looked over as the boy in plain black clothes, Corvid, set an open can of fruit cocktail on the ground and put something in the side pocket of his backpack, which was the color of a cloud at midnight, a dark blue gray.

Corvid sipped from the can, drinking the sweet syrup surrounding the chunks of fruit, savoring it. Novem took out a small knife and cracked open their own can, this one filled with pineapple. "You can use a knife to open cans?" Corvid asked, surprised. Novem nodded, and Corvid ate a cherry from his fruit cocktail, then pulled the can opener out of his bag and returned it to the counter where he had found it, replacing it with a swiss army knife that he found in a drawer.

After the teens had taken everything they wanted from the house, mostly food but also some flashlights and batteries, they headed back down the road, Novem following Corvid as he walked down the road, seeming sure of where he was going. Novem trusted Corvid for some strange reason, even though they had only known each other for a few hours, though they were still careful to keep out of arms reach of the boy, in case he tried something.

After a while of walking down the street, not seeing anything for a while, Corvid decided to say something, "I'm not gonna bite, you know right?" Novem sped up a few steps to be next to him, though they still kept some space between them and Corvid. Corvid wasn't surprised, the smaller kid looked like they'd been bullied, and Corvid looked like someone who'd bully a smaller kid, but in school, he really just ignored everyone, getting into a few fights though when he deemed them necessary, which was rare.

The pair kept walking all day, the road twisting like a stream running through hills, making minimal conversation as they followed Corvid's set route, though he hadn't told Novem where he was headed. They continued like this all day, until night fell.

Paranoia

By Fiona Jackson
Denali

The medal wasn't something that came for free.

In fact, so few people had ever been bestowed with the honor of wearing it that most members of the Governor's Bureau spent their time gazing dreamily at it from afar, eyes glued to the spotless glass case.

To Cassia Petrova, the medal wasn't just something to fantasize about. She didn't have a choice as to whether or not it was plausible to aim for such an honor. It was just a given that someday her photograph would hang on the wall, next to her mother's, her father's, and her grandmother's, and her great-grandmother's. "You come from a long line of Special Agents," she remembered her mother telling her the day she was sworn in as a Governor's Agent. "I know you'll make me proud."

As Cassia slipped the medal around her neck, feeling the satiny smoothness of it against her skin, she waved to her parents, who were standing in the audience, beaming. For a Petrova, there was no higher honor than to be awarded the medal, something Cassia had been dreaming of her whole life, and now, at long last, it was hers.

But she had never imagined it happening like this.

Two weeks ago

Cassia should have known something was wrong. Maybe from the sluggish movement of the people on the streets, or the way they shuffled forward, hands shielding their eyes as they craned their necks toward the top of the Governor's palace. She couldn't imagine why people were looking up there; Governor Thorne kept to herself.

As Cassia elbowed her way through the crowd, muttering hurried "excuse mes", she came to a stop in a clearing in the city square. Now that there were no heads blocking her view, she could make out a bright blood-red cloth waving in the breeze.

Emergency.

Cassia turned around and fled, bumping into people as she sprinted for her apartment. She came to a halt in front of the building and, without hesitation, jumped on top of her motorcycle.

When she reached headquarters, she screeched to a stop. Her motorcycle lay, forgotten, on the manicured lawn as Cassia made a beeline for the revolving door.

The lobby was in chaos. Agents rushed around in circles and papers flew through the air. Cassia caught one in her hand and stared down at the typed words in disbelief: *Code Red Plan of Action.*

Cassia felt a hand on her arm. It was Sienna, her best friend.

With her serious dark brown eyes, thick glasses and stick-straight black hair, it was no wonder Sienna had been recruited as a Secretary to the Lieutenant. Her handwriting was ever-neat, her desk impeccably organized, papers stacked neatly inside her crisp folder labeled *PRIVATE*. Sometimes Cassia would lift the cover of the folder out of curiosity, but all she saw staring up at her was a photo of a little girl with a noticeable gap between her two front teeth.

Outside of her job, though, Sienna was caring, patient, and not ambitious...pretty much the opposite of Cassia.

Sienna chewed her lip and tugged a strand of hair from her ponytail. "Cassia, what's going on?"

Cassia waved her hands in the air. "I don't know!"

An agent with a no-nonsense pixie cut and sunglasses brushed against Cassia. Sienna caught her arm. "Excuse me," she said, her voice syrupy sweet. "Could you tell us what's going on?"

The agent stopped, baffled. "I thought everyone knew," she said, eyebrows shooting up. "Thorne's gone. Missing."

Cassia's knees buckled. The room felt hot. She suddenly felt the urge to remove her bright-red jacket. "What?"

The agent hurried away. "Wait! Come back!" Sienna called. She turned back to Cassia, face pale. "Wow. Her poor daughter."

Cassia frowned. "Daughter?" Thorne didn't have a daughter.

"I..." Sienna trailed off. "Never mind."

Cassia set her jaw. "Sienna...we need to get to the scene of the crime. Immediately."

As it turned out, getting access to the governor's tower wasn't so easy.

"We're agents of the governor," Cassia protested. "You have to let us in."

The agent, a big, burly guy with a curly mustache, blew out a breath. "Can't. I got orders. No one enters the tower 'til the investigation's done. No exceptions."

Sienna patted Cassia's shoulder, with something almost like pity. "Cassia," she said. "Leave it to me."

Cassia stepped back, confused. She was a higher ranking than Sienna. What leverage did she have with this guard that Cassia didn't?

Sienna turned her back to Cassia, pulling something out of her pocket and showing it to the guard. The guard's eyes widened, and he backed away, stammering something inaudible to Cassia's ears. Sienna smiled, the gap between her two front teeth showing, and gestured to Cassia.

Bewildered, Cassia followed Sienna into the building. Sienna strutted over to the elevator, more confident than Cassia had ever seen her as they stepped in. The doors closed, and Cassia clutched the railing, feeling a sense of impending vertigo as she watched the people below get smaller and smaller.

The doors opened, and Cassia and Sienna stepped into the office.

This was it. This was where they had waved the flag from, where they sounded the alarm, where the perpetrator had passed through before they struck...

Cassia moved around the office frantically, knocking over pencils and books as she searched for something, *anything*, that could lead to the criminal.

As Cassia knelt to the ground, peeking under a coffee table, a flash of color caught her eye. Cassia frowned, reaching under the table and pulling it out. As she peered closer, she realized what it was: a night pass. There was no mistaking the bright blue hue of the keycard, and yet...

"It was an inside job," Cassia said.

Sienna tilted her head. "What?"

"An inside job," she said, talking faster. "No one is allowed in Thorne's tower after midnight, except for family and close friends of the governor. But whoever scanned this to enter had to have been related to Thorne, because you need a relative's fingerprint as well to access the office and living quarters after hours." Every governor's agent was educated in security procedures, yet Cassia had never imagined any scenario where that knowledge would come in handy. "But the rest of Thorne's family is all the way across the country,

helping the police. And she doesn't have any heirs..." Cassia stared off into space, thinking. Then it hit her. "What was it you said earlier?" she said slowly. "Her poor daughter?"

Sienna stopped, a smile frozen on her face. She ran her tongue between the gap between her teeth. "I don't know what you're talking about," she said lightly. "Thorne doesn't have any children. Everyone knows that."

"Unless," Cassia mused, "she had a daughter she didn't want anyone to know about. A daughter she wanted to stay secret. A daughter of a commoner." She turned to look at the keycard. "A daughter who wanted her out of the way."

Sienna took a step closer, eyes glittering dangerously. Her glasses clattered to the floor. Without them, the resemblance was so clear. The wide brown eyes. The slightly rounded nose. The flawed smile.

"I'm sorry it had to be this way," Sienna said, voice dripping with malice. "But you didn't give me a choice, you see?"

"Where is she, Sienna?" Cassia said forcefully.

"Let's just say she's...out of the way," said Sienna delicately, picking up a heavy paperweight and toying with it casually in her hand.

Cassia backed toward the glass doors that opened up to the balcony. The sleeve of her bright red jacket caught on the lock, and she twisted, trying to duck away from Sienna as she came closer. That gave her an idea.

Cassia ripped off her jacket and spun around to face the doors. She pushed them open with both hands, and a twisted smile spread across Sienna's face. Cassia knew what she was thinking. She was trapped now.

Cassia lifted her jacket and waved it back and forth frantically, hoping someone saw it. *Emergency! Emergency!*

Sienna smirked. "Sorry, Cassia. It's never going to-"

Her words were cut off by a blaring alarm. Cassia resisted the urge to clap her hands over her ears.

