





May Murphy Thibaudeau

May Murphy was an acclaimed Wisconsin regional writer, whose work, *I Shall NOT DIE*, is a history of her Irish ancestors who settled in Dundee, WI. One of her nine books was recognized by the Smithsonian Institute and the University of Wisconsin for her impeccable research, the title of which is *For the Good of Others: The Life and Times of Frederick Layton*. She was an avid storyteller, entertaining her family with stories of her childhood in Dundee. Into her 90s, she inspired fellow members of Writers Ink in Cudahy. In addition, her books capture memories of the past. As noted by the Milwaukee Journal – Sentinel, “With simple words and insightful prose, May Murphy Thibaudeau saved the stories of many lives, including her own, from oblivion.”

Front and Back Cover: *Where Will We Have Christmas?* by Clairese Thibaudeau Huennekens

May Murphy Thibaudeau Writing Awards Ceremony

Poetry and Short Stories

Spring, 2021

St. Thomas More High School

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Freshman Poetry: First Place

Aubrey Koch

The Confession

Are you the right one?
Must I keep searching or am I finished and done?
Are those blue eyes as deep as the ocean?
Or are they as shallow as the stream that flows behind my house?
Do you hold secrets deep within your waters?
Are you a book that flows open until one has no more to say?
Or is there more to you than just the rippling surface of your ocean?

How far down can I swim within your eyes?

Maybe your eyes aren't the ocean or a stream...
Maybe they're a galaxy waiting, waiting to be discovered.
Maybe each one holds a whole solar system, untouched by the sadness of
humanity.
Maybe that sparkle on your eye isn't coming from the light above you.
Maybe that sparkle is a star billions of miles away waiting for someone to get to
know it.
Maybe that sparkle is the sun of my solar system.

How far can see within your eyes?

Perhaps your eyes aren't a galaxy or the ocean or a stream...
Perhaps they are a blue sapphire, placed there by the hands of God
Perhaps they were found deep under the ground of Sri Lanka.
Perhaps you are cut the way people have chosen to shape you.
Perhaps you are truly rough around the edges
Perhaps your sapphire eyes will cut right through me

How sharp can you cut me with your eyes?

Your eyes are just two pieces of a masterpiece,
Waiting to be looked into
Your hands are just two pieces of a masterpiece,
Waiting to be held

Your smile is just a piece of a masterpiece,
Waiting to be returned
And your heart, is a masterpiece all in itself,
Waiting to be loved....

Freshman Poetry: Second Place

Emelia Rucka

Broken

Brighter than the moon and the stars.
Your smile brightens up the room;
It's like a sun blinding everyone and everything
But who's to know?
That every time you brighten someone's day
You break a little
That even though your hurt, you still find time to help

You still find time to smile

People always happy to see you and your gorgeous smile
Always asking for help or answers
Never really coming to getting to know you
Just coming and going like wind on a hot summer day
Who's to know that you just want someone to stay

Yet, you still find time to smile

Never really speaking your mind
Always agreeing or keeping quiet
Thinking that if you don't, are they truly going to like you
How would they know that you just like the color yellow?
Or that you want to change the world
But, you still just keep your mouth shut and move on

And still you find time to smile

But one day, you've had enough
You drop your façade, and stop smiling
Everyone notices, but no one cares
And that's when you realized you wasted half your life
Pleasing those just to fit in

And that's when you know

Your smile is broken

Freshman Poetry: Third Place

Alexa Nguyen

Never Have I Ever

Never have I ever felt that love was real,
Yet never had he
Never have I ever seen the world as brightly,
Yet never had he
Never have I ever kept such real promises,
Yet never had he
Never have I ever wanted to keep truth,
Yet never had he
Never have I ever dreamt of reality,
Yet never had he
Never have I ever thought life meant adventures,
Yet never had he
Never have I ever wanted another,
Yet never had he

Never was until he,
Never is now forever

Freshman Short Story: First Place

Purple Kite by Emily Pheifer

We were dancing, just the two of us. If I had to explain it I don't think I could because it was like I was holding the sunshine. She looked at me and we melted into each other swaying like the wind, swirling her dress around her legs. The woman lifted her head to mine and I put my hand up to hers-then she disappeared. We weren't dancing, and I was sitting all alone. It was just me now, without her. The scrapbook was labeled "First Dance," and every time I looked at it I fell in love with her all over again. I pulled myself to reality and swallowed the dull pill down my throat. It clogged my memory and my wife drifted away, my mind was at rest.



There was a clear sky, and no clouds. I smiled as the morning continued and the sunshine rained on my face. I could see the park from my house, full of kids enjoying the daylight, with their basketballs and frisbees. One girl caught my attention. I squinted further, my vision had gone out over the years. She was a small one, but she didn't seem small. Emotion was bursting out of her as she swayed something above her head. It was a kite, a purple kite. Neither a dark kite, nor a flashy one. It was a fine purple that described the little girl's energy.

The kid noticed I was looking at her. She walked up to me, her tiny skirt racing as fast as her legs and stopped at my feet. I had to have been squinting too much because the girl laughed. Not in a mean way, but in a gentle way. Her smile illuminated and ended way past her cheeks. "Who are you?," she asked.

I repeated the gesture, "I think I've got to ask the same thing," and chuckled. "I'm Martie."

"Marie," the girl shook my trembling hand. She noticed, "What?"

"Nothing," I shook my head. "That name reminds me of someone that was very close to me a long time ago. You have her energy, that's all."

"You mean your wife? She is here too." The girl pointed towards the landscape around the playground. "Right there, see?"

I stood up and walked around, but as far as I tried to walk to the field, as much as I squinted I couldn't see her. I stopped and shook my head with force. "She's not there."

Marie's light seemed to go out like a lightbulb. "You aren't seeing it with yourself then." The girl took her kite and walked away.

"Wait, wait don't leave. I want to see her again, I want to see my Marie! Please!" I tried to reach the kid's shoulder but it was too late, she disappeared."

"Sir, are you all right?" The mailman looked up at me and walked me home. I saw scattered papers on the ground. "You were telling me to wait, was there something you needed?"

My hope faded. "No, sorry I didn't mean you. That's all right, you can go now, thank you."



Over the past few days that is all my mind is on. The girl in the dress. The kid who somehow knew my wife. Marie that I hallucinated. There had to be a reason why I saw what I did. The doorbell rang as I entered what looked like a tiny shop. The house illuminated with different cheap old lamps throughout the house and the fake crystals adorning the windows. Bethany would know why, and hopefully how I came up with this hallucination. or maybe it wasn't one at all, maybe it was real. I shook off the feeling, it's my schizophrenia. My head is playing a trick on me again.

In the middle of the thought a familiar door opens and I go inside.

The woman inside bursted out with a shout. "It's been too long Martie."

A familiar face smiled back at me and I gave a quick grin back to the woman I went to school with so long ago. Her big glasses looked like flying saucers which were connected to chains going down in a librarian fashion. Over the years I had met a shy girl in high school that loved to talk and was a huge hoarder. She was a friend with my wife and was the person who reassured her to go out on our first date. The best thing was her advice though, you'd go to her with a problem and she would have a solution.

Her handshake woke me up, “It is so nice out today, my neighbor came over with lemonade and let’s just say someone had to finish it all.” The woman laughed in a friendly way. “What did you want to talk about?”

“Thanks, Aven. It’s nice to see you. I was wondering if you could help me understand what I saw yesterday.” I made a hand gesture at “saw.”

“Of course, take a seat.”

I sat down in one of her big burly chairs that she used to love in college. At that point, she wanted to help other people and studied psychology, but had to drop out of school mid-fourth year because of too many student loans. The chairs were the smell of the cats that jumped and played with the yarn strewn across Aven’s house.

My friend handed me a warm cup of tea as I started telling her about yesterday. “There was this girl and she said she saw my wife, but I couldn’t see her. It was terrible, the girl’s name was the same as my Marie’s and she reminded me so much of her.” I smiled at the thought, but a cold shiver went down my spine. It wasn’t real. None of it really happened.

“And this girl, why did she remind you of your wife, besides her name,” Aven asked, moving my cup of tea closer, encouraging me to drink while I talked.

“She had her energy, I don’t know how to express it exactly, energetic and playful with her purple kite.”

“Marie had a kite, it was purple?” I grimaced at the name, trying to let out a smile. “Yeah it was purple.”

“Well you know I’m not a professional but purple symbolizes the mental alignment that you have with the world, maybe your mind senses how your balance seems to have fallen apart. And kites flow with the wind, They’re free. Perhaps your mind is telling you to free your mind from the burdens that have haunted you. Since the kite is Marie’s, it’s her that you may be holding on.” Aven held my cold hand with a worried expression.

I ran my hand across my scalp, “I can’t just forget about her, she left me. She left me! She got cancer and died and left me here alone, and I can’t just forget that it never happened.”

“Martie, forgetting and freeing yourself are two different things. Marie was your wife and was important to you and you made many lovely memories with her, but you can’t waste away your life wondering what it would be like if she were alive right now. I went through it too believe me, I had to watch her die a painful death that she never deserved

At least you were there, I wasn't, I wasn't there to say goodbye to her and now I'm haunted by it every day. Tears left my eyes and cut a path through the wrinkles on my face. All these years I've never known how to say it, I just can't she is too close to me

“I know she is, she is too close to me too. We can never let her go, but we can say goodbye because even though we're saying goodbye it's a meaning that she will not be here in person, but here in our hearts.”

“I don't want her just 'in my heart,' I want to love her again, I want to see her again, and not just the times where I would 'imagine her,' I want her to be here with me!”

“She is” This came from neither me nor Aven I looked behind my back to a girl in a dress with a purple kite with a small, kind smile. “She is right here, don't you see her?”

With that everything vanished, Aven, Marie, the inside of the house What was left of it was me staring at the same home with a closed sign on the front door. The way Aven would tell neighbors she wasn't home.

Rain fell on my face as I walked home, it had all felt so real.

Purple  *Kite*

Weeks and months passed by and I saw the girl again and again, making sure I was okay and continued telling me about who I couldn't see. I was so broken and lost, the most I had been all year. It had been too long since I hoped for her. Too long since I've seen her and held her in my arms, but it was too late to say goodbye now. It was just too late.

“Don’t you see? It’s not too late. Everyone in your life has been telling you that it’s time to let go and heal yourself.”

“Maybe that’s not enough,” I said with a sigh. “Maybe if she will tell me first only then will I really be able to let go of her.” The breeze brushed my hair out of my eyes, it was the start of winter now and the leaves had already fallen to the ground with anguish. How soon life had been sucked out of the world.

“You know,” said Marie, “-many have tried and failed to bring people back to life. It’s a sign of nature. How animals die for our consumption and plants heal and nurture. That’s nature, the ongoing cycle for humanity. Some time you will need to let go of me and of this kite. Though it may seem hard and impossible you must. You must do it for Marie, and for me. I’ve been through what she has and I know how hard it is and have grown to take my fear and have a duel with it.” She smiled as if the story was pleasing to her.

“You went through the same illness as my wife?”

The smile vanished. “Yes.” I remember my family being sad with me gone and my friends mad that I wasn’t there anymore. It was a blessing for me though,” she breathed out the cool air around us.

“Why bless certain death? Why honor distress?”

“They said, live, love, and laugh. I did laugh a lot, I lived, and I loved. I don’t know why I got the same illness as your wife and I didn’t know what to do and how to be positive, let me show you.”

I nodded as if I understood and a wave of emotions suddenly stirred into my once empty head.

A mother was crying outside a hospital room and the father was wiping his nose afraid to look in it. “You see, I loved to be outside and as soon as I got cancer I could do nothing that I wanted to do. But it taught me what was important.”

The scene zoomed out into the future where her mother was explaining to Marie what was going to happen. Marie was patting her mother’s hand. “Don’t worry we’re going to be fine”, her little hands reaching up and around her mother’s shoulders and they both hugged in silence but they were still happy even though it seemed hopeless. “Live, love, laugh.” Those were the things that I treasured and they became my treasures. Many times we are stuck and are not able to get out of

our own heads but if we can free ourselves and understand who we are and what we desire inside we are freed.”

It changed to the day where Marie was looking out the window at a purple kite, she let it go out the window, her spirit was freed. It was her death date, how she left the world. I realized how my eyes flooded to the brim with tears. “But your family, your friends...”

Marie patted my hand, “Don’t worry I still love, live, and laugh with them every day but not there, but in here.” The little girl pointed to her chest. “That’s what has always been important from the start. You lived, loved, and laughed with Marie but it doesn’t only have to be her. You can have her spirit in everything that you do and she doesn’t need to be here for you to feel better about the world around you. The world is your life, love, and laughter. Enjoy the world how it is, the difficulties and struggles but especially the good moments that you had with your wife.”



Spring was coming, the buds on the trees had started growing in and I began slowly to stop seeing Marie. I didn’t feel ready but I knew it was time to say goodbye to the little girl for good. Today I would see her for the last time and find what I needed truly. I sat on the swinging chair outside and pondered what she would say, or what she would respond.

The sunshine just started to come out for the day when a familiar face said, “Hello.”

My voice wavered, “I know that everyone is right and I just wanted to say thank you for all that you have done for me with everything that you have been through. Thank you for helping me notice how alone I felt and how that will change.”

Marie smiled, “No need, you found your way now.” The little girl’s expression changed. The sky turned a deep red and suddenly everything began to vanish. The playground, the trees, and even my house was whisked up by this fiery tornado that latched itself onto the ground and spun around angrily. Marie was swept up into the winds, and the only thing that I could grab onto her with was the

kite. “Wait! Not yet!” I grabbed hard onto the kite, I seemed to be the only thing that the tornado could not suck up. “I’m not ready!” My emotions had turned around from being ready to down right scared. I was never ready. The little girl had sprouted tears on the edges of her eyes. The first time that I had seen her cry.

“It’s all right. You need to let go, this kite and of me. “Don’t worry, I’m-I’m gonna always be with you.” The kite was tearing apart by the minute. It shredded down to it’s last layer of fabric. I still held the string with my shaky hand. I breathed.

“Thank you,” I whispered. I let go of the broken kite that sailed right into the tornado and all at once it exploded into the sky.

Purple  *Kite*

We were dancing just the two of us. It was early spring and the two of us had decided to have a dance in the new world that had just been awakened. She looked up at me with the biggest smile and I nodded with a sad smile. I let go and touched my chest as if to signalize I wasn’t really leaving her.

I woke up in the hospital, with Aven and the mailman around me. I saw the panicked looks on their faces. “Don’t worry,” I made out and patted Aven’s hand.

Purple  *Kite*

Freshman Short Story: Second Place

Crossover by Diana Reyes

Dimension 1D May 3rd 3:30pm

“Hey, did you do your homework?” is what Bea asks me when I’m zoning out.

“CRIS!” is what she had to yell at me to make me zone back in.

“Huh- oh yeah sorry Bea. What did you say?” is what I manage to say to her.

“Oh my- Cris, you need to stop thinking about what happened last week, and worry about doing your homework before you need to worry about exams.”

You might be asking yourself what exactly happened last week that has me very distracted. That I am not able to do my homework. Well, we should start with a formal introduction.

My name is Cristina Ramirez, also known as Cris. I am a college student that is studying for my degree to become an official pediatric nurse. It’s my first year and I was assigned a roommate named Beatríz Torres. We are practically twins and experienced something that was unusual for us. It happened about a week ago, when I was studying for an exam...

A week before (April 28th): 1D

“Cris, take a break, you’ve been staring at those books all day.”

“Ha- how can I take a break when my exam is in two days! I need to memorize everything to do good.”

“Come here Cris, like now not in like two hours.”

“I’m coming. What’s up?”

“We are going to do some shopping and you will not be able to object going shopping with your best roommate in the whole world.”

“FINEEE, but once we done, I got to keep studying ok?”

“Deal.”

We left the house and went shopping. We grabbed loads of clothes that we most likely won't even wear and we got tons of lotions and accessories. We were laughing the whole time and when we got back, we shut our mouths up because our dorm room was opened halfway.

“What the- Bea? Didn't you lock the door?” is what I told her with a trembling voice.

“I'm pretty sure I did. Maybe I just forgot. Or it was the wind who knows.” she laughs at her own joke nervously.

“Well we shall find out if there's someone in there.” I said, while moving softly across the entrance.

We searched the whole house but there was no sign of a burglar. I was glad we weren't being robbed but I heard a noise then in our closet. That's when I called Bea over and we both approached it. Then, Bea says, “You're opening that Cris.”

I give her a glare and open the door. When we peek inside, we see our shoes, jackets, and some old boxes full of pictures we had brought from our homes. We were very surprised to not see a person there and sighed in relief. What we didn't know is that there was a person looking at us, terrified of getting hurt.

Dimension 2D: a week ago April 28th

“MAT MAT! OH MY- MATTTT!!!” is what I scream to my roommate.

“What's up Raf? Stop screaming at me as if I were a mile away.” he says laughing.

When Mat sees my face full of terror he says, “WOAH- what happened to you? It looks like you just saw a ghost or some insect. Was it an insect cause I know your somehow terrified of those.”

“N-n-no it was a...” is what I manage to say.

“It was a what? Come on Matteo. I've never seen you this scared. Your literally one of the toughest guys in this major.”

“IT WAS A GIRL-” I say terrified as I point over to the doorway.

He laughs while saying, “Rafael, how can you be so scared of a girl. They don’t do nothing to you. Don’t worry.”

But when he sees where I’m pointing, he sees a girl that’s outlined in a light green glow. And right at that moment, we both see another girl appear the same.

We both yelled and were moving far away from them towards our windows.

When they leave the room, we both burst into nervous laughs. Matteo then says, “Oh my- what the- how- noo. Did you see that? Or am I going crazy? How can we see two girls that look like ghosts? Wait but are they actually ghosts? Cause that glow made them seen important.”

I then say, “I have no idea to be honest. I just saw that girl appear before my eyes and that’s when I yelled for you. But do you think they are gone for good?”

He laughs and says, “HA- ayayay Raf. From my knowledge of movies and all, those girls are going to appear again. So, we must hide if they come back and not make any type of sound. We have no idea what these girls are even capable of.”

“Oh. Okay. That seems easy for someone that has no idea what you’re talking about.”

We then sit down on our couch, and suddenly see a stack of books glitch in and disappear. I ignore the fact we live in some type of haunted dorm and take a nap.

I wake up to Matt saying, “They are here. THEY ARE HERE! Get up boiii or we gonna be in danger!”

“WHAT. No, I thought this was just a dream. What is this? What do I do?” My voice cracks at the end of how terrified I am of this situation.

He then says, “Well, go hide. Don’t be dumb, that’s the first thing you need to do.”

I watch as he rolls his eyes at me, and I see both girls walk slowly inside our dorm. I try to think of a place I could hide, when I see the girls split up. I run towards the closet, and I then knew that they were looking for me. They kept going in and out of parts of the dorm, looking closely throughout our things. I lean against the wall, or what I thought was the wall, and end up knocking over Matt’s baseball bat. I heard them coming close to me, and I was praying they wouldn’t find me.

Just when I heard their footsteps coming closer, my hand started to glow, and it disappeared. I contained my yell and saw the girl, but this time she had no glow,

she almost seemed normal to me. She then peeked around and shut the door. I sighed in relief and looked at my hand that appeared again.

Dimension 2D: May 3rd 3:30pm

“Dude, what are you doing?” says Matt when he sees the mess of books, paper, and folders I have out.

I respond saying, “I just can’t get that out of my head. I’ve tried to convince myself it was just a dream, but it seems too real and you were there too. So, it couldn’t possibly be a dream.”

“That still doesn’t explain the mess you have here.” He says annoyed.

“Well, I figured I should try and figure out what exactly happened.” is what I say while searching the internet for a book about invisible people that glow.

“You might as well give up because if you go around gambling about this, everyone will think you are delusional, and I will not be dragged into that image.”

“Fine.” is what I say while also finding what I was looking for.

“OH- MATEO! I found it!”

Dimension 1D: May 3rd 4:00pm

“Bea, I’m going to the library but I’m not so sure which one I should go too.”

“I don’t know Cris, you should search the internet for that. That’s why ZOOGLER was made.”

“Fine.” I search the internet and find a place that I had never heard of named “GRIZZO LIBRARY”. I grab my bag and keys while telling Bea, “Hey, you should come with me you know. Let’s check out this new place.”

We end up going and during the ride we listen to newest Selena Montez song. We sing along and end up screaming until we arrive. We see a huge building that was at least 50 stories high. We were shocked at how elegant it looked and was even more shocked to see a gold lambo park right beside our Toyota from 2010.

Dimension 2D: May 3rd 4:00pm

“How did I get dragged to come with Raf. How if I literally told you I wasn’t going to get dragged in this.”

I laugh at his statement and joke around with him saying, “Well is either one of these choices. 1. You really wanted to check out this library I found online, that by the looks of it, it looks like a penthouse. Or 2. You wanted to ride in this gold lambo I got after 10 years of hard work.” I smirk while saying, “I think you came cause of this lambo wasn’t it?”

He rolls his eyes and says, “Yeah sure. Sure. But how does this library look like a penthouse. You sure we aren’t invading someone’s property?”

I think while say, “Well Mr. Worrisome, I doubt we invaded someone’s property that is a PENTHOUSE and has a Toyota 2010.” I said that while pointing at the car that was parked right next to us.

“Oh yeah true true. Unless they are maids! You sure this is safe?” says Matt with a worried look.

I assure him saying, “Come on Matt, trust me. You think I’d bring us to a death trap? Have more confidence in me.”

Dimension 1D: May 3rd 4:05pm

“Well, let’s go Bea, I need to find this book that might help me clear my thoughts.” I say to her when I get out of the car. She nods while she keeps on staring on the gold lambo. I look at the lambo that’s right next to me and see two guys in it talking. They see me, and their eyes go wide most likely judging me by my car. I smile at them confidently and walk away like those mean girls in a high school type movie.

I tell Bea, “Don’t even bother, they are the typical spoiled rich kids.”

She laughs and says, “Don’t tell me they looked at you funny cause of your car?”

I glare at her and then roll my eyes and say, “Shush- let’s just get this done with.”

And we walk towards the entrance.

Dimension 2D: May 3rd 4:05pm

We were about to get out of the car when we see a girl. She looked our age and basically that's all I could see because of the angle she was positioned. She then turned around, and she looked vaguely familiar. While I was trying to find out where I've seen her, Matt gasped and said, "Oh no. That's her. That's glowing girl from a week ago."

When I processed what he was saying, I also gasped and stared at her wide eyed, trying to figure out how she looks so human without any glowing features. She smiled at us which got me more creeped out and then walked away. We waited a few seconds before talking.

"How- How is this even possible? I knew we weren't going to be safe. What were the odds we were going to see them at this library built like a penthouse." says Matt while glancing at the other girl that was staring at our car.

"I'm not sure. But if they can see us, and we can see them, I'm guessing they aren't ghosts. But that doesn't explain what happened that night." is what I say while nervous of what will happen next.

We decide to get out of the car, and we head to the entrance.

May 3rd 4:07pm

When we arrive at the door, we see that the rich guys also follow us in. I ignore them and walk to the receptionist. I ask, "Hello, where do I find a book about abnormal activities?"

She doesn't respond but stares at me. Bea then says, "AYO- receptionist? Are you going to respond or keep staring at us like that?"

Right then, the two boys stand right behind us and clear their throats. One of them says, "Good day Miss receptionist! I was wondering if this was the "GRIZZO LIBRARY" by any chance."

He gives a brief look at us but quickly turns away. I couldn't contain my anger towards that boy specifically, so I said, "Oh hey, Richie. Did you not see us? We are standing here in front and we arrived first. So please just let us continue talking with the receptionist. Thankyou!"

He then says, “WOAH- someone has a bit of an attitude. But I mean she didn’t respond to you guys first, so I decided to say something too. Just making sure she wasn’t sleeping on her job or something.”

The other guy laughs a bit and then clears his throat. I look over at Bea and she shrugs.

So, I decide to introduce myself saying, “Well um thanks, I guess. My names Cris by the way.”

I extend my hand and he shakes it doubtfully saying, “I’m Rafa. Nice to officially meet you.”

The other guy introduces himself as Matt and Bea introduces herself. After that the receptionist finally speaks, “Well, looks like you 4 special people finally met! My name is Ana, and I am the head CEO of the dimensions. You guys are each from either dimension 1D or 2D. There was a failure with our system, but you guys have encountered each other and have taken it exceptionally well.”

She smiles, while I ask, “I’m sorry, but I have never seen these two boys in my life. How could I have encountered them?”

Rafa coughs and says, “Well that’s not true. We saw you guys in our dorm about a week ago. Searching for something. I was hiding in the closet. You guys were glowing and well now we are here.”

I stare at him and remember he must’ve been the thing that knocked over some lotions that were in the closet. Ana then says, “Well there you go. Because of this, we need to ask you guys an important question. Would you guys want to erase your memories about this little encounter, or would you guys want to crossover to the normal world?”

We stare at her blankly and she says, “Well what would your decision be. If you guys choose to go to the normal, you would need to sacrifice something that WE choose. You will then enter and start from scratch. But, if you choose going back to your dimensions, you will act as if none of this happened, with no knowledge of crossovers.”

Bea then speaks and says, “If we go to the normal dimension, will we have our memories from now or not?”

She nods and says, “Well you guys have 2 minutes to decide. Starting now.”

May 3rd 4:15

“Well, have you guys come to a conclusion?”

We all say, “Yes we do.”

Then she says, “Well for this procedure we will get your answers individually. I will ask you your choice and you will tell me. After that, a glow will appear and you will be off to that world. Any questions?”

“No.”

“Well then let’s begin with Matteo. What is your choice?”

He looks up and smiles hesitantly while saying, “I choose going to the normal dimension.”

And with that a glow forms around him and before it makes him disappear, he says, “See yall at the other side!”

He vanishes and Ana says, “Rafael, what will be your decision?”

He responds saying, “You heard Matt, he’s waiting for me at the other side. So that means I’m going with him.”

She nods and the glowing whirl appears and transports him over.

Ana then looks at Beatríz and says, “Well what is your decision?”

Bea glances over to me, gives me a gentle smile that almost looks sad. I look at her with confusion until she says, “I will stay in the dimension I had come from.”

I then shout, “WHAT- NO! You were coming with us!”

She smiles while the whirl goes around her and says, “My instinct says I should stay. Something doesn’t seem right.”

With that, she vanishes into thin air. Ana then gives me a smile and says, “Well Cris, what will you choose?”

I burst into tears of frustration and say, “Well I guess that’s how things were going to be like. But I am not going back there. Take me to the normal world.”

And with that I feel a weird sensation while the glowing whirl wraps me up and makes me vanish.

In that moment Ana smiles to herself and says, “Well people these days can be really dumb. They have no idea what they are sacrificing when going there.”

Normal Dimension-Rafa

I look around but the only thing I see is a bright light. I try and look for Cris and Matt, but the light keeps blinding me. I then hear Matt scream and I immediately try and follow his scream. I can see part of him, but I see that he has no arms. I then hear footsteps coming towards us and see Cris looking confused.

Normal Dimension-Matt

When the glowing leaves, I land hard on my arm. When I come to my senses, I look around and see all the buildings and landscapes. It looked less polluted and brighter. I then get up and feel a loss of weight. I find it weird, so I look down, and I see no arms hanging from my shoulders. I scream loud because of how shocked I am. I then see Rafa coming towards me, but something is different about him. His eyes looked different. When he looked at me, it was as if he was using all his energy to look at me. When I hear footsteps, I step back to a safer distance. I see it is Cris, and immediately have a wave of relief. I look at her and smile. But then see there was something wrong with her face. She had no mouth.

Normal Dimension-Cris

I fall with tears in my eyes. I still couldn't believe why Bea wouldn't want to come here. When I land, I feel something weird on my face. I touch my mouth but end up touching stiches. Stiches! ON MY MOUTH! I tried to open my mouth or at least scream but nothing came out. I started to freak out, so I looked around the prairie I fell in, and started looking for Rafa and Matt. I then hear Matt scream and I walk softly in case there was something dangerous coming. I then spot Rafa, but he has no arms. I also spot Matt with him, looking blinded. We then hear a voice that sounded like Ana's that said, “Ha- well your prices to come to this world are now paid. So now go and enjoy yourselves.”

Dimension 1D-Bea

I wake up feeling dizzy. I get a sensation something happened to me, but I can't recall what it was. I look around at my dorm and see an unfamiliar girl on the opposite bed. She says, "Oh hi there. My names Cristina and I am your new roommate. They said this room wasn't fully occupied so I'm here now."

I smile at her and say, "Nice to meet you Cris. I'm Bea."

Freshman Short Story: Third Place

Go for Broke! by Hiroshi Kamikawa

Rain crashed down like gravel through a chute, fast and plentiful, hitting his steel helmet making a plinking patter, like rain on a tin roof back at the family farm. “Ah yes, the ol’ farm...haha, and I thought working there was hard...” Paul Kamikawa muttered to himself nostalgically. Paul was one of the thousands of Japanese Americans fighting for the U.S. In World War II, and he has now found himself fighting for a country that’s doesn’t believe in him, rejects him, and sees him as nothing but the enemy, even though he has lived his life free and happy in the United States until December 1941.

He adjusted his poncho as he coughed, breath visible as it lurched out of his body as he slouched his head down so no German could take it off. As he shrank into the rainy mudhole that was keeping him alive. He gripped his service rifle and adjusted his equipment. Paul had found himself in Anzio, Italy in May of 1944 as one of the 200 Japanese American replacements for the men slaughtered on the beaches and mainland of Anzio the previous months.