"Real smart," Sienna sneered. "But by the time they get here, you'll be gone."

Sienna advanced on her, and Cassia backed up to the railing of the balcony, biting her lip as she willed someone, *anyone* to come to her rescue.

"I'm sorry, Cassia," Sienna said, and then the door burst open.

"Freeze!" someone yelled.

Cassia watched, seemingly in slow motion, as the agents moved through the doorway and surrounded Sienna. She turned toward Cassia, eyes wide with something like incomprehension as she raised her hands above her head and her mouth formed a thin line.

An officer handcuffed her, and she was led away, away through the doorway, away from Cassia, away down the stairs.

That was the last Cassia ever saw of Sienna Thorne.

The Play At The Globe Theater

By: Susana Baro Doreste

Team: Denali

It's the 28th of June 1614 and today John, Edward, and I went to the famous Globe Theater for the first time. It was amazing and even better yet (as Edward was yelling about four hours later) it was a tragedy named *Romeo and Juliet*. Very impressive and so much drama that I was surprised they let us watch it. We set out for the Globe Theater before midday hoping to get there before the crowds did. John had heard about the Globe Theater (well really we all had) and he decided that we would be going as soon as possible because who could tell for how long we'd stay in London. He also very clearly enunciated that it would be during work in fact he gleefully shouted that we would be missing work yesterday night.

So with him in the lead we snuck out of the shop and set off for the Globe Theater. John told us facts about the Globe Theater as we moved through the crowded streets. Here are some important ones that I remember: Out of all the playhouses in London the Globe Theater is unique because of the fact that it's circular. It's 9 metres tall. Three levels of seating and the Pit (where we watched the play) are used by spectators. Also the fact that it's the most popular playhouse in London. (This was the one he kept repeating over and over again)

By the time me and Edward were begging him to stop with the fact we'd reached the Globe Theater. There was an open air market happening right in front of the Globe and it was a buzzing hive's nest of activity. People and colors were everywhere but the Globe was what really took my breath away. It was huge and towered over the market and on the top barely visible to us even from afar was a black flag. Edward asked John about it and much to our surprise he did not offer an immediate answer but stared up at the Globe Theater in open awe.

We slid through the crowd making our way to the Globe Theater's entrance. It was an everything, everywhere, all at once sensation as we struggled to stay together in the absolute chaos that the market caused. It felt like an overwhelming eternity but in the end we made it to the Globe Theater's entrance. Just then a trumpet sounded, the play was about to begin and then there was a sudden surge of people from behind us. Quickly John placed three pennies in the collection box and we ran inside to get the best spot in the Pit that we possibly could. People swarmed in behind us and I can see very clearly how smart we were in getting there just on time and not running late. The stage was in front of us and John quickly found us a spot at the front of the Pit. From there we waited anxiously for the play to start hoping that no one would recognize us as the apprentices of the new shop owner.

Once it did, I thought it was spectacular. There was blood and drama sparks and even poison was used at the end when both Romeo and Juliet died. The part I thought was cool was that there were musicians playing from somewhere which made everything more entertaining.

We all left very impressed with Edward crying because the two lovers had died and at the same time also loving it for the fact that the two lovers had died.

On the whole it was a very eye opening experience and I hope to go again as soon as we earn back the trust of Mr Malcom because the Globe Theater is truly as splendid as everyone says. Now that I think of it Mr Malcom hasn't been to the Globe Theater, maybe if we manage to convince him he'll see how great it is and not punish us as harshly for leaving him alone to run the shop. Farewell journal I must go because as Mr. Malcolm is yelling there is a dinner just waiting to be cooked downstairs.

When the Clock Stops Ticking

Jessica Bradwell

Birch

It was almost just another day in my head. I woke up, walked to school, fidgeted with a squishy the whole day, came back and ate, and went to bed. But that day something was off.

I walked through the hallways, almost mindlessly, when something stopped me.

"Oh sorry. I-" I said bumping into someone. But they didn't move. I looked around, thinking someone else would notice this strange interaction. *Thump* my heart whispered. So I took a step away from the scene and I walked into another person.

"Watch where you're going!" They said walking away. All of a sudden, the world was back to normal. People pushed through the cramped hallway laughing, talking to their friends, all was normal. *Thump*. My heart pushed on my chest.

"Maya! Come on, we're gonna be late!" Eya (I-ya) pulled me through the mass of people towards our next class.

"Mrs.P is going to be so mad when she sees how late we are," Eya whispered. I hadn't noticed before, but the halls had suddenly become eerily empty. I pushed out of her grip and pulled her into a corner.

"Listen, Eya, you're not going to believe me when I say this but I need you to try." I said in a hushed tone.

"Oh, ok, let me guess, you're going to skip? Or are you-"

"No," I took a breath, "I stopped time." I looked at her hoping that she would understand.

"HAHAHAHAHAHA! Ah. Girl, you're funny! That's crazy. Come on, let's go get some food."

"Yea lol.....I was joking!" I said but it was so hard to keep up the fake smile. Eventually we arrived at Dunkin Donuts. A long time ago, our school was supposed to be a small mall, but they didn't have the funds or something so it got turned into a school instead.

"Hi, what would you like to order today?" The girl said with a flat, tired voice.

"Could I have a... I don't know, let me think for a second." Eya really had to step up her game.

"Ok, call me when you're ready to order," She said and slumped to the back.

"What do I wanna order..." Eya thought out loud. As she walked back and forth I looked over to see what the barista was doing. It looked like she was scrolling her phone, but.... Julia had stopped, most likely for a longer video. But she was as still as a statue. The world was deadly silent except for Eya still pondering her order.

"Eya..."

"Wassup? Wow..." She looked around astonished as her eyes filled with curiosity. "Maya, there is a flouting car outside."

"What? That's not what I wanted to show you-oh my gosh what is happening?" I walked towards the door and opened it. As I walked closer to the road, you could see the driver. He had both hands gripped tightly on the wheel and his head down to his lap. In the passenger seat there was a woman who looked towards the back reaching out her arms. In the back was a baby and a toddler, the baby was crying and the toddler had her eyes closed tightly, but no one moved even a little.

"We need to help."

"Are you crazy?! How will you get up there?" Her eyes drifted towards the other cars.

"I need you to... to pick up the cars..." She said carefully. *Wait what?!*

"What!?"

"Time is paused, I'm guessing, and without time, there will be no weight." *What.*

"You know... sure, it wouldn't hurt to try and help." I hustled over to the road and put light force on one of the cars, and to my surprise, it felt like lifting a feather. I made my way through a couple cars and made them in a staircase to the door of the van.

"BE CAREFUL WITH THE BABY!" Eya shouted from below the cars.

"I WILL!" I shouted back. I opened the door and shuffled in. The car was hotter than outside, and everything was frozen in place, a pacifier just out of the baby's reach, an ABC book flouting above the ground, and sunglasses falling off the woman's head. I carefully picked up the baby and thought 'How did this happen? A crash this bad never happens.' But I didn't doubt it too much, because I wasn't there when it happened. I made my way down but something felt off. Not just the time randomly being paused. 'It's fine! It's fine, don't forget.'

"Here... I'm going to get the others in the car, be right back." I handed her the frozen baby and started my climb again. Eventually, I made it back down with the toddler and carefully set her down. I repeated this with both the...parents? Probably.

"Ok, now how do we start it again Maya? You're the professional." Eya smiled.

"Uh, I'm not sure, last time, you were the only one moving and then it happened again so maybe-"

"Oh my gosh! What about the people in the cars below- also what about the other cars that you put in the air- you still gotta fix that!" She pointed to all the cars.

"No, you have to do it this time. I already put it all in place, so you have to put everything back." I said. She reluctantly walked to the floating cars and slowly pulled them all down, and moved the other cars in the way. She walked back.

"Maya, I really don't see why you couldn't have helped me-AH-" The cars came back to life and the one she had just finished putting down swerved so hard I thought that it would flip.

"Eya! Are you okay? You almost got hit by a car!"

"I had no idea actually, thanks for warning me. But yea I'm fine." The sounds of the world slowly came back as we walked back into the shop.

"So, are you ready to order yet? Waiiiiiiiiiit why were you outside?" Julia said, confused.

"Just getting some fresh air, oh could I have...." Eya started to order but I tuned her out. The clear doors showed a busy highway, and a very confused family examining their ruined car. What a strangely normal sight.

"Annnnnnd, that's all." Eya said and Julia sighed.

"Coming right up...." Julia lazily turned on her heel and started making her drink.