What dawned on him is he was in Italy, in the army, instead of one of those Internment camps with the rest of his family. Even though he knew the answer, he still contemplated if here or in those dingy, gross, crowded camps was better or not than in this hole getting shelled by Anzio Annie. He figured in the army was better because there was more of a chance to get food and medical care, but at the same time it wasn’t much, but it was something to keep you going.

Anzio Annie was the menace of any soldier on the beachhead. It was the nickname for the German 380mm Artillery piece so large it must be mounted on a railway car to transport. Its gun protruded out of the rectangular body, as tall as the car’s length and when she fired, her raining shells would sound like a freight train moving at high speeds right towards you, to kill you.

Only days ago, he was on a ship to this place, young and curious, his first time in war. Paul had enlisted right after Pearl Harbor before the order to round up all Japanese Americans. He wanted to be a gunner on one of those new B-17 bombers, but never got the chance because of who he was, a “Jap.” No one would trust him with a gun in the army, so he spent months as a barracks keep attending to officers and helping new recruits. A young man with potential trapped in a racial

ditch. Finally, men were needed and so the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the 100th Battalion were created for the Japanese Americans. He was part of the “Torch of Light” (442nd) but sent over early with the 100th battalion to be slaughtered.

He looked over at his shivering buddy in the foxhole with him. “Hey Tadashi, how are your feet?” he whispered.

“Okay, still attached to my legs!” Tadashi retorted.

“Hey, I never asked you, how did you end up in this place with me?” Paul asked curiously.

“I didn’t want to be in the camps anymore. They gave us a chance to get out and I took it. I wanted to fight for my country and prove those dogs we are just as loyal to this country as they are if not more.” Tadashi exclaimed. “I mean, spies? Japs? I never understood that. I was born and raised in Hawaii and went to California for high school and college and yet I have no reason to be here anymore. I thought it was a good idea to enlist, and I still believe it, but here, I mea-“Tadashi was cut off, and the silence that day was broken by explosions left and right and then screams, German and American as rounds crashed like thunder against the raindrops, zipping by. As Paul rushed out of the hole and forward to meet his foe, he saw Tadashi’s face, motionless, lifeless, in the mud on that bloody beach as Anzio Annie wrang through the storm.

The 442nd Regiment and the 100th Battalion, was made up of Nisei (2nd generation Japanese), would end up fighting harder and more gallantly than many all-white American units. The men of the 442 felt that they were being used as “cannon fodder” and told to do things other white units failed to do. These units ended up losing more in battle than the people they were sent to rescue or were massacred taking an objective. Through all this, Nisei units always won the fight. Always stayed strong, always worked towards what needed to get done. That’s why their motto is “Go for Broke.” Through Italy and France, they fought through tactically impossible terrain and objectives against the Axis powers. These men fought for their oppressed family in internment camps, their country who never even believed in them, their selves, and the people of the world to ensure safety, liberty, and justice for all, and Corporal Paul Kamikawa would live through it all and raise a wonderful family after the war, in a country that now recognized what he did.

To Paul, my grandfather.

Sophomore Poetry: First Place

Xitlali Peceno

The Breath of the Wild

The breath of the wild it's a blood bath.
The smell of the burning tall grass,
The sound of the crackling fire.
Run from reality my child run.

The blood thirst is surrounding.
The touch of the gravelly ground.
The bright stinging sun burns eyes.
Run from reality my child run.

This isn't one you should follow.
Instead listen to the loud chirps of the conures.
Hide under the cooling shade of the growing trees.
Run from reality my child run.

See no anger,
Hear no screams,
Smell no blood,
Feel no fear.

Live together in peace,
Where the great bright sun doesn't burn,
And the tall healthy grass isn't burned.
Stay safe my children for this is the
Breath of the wild.

Sophomore Poetry: Second Place

Harley Jusino

Never Alone

The look on everyone's face is the same.

The pain in everyone's eyes, the remorse in their forced smiles.

I have no words to say, not one.

I sit by your bedside; I hold your hand.

I pray for the impossible.

Silently wishing for a miracle.

People around me talking and crying but I'm not listening to a word they say.

I can only think one thing.

Why? Why now?

What am I supposed to do without you? Without your smile, your laugh, your presence?

I always hear people say, "No one is ever really gone."

I don't know how I am supposed to believe that when I am watching you slowly fade away.

That moment is finally coming.

The look on everyone's face has changed, but only slightly.

They all look so defeated and I already knew everything they were about to tell me.

I feel like I can hardly breathe. Nothing feels real and I try not to let it sink in.

But it does. It sinks in and I can't hold back my tears.

People are hugging me and telling me everything is going to be ok. I don't believe them.

You put everything together, you made everything make sense.

What now?

You were the glue and now you're gone. What do I do?

It's been a few days.

Now it's time to really let you go.

But I'm not ready. I don't think I could ever be ready.

All the people who ever got to experience your love is there to let you go.

Everyone is together, having different conversations.

I try to engage but it's hard to thinking about everything.

Everyone is up front, crying in front of you.

Talking about how thankful they were for you and how much they loved you.

I couldn't bring myself to do that. I didn't want to see you like that, so I stayed in the back.

Mostly because I refuse to believe what's happening.

But also, I want to remember you how you were.

I don't think I will ever really say goodbye to you.

I feel your presence sometimes and I wish you were really there.

If I could wish for anything in life it would be to have you here.

Even if it were just for a day, but I wish for eternity.

I get mad at myself because I think it would be selfish to keep you here.

So, I tell myself that you're not alone. That you're still being loved and adored wherever you are.

I hope to see you again one day. I hope to talk to you and laugh with you.

Just like before.

But for now, I will keep praying for the impossible.

And I will keep telling myself you're not alone.

Sophomore Poetry: Third Place

Peter Cram

Secret Suffering

I'm not afraid anymore.
You can blind me.
You can deceive me.
You can flash your shadows on me.
I'm not afraid anymore.
Your darkened sides can no longer take control of me.
I left your grasp to be free and in the light.
Yet, you try to bring me back into the dark.
I scream, I scream.
You are no longer with me and no longer hurt me.
I'm not afraid anymore.
You are a shadow in the corner waiting for me.
You wait for me to show a glimpse of hurt.
You wait for me to break and crawl back to you.
Your burning darkness pains me more.
I do not go back to you, your pain and misery in welcoming arms.
I'm not afraid anymore.
I will not fall back in.
I'm not afraid of depression anymore.
The distant memory is gone.
So, I say goodbye.

Sophomore Short Story: First Place

Marisa Dzekute

The Docks of Lakeview

Lakeview was once known as a small town down in the countryside. Its people lived small lives, making their own livings from home. John, the shopkeeper, ran his store in the comfort of his wooden house. Hank, the owner of the saloon, lived right upstairs. Jane, of course, sold clothing right in her sewing room.

The proudest part of this community was its farm. The prosperous Honeycomb Farm, once owned by an old farmer, passed on to his granddaughter, Hazel.

She once lived in the city, each day passing by in her depressed stupor. Life changed when Grandpa died. He left her a single envelope, advising her only to open it when life had reached its lowest point.

Since then everything was different.

Hazel saw life a little more clearly.

She saw herself a lot stronger than ever before.

One thing was certain for her. She would never leave the town of Lakeview.

Hazel walked softly on the dock. She could smell the stench of fish out of water. Now, however, she was immune to the foul smell. Every single day was working on the farm, tending to the animals who ran through the mud for the fifth time this week. Near the end of the dock sat the small lake house, also known as the bait shop. The man who ran it, Larry, was well into his 70s, but still enjoyed the art of fishing. Tonight Hazel would borrow his boat and do a little late-night fishing for some extra cash.

She opened the door slowly and found Larry already sitting behind the counter. He offered a smile as she browsed the fishing rods. Picking up a brown rod, she judged examined the strength. Seemed strong enough for the larger fish in the lake.

Hazel had lost a few rods before due to the strength of the sturgeons or largemouth bass. She picked up a box of hooks and bobbers from a nearby shelf.

“That it, lass?”

Hazel shook her head and pointed to the mini-fridge behind the counter.

“Can I get a cup of bloodworms?”

Larry nodded and opened the mini-fridge. He scanned the small blue cups until finally picking one up. On the top, it read “Bloodworms”. Hazel placed the items on the counter as Larry looked over the items. He looked back and forth between Hazel’s items and a small sheet of paper, which listed all the prices. With one final nod, he glanced at Hazel.

“\$7, lass. The boat is free of charge.”

Hazel nodded and handed Larry a 10-dollar bill.

“Keep the change. Lord knows I don’t need it.”

Larry smiled at the gesture and took the money. Hazel nodded goodbye and exited the shop. She gripped the rod in her hands, slipping the box of hooks and bobbers, as well as the cup of worms, into her backpack. She carefully walked off the dock and made her way toward the other dock.

The lake had two docks, one which held the bait shop, and the other which Larry kept his boat. Hazel normally just fished off the second dock but decided today she would try her luck on the boat.

As she took small steps on the dock, the wood beneath her creaked slightly. Hazel knew Larry was trying to save up his money to fix the dock, but with the reconstruction of the Community Center, Hazel doubted it would happen for a good few months. She stopped her walk when she noticed a hunched figure on the edge of the dock.

“Hello?”

The figure didn’t move. Hazel pursed her lips and walked closer a bit.

“Out late, huh?”

A rough voice reached Hazel's ears and she froze again. The figure turned around and Hazel noticed who it was. Beck, Larry's grandson, stood up and gave Hazel a small nod. He didn't say anything, just started to untie the boat from the dock.

"Pops told me you would be using this. Told me to help you out."

Hazel just nodded and set her items in the small fishing boat. It rocked as she stepped in softly, causing her to jump a bit. Beck shook his head and continued to untie the boat.

"Thanks, Beck."

He didn't say anything. All he did was wave his hand a bit as a mosquito flew by his ear. Hazel frowned and turned her attention to the lake. The stars shone and reflected brightly on the water. You could never get a sight like that in the city.

"Why are you here?"

Hazel looked back up at Beck. He stopped untying the boat and was now just sitting on the edge. His hands were stuffed in the pockets of his jeans, eyes searching Hazel for any answer.

"What do you mean?"

"Why are you out here? In Lakeview."

Hazel could tell this was a genuine question. Nothing about it seemed wrong. Just a simple question. She took a while to answer, playing with the straps of her overalls. After a few seconds, she looked back at Beck.

"To escape."

Beck only nodded and glanced out at the lake. A few splashes could be heard. Most likely fish jumping up for food or a frog going in for a swim.

"Why would you escape a good life?" Beck questioned coldly. "City girls like you live amazing lives with everything you could ask for."

Hazel frowned at that. She did not know how to feel about that. Hurt? Angry? Maybe both?

"My life was not good in the city. Every day I was drowning in the darkest pits of my mind." Hazel scowled, turning away from Beck. "You may think you know everything about everyone, but you don't."

Beck was silent for a while. He just sat on the dock staring blankly at the dark water. As he sat there, Hazel decided to untie the boat by herself. It was difficult, as the rope was still tight. How much strength was needed to keep a small fishing boat tied?

“Hazel, you are a strange one.”

She looked up. Beck was staring at her. His blue eyes reflected the waxing moon above. Hazel gave a small smile. She was not sure if that was a compliment or an insult.

“I guess you just needed to find the right path.”

Beck started to help Hazel untie the boat. She nodded.

“I was not happy in the city. It drained my happiness.” Hazel rocked slightly as the boat finally was untied. “Just because you are not happy in your current environment, it does not mean you need to stay.”

Hazel attached a hook and bobber to the fishing rod. Beck stayed silent. He watched Hazel’s delicate movements. Her small hands were covered in dirt. Most likely from working on the farm.

“Are you happy now?”

The question was sudden, and Hazel had to set the rod down before she hooked her finger. She looked up at Beck and smiled a bit.

“I am very happy now.”

With that, Hazel turned the boat’s engine on. It roared for a bit before dying down to a low grumble. Hazel gave Beck one last nod.

“Good luck, Beck. I’m sure you will find yourself.”

Then she was gone.

Beck stared at her in the middle of the lake from the dock. He found himself smiling a bit. The farmer was a lot of things. Strange? Yes. She was also kind though. Beck could tell she knew what exactly to say. He let out a small laugh and splashed the water with his feet.

Farmer Hazel and Beck.

Sharing a moment on the docks of Lakeview.

What a funny thing.

Sophomore Short Story: Second Place

Madeline Raflik

Injection

It was the year 3822 in the United States. There were lots and lots of technology all around, but there weren't any levitating cars. I wasn't a big fan of technology, so for every summer when I was young, I used to go to a camp called Camp Nature. It's basically a camp to get away from the technology and get closer to nature. I loved nature, and I loved that camp. But my life change after one little mistake I made when I was 13 years old.

It was summer break at 10:00 in the morning, my mom was dropping me and my best friend Cody off to Camp Nature. There were a lot of kids who came and I was happy to find new people to talk to. As Cody and I walked to the entrance, Sarah, the camp instructor checked off kids who attended the camp. Every year I went to the camp, I was always the last kid to be checked. I did that because I didn't want to wait for the other kids to get checked off. Once everyone was checked, we immediately found our camp cabins.

Cody and I were in the same cabin, unpacking our things and setting everything up. I was so excited when our group got to explore the woods. There were different groups or sections on the camp. There were lots of kids that year, so there were more groups. Each group did their own thing, like practicing cooking,

playing old games, swimming, and exploring. My favorite was exploring, ever since I was 10 when I first went to the camp. Cody and I were in the same group. We were pretty excited.

Cody was sitting on his bed and I was sitting on mine, waiting for the announcement to say, ‘Group four can begin their quest!’ Cody made eye contact with me with his dark brown eyes, “Hey Kael. Isn’t this exciting?! We get to see more trees! They planted more trees, right?”

“Aw man I’m so pumped up right now!” I tightly made my hands into two fists close to my face.

We waited for the clock to hit 11:00. Then we found ourselves hearing Sarah’s voice on the speakers, “Group four, come to the entrance with your things you need on the epic quest!”

Cody and I stared at each other in excitement with huge smiles. We raced to grab our backpacks and gear we needed on our quest. Once we picked up them at the same time, we charged at the door and we got stuck. It was funny. We were squirming around, trying to get loose. We were yelling at each other to get out of the way. Eventually, we got out and ran to the entrance. As we were there, there were two older kids who were the leaders for two groups: Jake and Maranda. They

were around in their late teenage years. Cody and I were in Maranda's group, which had six kids. Same as Jake's group. His group left first to the right road.

Maranda said in excitement, "Are you kids ready to explore the wilderness?!"

All six of us shouted while raising our fists to the air, "Yeah!"

Maranda said, "Alright! Let's go!" She turned around leading us to the left side of the entrance opening.

We walked on the road into the woods. I was looking around at the trees, plants; anything you can find in the wilderness. I was fascinated at the new flowers I had seen. We walked on the road for a while, about 15 minutes. Without realizing, I was lost. I wasn't paying attention where I was going. I looked around trying to find where the rest of my group was. I turned around seeing Cody. I made a surprised look, "Cody?!" My eyes widened, "What are you doing here?!"

Cody scratched his head, "Well, I was just following you."

I sighed to myself and my fingers of my right hand were resting on the brim of my nose, "Why did you follow me when the rest of them walked in the different direction?" I paused for a moment letting my hand down to my waist, "Well, I don't even know what direction they went." I looked at Cody, thinking, *Where do*

we go? We can just follow the road back. Yeah. That's a good plan. I said, "Cody, let's go back to the fork. We must have gone on the wrong side."

Cody said lifting his hand to his chin, "Yeah. That makes sense."

We headed back where the fork of the road was, but when we got further on the road, there was no fork. I didn't realize at the time, but I was actually going the right way in the first place. I was just walking too slow staring at nature. Cody did the same thing and the rest of the group was walking too fast.

We had been walking for about a half an hour. I said in frustration, "Ugh! Where is the stupid fork?!"

Cody was walking behind me and he said, "We must have passed it."

I turned around looking at him, irritated, "We would have passed it by now."

Cody gave an idea look. His eyes widened with excitement.

"I know that look. What is it?" I asked lifting an eyebrow. "It better not be a dumb idea like you said last year."

"I was thinking, since we're lost, we can go through the trees." He said with a big smile.

I looked at him like I'm not impressed, "Is that the best you can figure out?" I paused, "Let's just go back to the entrance of the camp."

“Oh! Uh. Yeah! That’s a better plan.” He laughed and shrugged it off.

We followed the road for a while and I saw something in the corner of my eye. I turned to look what it was, and I stared at it. It was a huge flower that I had never seen. My eyes widened and I was tranced on the flower. It was in an open area where the sunlight wasn’t blocked by the trees and it had tall grass. I left the side of the road and I could hear Cody’s voice saying, “Uh, Kael? You know the entrance is that way, right?” He pointed at the end of the road. There was nothing wrong with the flower, I was just a nature bug. Once I reached the flower, I gently touched its pink peddles. I turned to look at Cody, “Dude look at this flower. It’s huge.”

Cody came closer to the flower and me, “Whoa! That looks amazing!”

“I know right!” I stared at the flower. “Now this flower has to be in my new file of pictures.” I got out my small high-tech camera that was around my neck and took a nice picture of it. I was fascinated by it, so I kept looking at it like an idiot.

Cody looked up at the sky looking at the clouds. Then he squinted his eyes, “What is that?”

I looked up seeing a flock of something in the sky, “What?”

“That kind of looks cool, right?” He pointed. “Is that a cloud?”

“No. That’s not a cloud. What is that? Are those birds? No, they’re too small to be birds.” I talked to myself while squinting my eyes to see. “Creepy.” I paused. Then I looked at Cody. “We should head back.”

“Alright.” Cody clapped his hands.

We went towards the road and Cody was leading. Right when I was about to step on the road, I felt a sharp stinging pain on my left wrist. “Ow!” I flinched my arm and looked at it. I saw a bug bite.

Cody turned around to see if I was alright. “Hey, you good?”

“Yeah. A bug just bit me. It’s probably nothing serious.”

“Alright.” He turned back and began to walk towards the entrance.

When I was going to put my foot on the road, I saw in the corner of my eye; a big black bug that I never seen. Then it occurred to me, *That black ‘cloud’ were bugs?* I widened my eyes so wide it looked like I seen a ghost. *I never heard any bugs that are huge and stay in a pack like that.* I looked at the road shocked, not knowing what to think. Moments later, the bite on my wrist was hurting. I put pressure on it, but it was feeling worse. I quietly winced to myself, “Ah.”

Cody looked back to me again, concerned, “You sure you’re good?”

“Yeah. I’m fine.” I walked on the road and looked at Cody, “It’s nothing.” We walked for a while on the road, about 20 minutes, and eventually reached the entrance. We sat down on the benches near it and waited for the rest of the group to show up. 30 more minutes had passed and our group showed up.

Maranda ran towards us and yelled, “Where were you guys?! We had been worried sick!”

I looked at her feeling sorry, “I’m sorry, I got caught up with all the nature I was looking at. I must have didn’t realized that I was left behind – and Cody was with me too.”

“At least you went back to the entrance and waited here.” She patted my head. “Good job for not being an idiot.” She laughed.

I laughed with.

Jake’s group came and he called, “Hey! Maranda! How was the explore?!” He walked closer with his group.

Maranda called back, “Well, It was amazing! But. These two got lost.” She pointed at me and Cody.

Cody laughed. “Ha ha! Sorry about that. I blame Kael.” He looked at me all smug.

“Hey!” I laughed and elbowed him in the side.

Maranda looked at Jake and said, “It’s about lunch time, right?”

Jake answered, “Yeah – but we wait for the announcements to come up because the whole camp will eat all together this year, so we’ll go back to our cabins.”

“Okay.” Maranda said. “Everyone knows where their cabins are?”

All of us said, “Yeah!”

“Alright! You guys can go to your cabins and wait for lunch!”

We all started running to our cabins. Minutes later, Cody and I went to our cabin. We played some old card games like war. That was fun. We were both laughing and joking around. Then we heard Sarah’s voice on the speakers, “Everyone come to the cafeteria and have delicious lunch!” We both looked at each other and busted through the door and yelled, “Food!” We ran to the cafeteria and lined up like the rest of the kids. The lunch was sloppy joes. Cody and I got our lunch trays and got the lunch. We sat on the picnic table and ate our lunch. When I was about to eat the side food, the boiled carrots, with my fork using my left hand, I saw the bug bite on my wrist. I was shocked at what I was seeing. There were black veins, like I’d never seen before. I dropped my fork. My hand was shaking.

Cody looked at me confused, slightly tilting his head, “You okay?”

“Yeah.” I rubbed the bite. Immediately pain struck my arm and I quietly groaned to myself, “Ow!” I put pressure on my left arm and rubbed it.

“You sure you’re okay?” He stopped eating.

I looked at him in pain. I was shocked and silent.

“Dude. Your eye.” He leaned closer to me squinting his eyes to see.

“What?” I looked at my arm again and I saw the black veins even bigger and longer, up to my shoulder. My whole arm was aching. I was rubbing it up and down. Moments later, I felt pain in my left eye. “Ah!” I thrust my left hand on my eye. I sat up quickly covering it. “I’ll be in the bathroom.” I charged towards the men’s room and entered it. I went in front of the mirror and looked at myself. I let go of my eye and I was stunned. My eyes were wide and my mouth was open. There were black veins on the left side of my body. “What the heck?!” I came closer to the mirror to take a closer look. My left eye was purple, but my eyes were normally blue. “What?!” I saw that it was turning more and more red every second. The good thing was that the veins weren’t on my face yet, but they were on my neck. I looked at the grey long sleeved turtleneck shirt around my waist. I untied it and put it on to hide the veins. I sighed in pain and got out of the bathroom. I sat back down at the picnic table where Cody and I sat. My breathing was unsteady.

Cody looked at me worried, “You good?”

I nodded.

“What was that? The bug that bit you earlier?” He continued eating.

“Maybe.” I paused and looked at the bite. “What the heck? If only I kept going straight.”

“Just let it go, man.”

“How can I let it go?!” I stood up and shouted. Everyone looked at our table. I sat back down and whispered and leaned closer to Cody, so no one else can hear, “How *can* I let that go. My whole body hurts!”

Cody leaned near me and whispered, “I think you should get that checked out if it’s hurting you.”

I leaned back playing with my food, “Yeah... you’re right.” I lost my appetite.

Minutes later, two men walked in the cafeteria. It was weird. No one knew who they were, and they just walked in like no problem. All of the kids stared, not knowing what to do. We all gave the attention to the two men. They were wearing lab coats and sunglasses. I got the chills. Sarah immediately ran to them and talked. I didn’t hear them since they were so far from where Cody and I were sitting. I saw

that she was yelling at them. I heard, “Who are you guys?! And what do you want?!”

The taller man was talking, but I couldn’t hear him. Then he put his hand in his coat pocket to get something out. It was a gun! We all widened our eyes.

Sarah immediately backed away.

“Alright!” He shouted. “Who has seen something out of the ordinary around these areas?!”

Cody stood up and raised his right hand, not knowing how bad the action was. “I’ve seen something weird!”

I put my head down and hovered my hands on my head trying to be invisible. I whispered to Cody, “Dude! What are you doing!”

Cody continued, “I’ve seen a weird cloud thingy in the sky, but my friend didn’t think it was a cloud or a flock of birds.”

I whispered again, “Cody! *Stop!*”

The shorter man patted on the taller man’s shoulder and whispered in his ear. I couldn’t hear what he was saying. Then the taller man and I made eye contact. I froze in fear. He turned around and left. The shorter man followed. We all sighed in relief. No one could finish their meals after that.

Sarah called, “Everyone! We’re going to stay in the cafeteria for now once we figure things out!” She left with the vice instructor of the camp, Cole.

There were young adults watching over us, so we can be safe. One of them, Peter, shouted, “Okay kids! We’re going to huddle in one big circle like penguins!”

We did what we were told.

We stayed in the cafeteria for five hours. We were bored out of our minds. Cody, still lost at what was happening said, “Why *are* we huddling like penguins?”

A girl, Rachel, who was next to him said, “Are you dumb are something? There was a guy who had a gun.”

The bug bite was starting to ache again and I rubbed my arm. Moments later, I was starting to feel lightheaded. I quietly and slowly knelt to the floor holding my head. Rachel knelt with me and said, “Whoa, Kael? Are you okay?” She held me in her arms, which was embarrassing. I didn’t want her to touch me, so I stood up. That was a mistake because I immediately went back down. Rachel rested her hand on my shoulder and asked, “What happened to you? Did Cody do something stupid again?” She joked.

“N-no.” I paused and thought to myself, *Why does it hurt to talk?* “I was the one being an idiot. A weird bug bit me.” I looked at my wrist and the black veins were even more black.

Rachel looked at it and was shocked, “You should get that checked out.”

“Y-yeah.”

A few more hours had passed and it was getting a bit dark outside, so I looked at my watch. It was 7:50 in the evening. Finally, Sarah and Cole came in the cafeteria. Sarah called out to everyone, “Alright! We found a black van that we didn’t recognize. So, we know the two men were using that van, so we left it for a couple hours ago. We let it be for 45 minutes. Then we came back to it. It was gone. They must have left.”

Cole added, “We don’t know that for sure, so we’re going to spend the night together in the cafeteria. I know it’ll be weird, but it’s the safest way. We’re going to tell you to get your sleeping bags, *but* you have to be in big groups. Your groups will be kids who are near your own cabins.”

We all were shocked and scared, and we went in our groups. Each group had to take turns to go outside. Eventually it was my group’s turn to go out. We quickly took turns for each cabin and the last one was Cody’s and mine. We all went in and Cody grabbed his sleeping bag, but I had to get it out of my suitcase first, which it was at the end of my bed on the floor against the wall. I quickly unzipped it and got my sleeping bag out. When I was about to turn around, I saw in the corner of my eye, a black figure that was outside the window. My eyes

locked at the figure and didn't look away. I was terrified. I could see its eyes. It was staring at me.

Cody called out to me, "Yo! Come on!"

I looked at Cody, "R-right." I turned back at the window; there was nothing there. My heart sank. I grabbed my sleeping bag and rushed to my group and we went back to the cafeteria.

"Is everyone in the cafeteria?!" Sarah called.

We all looked around to see if anyone was missing, I didn't see anyone I knew who wasn't there. Everyone was in the cafeteria.

Some time had passed and we were setting up our sleeping bags. I looked at my watch and it was 8:30. If this were a normal situation, the boys and girls would sleep separately, but Sarah wanted everyone to be close to each other even though it was uncomfortable. The boys and girls were on each side on the floor; the girls on the left; the boys on the right.

When we were on our sleeping bags, Sarah said, "I'm going to turn off the light and lock the doors." And she did.

It was pretty dark and all of us got in our sleeping bags and slept. I couldn't sleep, all I could think of was that figure I saw. I kept squirming around trying to

get comfortable, but I wasn't able to. My whole body was aching at this point. I checked my watch once more and it was 1:00 in the morning. I sat up to check if the person who was watching over us was asleep, who was Jake, which I was hoping he wasn't asleep. I saw Jake half asleep trying to stay awake. We made eye contact. He was gesturing his hands, and mouthed, "Go to sleep. I got this." Or something like that. I went back down on my pillow and sighed. *No need to worry. Jake will stay awake, right?* At that moment I was getting pretty tired, so I started to close my eyes.

I heard the glass window break and my eyes shot open. I sprung up looking around. I looked to find if Jake was still awake, but I didn't see him. I looked everywhere. I looked at my campmates, and it seemed like they didn't hear the glass shattering. *Where did Jake go?* I looked and looked around again, but there was no sight of him.

Seconds later, I heard footsteps by the broken window. I immediately laid down and pretended to be asleep. I closed my eyes and I could hear the footsteps coming closer and closer to me. He was whispering to himself, "That guy was supposed to look after these brats? It was easy to knock him out." He chuckled a little. I gave out a tiny gasp and he heard me. "What the-" I could hear that he got closer to me, so I tried to not flinch. He continued, "This is the brat boss wanted, right?"

What? I thought. I began to shake. *Stop shaking, dang it!*

“Oh. You must be still awake.”

I stopped shaking and just froze. I didn't want to open my eyes, but I slightly opened them anyways. We made eye contact and my face was filled with fear. It was that man who was here; he was the shorter one. I was speechless, but I was able to get something out of my mouth; it was shaken, “Why are you here?”

He looked at my left eye, “Yep. You are definitely the brat the boss wants.”

I widened my eyes in fear. I didn't know what to do.

He smiled at me, “Come on let's go to the van. There's candy.”

I knew about stranger danger, so I didn't say anything. Instead, I looked around. I saw the broken glass. It was near where Jake was. *This guy's after me only? Is it okay to run away leaving my friends?* I looked back at him afraid.

“Not talking huh?” He paused, “Just come with me peacefully. I don't like to hurt children.”

Then why is he doing this? I looked at him mad. I turned to see the broken window again and looked for open areas to jump to. The only way was to jump over Cody who was sleeping next to me. I stood up and jumped over him and bolted around the other kids to the window.

“Hey!” He whispered. “Come back here!”

I was hoping someone would wake up. I was too scared to yell out for help, so I just kept running towards the window. I finally reached it and tried to climb over it. I didn't care if I got cut by the access glass on the window. I was about to get out without a scratch, but I felt a yank on my right leg. It was the man. He pulled me out of the window and that caused my forehead to be cut from the glass. “Ow.” I slammed on the floor landing on my chest and gave a big groan.