"Maya we're going to be late for lunch! And I am NOT missing lunch again." This felt more normal.

"Oh yea-" I looked at the clock "Lunch is in 10 minutes, we have a little time."

"Okay good. We need to discuss the quiz that we have... had today...." Her voice drifted off.

"Oh- oh we just missed the ELA test, didn't we..?" *That test was for 50% of our grade..*

"Order for eye?" Julia held up a bright pink foamy drink.

"It's Eya, thanks!" She fake smiled and placed an extra dollar in the tip jar. We walked out and I became vividly aware of all the sounds. Every little scratch of tiers, a phone conversation, birds cooing to each other, it all seemed so loud when everything had stopped.

Ding Ding Ding The bell rang for lunch just as we made it back to school. The halls flooded with teens on their way to their only free time at school. I stood to the side with Eya waiting for our friends. Eventually, I saw them arrive.

"Heyyyy!" Sydney said and walked over with Nia. Me and Eya waved back.

"Oh my gosh, where were you guys during yellow? The test was horrible! Like..." Nia kept talking about the test the whole way to the lunchroom and as we sat down. "Who puts math in an ELA test?!" She finished with a breath.

"Well, as you can tell the test was no fun. And anyways, where were you two, huh?" Sydney looked at us suspiciously and me and Eya looked back and forth.

"Welllll...you wouldn't believe me if I said what really happened." I said but Sydney rolled her eyes.

"I don't care if I don't believe you! Just tell me where you went Maya!" Sydney took a bite of the school chicken. She immediately spat it out.

"We skipped! Me and Maya went out to get donuts." Eya said, thinking of an alibi. Nia looked up from her food and side eyed us. Sydney didn't seem to buy it either, but, I was guessing, she didn't have enough energy to fight.

"Fine. Don't skip on us again though, that test was rough!" Nia said and took another bite of her nachos. I took out my phone and started to type. Eya took the hint and took hers out too.

I typed: Should we tell them what happened?

Eya started to type.

Eya: No, not yet. And also, you said it : yourself, they wouldn't believe us anyways.

I look over the table to my friends. *Will they ever believe what happened?* Nia might, but Sydney would never. Then again, they should know. My phone buzzed.

Eya: We'll tell them eventually, just for now, leave it with us, okay?

I typed: Okay.

I put my phone on my lap and looked down at the food. That day, I had chips and hummus from home, but they didn't look as good as they once had.

"This is so good." Nia said with a mouth full of rice.

"Really? But is it better than my food?" I said.

"Uh- Yeah! All you've got is some chips! That shouldn't even be called a lunch." Nia said and I fake gasped.

"Well, I think my food is probably even better than yours. I have sushi, beat that!" Eya said. Sydney raised an eyebrow and picked up her tray.

"The best food can't be mine." Sidney said. "The school chicken sucks!" We all laughed and continued to eat while comparing foods.

Core of the Keer

DM

Birch

I was sitting on my bed reading my book when I heard it: a loud screech. It sounded like an oil canister scratching the pavement or an asteroid burning through the atmosphere. That's when I looked out the window and saw it: the one and only Keer. I thought it was just a myth, but that thought ended right when I looked out the window and saw it. I decided to lock all the doors and hide in the closet. I knew that if I made a lot of noise, then Keer would 100% hear me so it took me a good 8 minutes to lock everything. That's when I accidentally tripped on my book on the floor and made a huge bang noise. So then I heard the Keer started to head towards my house and I got in my closet as fast as my legs could take me. Keer was trying to get into the house, but I wasn't too worried because I had locked all the doors. Then I had realized that I didn't lock any of the windows, so I heard him coming into my cabin and I was on the verge of screaming. I decided to jump out of my window and run into the forest and hide in a tree since all of the trees are pretty high. So I decided to wait until Keer got into the dining room, once the beast got in the room I jumped out the window. I heard Keer screech and come after me so I ran as fast as a cheetah. I got up in a tree right before the beast was about to catch me. Then I relaxed and sighed before falling asleep.

When I woke up in the morning I saw that the Keer was gone. So I decided to get down from the tree and go back to my house and go grab supplies so I could maybe live in the tree because I was traumatized from the Keer and I could never see myself living in my house again. I got to the house and got all of the supplies I needed then I heard the Keer so I ran so fast, I would have been running at cheetah speed! I got up the tree and started unloading the supplies. A medkit, snacks, knife, bedsheets (to bundle up so I could sleep), matches, water, cellphone, and finally my book. I also brought a big backpack to keep all of my stuff in so I put all my supplies in there. But that's when I saw the Keer right under the tree and it was sniffing for a scent. I climbed up higher in the tree and held on to a big branch until the beast left. After that, I started to unload all of my things so I could set up a little area for my "bed". But right then the tree started to crack and then it crumbled to the ground and then I ended up on the floor.

I heard the Keer coming toward me. Before long the Keer was right over my head but then I heard a voice.

"You're not Leo?" The monster said.

"No, I'm Jack. Are you a person in a suit or a real Keer that can speak English?"

"I am a person in a suit. I am trying to scare my enemy Leo after what he did to me at school."

I was amazed that the Keer wasn't real and I was just getting scared by a random dude who was trying to scare his friend named Leo.

"Well I got to go," the person said.

I went back to my house after the crisis and passed out on my bed. I wanted to sleep for the rest of the day.

The Dream

by Rokšana Bentlage

Thyme

Have you ever had a dream that you wanted to pursue so badly that you would do anything to do it? Well I have. I don't want to be smug, but I am a very good violinist. I wanted to be in the Chamber Orchestra so I practiced every day for 2 hours. When the week of auditioning came, I auditioned earlier so I could get it over with. On Friday, I was eager to know if I got in or not. When the roster got posted, I instantly checked. "Guys, the roster just got posted. Drumroll please..." I said while opening the roster to check. "I didn't get in?????? WHAT THE...???? I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING WRONG!!!!!! I DON'T GET IT!!!!"

"I don't get it either," Mom said. "I'm going to defy this woman because this is unfair!!!!!! I literally heard this every single day and yet you don't get in?????"

When Mom was gone, I sent Mrs. Spatula, the Orchestra teacher, a video on Schoology of me doing the piece. When I was done, I joined the rest of my family. Mom and I plotted a plan. We would wake up at 6:25. When we were awake, we would eat. After eating, we would change into our clothes. After changing, we would chill until 7:15 since the rehearsal was at 7:25. Once we got there, Mom would go confront Mrs. Spatula like a feral animal before rehearsal. Once she's done talking to her, I will go in there and get the schedule and pieces. Then, this vivid dream will come true!!!! Sure enough everyone in my grade will be muddled because I'm not supposed to be there but who cares???? I hope Mom's efforts aren't futile because if they are, I will crash out!!!

The next morning, we had a picnic with Mom's friends. "Did Maesi get in???" asked Mom's friend, Rebecca.

"No," Mom said. "I'm confused."

"I'm confused too," said another one of Mom's friends, Krystal. "This is rigged."

"Wait a minute," said a random lady. "I used to teach orchestra. Maybe I can help Maesi get in."

Mom and the former orchestra teacher talked to each other a bit and exchanged numbers.

The next day, the former orchestra teacher called and told Mom to come over with me to see her. We raced to the car and left the house. When we got to the destination, we rang the doorbell and she answered. "You must be Maesi?" said the teacher.

"I am," I said.

"Come on in."

We worked on everything. "That's strange," said the teacher. "You are perfect. You should've gotten in. Here, I'll record you doing the piece."

She recorded me and sent the video to Mom. This would be more proof that I should be in the Chamber Orchestra.

A day later, her friends began to ask me one question.

"Did you get in?" Skye asked.

"No," I said. "It's strange."

"I agree," Frida said. "I've heard you play before. This is rigged."

A couple hours later, at Cross Country, more of my friends began to ask the same question.

"Did you get in?" asked Susie.

"No," I said. "I literally crashed out!!!!!!"

"That's strange!"

An hour later, I had Acro and everyone was confused.

"Did you get in?" Jessie asked.

"No," I answered.

"This is rigged," Ariana said.

Another hour later, I had Ballet and there was even more confusion.

"This is rigged," Becky said.

"This is unfair," Sally said.

"This is terrible," Wendy said.

"This is the worst," Maria said.

Two days later, it came. The first rehearsal for Chamber Orchestra had arrived. Mom woke me up at 6:25 as planned. We got dressed, ate breakfast, and chilled until 7:15. We dashed to the car and zoomed out of the driveway. When we got there, we immediately ran inside. When we were inside, there was a muddle like I thought there would be.