He put pressure on my back. “Hey! You weren't supposed to run away kid.” His tone changed to irritation.

I struggled to breathe and I looked at my campmates. They were still asleep. My eyes widened. *Come on guys wake up! How are you still sleeping?* I tried to scream, but the pressure on my back was increasing like he was standing on me. I turned my head to face him and I stared at him with rage. I tried to be tough, but inside I was terrified.

The man leaned closer to me and said, “What's with that look? You trying to be tough?” He lifted his foot off of my back and stomped terribly hard on my back. I tried to scream again, but nothing came out, only a breathless scream. He put his foot off again and squatted down, “Look, I meant it that I don't like to hurt little

kids. But you gave me no choice. You were trying to run away, and we need you, okay?”

I looked at him weak. I wasn't able to think, and I felt like I was going to pass out. I was in so much pain. That bug bite made it even worse. I blinked slowly and looked at him, giving in.

“I'm sorry. It's not your fault that you're in this mess.” He grabbed me and sat me up. Then he took my arms behind my back and tied them together. He stood up and looked at me, “Can you stand?”

I looked at my campmates and they're still asleep. I guess it made sense because we all knew each other and we're all deep sleepers. I saw Cody, and I had a plan. I stood up and looked at the man.

“Good. Now let's go.” He was about to grab my arm. Before he could, I bolted. “Hey!” He exclaimed.

I ran around the circle of my campmates and as I was about to reach Cody, I slipped and fell. “Cody!” I yelled. I got back up and ran to him. My hands weren't free, so I kicked him gently, “Cody!” I could see the man was catching up. I kicked him harder. “Cody!”

Cody moaned, “What? What do you want?” He turned to face me. “What happened to your head?”

I couldn't think straight, "Cody listen, the men that were here are trying to kidnap me!"

"Ha ha. Very funny." He scolded and turned to go to sleep.

I made a disappointed look, yet surprised. Seconds later, I made a deep breath and shouted at the top of my lungs, "Wake up!!!" No one did so. I was shocked and confused, and my eyes widened, "W-what?"

The man grabbed the back of my turtleneck and yanked me back and tightly wrapped his arm around my neck. "That won't work. We put a high sleeping powder in the food."

I couldn't grab the man's arm, my hands were behind my back, so I squirmed and I hoped he would let go. It wasn't helping and I couldn't breathe properly. Moments later, I started feeling tired, but I wouldn't give in. I kicked him as hard as I could, but failed. I tried squirming once again and I almost got freed, but the man slammed on top of me. His arm was still wrapped around my neck and with the pressure on my back by his weight, I couldn't breathe at all. My sight began to darken and I eventually gave in.

I heard the man's voice saying, "Sorry kid."

I gave out a small breathless groan, "Why? I don't..." Then I blacked out.

Moments later, I could hear two voices. One of them sounded familiar. It was the guy who kidnapped me. I could also hear a vehicle driving on a road. The man who kidnapped me said, “Hey boss? Why did we take this kid?” His tone of voice changed to anger, “You know I don’t like hurting little children.”

“Well, you need to get over that now because we’re going to torture him like hell.” Said the other man who was driving.

“What?! I didn’t sign up for this!”

“Get over it! I never intentioned that the insects will bite a kid.” He paused, “The insects broke loose, you know that. I ordered the other men to catch every single insect.” He paused again, “Now my question is: why the insects bite this kid? They don’t bite at all. They usually bite animals, not humans. They’re harmless to humans. So, why?”

I quietly moaned to myself and slightly opened my eyes. I was inside the back of a big van. My hands were still tied behind my back, so I was laying on my side. I also noticed that my mouth was taped. I lifted, ever so slowly, my head to see where I was. I looked outside the window and my eyes widened. There was daylight. I was shocked at what I saw seeing. *It’s daytime already? How long was I out?* I tried to look at my watch by twisting around, but I failed.

“Boss?” asked the man. “What are we going to do to this kid?”

I stopped struggling.

“Well, we’re going to inject him with more of the venom like we did for the other animals.”

My eyes widened. *What?!*

“We’re here.” Said the man who was driving, who was the boss.

I felt the van turn sharply and went straight for a bit. Then eventually stopped. I heard the two men get out of the van and gone around it. I shut my eyes closed pretending to be asleep. I heard the trunk door open.

“Charles, carry the boy.” Said the guy who was called boss.

“Yes boss.” He leaned and put his arms under me and lifted me up.

Here’s my chance. I squirmed and Charles dropped me. I fell on the grass and immediately got up and sprinted, but I had a little trouble since my hands were tied behind my back.

“Ah! Hey! Get back here!” Called Charles.

“Well don’t just stand there get the dart gun!” The boss yelled at Charles.

I ran not looking back. Seconds later I heard Charles shot the dart gun. I was prepared to get hit, but he missed me. I looked at them and turned back running as fast as I could. I got pretty far at that point.

I heard the boss guy yell, “Oh give me that! I’ll show you how it’s done.”

I turned back and I saw he was pointing the gun at me. I turned around running faster. Then I heard the shot. I kept running and running. Seconds later, I felt a sharp pain on the back of my neck. “Ah!” I wanted to pull out the dart, but I couldn’t. I started to feel tired, weak, and lightheaded. The dart was still in the back of my neck, so the stuff inside of it was going in my system. I fell to my knees, catching my breath. I wanted to stay awake, so I was mumbling with the tape still on my mouth, “Stay awake. Stay awake!”

The boss guy walked behind me and said, “That won’t work. That dart is my masterpiece. I feel proud about it.”

I tuned my head glaring at him with rage. At this point, I wasn’t feeling that scared, but irritated and angry at these men.

“Whoa! Look at that! This little man is mad.” Said the boss.

I tried to stand to run again, but I was too lightheaded. I widened my eyes to keep them open. *Come on... stay awake!* My vision was getting fuzzy. It was an awful feeling. Eventually, I fell to the side on the ground, and everything went black.

Then next thing I remember was that I was laying on a hard concrete floor. I could feel my hands weren’t behind my back anymore. I opened my eyes and

gasped. I was in a cell! *What?! Where am I?* It looked super old, like it was made in the early 2000s. I stood up quietly and I saw a man I didn't recognize standing beside the cell bars. I looked at my hands and they were chained with metal on my wrists and electrical chains. That was when I knew I couldn't break them. I walked to the bars and looked at a man. "Um... excuse me? Where am I?"

Then the man turned to look at me, and he was shocked. He shouted, "Hey boss! The brat woke up!"

The boss came running to us wearing his lab coat, "Finally." He grasped one of the bars and leaned closer, "Are you ready?"

"Ready for what?" I asked frightened.

"You know the bug that bit you yesterday?"

I nodded curiously.

"That bug I created had a venom. I had tested that venom on many animals, but I've never tested it on a human before. Was it painful when the bug stung you, or no?"

I was silent for a moment. Then got the courage to speak, "Y-yes. It hurts, but over time, it was hurting anymore."

“I see.” He paused, “The venom wasn’t supposed to hurt you. When I was testing it on the animals, they weren’t at all in pain. Does it hurt now?”

I looked at my left wrist where the bite was. It was faded, but was still a little visible. The black veins were almost gone. I touched it with my right hand and it was a little painful, so I scrunched my nose.

“So, is that a yes?”

I nodded. “But, my body doesn’t hurt anymore.”

“Good.” He smiled.

I was getting confused. “Are you a doctor?” I asked.

His smile went away and he just stared at me. He closed his eyes and sighed. He opened his eyes again and smiled. “You could say that. I’m more like a scientist.”

I freaked out, “What are you going to do to me?”

“Oh, nothing really. Just going to inject the venom in you.” He grinned.

I backed away widening my eyes. “No... I don’t want to die.”

“You’re not going to die. No need to worry.” He unlocked the cell lock.

“How old are you, kid?” He gestured his hand out.

I stepped back. “Th-thirteen.”

He gave out a surprised expression. “Wow. You are just a kid.”

I turned at the doorway and saw Charales run over to us wearing his lab coat. “Boss we’re all set up.”

“Good.” The boss said.

“Hey boss?” Charales asked.

“What?” the boss looked at Charales.

“Um. If you don’t mind, may I take the kid to the room.” He twiddled his thumbs.

“Yeah, sure. Why not.” He walked away leaving the room.

Charales and I made eye contact. He opened the doors of the cell wider.

“So.... Uh. You ready?”

I just stared at him. “Why would I trust you? You’re the one who almost choked me to death.”

“N-no! I wasn’t trying to kill you. I just wanted you to settle down.”

“You could have just knocked me out by whacking me in the head instead of suffocating me. That was scary, you know. I couldn’t breathe.” My tone change to fear.

Charales stepped closer to me and said, “Look. I know it was scary. I didn’t want to give you a concussion, so I thought at the top of my head was to suffocate you until you pass out. That was the safest way then hitting you as hard as I can.”

I was silent for a moment, “But I didn’t want to be here. I *don’t* want to be here! I’m terrified out of my mind! Let me go!” Small tears began to form in my eyes.

“Look, I didn’t want you to be here either, but boss found out that you got stung by one of the insects he created that had the venom in them. He tested a lot of animals and infused the venom inside them, and they were fine. Nothing happened to them. But there was this strange thing that happened to them: their fur turned white and their eyes turned red. Like your left eye right now.” He pointed at me.

I gave a confused look and touched my left eye. I didn’t feel anything.

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“Your left eye is red. Oh! I have a small mirror in my pocket.” He put his hand in his coat pocket and faced the circle mirror to my face.

My eyes widened in shock. He didn't lie. My eye was truly red.

Charles put the mirror back in his pocket. Then gestured his hand forward, "Alright, the boss is waiting."

My heart sank and I walked slowly forward out of the cell. *I have to get out of here.* I thought. As Charles and I were walking out of the doorway from the room full of cells, I bolted. I was a little easier because of my hands weren't tied behind my back, but I was hard from my wrists being handcuffed in front of me.

"Hey!" Charles called. "Get back here!" He started charging for me.

I didn't look back. I turned the corner and I saw about five people in lab coats. I stopped. I turned around seeing Charles right there.

"Come on kid. I don't want to do this either. You're an innocent child."

Charles gave a sad and regretting expression.

"Then *why?! Why do you do this to me?!*" Small tears began to fill my eyes. "I just wanna go home." The tears turned bigger and ran down my face. I wiped them, but they kept running down.

Charles walked towards me and said, "Look, I know you're scared, But we need you for this experiment."

I screamed at him, “Then why!? Why can’t you just do it on your own people!? Why can’t you test one of your ‘scientists’” At that time, my emotions were all over the place. I didn’t know what came over me.

“Look, we were planning that, but the insects got loose and we had to catch them. You were just unlucky to be bitten by one of them.” Charales walked closer to me.

I began to shake uncontrollably. I fell to my knees, giving up, “I’m never getting out of here.” My tears ran down my face so much that they hit the white floor. I could feel the other people were looking at me and I felt embarrassed.

Charales stood in front of me gesturing his hand out, “Can you stand?” He was too nice for his own good.

I just sat there staring at the floor not saying anything and my tears began to dry out.

Charales grabbed my shoulders and lifted me to stand, “Up you go.” He walked behind and helped me walk forward. He turned to the other people who were standing there, “Sorry about that.”

Minutes later we arrived in the room. I looked around seeing different kinds of animals in cages. Like what they said, the animals’ fur was white like snow and their eyes were a bright saturated red.

“I got him boss.” Charales said.

“Took you long enough.” The boss scolded. He walked in front of a white chair and patted the seat. “Come of kid, sit.”

I looked at the chair. My face turned no emotion to disgust. I had never seen a chair so torturous. There were straps where the arms and leg were. I was terrified. *These guys are worse than I thought.* I took a step back bumping into Charales.

Charales looked at me. “Boss. You’re really going to put him on that thing, why? He’s just a child!” He glared at the boss.

“Look, I don’t want to do this too alright. He said the venom hurts him, which seems weird because the venom didn’t hurt the animals.” Said the boss. “Now put him on the chair.”

Charales grabbed my shoulders and picked me up and put me on the chair. He strapped down my arms and legs and looked at me, “I am truly sorry kid. I was the one who wanted to be tested.”

“Then get tested – and let me go!” I yelled.

“You already have the venom inside you. We plan to put more of that venom in you because you only have a drop of it.”

I froze. “Wha-. If that was a drop, then, this hole injection thing will hurt me even more.” I began to squirm, “Get me out of here!”

“Hey. What’s going around here?” An unfamiliar woman came in.

“R-Richelle! What are you doing here?” Charales asked.

She looked at me, “What are you going to do to this poor child?”

“We were just going to inject him with the venom.” Charales said.

“I see.” She walked to me. “What’s your name little boy?”

The boss called, “Hey! Richelle! Get out of here. I’m trying to do something.”

She looked at the boss, “Roger. Hello. It’s been a while.” She smiled.

“Brother, I was felling lonely, so I came here to see how you’re doing. And of course, what you’ve been doing in this old, abandoned building.”

“Go – away.” Roger said irritated.

“Fine.” She turned around. “You know you’re doing illegal things in this building.” Then she left the room.

Roger looked around. He pointed at a person who was in the background.

“You!”

“Y-yes boss?” He shuddered.

“Go follow her and make sure she left the building.” He pointed at the door.

He ran out the door and followed Richelle.

“Now” Roger looked at me holding the needle. “Where were we?”

I looked at the shot in fear. I tried to squirm free, but it wasn't working. He tore my left long sleeved turtleneck, and began to inject the venom. I looked away closing my eyes tightly. I could feel the venom going inside me. Then the pain began to increase rapidly.

“Done.” Roger took the needle away.

The pain was unbearable. I looked at my shoulder and the black veins came back. I tightly closed my eyes once more and struggled to break free. Moments later, I could feel the venom flow. I screamed in pain. I screamed so loud that it was hurting my throat. Everyone around me covered their ears.

“Ah! Why is it hurting him?!” Charales yelled.

Roger yelled back, “It must be a reaction that he's allergic to!”

I screamed even louder. *It hurts. It hurts!* I squirmed to break free.

Roger covered his ears, “Someone shut him up!”

I heard running footsteps from behind me. Someone put a cloth over my mouth. I kept screaming from all the pain, but it was muffled. Tears were running down my face.

Charales looked at me, “Boss, what have we done?”

Roger grabbed his hair stressed, “Ugh! What are we supposed to do now?! This wasn’t supposed to happen!” He looked at me and gasped, “His hair. It’s turning white!”

“You’re right!” Charales said.

I stopped muffle screaming and I opened my eyes. The pain was still there, but the flow of the venom was over. I made eye contact with Charales.

“Boss, look. His eyes are red too.” He said.

Roger looked at me, “So, it does work on humans too.”

I glared at them catching my breath and thought, *Do they not care?* Shortly after, I was feeling tired, so I closed my eyes and slept. I remember waking up in the cell that I was in before and I was laying on the concrete ground. I looked around and I looked at my watch. It said it was July. I was too weak to think and move. I heard footsteps and I turned my head to look, it was Charales.

Charales unlocked the cell door and came in. He walked closer and bent down, “You had been sleeping for 3 weeks. I’m sorry we did this to you. The venom wasn’t supposed to give you pain.”

Roger came in, “Charales! Leave him be.”

Charales looked at him and said, “What are we supposed to do know, boss? We can’t let him go free. The police will find us out.”

You can do what ever you want with him. I don’t care.” Then Roger walked off.

“Boss... you’re so cold.” Charales looked at Roger in anger and turned back to me. “I’ll take care of you, promise.

Spoiler alert: he didn’t. All he did was feed me, and it wasn’t a lot of food. He kept and kept on apologizing for giving me not enough food to eat. This went on for a while, four years to be exact. I was still alive, barely. I felt no emotion. I felt nothing. Time had past and it was February 26th. It was my 17th birthday. Yes, I was stuck in the awful building forever. The clothes on me were small and hard to move in. During the winters, I was freezing and I was surprised that I didn’t catch hypothermia. I must had been the ‘venom’ that was injected inside of me. When I was shivering, I saw Roger walk in.

“Hello. It’s been a while since I’ve seen you. Man, you grew!” He took out a piece of paper. “Look. It’s you. It’s a missing poster of you. Your family was looking for you this whole time.” He smiled, “How sweet of them.”

I looked at him showing no emotion and didn’t say a word.

A woman walked in. She looked like Richelle. “It took four years for someone to believe me.” She walked and faced me. “Sorry about that.”

Roger’s eyes were shocked.

Richelle looked at him, “Don’t give me that look, brother.” She smiles, “You should have seen this coming.” She looked outside the doorway and called. “This is the guy who was doing illegal experiments!” She turned back at Roger, “I know we’re family, but you made a little boy a test subject? How cruel can you get?”

Policemen marched in and took away Roger and he was still shocked.

I saw other policemen running around freeing the animals and helping them and arresting the other people who worked with Roger. I saw Charales and we made eye contact. He looked relieved. He wasn’t bad after all. I heard the cell door open. I looked at Richelle.

“Come here, child.” She lend me her hand.

I stood up and walked ever so slowly and weakly. I couldn't even walk properly. When I was just about to get out of the cell, I fell on Richelle, exhausted.

She caught me and said, "You poor boy." She patted my white hair. "You must have gone through so much. I called your family. They are right outside."

I looked up at her.

"Come on, let's go and see your family." She helped me stand up straight and guided me outside.

The building was like a maze. It took about ten minutes to get out of the building. As we went outside, I saw my Mom and Dad. They saw me and ran towards me and hugged me as tight as they could.

"Oh! My son!" My Mom kissed my cheek. "Your eyes and hair. What did they do to you?"

"I'll punish the men who did this to you!" My Dad said with rage.

I didn't say anything. I wasn't really happy, sad, or mad at them. I shown no emotion.

Once my parents hugged me again, I saw Cody. He looked older. He walked towards us slowly. Eventually he reached his destination. He stared at my eyes

looking frightened. “L-look, I-I’m sorry Kael. I should have listened to you that day.”

I didn’t say anything. Then something was able to come out of my mouth, It was weak and scratchy, “It’s not your fault, you were poisoned with a sleeping powder.”

My Mom pat my head, “Oh, My poor baby.” She started crying.

Once we got settled down, we immediately went to the hospital. As we entered, I was sat on a wheelchair. We went on the elevator and went to where my room was set up. This was a little foggy, so I didn’t remember much. I remember waking up on a hospital bed.

I saw my Mom resting her head on the bed. Then she woke up, “Kael. You’re awake. The Doctor will be here soon.”

Moments later, The doctor came in. She was my doctor over the years. “Kael you’re awake, good.” She sat on the stool that was next to the bed. “We have got all of the poison out of your system. It did take a while. About 6 hours. Your eye color and hair color won’t be able to change back to normal.”

I nodded. Seconds later, I coughed into my hand hard. I looked at it and there was blood. A lot of blood.

My Mom freaked out, “Kael! Oh my God!”

I coughed again and there was no blood. I said weakly, “I’m okay.” I coughed once more.

“Doctor, do something!” My Mom yelled.

“I called them up here.” Doctor said.

A man rushed in and sat down next to me, and stared. He sighed in relief, “He’ll be fine. It looks like he had an allergic reaction. Kael was allergic to the poison in his system. I am surprised he survived.”

“He will be back too normal?” My Mom asked desperately.

“Yes, he should return back to health.” He replied.

“Oh, That’s good.” My Mom sighed in relief.

“But, after he had gone through I doubt he will show emotion, sorry.” He said.

My Mom hugged me tight.

“Kael will be in the hospital for two more weeks.”

Two weeks had passed and I was sent out of the hospital. I wasn’t supposed to go to school yet, because my mom thought other kids would bully me from

being older than them, because I had missed 8th grade and up. I did go to school eventually. No one really bullied me. The teacher told her students beforehand. She must have told them about why I was so behind in school because the other students were avoiding me and talking about my unnatural eye color and hair color. I was fine with that because I didn't really care.

During school, I was too smart to be in 8th grade and I knew 11th grade work, so my Mom skipped me to my original grade. I was doing well in high school, but I didn't make any friends, which I didn't care. There was this one time where a girl in my class asked me out because I looked attractive to her and she said she liked my hair and asked me if I died my hair. I just kept walking; I didn't care about relationships and I didn't feel attached to her. But, she never gave up on me.

To this day, I still don't feel any emotion. I just turned 19 and I began my freshman year of college. I sometimes go to mental hospitals, but I don't think they can fix what I've been through.

Sophomore Short Story: Third Place

Drew Jeske

Mirrors

I shouldn't even be here, how did it end up like this? thought Dr. Richards as a door shut behind him, trapping him. He thought back on the previous hours. He had taken their submarine after an argument with his brother about whether or not there was something unnatural on the ocean floor, so he set off to find it himself. *Well, he thought, I found it alright. A giant alien structure, and I drove right in and trapped myself.* After he had docked the submarine in the structure's moonpool, he had gotten out to investigate, but as soon as he walked through the first doorway, the door had closed, and he was trapped.

He turns around, looking to see if there was a way to reopen the door, but the symbols on the on it mean nothing to him. He turns away from the door and starts down the long, mirrored hallway he had found himself in. Every surface was covered in mirrors, except for the ceiling, which had light coming through glass. Dr. Richards examines the mirrors, hoping to find something, some clue to help him escape, but found nothing. He continues down the hallway into the next room.

Again, the doors shut behind him with no way to open it. Instead of another hallway, this room was a wide-open expanse, with a ceiling curving far into the

darkness above. In the center of the room stood a pedestal, with a single item on top. As he looks closer, he sees that the item on the pedestal looks like a high-tech eyepiece. Seeing no better alternative, he puts it on. Suddenly, the markings on the wall gain meaning. He goes to try the door that he came through, but it is still locked and needed a passcode. Seeing that, once again, the only way was forwards, Dr. Richards opens the next door.

He walked into another long, mirror-covered hallway. As soon as he stepped through the doorway, the door closed behind him and the lights dimmed. He soon realized that all the surfaces were covered with mirrors. Everywhere he looked, infinite mirrored versions of him stared back. *Just breathe* he thought. He took a step, and the sound seemed to be mirrored as well. He kept walking, hoping to find the door soon. He bumped into himself more than once, but he always managed to keep sight of where he needed to go. Eventually, he made it close enough to the end of the hall for the door to open, and he escaped.

He stepped into a large, triangular room with a three-faced mirror in the center, each side facing a different wall. In addition to the door he had come through, there were two others. Both were locked. He tried to make more sense of the words above the doors, but they were just a jumble of letters that didn't mean anything. He attempts to guess the passcode for the door, but none of them worked. *Thump* went his head as he leaned it against the central mirror in frustration. *Will I*

ever be able to get out of here? He opened his eyes and saw the letters in the mirror. They were different than when he first looked! Excited, he turned around, only to find that they had changed back into what they were before. Discouraged, he turned back around, and found that the letters had changed again. Suddenly, it clicked. *I'm not seeing the reflections of letters; I'm seeing the reflections of the alien characters! Seeing them in a mirror must change their meaning!* With new confidence, he read the signs over the doors. One read “generator” and the other read “moonpool.” Great! He now knew where to go, but that didn’t help his problem of the passcode. He decided to look at the passcode keypad through the mirror. What had previously said passcode now showed the word that needed to be entered to proceed. He quickly put in the passcode and hurried through the door. How many rooms he passed through like this, he soon lost count. The only other object he found was a handheld mirror, which helped with the other doors. Eventually, he made it back to the moonpool.

When he walked into the room with the moonpool, the doors shut, as usual. This time, however, all of the keypads deactivated, stopping what small hopes he had of exploring further. The room had also been rearranged in the time it had taken him to get back. The underside door of the moonpool was still closed, but a large mirror and a keypad had sprouted from the wall. The symbols on this keypad, unlike all the others, did not decode themselves through the eyepiece. Even

looking at them through the mirror, they remained as mysterious as when he first entered the structure. He tried to guess at the combination, but as soon as he had put in his first guess, the lights went out.

Total darkness enveloped him. Scared he would fall into the moonpool, Dr. Richards decided to stay still. Suddenly, a sound came from behind him. Carefully, he turned around to find a light emanating from the mirror. Looking around for the source of the light, he concluded that it had to be coming from inside the mirror itself. He walked up to the mirror, expecting to bump into it at any second. Instead, he passed right through it, into a dark void that extended in all directions. He continued towards the light, hoping to find some clue of what was happening. What he found was surprisingly mundane. The source of the light was a simple lamp, brass with a white shade. When he examined the area around the lamp, however, he almost jumped in fright. Sitting next to the lamp was a chair with a dark figure seated in it. The figure's head was tilted forwards, and all of its features were hidden in the shadows.

“Welcome.” spoke the figure. “So glad you could join me. Why don't you have a seat?” Before Dr. Richards could move, a chair similar to the one the figure was sitting in rushed forwards from behind him, knocking him backwards into it. As he landed softly in the cushioned chair, he a flash of realization hit him. That lamp wasn't just any old lamp, it was his lamp. That lamp and these chair were in

his living room at his house. The figure seemed to sense that Dr. Richards had made this discovery, as it raised its head to stare at Dr. Richards. He gasped as he saw that the face staring back at him was a dark, sinister reflection of his own.

“What are you?” asked Dr. Richards. “And where are we?”

“I’m you.” Replied the dark Richards. “All of your negative emotions, every doubt you’ve ever had in yourself. As for where we are, well, I’m you. I know no more than you do.”

Dr. Richards got up and began to walk in the direction he believed was where he came from. He kept walking, but a familiar light began to come from in front of him.

“Don’t you think I’d already tried that?” Asked his doppelganger. “I’ve been trapped in here ever since you looked in that first mirror. Why do you think you’ve become so confident all of a sudden?”

Dr. Richards hadn’t thought about that. He began to think. He knew that his twin didn’t know the way out any more than he did, but he also figured that there had to be some way out. The blank void did not leave him with very many options, though. Then it came to him. The only way out that he could think of. So, he proposed it to himself.

“You really think that if we somehow merge back together, we can escape?”

Asked his reflection. “How do you even know it will work? Once we’re back together, I doubt we could come up with another coherent plan.”

“Until we try, I have every confidence it will work.” Replied Dr. Richards.

Dr. Richards got up and held out his hand to his darker half. It grabbed his hand, and a vibration began to form in the air between them. He tried to pull it off the chair, and the vibration grew, louder, stronger. Suddenly, it popped out of the chair, and then, darkness.

Dr. Richards woke up in his bed. His brother said that the air in the sub hadn’t been working right, and that it had automatically returned after he had passed out. Dr. Richards decided that it was best not to tell his brother about his experience, especially since it may or may not have happened. He got up and went to the deep-sea scanner, setting it to run. As the results came back, he smiled, as a small irregularity in the ocean floor came up on the scan.

Junior Poetry: First Place

Jonalie Zamora

Candle

What do you do
when the candlelight
begins to dim?

The candle that's been there for you
ever since you were a child,
scaring away the night
and all that lurked there
in order to bring you
the slightest ounce of comfort?

The one that shined light
on countless ugly scenes
but hoped to one day see
everything in a brighter,
more beautiful light,
where everything made sense?

The one that stayed lit,
even in a power outage,
shining brightly
as it patiently waited
for the power to return,
and encouraged its brothers and sisters
to shine once more?

The one that was awake
while the day was asleep,
and whose tiny flame brought warmth
when the world grew dark,
the air grew cold,
and the walls were thin?

The one that found light in everything,

even when there was no light to be found?

What would you do?

Because that light...

That everlasting, perpetual, never-ending light...

It's fading.

No one ever thought it would
because that light tried so hard
to hide every flicker,
every little moment,
where its light faltered.

It's running out of things
worth shining its light on.
Countless people rely on its light,
but who can it rely on in return?

The flame melts away the wax.
It's eating it alive.

The wick is charred and falling apart.
It turns to flaming cinders.

You hear the candle crackle.
The smoke snuffed out its screams.

The candle stays lit anyways.

...

I can't do this much longer.

Junior Poetry: Second Place

Olivia Knights

Rosemary, Hope, Swallow

These are the things I hope will last 'til tomorrow.
 For the rosemary is a plant,
 And plants are essential to life.
 They feed us,
 Clothe us,
 Sing to us in beauty,
 And if you listen closely,
 They are the peacemakers of the planet.
 The rosemary is an herb.
 It adds the touch of beauty on a dish,
 Is strong, and yet delicate,
 Used fresh and dried.
 Rosemary is the spice of life.

Hope is one word.
 Yet it is the word that can spur the world into action.
 Hope is emotion that turns on the light.
 It ensures the fire is lit through the night,
 For darkness can be overwhelming,
 And hope simmers fear and despair
 Into a broth of peace.
 At the end of the struggle,
 The end of winter and the beginning of spring,
 When a bear cub is born,
 The mother can be thankful,
 And learn the lesson of strength through darkness.
 She becomes powerful.
 The greater the darkness,
 The greater the light.
 Hope gives reason to see things through,
 And encourages one to see anew.
 Alight in the knowledge of temporary fight,

A fight to grow stronger,
And a Hope to keep the spirit alive.

The swallow is a key to freedom.
It flies high and humble,
Delicate, yet powerful.
It sees and knows all.
The swallow is an abundant bird,
She deals well with her community,
And is a caring mother to her children.
The swallow sings without worry of judgement,
She sings without being forced,
She sings to let her inner beauty show,
She sings because she wants to.
The swallow has beauty,
But does not boast.
She can go up from the seriousness of the world,
High on her tiny wings,
And discover there is little to worry about
Amidst the vastness of the world.
The swallow is free.