"What are you doing here?" Dina asked me. "You're not supposed to be here."

"We are fighting for a spot here," I answered.

Mom stormed into the Orchestra room. "WHY DIDN'T YOU LET MY DAUGHTER BE IN THIS GROUP?????"

"She sucks!!!" Mrs. Spatula said.

"No she doesn't. She belongs in this group. I have one piece of proof." Mom played the video.

Mrs. Spatula listened and heard me playing perfectly. "It's not good enough."

"It is. She has been practicing every single day for 2 long hours and she doesn't get in!?!?!?!?! How dare you be mean to my daughter!!!!!!!"

"Fine."

Mom walked out of the room. "Have fun," she said.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Don't worry. I took care of it."

I went in there and had fun.

The Mysterious Figure

by Olivia Brown

Mint

It's been a week since Brock and Brog were sent out of the dome. So far they have adjusted well, and have found more dogs and wild animals than they ever imagined. Brog loved seeing more species like her and she made friends with the new dogs quickly. They found big dogs that were as tall as ponies. They found small dogs too that could fit in the palm of Brock's hands. Brock and Brog even came across some hairless dogs, their skin as rough as sandpaper. All of them were unique in their own ways. Brock and Brog ate fish like cod, their scales shined like the sun's rays shooting across the horizon. They snacked on small mammals such as chipmunks and squirrels, and drank from shallow, swift moving rivers and brooks.

At night, they set up camp under the safety of the dense forest, and built a warm crackling fire to cook their dinner. During daytime, they explored the outdoors and collected resources for the next evening's camp out. They found all sorts of new and exciting things like caves and bee hives. Brock even found a piece of pottery that was broken and covered in dirt. The pottery had designs inscribed on its surface with swirls and lines of all sorts. Brog grew bigger and stronger each day, and became more confident to explore new things. One time, Brog found a massive river that was filled with salmon jumping out of the water. He loved watching the salmon flop around like wet noodles.

That night, Brock cooked the salmon for dinner and it paired well with his roasted chipmunk kabobs. "Well Brog, do you like my cooking?" Brock asked.

"Ruff ruff!" Brog replied

"I'm gonna take that as a yes," Brock said.

The following day, Brock and Brog packed up camp and started exploring. Brock wanted to see the purple mountains he saw in the distance on his first day outside the dome. It took Brock and Brog about an hour to reach the base of the majestic mountains. Brock loved them, they were as breathtaking as a cool bay breeze blowing through the air. At the top of the purple mountains, Brock saw a figure outlined against the bright blue sky. Then he heard the figure yelling down to him, "Hey, who's there?"

Brock shouted back, cupping his hands around his mouth, "I'm Brock, who are you?" Brock was starting to believe that more humans existed outside the dome. He was so excited to meet this new person that he felt goosebumps running down his spine. His heart was pounding so fast he felt as though it was going to explode! He headed towards the figure, but suddenly it disappeared into the fog that was rolling in. It was getting dark anyways, and he didn't feel safe continuing up the mountain. Brock decided to head back to the safety of the forest to set up camp for the night. The next morning, he and Brog set out to find the mystery figure. He knew this would be an adventure of a lifetime!

Astra Dome

By: Susana Baro Doreste

Team: Denali

Part 1

The evening rays lit the white dome "sky" turning it orange-purple from the inside and twisting the sun's rays to form an illusion: making it invisible from the outside. As the rays "touched" the park's canopy they spread out to reach the dome's crowded walls. The octagon tiles twisted and spun for the Drawing was four hours away. Looking at the "sky" from the Prismalin Gardens ensured privacy from most heat seeking cameras, and people of any kind today because of the coming Drawing most people were home preparing for the possible fatal Drawing of their housing unit, and pearl selection. Koral Serven didn't care about the Drawing because if she was picked from her housing unit it was fine and she was ready. The C.A.U or Cameral Air Unit would start looking for people outside their housing unit and sending escorts to bring them to their unit at Blue Light Curfew. In the Astra Dome there was five minutes till the Blue Light Curfew. The Drawing started at different times in the other domes but all the Drawings happened on the same day. The dome's "sky" was almost Blue Light Curfew, and Koral wanted to see the Tonomag Stars before then because she might never see them again in the Astra Dome. As the Blue Light Curfew pinged the dome "sky" Koral heard iron heeled boots hit the Prismalin Gardens gravel path. She didn't move from the Shilter tree's nook she hung in, peering at the stars, not even as the Estorals stopped below her did she move.

Only after the third cough for attention and when the dome's "sky" was fully blue did she move. Koral moved with speed and jumped from the Shilter tree's nook to the pink-gray Sum tree's far branch. The Estorals probably hadn't been expecting that, but without looking behind her Koral jumped to the Limen tree's wide under hanging boughs. Her jacket was black (and the only thing hers by birthright) and wearing black the day of the Drawing was illegal. Koral thought of that when she landed on the Prismalin Gardens purple walls and locked eyes with a blue eyed Estoral who seemed a little impressed.

Koral took no time in sliding off the wall and sprinting towards the Elsten Unit. Footfalls followed after her, no voice though. Sector's blurred by and the dome's "sky" was getting darker. Koral's Sector was coming up; she ran faster. On the curve ahead a stand had been set up. Koral slowed to see an old couple sitting at a table, and glanced around to see three people running towards her. The first thought that popped into her head was "that table would make a good ramp." She ran and jumped onto the table.

The back legs collapsed and made a ramp like Koral thought they would, the unaccounted feature was that the couple had E Range Knives. Knives weren't uncommon, E Range to I Range however were really rare to see in the open. E Range to I Range were seen in auctions, dark-way-alleys, and Elite's Columns.

One of the couple lunged towards Koral, and she kicked, then dashed forwards. Koral felt a stab of pain run through her brain as she turned around the corner. She slid into the darker portion of the wall that framed a housing unit. The E Range knife must have hit her somehow when she'd kicked it out of the way. Koral caught her breath as she hid from view and contemplated her options. She couldn't keep running that fast or she'd really be hurt by the time she got to her housing unit. It wasn't that far away, she thought, if she could get onto the second base hangers she could possibly climb up them and reach her housing unit. The dome's "sky" was now dark blue, the

out-of-unit-lights would be going off in approximately ten minutes. Her previous idea would take her twenty minutes minimum: she would make it in time.

Koral's head jerked up, as a new idea took place. Quickly she felt the framing of the housing unit she was leaning against, perfect! Carwor Resin would stick to the wall framing just enough for a short climb. Koral had a pouch with some unhardened Carwor Resin from the Prismalin Gardens. She had six minutes to get to her housing unit. She turned her head from side to side looking around for any people; not seeing any she stepped away from the wall for a second and, unsealing the pouch, spread some Carwor Resin on her hands and boots. Then she dashed toward the framed housing unit and jumped just as she reached the wall.

She clung to the framing straining as a ripple of pain slid through her brain. Koral started creeping up the wall, housing unit frame, by housing unit frame. She got faster but kept having to stop to apply more Carwor Resin so she wouldn't plummet to her death. Risking a quick glance upward to the dome's "sky" she saw that she had around three more minutes to reach her housing unit. Climbing with more awareness to the time kept her focused on the goal at hand. Koral only had one minute to get to her housing unit when she reached the right level to start going sideways instead of straight up. Her housing unit was five frames away, so she sped up slightly. The E Range knife must have hit well because waves of pain struck her from all sides.

Koral tapped on the clear window panel of her housing unit three times and the panel slid open. Her housing unit was rather small (as it wasn't super high or super low on the dome's wall) but when Koral stepped in it seemed smaller though that might've been because it was holding six additional people.

Part 2

Koral didn't focus on the extra people, rather the opposite as the first words out of her mouth were, "Am-ia, Pego can I have some water?"

Her aunt's first words to her were quite different as she exclaimed, "Mara-an you arrive at your housing unit after Blue Light Curfew, wearing black on the day of the Drawing after running away and the first thing you say is 'can I have some water?' it is unbelievable!" her aunt crossed her arms, "Not to mention that you ran away from and ignored some Estoral, got here right as the out-of-unit-lights were about to go off! It is--"

Koral cut her aunt off with a cold glare and spit out, "Ia, I'm sorry that I didn't make it here on time. Se-ecom may I now have some water." Her voice was loaded with sarcasm and as she spoke her eyes roamed around the room giving each of the Estorals a once over.

"Koral," her uncle warned with his don't-fight-with-us-on-this-one tone, "Why don't we sit down and talk about the evening you've had so far?"