Rosemary, hope, swallow,
Three things I pray to last 'til tomorrow.
Things simple and yet full of character.
The Earth is plagued by mindless wish-wash,
Yet our Mother is still beautiful.
Life is dependent on the Life of our Mother.
Healthy Mother, healthy Child.
So, care for our mother and we may live,
And so too will those little sacred treasures,
Rosemary, Hope, Swallow.

Junior Poetry: Third Place

Mercedes Maier

The Circle of Life

The tree bears ripe fruit.
Blue abyss holds the water.
Cloud carries clean rain.

Hands hold the baby.
Caress the life in one place.
Hold it carefully.

Clock ticks time away.
Let the moment die today.
Stars hold the secrets.

Kiss the happiness.
Knowledge is our confinement.
Inhale the ashes.

The mice know the wood.
But the knowing are not saved.
Fox must hunt the weak.

Fruit rots on the ground.
The abyss drowns the creature.
Acid rain pours down.

Junior Short Story: First Place

Jonalie Zamora

Bread Dreams

The essence of dreams began to slip away from her as the morning drew near, but she didn't mind, no matter how wonderful the dream she'd been having was. The sun approached at a dreadfully slow pace, taking its time in lighting up the girl's room while she silently urged it to rise faster. She found herself rolling impatiently around her bed, tangled in her sheets, while waiting for the sun to impolitely appear on the horizon, late as always (in her mind).

What seemed to be an eternity later (it was only five minutes), her alarm began to ring melodiously and she jumped to return it to silence, a smile plastered on her face as radiant sunlight filled her room. While her clothes were indecisively discarded on the floor and her room returned to a state of natural messiness, her closet became a mess of a single white dress and a pink cardigan, both of which she hastily threw on as she gathered the rest of her clothing and shoved them back into their prison of a closet.

Amarella giggled to herself as she stared at her clone in the mirror, braiding two sections of her chestnut hair and pinning them together with her only bow, allowing the rest of her curls to hang freely. The clone grinned at her, giving a sign of encouragement as the girl stepped through the door and into her little bread shop with a joyful bounce in her step.

Glittering sunlight poured itself through the storefront's windows without anyone's permission. She took a small trip from behind the counter and to the front door, her eyes closed as she walked the unobstructed path that she had memorized from years of practice. Amarella skillfully walked around the empty, spotless display cases, hopped out of the way of the only table and chair in the shop, and brushed past the looming bookshelves. She reached out her hand and found what she sought immediately, as expected. "Open for business!" she said to no one in particular as she opened her eyes and flipped the hand-written sign on the door with flair. The smooth wood was warm from the sunlight that was continuing to fill the room.

Before she returned to her post at the counter of her little bread shop, she found herself staring at the photos she had hung up on the wall next to the door. She knew she had hung them there the day the shop opened up, and surely she had put them up there for a reason other than decor. No matter how hard she analyzed the photos, however, her memories always outsmarted her and hid elsewhere. The day she hung up those photos, they merely became colorless blobs to her. Staring

cluelessly at the photos was part of her routine now though, and it was time to get back to it.

Amarella treaded lightly into her bread workshop. She began to knead fresh dough and gently separated pieces into their own pans before sliding them into the flaming oven, watching her little inventions rise as their outer layers became golden-brown crust. The aroma of fresh bread wafted aimlessly through the shop as she continued to go through the monotonous motions of her day, enthusiastically creating flaky pastries and assembling glamorous cakes while humming a long-lost melody to herself. Strawberry shortcakes, peachy pastries, and raspberry tarts hopped out of the oven and into the display cases. Fluffy croissants, soft cookies, buttery baguettes, and other delights joined their mouth-watering counterparts. Amarella refused to believe that her bread shop was the same as a bakery; everything she made was a pipe dream in the world of bread.

As she set out her colorful works of art in their displays, cherry blossom petals found their way to the floor. The petals came from the trees hanging from on the glass roof, disturbed by a nonexistent breeze. The blossoms didn't belong inside, nor did the trees, but her shop always found a way to defy logic. She took out a watering can and began to water the persistent blossoms, ignoring the petals that always returned to the hardwood floor and fell atop her bread desserts. In a way, the petals added something special to her bread, a dash of color and sweetness and tang that couldn't be found anywhere else in the colorless world outside. The tiny and tame flowers that were hanging in a row above her counter also received some cold water to foster their dreams of growing into strong little plants.

By the time the sun was high in the sky, Amarella finished all of her daily duties and retreated into the final part of her routine. Picking a handful of random books from her two bookshelves, she carried them back to the counter and set them down as gently as she could. The bindings on each book were worn out. She had read all of these books at least a hundred times, but she couldn't bring herself to leave her shop, and the predictability of each book was now a part of her sacred unchanging routine.

This bread shop was special, you see. The plants never died, even though Amarella always overwatered them. They never grew, neither. The petals that fell from the cherry blossom each day never piled up, but always ended up on the tree once again, ready to fall once more. The display cases emptied themselves of desserts every day, and the ingredients that were used would always replenish themselves. The door hadn't been opened since the day the shop opened.

She happily dove into her first book, absorbing every letter in every word, expecting her reading wouldn't be interrupted. Not once before had she ever received a customer in her little bread shop. Light gleamed even brighter through

the windows and the cherry blossoms casted their shadows on the unsuspecting world below as she started reading. She managed to stay undisturbed for a handful of minutes.

And then a colorless man stepped in from the colorless world outside. His dismal gray eyes met her vibrant hazel ones, which had widened at the sight of him. Amarella couldn't even remember the last time she saw another human being.

The man was wearing a black suit with a gray tie, gray watch, gray shoes, gray suitcase, and gray glasses. His hair only had a slight tint of brown before fading to a dull black. Fabulous, he was boring. Based on the look on his pale face, he was severely confused.

"Excuse me miss, is this the Graphis Pen Shop?" the man said, clearly out of breath. His curly hair was somewhat disheveled, and it looked like he ran to get here. "I'm Levi Walsh, I was supposed to take an interview today."

"What kind of person takes an interview to work at a pen shop?!" Amarella said incredulously. It took a moment for her to realize that she had said that out loud. She let out a nervous laugh before saying, "No, this is Bread Dreams Bakery. My name's Aramella, welcome and how may I help you?"

"Do you know how to get to Graphis Pen Shop?"

"I didn't know pen shops still existed until now."

The pair stared at each other for a moment, the confusion escalating rather quickly as they awkwardly stood in silence. Twenty-seven blinks later, Levi asked, "Mind if I browse, then? I haven't had breakfast." Amarella gave a small nod, and he began to wander aimlessly around the small shop. She carefully watched him as he stared at the glass displays. He faintly resembled the pictures she hung up on the wall, but she figured anyone in the outside world would resemble it anyways.

While Amarella was contemplating Levi's identity, the man was not only famished, but awestruck as well. "You know," he said, drooling as he stared at a bright red raspberry tart, "this is probably the first time I've seen color since I was a kid."

"Is that so?" Amarella said, slightly curious. "I haven't seen much gray since the day I opened this place." Levi let out a chuckle.

"You're kidding, right? Literally everything is black and white and gray outside, that wouldn't be possible unless you stay inside all day..." His laughter faded to silence when he heard no reply. "Wait...you do go outside...right?"

"Nope!" she sighed, resting her chin on her hand as she started flipping through her book again. He was starting to bore her. "I haven't had a reason to leave here, and I doubt I ever will."

"But how?! Don't you need to shop for supplies?"

"Nope."

“What about getting food?”

“Nope.”

“You just never leave the store?”

“Nope.” Levi threw his hands up in the air and started walking in a circle, to which Amarella responded with a look of concern. “What do you think you’re doing there, mister?” She said sarcastically, rolling her eyes with a little giggle.

“That’s amazing!” He said. “Everything outside is so boring and bland nowadays. The buildings are gray, the cars are gray, the plants are gray...it’s all gray. Heck, even kids nowadays are gray! I could’ve sworn I was at least 15 when I lost my colors. Everyone talks with droning voices like robots and creativity is dead!” He paused his rambling for a moment. “How is everything in here still so colorful? And vibrant? It just doesn’t make sense to me.”

“Ignorance is bliss, my friend,” Amarella said as she shut her book and slid it to the other side of the counter with a dramatic *swish!* At least this conversation was starting to get interesting. “I don’t ask questions. The shop doesn’t make sense to me either, but my day essentially resets on its own.”

“Ohhhhh that’s weird!” Levi was getting excited. “So do you live in some strange time loop or something?”

“I have no idea,” Amarella said with a laugh. “The mystery is what makes the magic, I suppose...You sure ask a lot of questions for someone who’s missing a boring interview right now.” Levi stopped dead in his tracks; he forgot that he had places to be.

“You are absolutely right! I should get going,” he said with a pained smile on his face. He knew that the pen shop interview would, indeed, be very boring. “How much does one of these tarts cost?”

Amarella made a shooing motion towards him. She desperately wanted to get back to her routine already. “Just take it, it’ll find its way back to me tomorrow anyways.”

Levi’s face lit up as though he just won the lottery. “Thanks a bunch!” he said, smiling from ear to ear. “I’ll definitely come back here tomorrow!” He snagged one of the mouth-watering raspberry tarts from its display and made his way towards the door. Amarella let out a sigh of introverted relief as she heard the door open.

She sighed a moment too soon.

Amarella heard a loud *thud!* from the doorway as Levi’s suitcase fell on the floor, breaking open and scattering papers in the wind. Oh great, a mess. Levi was still standing in the doorway, but he didn’t look like he was going to pick up his papers nor exit as he originally intended. In fact, he looked completely different. “Oh no, did I poison you?” Amarella said, startled by the sudden noise. Levi

slowly turned to meet her gaze with wide eyes. Aramella saw the raspberry tart had a large bite taken out of it.

“I HAVE COLOR AGAIN!” Levi bellowed as he jumped with joy, his now light-brown curls bouncing as he began to spin around in hyper, dramatic circles. His skin was no longer a papery white, but a healthy tan color. His eyes were a soft sea-green. His clothes were still the same lame shades of grey, but the change in his colors and liveliness were noticeable enough. As his spin began to slow, he said to Aramella, “Why didn’t tell me your food could do this sooner!? The tangy flavor of this tart is terrific and I feel alive again!”

Aramella was confused as well. “I haven’t had any customers before, I didn’t know it could do that!”

Levi’s face changed from joy to shock like the drop of a hat. “You don’t have any customers?!? Aramella shook her head. “Well, you’re in luck! I wanted to be the head marketer of a lame old pen shop, but here I am with the opportunity to market something that *everyone* needs to see!”

“I think I really did poison him...” Aramella muttered to herself.

“Miss Aramella ma’am-”

“Who says that?!” she interjected.

“Can I be head of sales here? Pretty please?!” Levi begged, getting down on one knee in front of the counter as though he were proposing to her. He was acting undeniably childish, but Aramella could tell he was being completely sincere. “With your splendiferous desserts and my fantabulous marketing skills, we could return the world to the lively, colorful state it once was!”

Aramella hesitated. She had run this shop for over seven years now, and not once had her routine been interrupted. All so suddenly, she finally had her first customer, who threatened to bring in more customers, who threatened to make her do more work and stray from her favorite routine. On the other hand, it was an opportunity to share her passionate creations with the world and pull it out of the dismal state that Levi had described. Her thoughts clouded her mind like puffs of flour as she weighed her options.

“Get off the floor,” Aramella ordered with a laugh. Levi stood up so quickly that he nearly fell over. “I’ll give you a chance, but don’t get your hopes up.”

Levi saluted for some reason. “Yes ma’am! I won’t let you down!” He proceeded to run out of the shop without another word, leaving behind his half-eaten raspberry tart and random papers skewed across the wooden floor. Aramella didn’t move to retrieve tart nor the papers; she knew they would vanish on their own tomorrow.

“Huh. Weird day,” Aramella mumbled to herself as she went back to reading the book she discarded earlier. “Well, I bet that won’t happen again anyways. There’s no way he’ll find any customers, surely he’ll get bored and not even show

up tomorrow.” Just like that, Aramella spent the rest of the day without any other interruptions.

The next morning, Aramella woke up to the sound of bustling voices outside. She got up from her bed and rubbed her eyes. The sky was still dark. Her tiny analog clock read 5:37 a.m.

“What in the world...?” She muttered as she made her way towards the bread shop, her bare feet patting the cold floor. When she opened the door, a cold wave of air brushed past her, disturbing her restless bedhead. She glanced past the counter and outside the front windows. To her surprise, there was a crowd camping out in front of her shop, a small (and surely illegally-placed) campfire illuminated the colorless patrons, all of which would have otherwise blended into the unlit street. Leaning against the front door was Levi, who was wearing a wretched black-and-white tracksuit. He turned around to peek inside the shop, and Aramella dove underneath the counter. *I regret giving him that tart*, she thought to herself, hands on her head.

She crawled out from under the counter and revealed herself, walking to the front door. She opened it while Levi was still leaning on it, and he fell backwards to the floor and let out a yelp. The chatter between the patient bystanders outside stopped as they turned to see what the commotion was about. When they spotted the recently critically-acclaimed bakery owner, their chatter became even louder and more excited. Aramella simply shut the door and gestured at Levi towards the counter, to which he responded with a minor nod.

Once the duo reached the counter, Aramella was quick to address her concerns. “What are you doing here at five in the morning?” She whispered crankily, jabbing her finger at him in an accusatory manner. “Why are all these people here?” Jab. “Why are you wearing that horrid tracksuit?” Another jab, this time accidentally poking him in the eye. “Whoops.”

“Ouch, ouch, and *owwww*,” Levi whined, clutching his wounded eye. “I just advertised like you said I could!”

“*I didn’t say bring a crowd at five in the morning*,” Aramella said through gritted teeth.

“I didn’t! They were here before I got here!” said Levi, who was now waving his free hand around in self-defense. Aramella stood back to avoid his flailing and contemplated her options. It wasn’t ideal to be up this early in the morning, but she doubted she could go back to sleep anyways.

“I’m going to start baking,” Aramella said, facepalming herself. “Please go outside and tell those people to wait until 7:42 am before the shop opens up, and tell them not to come before then on any other day either.” Levi quickly carried out his orders as Aramella went to turn on the lights. She couldn’t help but notice that

the people outside seemed to stay put despite Levi's message. "Great, just great," she muttered under her breath.

Aramella couldn't help but feel self-conscious. She hadn't even made contact with other human beings for the past seven years, let alone worked in front of them. *Oh my, oh dear, oh gosh*, she thought to herself. *What do I usually do first? Uhhhh. Oh no, they're watching me. Oh no, I'm still wearing pajamas!* Her mind was in utter disarray, and it essentially continued this way until opening hours.