Koral seethed with fury because how dare he try to pin down her temper with his words and tone. To others his tone might sound dismissive, or filled with imploration but what it really was the demand of too much from one point of view which was one the Koral simply didn't have. Her aunt and uncle's thoughts about the rules was the thing (among many others) that she did not share. Her point of view was more flexible than her aunt and uncle's. Koral sneered at her uncle and said, "I need water now, not later Sheu." She sounded clam but really was about to implode as not only was her patience wearing thin but also her head was pounding in agony. The E Range Knife must have had a strong electric plus (at least a 6.7) because most E Range knives sent out a nerve sensed pulse

every 5.47 seconds which simply stunned the nerve, with some pain in the aftermath of a fight. Koral needed to lean against something. She felt like she was going to fall out of her open housing unit.

One of the Estorals interrupted the tense silence, "We are going to let you discuss in privacy for a while, we'll be outside checking security." Having said that all of the Estorals filed out of the housing unit. Her aunt and uncle looked at her angrily and she sneered disdainfully back at them. They shared a glance and promptly went upstairs.

Koral glanced around just in case anything had changed while she'd been away. It was the same as she'd left it a few days ago. Nope it was exactly the same, the kitchen was the same flat topped stone and wood arrangement. In front of her were a small couch and two comfy chairs around a small wood framed glass topped table with a nice window view. She used the comfy chairs and the walls to make her way quietly to the kitchen. The one thing she needed desperately was water, and her annoying guardians had denied request so she'd just have to get it herself. The cups were in the cabinet over the standard core-speed oven. The one problem with getting the water wasn't the accessibility but the noise that the faucet would make. As she slid onto the kitchen flat top to get the cabinet's sensors tricked for her to open it and get a cup she thought of ways to muffle the faucet's sound. Koral thought she heard footsteps near her housing unit's door and her mind started racing. Rapidly she slid off the kitchen flat top noiselessly and walked towards the sink. The footsteps were either coming from right above her or directly outside the door. Koral pulled out a sharp edged pin and with it unscrewed the top of the faucet. She then put the cup to her left eye and peered into the eye scanner. The cup like many other times distorted the image so much that the scanner thought she was her aunt. The faucet started gushing water off the top of the rim and into the cup. It hurt a ton to move but she had to if she wanted the water.

Raising her tense hand till water soaked her lips she managed to swallow it down. A ripple of pain crashed through her and the water only amplified it. Then she realized the footsteps were coming from outside her housing unit. Quickly she turned off the faucet with the pin and screwed the top back on. She hid between the corner of the two walls near the kitchen flat top, and made herself fit in a nook touching the ceiling. Koral hid just in time as one second later her housing unit's door opened.

Part 3

The six Estorals came in with two additional people wearing sliver masks. The one who'd opened the door started quietly giving orders, "Find the aunt and uncle: knock them out." was asked of the two new people. The two started walking up the stairs when they were out of earshot; another order was murmured, "Find the kid, and block the exit." The nook Koral was using right then had never been discovered so far, she hoped it would stay that way.

A few minutes passed and no one spoke or found a thing, chairs were overturned, plates were broken, and exits were blocked. No noise was heard or made from upstairs, and annoying Koral wasn't exactly in the position to be happy about the fact that her aunt and uncle were being knocked. No, now she had to worry about staying still so that she wouldn't be caught because the pain raging through her made it hard to stay in the same position without swaying. Swaying in a situation when trying to hide in a dark corner could be useful to distort her presence, but it could also cause too much attention to focus on her dark corner.

Minutes crept by and it took all of Koral's energy not to fall and crash onto the floor. The pain she was enduring made it feel like every part of her was on fire. A ghostly silence had crept

into her housing unit, if she made a sound it wouldn't be hard for anyone to guess where she was now.

Just as she felt like she'd disastrously be discovered, the silence was broken, "Umm... The window's still open, is it possible that she got out the way she came in?" asked a boy with short black hair, who was peering out the window.

The response came quickly, "No way," There was a pause, and Koral feared that she might be discovered as the pause stretched on, "The E Range Knife she was hit by will have made it impossible for her to move without collapsing so if she even could've thought about going out through the window she would've fallen out and died."

Just like that the half form plan Koral had started to create crumbled. She got quite lost in her thoughts and the rising pain and anger building up inside her which of course caused her to miss ten minutes full of very important conversation. If she hadn't been so distracted she might've heard the answer to the question that she kept fixating on. "How did the person who'd answer the boy's question know that she'd been hit by an E Range Knife with abnormal effect? The answers to her question were of course important to understand why after ten minutes of dazing off she found herself being stared at by several people high above her. The pain in her head had tripled and she must have fallen without noticing a thing.

She glared up at them as hard as she could hoping that her stare would pierce their hearts forever. Koral felt fury boiling up at them because not only were they staring down at her but she also couldn't see their faces because they were wearing masks. Two of them had decorative masks that she guessed were meant to resemble owl faces but it was impossible for her to tell. The pain had reached the point where it made everything so disorienting that all she could see were blurred shapes and color bobbing in and out of focus. She could also tell that things were being said around her but couldn't tell what as the words seemed to melt into each other and buzz on different frequencies.

Several more confusing minutes passed and her vision became increasingly dimmer until she reached the point where it was all black but a few faint yellow splotches. A second later and everything went dark.

IS
Birch Team



Valedictorian Championship #2

I stormed into the house, my body filled with rage and adrenaline. I still couldn't believe what happened!! The nerve of that... oh you probably don't know what I am talking about. Let's just backtrack a little.

My day started like every other day, I went to blah, blah, blah. Then I went to my club, digital news, blah, blah, blah. All of a sudden, my bestie Georgie burst in and started talking about how annoying Cal had also gotten to be valedictorian along with me. And as I went to confront Cal, he decided to bump into me. But he ended up being severely embarrassed because he didn't know that I knew that he was also valedictorian. Uh, that was a little confusing. Anyways, if you fast forward past all our talking, I announced the start of our Valedictorian Championship. At least in my head. But you know what Cal did?! Ugh, even his name is weird! He announced out loud that we should have a valedictorian championship. He had the audacity to steal my idea (kind of).

After club was over, I walked over to my car, a bright green Volkswagen Beetle I got for my 17th birthday. I loved it so much that I wouldn't let my little sister get in it (I would've also not let my parents in but they had to make sure that I was being a safe driver in it). On the drive, I had pondered what I could do to outdo Cal. Something that would make it clear that I was way better than him. But instead my mind went back to how he stole the words out of my head. What if he steals my amazing ideas that prove I am better? I must say that was the worst drives I have ever taken and I have taken many bad drives.

Okay, now you are all caught up. I stormed into the house and somehow I was so loud, my little sister came running downstairs with her eyes closed, screaming,

"Get out intruder!!!"

She almost ran into me but at the last second I moved out of the way. And instead of hitting me, she ran into the door.

"Ow!"

"Hello, Barney."

My sister disliked that name sometimes but my dad loved it. He probably loved it because he was the one who chose it, he didn't care if it was a girl or a boy, he just knew he would name the baby Barney. I, on the other hand, am lucky and I like my name.

"Oh, it's just you. Why didn't you tell me it was you?"

"Uh, because you came charging downstairs with your eyes closed, which I must say is very unsafe."

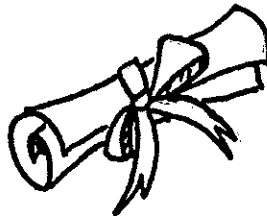
"Yay, fine. But why were you being so loud? I thought you were an intruder."

"You made that very clear. And I was upset. Correction, I am upset."

"Let me guess. Cal."

I sighed, nodding. My sister knew me too well. She also knew my relationship with Cal all too well.

A few hours later, me and Barney had brainstormed a whole lot of different ways to beat Cal. And the first one, spread the news that I was valedictorian.



At dinner, my parents asked me how my day was and at our house nobody was allowed to lie so I told them the truth. They loved Cal and kept telling me to invite him over and solve our problems over cookies, like we did when we were younger. They didn't really understand my problems because they were adults but my sister did understand and that is why she is always first to know.

That night, when I went to sleep, I went over the plan in my head. It was Barney's idea and she is more... bold than me, so I was a little nervous but she told me it would make people believe that I was cool and vote for me (I don't think she totally knows what a valedictorian is and I can't believe she said it would make people *believe* I was cool)

The next day, I waited as history class dragged by with Mr. Pumphrey droning on about World War II, something I learned about in 2nd grade on my own. I looked to my left and noticed that Cal seemed absolutely entranced by this subject. I guess he just isn't as advanced as I am.

Finally, the bell echoed through the hallways and the classrooms. The sound of the desks screeching hurt my ears as 12th graders jumped out of their chairs and sprinted down to the cafeteria. This was my chance.

I made my way down to the cafeteria. Walking slowly so I could go over the plan for the thousandth time, I remembered exactly what Barney said. I needed to stand on a table in the cafeteria and get everyone's attention. I would then explain that I was the true valedictorian and give a breathtaking speech. Barney also told me to throw paper towels at the end but I didn't want to have to clean it up and I could get in a lot of trouble.

I approached the cafeteria's double doors and pushed them open. I casually walked over to one of the tables in the middle of the cafeteria. My friends noticed me and waved to me to come over but I ignored them. I lifted my foot on to the seat and pushed myself up. Then taking my other foot, I planted it on the top of the table and pushed up yet again.

"Hello everyone," all heads turned to me and I could feel their eyes burning into me. Taking a big breath, I continued,

"You may not know me but I am-"

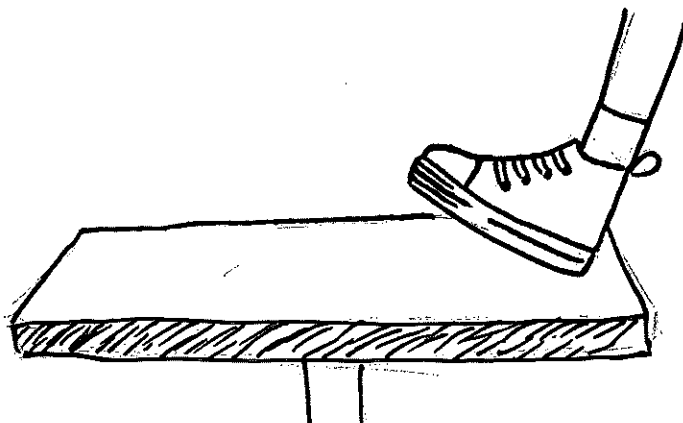
"Bailey Neverswift, get down from that table right now!"

The voice of the principal made me freeze. I was caught. I slowly stepped down from the table and turned toward the tall lady in the bright red blazer with a disappointed look on her face. As I walked toward her, I saw a look of confusion across the face of my friends with Georgie staring at me with concern. I finally made my way over to the principal and squeaked out,

"I can explain."

"You better. In my office."

Together we walked out of the cafeteria and into the hallway and began the walk that felt like an eternity. (To be continued)



Into the Jungle

Kabir Sangurdekar - 6 BIRCH

Xander Siebert, 6 FOREST

Carter Bennett - 6 FOREST

Henry Frank- 6 BIRCH

Chapter 1

Joe was never an ordinary snake. Always picked last in leafball (the dodgeball of the jungle), lonely and bored of life. But now Joe was going on the adventure of his life. He woke up that fateful morning and decided to grab an early lunch from LeafDash. He ordered a nice juicy frog and went outside. After a little while, it arrived. Just as he was about to grab it, the frog hopped away.

Then a flyer floated down and it read, "Rain Alliance! Join now! Go to the canopy hideaway and talk to Jerald to register." The flyer had frog prints all over it. Jerald must have accidentally dropped the flyer when grabbing the frog. But the only thing wrong is the sound of music and the smell of cake. Must have been a late night party at the bar on the 5th vine. Joe searched the whole creek until he found it, the canopy hideaway. He heard Jerald and the frog speaking, "Sssssso, you want to join? All you have to do issss...Joe Viper... bring him to the ssssite..." Joe was beginning to get mad. All he wanted to do was make a frog sandwich with fly jam and leaf bread. But this had turned into a mystery.

That late night party must have been wild, because they had forgotten to turn off the music. He heard Jerald and the frog leave, so he snuck in and found the frog's information. His name was Chub, and he lived in the big tree in the lone swamp. He hatched a plan to bushcamp there and get the frog when it returns. But he has to be quick, because the frog has started to move.

After a while of slithering to the tree, he saw a buzz of movement in a small cave. Joe thought Chub may have gone there for some reason. Then he hears the music again! It sounded like animals were "dancing on the ceiling". Joe decided to stay and listen to see if Chub is there.

He was so focused on the music, that he did not hear a small thud. Big mistake. Joe felt a stinging bite on his tail. He immediately turned around and saw Jamal, his old rival-turned snapping turtle enemy. He started to slither away while Jamal snapped at him. After making a few quick turns, Joe managed to get away from him. He breathed a sigh of relief. He did not want to be eaten by Jamall Joe started to slither more quickly, so he did not run into any more inconveniences. As soon as Joe thought he was out of danger, a falcon grabbed Joe out of nowhere and started flying for the clouds. Joe desperately tried to get free by doing the worm (Joe liked to call it "the snake"). Instead, it tickled the falcon which made him drop Joe onto the canopy of a tree. Joe was hyperventilating because he got the air knocked out of him. But he knew that he needed to eat lunch, so he jumped off the tree and landed next to a human who is telling some kids about Maui, his slingshot buff spider friend. Joe started slithering away, towards Chub's home. Joe slithered to Chub's house and started to bushcamp. When the frog got home Joe jumped out of the bush to attack! Joe missed and the frog started to run for his money! Joe chased him and the frog was jumping like crazy! After a long montaged chase, they got back to that cave. Joe was so exhausted that he passed out. When he woke up, he heard all the animals say, "Surprise!". All this time, they had been planning a Dancing on the Ceiling music video party! Everybody was there, even Jamall! The party went on for the rest of the night.

Later that night, Joe woke up to the aroma of something sweet, but Joe couldn't place his finger(tail) on it. He sat up and saw the scene. Pink goo splattered everywhere, the snack table was flipped, and most of the animals were on the ground. Asleep. But Jerald, Chub, and Jamal were gone. Like the wind. Joe quickly slithered out of the cave to see if they were at their homes. They weren't. Naturally, Joe thought this was some sort of joke. He went back to the cave and called out

their names. "Jerald, Jamal, I know you're hiding somewhere." Joe's voice echoed through the cave. It soon sunk in on Joe that this might not be a joke. The pink goo. The sweet aroma. The missing animals. It all had to be connected. But how? Joe started to follow the trail of goo deeper into the cave. The smell started getting stronger. Signs of getting close. At last, Joe came upon a huge door. There was an access panel next to it. As soon as Joe went up to it, it asked for the password. This confused Joe. When Joe tried to speak, he heard the door slowly creaking. Then it began to open. Joe quickly slithered to a crook in the rock. He saw a dark figure walk out and move out of the cave. This was Joe's opportunity. He slithered past the door just as it was about to close. Then he saw the cages. It slowly dawned on him that this was not an ordinary cave. This was a lab. He suddenly realized that he was not alone. He twisted around and saw a black bag coming towards him. He tossed and turned until he was dumped unceremoniously into a tall tube. Joe groaned. He rolls onto his stomach to get a better glance at the tube. It was narrow, but slippery. There was no way out. Soon, Joe fell asleep.

When Joe woke up, he was out of the tube. "Freedom!" Joe thought. But when he tried to move, he got stuck. His tail seemed to be chained to a table. "Okay what now." Joe said aloud. His voice echoed through the room. In response, he heard footsteps. Not the average Jungle footsteps, but footsteps of another living thing. A human. The human soon came into view. She(or he?) was wearing a mask. "Well, what do we have here?" The human said in a deep voice, "A trespasser, it may seem." The human then walked to a table, where he/she picked up a bottle. "We have something for that exact scenario, Joe Viper." Joe was astonished. How could this person know his name? And how could he know English?

"How do you know my name?" Joe said finally. The human was silent. He then walked over to the tube.

"Oh that is not important. What's more important is you forgetting this ever happened." He then poured the contents of the bottle into the tube. Joe tried to resist the feeling of sleepiness, but it was too much. As he drifted off to sleep, he heard his voice. "We will meet again, Joe Viper."

Into the Jungle

Chapter 2

10 years ago...

"Huff Huff" The sound of crunching leaves echoed from the behind. He had to get to the cave, to home. He quickly ducked behind a tree, relieved to be free from it all. This boy's name was Alex. Plain, boring Alex. Alex who lived with scientists in the jungle. He hated it. Poison Ivy at every turn, roots to trip on everywhere, and bugs. Lots and lots of bugs. But that did not matter anymore. Soon, he would be free from the jungle. Free from the bugs, vines, rain and leaves. Normally, Alex would have been happy, but for the first time in a long time, Alex was at peace. That peace was soon interrupted by the sound of a car starting. They were leaving Alex. He quickly bolted to the cave, only to find the remains of the lab. It was at that moment, when Alex swore he would get his revenge.

Present

Joe Viper hated mornings. Mornings meant that you had to get up, and face the cold wrath of reality. But this morning felt off. Everything looked normal. But that was the problem. It was TOO normal. Joe smelled it. A sweet, cakey aroma. Pink goo. Joe tried to think. How could this be familiar? He shook it off. Just an afterthought of the party. The party. What exactly happened then? Joe remembered the dance, he remembered waking up, but then it blanked to now. What happened in between, was the question. Joe decided to get some food. After all, he missed lunch yesterday, or was it the day before? Anyways, when Joe opened the fridge, inside sat a single cupcake. Exactly like the ones yesterday. On it, in careful icing, read the words, "Good Morning, Subject V." That's when it clicked. The lab. The tubes. The cages. The Masked Person. At that moment, Joe realized that this, and he meant it this time, was greater than lunch.

Into the Jungle

Chapter 3

Ever get that feeling you are being watched? That is exactly how Joe felt slithering through the forest. When he got to his house, he could not stand the feeling and started yelling. "WHOAREYOUANDWHATDOYOUWANTFROMME!?"

As soon as the words left his mouth, his head began to ache. Flashbacks of the lab came to him. A voice whispered in his head. "Good Morning Subject V."

"GET! OUT! OF! MY! HEAD!!!" Joe yelled. And then, silence. "I am not... asking... again." His voice was rasping and quiet. His response? A faint clicking noise from behind. As soon as Joe turned around, he saw nothing. At least, that's what he thought. Suddenly Joe felt very sleepy. He thought it was just a lack. But Joe felt unnaturally sleepy. Soon, it overpowered him. He fell sound asleep. When he woke up, he was still in his house. Weird. "Probably just a weird dream." Joe thought to himself. Joe continued on with his day, but could not help but notice strange things going on. Every animal's sentences felt off. Repetitive. Like a wind up toy, only real. Joe tried to ignore it, but more things started feeling off. The same people were going to the same places, at the same time. Every time Joe tried to remember if anything happened, his mind came up blank. The only thing he could remember was a sweet, cakey aroma, and a cupcake. The Cupcake! Maybe that could help stuff move in his brain. Joe quickly slithered to his fridge and threw it open only to find an empty wrapper. "Arrggh!" Joe was ready to give up. He sighed as he closed the fridge and went to his bed. Maybe a nap would make him feel better.

Only, it didn't. After he woke up, Joe still felt the same. He went back to his fridge to see if there were any clues by the wrapper. But this time, there was a new cupcake. Same size, same color. Only the icing was different. This time it read, "You remembered. That makes you dangerous."

That's all for now!

The Rise Of The Olympian's Blood

Chapter 1

by: Susana Baro Doreste

Denali

Hi, I'm Verglas Anastaisa. I go by Specter but never use my real name. I'm actually saying all this and since the computer has a voice typing mode everything I say is typed. The people I formed an alliance with -which I will get to talk about later- are the ones who convinced me to do this. They say that it is a very good idea for me to record what has happened in the last few weeks because a lot happened and it is a good project to waste time on when no one wants to do what they should be doing. It is also supposed to be a team building exercise since no one really trusts anyone else. The others will chime in when I miss something but they'll do it in a different font and introduce themselves -like I'm doing right now- or when they get bored and need something to do.

I'm going to start off three weeks ago at the Court Building Of Blah Blah Blah... I forgot what the building is called and don't want to search up what the name is because I hate the building and its purpose. I mean I've been in that building so many times that I've lost track. Anyway it was a cold December day, -the nineteenth to be precise- and I was in the Court Building. I was down on the first floor in the waiting room -doing as the name suggests- waiting. I was going to have a court hearing because of another problem with idiotic foster parents who didn't know what life was because they never opened their eyes and touched grass.

At around five o'clock, two people appeared at the doorway of the waiting room and said that they were here to escort me to the courtroom. I walked down the hall with them and I passed several people in the hall. The first person I passed was not the smartest, and neither were the two people escorting me or they would have noticed that as I passed I dropped my hand very quickly and discreetly into the person's pocket. A split second later I took my hand away from her pocket and a set of Tesla car keys were now tucked in one of my jacket's side pockets. We kept walking and after three flights of stairs we arrived at the courtroom.

The two escorts stopped at the doors and opened them. They didn't step inside the room but instead ushered me inside. I took a look around the room before I sat down. On the far side two people were leaning against the back wall but they were the only people in the room. In the center of the room there was a long semicircular table and the chair nearest to me was the one I supposed I was going to sit in because it was the only one on the smaller side of the table. The chair I chose to sit in was the nearest one because not only was it the one that the judge wanted me to sit in, it was also the only one on the side of the table that was closest to the doors.

The doors opened about twenty minutes after I sat down, and in filed the judge and a bunch of other important looking people wearing suits and fancy stuff. I suppose they were trying to make me look bad but I honestly couldn't care less. It took them about a full five minutes to get settled across from me!

Finally the court judge was settled down and everyone was staring at me. I was staring at the ceiling because this was a giant waste of time. The judge took the large file from The Undersecretary Of Mintery Ward and slammed it on the table to get my attention. When I dropped my glaze back down to look at the judge and the undersecretary I started smirking. The reason was that the undersecretary was the

person who I'd bumped into in the hall while taking her car keys and she still had no idea that I had. It was obvious that she hadn't noticed because she had a very thin smile pasted across her face and her eyes weren't gleaming maliciously. I pictured for a second what she would look like if she knew and I had a wild idea. My wild idea wouldn't work if I didn't build character, so I started looking around and thinking about why everyone was here.

The people in the room weren't here to be kind to me. They were here to at least place me somewhere I couldn't wreak havoc with anything/anybody. Their previous attempts had failed miserably and the only reason I wasn't back at Mintery Ward was because as the director said, "they had no space and were very sorry". What that really meant was that the director and staff were terrified about the prospect of maybe having me back and might go into hiding if I was sent back and the wards were probably so eager to have me back that the amount of havoc at the ward had reached a crazy spike- The spike of course would only be a small percentage compared to the spike there'd be if I showed up at the ward-. Anyway back to the judge and the large file that he'd just placed on the table. The judge stared at me like all the judges I'd ever sat in front of usually did. It was like the judge was waiting to see if I'd realize that I'd made a terrible mistake and started by saying sorry to everyone. They all did that, but what none of them understood was that I didn't think that I'd made a terrible mistake, on the contrary I knew that my decision had been made completely based on self defence.

Then the judge finally started talking and he did it in a very sonorous voice which was kind of surprising, "Do you know why you are here?" He boomed staring at me like it was the most important question he would ask me the whole time.

I gave a careless shrug as I answered his question with one of my own, "Don't we all?" Then I prop my feet on the table, and gazed at my black laced combat boots to annoy the judge.

He gave out a sigh-of annoyance of course- then commenced with one of the biggest lies I've ever heard. Flipping through the file he stated,"You are here because of the fact that you beat up your former foster parents in a fight about school grades. Your violence was unprovoked and because of it Mr. and Ms. Gateli have not only canceled the preceding foster care they've also suffered numerous injuries. This includes the fact that Mr. Gateli apparently will have a scar to remember you by for the rest of his life. In your attack you also destroyed half the house and the Gateli's are now asking for us to pay five thousand dollars for all the damage you caused. Anything you'd like to say in your defense because if you don't we will proceed in giving up your case to some social workers and then you'll be moved to California whether you like it or not." As he mentioned the social workers he pointed to the back of the room where the two people who'd been here before everyone else were still leaning on the wall.

I didn't look at them or turn around to glance at them because I already knew that they were there and I wasn't going to give the judge the satisfaction of knowing anything I didn't. When I'd seen them when I entered the room, I came to a conclusion. Which was, if I was going with them there was no way that it would be to California. In fact it would probably be somewhere close by in Massachusetts and nowhere near California.

So I chose to protest instead of giving to buy myself time and the fact that I never agree with the judge no matter who they are or what they're trying to tell me. I started defending myself at a rapid speed, "One, I think a lawyer is required in such case. Two, you nor anyone else in this room was there when that happened the only proof that I attacked them for no reason other than the word of Mr. and Ms. Gateli and seriously who can trust them everyone knows that they are really good at lying. Once they tried to smuggle

half of a grocery store's supply of ice cream and they blamed it all on me. Three, they were the ones that trashed half their house, not me, they chased me from the living room all the way to the attic and-

The judge cut me off. "You've already told that sorry excuse of a story to the officer that picked you up from the Gatell's house. Did you think that anyone would fall for your story? It is just as insane as if you hadn't attacked the Gatell's."

Since the judge was being persistent with his story I decided to put my wild idea in motion. He had just finished speaking when I jerked my head up to look the judge in the eyes and crowed with a smirk, "Well then I guess the only option left is to..."

I paused for dramatic effect for such a long time that the judge leaned over the table like an excited puppy and breathed out, "To go with the social workers to California?" After he said in such a desperate way that I almost felt bad for what I was about to do but then I remembered the only reason he wanted me to go to California was so that he never has to see me again and the bad feeling instantly vanished. I copied him and swung my feet off the table, I even leaned towards him like I was about to tell him the biggest secret ever. My wild idea wasn't stopping that it was in motion because well nothing could stop my wild ideas once they were in motion.

Right when the judge and I were almost face to face I jerked up like I'd been zapped by some sort of invisible energy, slammed my fists on the table, and shouted, "RUN!" With the energy that I'd been storing up every single time that the judge looked at me like I was a bug waiting to be smashed down by the court, I got up so fast that the chair I'd been sitting in toppled over. Then I high tail out of the room like the building was going to explode in one minute. At the door I glanced back for a second and that was all it took for me to sprint down the hall laughing my head off.

It had been the funniest scene I'd ever left a courtroom to see. The judge was still leaning over the table with a shocked expression on his face while the undersecretary of Mintery Ward was screaming her head off like a banshee, trying to give orders to everybody and anybody. The rest of the room had gone into a state of panic and people at the table were halfway to getting up, others were running to the door. So many people were in tangles of limbs on the floor because of all the sudden commotion, and it was impossible not to laugh.

This was the kind of chaos that I like causing, the only bad thing about what was going on was the two social workers that were supposed to be from California weren't behind the judge leaning on the wall like they'd been before. They weren't in the room, and I realized that fact right when I was about to round a corner. Good thing I realized that fact or I might have gotten a heart attack, because leaning on the wall right at the mouth of the hallway were the two social workers that definitely weren't from California but wanted everyone to think that they were from California but made it so obvious that they weren't from California. I almost ran into them but they moved with surprising speed for two people who'd just spent the last thirty minutes leaning on a hard wall and shifted out of the way just in time. The only thing that kept me from smashing into the wall head on was the arms that shot out in the blink of an eye. I crashed into their arms and almost instantaneously collapsed.

The world quickly went from fine to blurry vision and the out of focus sounds around me. I dimly felt arms pulling me up and the noise of the hallway seemed to increase by a tenfold. At first I was very confused on why everything was wonky now even though it hadn't been five seconds ago, but my confusion was drowned out by the sudden spikes of pain that took over. Each wave was worse than the

last and I felt my arms and legs start thrashing around wildly but they didn't feel like they were mine. Two pairs of arms supported and held me up by the arms. Since I wasn't really in control of my body at that moment all I can really remember was the fact that they were moving me down the hall and then down on an escalator.

The pain lessened a bit when we left the building and stepped out on the sidewalk. I was able to distinguish one thing from another and right then I could only see that the people supporting me were wearing black jackets. They looked like the people from the movies that had really harsh childhoods were the ultimate evil henchmen and never smiled. Okay maybe I was exaggerating a bit at the last part but the point was that I didn't want to be seen with them. So of course because I'm just cool in so many ways I tried to run away, obviously it didn't work but I still tried and that's all that counts. -The last part is a total lie because as soon as I tried to get away their grip tightened and they started walking faster which didn't help me at all.- As we went faster the world started spinning which of course had to make the pain from before relapse. I struggled like a helpless ragdoll and it filled me with fury.

Since the world was spinning around me all I was able to make out were a bunch of tall looming blobs -which I supposed were the buildings- and a dark big hole thingy up ahead -I kind of panicked at the sight of the hole thingy-. It didn't help that the people seemed to be heading straight for the dark big hole thingy, it just made me struggle harder. It also didn't help that they both seemed to have a grip like iron. They kept moving towards the big dark hole and by the time we were right in front of it the pain subsided into a mild headache and I realized that the big dark hole thingy was actually a tunnel. By a tunnel I meant one of those tunnels that leads to an underground parking lot type of tunnel.

I knew this as soon as we entered the tunnel and a van was waiting a few steps away. A good thing was that the walls of the tunnel were actually gray and that the van was black or else I wouldn't have seen the van at all. I couldn't really see straight but I did see someone's figure in the driver's seat and a pit of dread blossomed in my stomach. I didn't trust anyone to take me anywhere in a car or any vehicle for that matter, but they weren't really giving me a choice. I was pushed into the van as the back doors opened. It was dark inside the van but streaks of red were in my vision for no reason and the pain from before came back for the third time and it was worse than it had been the first time. This wasn't going to be a fun van ride, or a painless one either. There was a thirty percent chance that the van would crash because of the pain I was feeling, -trust me when I say that it is possible it almost happened once before and the experience was not fun at all.- and the other seventy percent chance seemed to be leaning on the fact that the world would end while I was in the van.

Sadly the world didn't end while I was in the van. Rather the world seemed to save some time for this to happen and nothing other than the fresh relapse of the pain from before changed. The two people who'd basically carried me to the van got in and settled down across from me and I could make out another person who was already sitting. I still couldn't see straight, much less find a seat belt that is the same color as the seat and then find the buckle. So someone had to do it for me, it was very embarrassing. The car started moving out of the tunnel as once everyone was settled down.

I felt the van bumping along the road. I also felt the tires skid on pavement as the van gave a sudden turn. This was not good or fun at all. My only hope is that I don't get another relapse of the pain.

"Hello, we are sorry in advance about this." Started saying one of the people across from me before pausing to see my reaction, I simply huffed in annoyance. "So very quick question do you know who your parents are."

"I know exactly who my parents are." I hissed under my breath. My dad kind of a huge jerk would must not be spoken of. My mom is Medusa and the gods dared to try and send that damned demigod Pereus to kill her after they curse her for no good reason. Though everyone is wrong about her because she is an absolutely amazing mom. To them though I asked, "Why does it matter?"

"Well your parents determine everything." They responded quickly almost like they were nervous.

"Like?" I questioned because despite myself I was kind of interested.

"If you can sense the coins," One them pulled out a coin and tried to keep my face as blank as possible because man I had not seen that coming. The coins are in short complicated, because... well. Okay I'm just going to say this every fast. They-each-the-immortal-soul-of-a-god-or-monster-giving-the-user-an-unlimited-amount-of-power. Wow that was a lot which means... Ugh they're demigods. Also this could prove to be very interesting.

They said it in a different way than my mom had but it was basically the same thing. I asked, "Why are the coins important?"

The people in front of me shared a look that seemed to have its own meaning to only them before the one in the middle answered, "The coins are the founding roots of the world, and though it might not make sense to you right now. They pose a great threat to unravel the world we know if anyone was to have them all."

I knew that this was my chance to find out whatever I hadn't been told by my mom without arising much suspicion. So I prompted them, "They pose a great threat to unravel the world as we know it.... How?"

They shared another look before answering, again the one sitting right in the middle answered. "They pose a great threat to the world if they are all together because, well.." he paused and took a deep breath -which didn't help the nerves that I'd suddenly developed- then continued " They could awaken Chaos."

After he said that I stared at him and he stared back for what seemed like an eternity. -it was actually only a minute but it felt like an eternity because I went on very high alert- Then time flipped to normal speed and everything felt like it was stretchy and thinning everywhere. That explained so much but it was a little too much to process all at once. The others let it sit there for a minute waiting for me to process it while they also took a minute to think about the deadly fact.

That was the reason no one was really paying any attention when the van got hit on the side. The car lurched sideways and I banged my head against the van door. Tires squealed on the metal barrier of the bridge and for a second I was frozen. Then suddenly I was moving but so was the van, and unfortunately the van was moving in the opposite direction than I was. My head crashed into the roof. Then the world flipped upside down.

It was a weird sensation to be weightless for a second but I wasn't really paying attention to that, in the moment I was focused on the surge of pain -that if I'd been standing would have made me fall down.- that had arisen when I hit my head twice against the metal of the car very suddenly. So of course I hadn't noticed the reason for why everything suddenly defied the laws of gravity was that we were in a van that was plummeting off a very long bridge into the river down below.

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IMMORTALS

- WOULD YOU LIKE TO LIVE FOREVER? -