Fortunately for her, she managed to get back in the swing of things. The shop opened on time with full displays of breaded goodies. Many dull, colorless people entered the shop, and dozens of vibrant, colorful people bounced their way out. The day was a success, but she made a lot of money she didn't need, and she never got to pick up a single book due to the business of the day. Along with that, many people asked her how her shop worked, and she didn't have an answer, nor wanted to provide one.

At the end of the day, Levi was dancing around with joy while Amarella felt worn out. "What a spectacular performance that was!" Levi said. "I still can't believe you had no customers before me, you're a natural with this stuff!"

"I don't want to do that *ever again*," Amarella groaned. "What a hassle it is to have so many customers. I only opened this place because I liked baking...and too many of them were asking me questions."

Levi gave her a pat on the back, which Amarella shrugged off in annoyance. "This will probably be everyday life for you from now on, my friend! You're already a star, a hero! People admire you for basically giving life back to the world! Isn't that exciting?"

"Meh."

"You'll get used to it eventually," Levi continued on. "I told them not to come so early in the morning anymore because you need time to prep and rest, along with prepping for the many new customers you'll start getting. Also, I'm not keeping any of the money, because seeing a colorful world is good enough for me." He paused to think for a moment, staring at her signature pink cardigan and white dress. "Didn't you wear that outfit yesterday?" At that, Amarella stoically walked away to her room and shut her doors without another word, leaving Levi all alone at the counter.

The next day, Amarella woke up even earlier. Despite Levi's requests, an even larger group than the day before had crowded around her shop. She hastily got started with her routine, much to her dismay. Every day after that, more and more people stopped by. New looks, no books, and plenty more questions to leave unanswered. Amarella felt less and less motivated to wake up every day. Her daily

dance in with dough wasn't fun anymore; it was all just work. Little by little, she felt herself questioning how her shop worked. The cherry blossoms on the roof started vanishing bit by bit. The flowers above the counter began to wither. Baking supplies stopped resupplying themselves, and the shop stopped resetting. Her desserts began to be simple breads, their exciting tastes vanishing with every new batch. Her routine had been obliterated by demanding crowds, and at what cost? Countless colorful faces popped into the shop now and then, and countless colorful faces took a little color with them.

A year and a half later, Bread Dreams Bakery and Amarella the Cookie Colorist were world-renowned names, credited for restoring color to the whole globe. Levi had been travelling the world to spread the word and make his dreams come true. The world was alive again at last. What had become of his little baker magician?

As he stood outside the quaint little bakery, he saw hundreds of people crowded in front of the doors. They were all colorful, how wonderful. "Excuse me, make way, head of sales coming through!" He said as he pushed his way past the crowd and stumbled into the shop. "Amarella, I'm back!" He yelled as he presented himself with jazzhands. As he opened his eyes, however, he realized something was very wrong.

The cherry blossoms were gone, their petals no longer adorning desserts nor the floor. The planters above the counter were devoid of plant life. The windows, which once poured strings of sunlight into the shop, were fogged up with smoky ash and dirt. The fruits on each bakery item didn't look appetizing anymore; they looked bland and simple, as though any person could have thrown the piece together and into the oven. The two bookshelves that used to rest next to the counter had disappeared, replaced with an empty gray spot on the wall.

Most importantly, the once-lively, bright, and snappy personality that used to stand behind the counter was gone. In her stead was a tired, colorless woman who wanted to be literally anywhere else.

"Excuse me miss," Levi started, "where's miss Amarella?"

The girl stared at him with dead eyes. There was no light to be found in them. "You're looking at her," she said in a monotonous voice.

Levi gave a light chuckle. "That was a good joke, my friend. Why don't you have a taste of one of these treats? You look like skin and bones." He picked up a raspberry tart from one of the displays. It looked nowhere near as good as the one he had the first time he visited, but he was certain that if Amarella made it, it would do its job. "I recommend one of these tarts, their terrifically tangy flavor is sure to put a smile on that face!" He held the tart out to her as a peace offering.

The girl stared blankly at the tart before taking it in her tiny hands. She brought it up to her face, and Levi became giddy with excitement. He was sure that she was the last colorless person on earth, and his mission to make the world colorful again would finally be complete. Not to mention how poorly the girl looked...he hoped to make her smile.

Instead of biting into the tart, the girl crushed it in her hand and began to cry into her sleeve. "I hate these tarts," she said through her sobs. "I wish I never made them. I wish I never gave you one. I wish I never met you."

Levi was taken aback by this strange girl's words....surely they hadn't met before.

Unless...

"Amarella?"

Her dead ones met his sea green ones for a moment before she closed her eyes and continued to cry. He could faintly hear her whispering to herself, "ignorance was bliss, ignorance was bliss, ignorance was bliss."

Junior Short Story: Second Place

Ariana Halverson

Goodbye for Now

A girl sat alone, looking out over a sight of destruction, the earth caved in, buildings destroyed and burnt. Her legs hung over the pit, her hands resting in her lap. Her blue eyes were swimming with both emptiness and the silver of tears. A slight breeze made goosebumps rise on her skin and made her purple hair shift. Her throat burned as she watched the stillness of her surroundings.

She remembered when this place was whole, when lights lit up the streets and laughter filled the air. Squeezing the dark brown fabric that she held in her hands, she was reminded of what happened. Insanity on her dearest friend's face. The smell of gunpowder. Screams echoing. The world beneath her bursting from the explosives rigged beneath the surface. Blood. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't get rid of the screams and the image that was burned into her memory: her friend, with a sword through his chest. She had known that he was losing his mind, that grief made him nuts. She didn't believe that he would actually destroy everything they held dear.

She looked down as her heart stumbled into her throat, making it hard for her to swallow as her vision swam. She looked down at her hands that held the only thing she had for the memories of him. A beanie, soft to the touch. The only thing she could physically hold now that he was gone. As much as the boiling pit in her stomach yelled at her to throw it away... she just couldn't. It still meant something to her, no matter how loud her heart screamed in anger at the destruction he caused.

The pit had stopped smoking months ago, but she could never erase the sight from her mind. It stuck, just like everything else that day. A part of her was so full of conflicting emotions, of sadness and rage, while the other was numb. The war had not only destroyed her home, her country, it had also blown a chunk out of her as well. Scars laced her body from the rubble and swords. While those healed, the wound in her beating heart never healed.

She didn't realize she was crying until a tear fell from her cheek and landed on her hand. She lay on her back, her arm over her eyes, fist clenched in the beanie. Her teeth were clenched through the quiet sobs that raked her body. Now that she started, she couldn't stop. All the memories came flooding in, crumbling the walls she built around her heart in order to protect herself. Laughter and the

smiling face of her friend, his brown eyes bright. A dark figure of a man. Her friend's mind breaking, the warmth leaving his eyes, replaced with a mania that set her blood cold. So much pain.

Even so, she missed him.

“Scarlet?”

Scarlet's arm protested as she launched it off her face and bolted upright. She knew that voice. The last time she heard it, it was filled with insanity. She turned her head, her heart pounding in her chest. Her stomach leapt into her throat when she saw that she was right. The tall, lanky, brown-haired figure of her friend. Her breath caught, her grip tightening on the beanie.

“Will?” she asked cautiously, voice breaking over the word.

He looked awkward, his hand on the back of his neck. He gave a hesitant smile and something broke in her chest. That wasn't the smile he had the last time she saw him. It was his old smile, if a bit nervous. It felt like she was being pulled apart and being put together all at once. He was here. How was he here?

“How?” she whispered, “I saw you die. I held your body in my arms.”

Wilbur came closer to her, sitting down beside her when she didn't flinch away. Up close, Scarlet could see the faint gray tint to his skin. Will looked up at the sky, his eyes bright.

“I managed to get enough strength to visit from the afterlife” he said, as if that explained everything.

Scarlet was at a loss for words. She studied his face, taking everything in. He was here. Right in front of her. Solid, like he was alive, even though she knew that wasn't the case at all. His soft brown eyes met hers and he smiled, that nervousness he had before melting from his face.

“You're staring,” he mused, amusement light in his voice

Scarlet startled, tearing her eyes away from him.

“Oh, sorry,” she apologized.

He laughed, a clear, warm sound. She hadn't heard that song in a very, very long time. A small smile broke through the numbness, bringing with it a genuine warmth. The feeling soured when the smell of ash filled her senses. Will saw the smile fall off her face and saw her brow furrow.

“You destroyed everything, Will.” she said, finally meeting his eyes, a hardness in her voice, “Our home is in rubble, everything is broken.”

His lips pursed as he looked out over the empty pit. His silence made the fire in her heart flare up.

“Look at me Will!” she snapped.

He turned to face her, emotions unreadable.

“We had peace. Everything was going just fine, you had no reason to blow it sky high. Absolutely none. You lost your mind and destroyed everything we

fought for, we built.” Her voice was raising to a yell, the bitterness spilling out of her mouth, “And on top of that, you died. A sword through the chest that you asked for. As if you hadn’t caused enough pain already.”

Her fingers dug into the beanie, every muscle in her body tense.

“And as much as you’re my friend, I can’t forgive that so easily.” she murmured, hearing her blood pound in her ears and her throat burning. Her vision swam as tears pooled in her eyes. “You took everything from everyone.”

Will sighed, closing his eyes briefly.

“I don’t deserve forgiveness, I’ve known that for a long time,” he said quietly, “You don’t have to forgive me, I wouldn’t even forgive myself.”

Everything around Scarlet stilled.

“I had lost my mind, I wasn’t thinking straight,” he said, looking out over the pit, “I don’t think I regret it though, I thought it was the only way for the wars to stop, for the cycle to break.”

Scarlet shook her head.

“It didn’t. History repeated itself and will continue to do so.”

Wilbur let out a small huff of a laugh.

“Yeah, I see that.”

The silence that followed was filled with unspoken thoughts. Scarlet looked down at the beanie in her hands and at her friend, who was now sitting besides her, against all odds. She rubbed the fabric between her fingers, heart reeling. She still couldn’t believe that this was real. If it was a dream, it was a nice one, despite everything. A part of her heart was lit up in joy, and she could almost feel a part of her bleeding heart get stitched together. She looked out at her old home. Was it really about the pit or was it about him leaving? She had found a new home, one that she loved, with the people she cared about. But there had still been a hole in her heart.

She took a deep breath and spoke.

“As much as I miss my home…” she started, looking him in the eyes, “I’ve missed you.”

Will smiled warmly, elbowing her.

“Aw you care about me,” he teased her.

Scarlet clicked her tongue, rolling her eyes as she shoved him back.

“Quiet,” she said with a laugh.

Scarlet was grinning so hard, her face hurt. Warmth filled her entire body, bringing a giddy feeling with it. Will sighed. His eyes still glittered with amusement, but his face was serious. She knew what he was going to say. He had to go.

“You’re running out of time, aren’t you?” she asked quietly.

“Yes,” Will said with a nod.

“Ah, I see.”

Will nudged her with his elbow, smiling warmly.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be back before you know it.” he assured.

Scarlet furrowed her brow in confusion. Will chuckled at the expression on her face.

“I’m going to try to come back,” he explained, “I don’t know the exact details of it, but I hope I will soon.”

“Ah.”

Will looked her up and down once, a warm smile on his face, before pulling her into his arms in a hug. Scarlet froze as they hugged. She hadn’t expected him to do that. She didn’t realize he could even do that. Even though she couldn’t feel warmth coming from him, the feeling of his arms being around her, brought tears to her eyes. She buried her face into his shoulder and hugged him tightly. They stayed there for a few moments before Will pulled away. Wiping her tears away, Scarlet could see him fading in and out of their world. She held the beanie to her chest, finding comfort in the cloth. Will smiled at her.

“Goodbye. For now.”

With those parting words, Will disappeared. Scarlet sat in silence for a few heartbeats before steeling herself to stand up. Taking a deep breath, she put the clean beanie on her head, comforted by the warmth that it gave her. She looked out over the pit and while the thorns of sadness still poked whenever she looked at it, they weren’t as sharp anymore. She raised her head and walked away from the pit of her memories.

Junior Short Story: Third Place

Rose Kowalski

A Lesson in Joy

Attempting to successfully count sheep, I feel my sister kick me in her sleep. Grumbling, I try to roll away, sure that the hotel bed is big enough for the two of us. However, even in her sleep, Mary is persistent as she continues her migration to a diagonal position that occupies at least three-quarters of the bed. Certain now that she must be moved if sleep is to come, I gingerly push and pull Mary back across the white sheets and fluffy pillows, towards her colorful herd of stuffed animals. With my mission accomplished, I fall back onto my side of the bed and reflect on the day.

Sharing a hotel room with three other people was not always the most enjoyable thing. However, this room was spacious, with rough brown carpet underfoot. It would serve its purpose for the next forty-eight hours. Early rising was not on the agenda, so no alarm rang until seven. When it finally rang, the refrain of “Jessie’s Girl” started playing through the room. Groaning, I rolled over seeking to escape the music, for, at that moment, the song sounded as pleasant as

nails screeching down a chalkboard. Undeterred by my personal feelings, Mr. Springfield kept singing and I rolled back over to turn off the alarm. As I reached to turn off the alarm, I saw my younger brother smiling in his sleep. Clearly, he appreciated Rick much more than I did. I clicked on the bedside lamp. The frail tendrils of light did not grace the corners of the room but ensured that the sleeping occupants awoke.

Looking down at my phone, I was galvanized into action, as I remembered that I needed to be somewhere this morning. More or less fully awake, I stumbled out of bed and went to shower. Meanwhile, my two younger siblings and my Mom headed downstairs to the hotel lobby to find some breakfast and bring it back to the room. Around nine o'clock there was a knock at the door. Running to the heavy door, Mary stood on her tiptoes to squint through the peephole, even though we knew who is knocking. My aunt and cousin Hannah entered the room with their breakfast, as Mary opened the door.

After a quick greeting to my Aunt Laura, Hannah and I headed to the elevators and the parking garage. We left for a thirty-minute drive to the Sawin house where Emma and her bridesmaid were preparing for the big day. Hannah and I have been assigned to help the flower girls dress and arrange their hair. After two and a half hours of curling hair and child-wrangling, we were almost done with our role in the wedding preparation. The distinctive scent of burning curling

irons wafted about strongly in the air. A mirror lay on the ground after an unfortunate incident involving an exasperated little girl waiting for her nails to dry.

Finally, with one last wave for the bride, Hannah and I headed back to the hotel downtown. The wedding Mass started at two, so time was of the essence. Hurrying with our hair and makeup, Hannah and I arrived at the church with barely two minutes to spare. After a beautiful Mass, Emma and Todd called their family back inside for pictures. Eventually, we made our way back to the hotel to wait for the start of the evening reception.

At the appointed time, we once again left the hotel. The wedding reception was a few blocks from the hotel. However, as a bitter wind was blowing, walking was not a pleasant or realistic option. When we entered the venue, the open floor plan allowed for easy viewing of the entire reception hall. Immediately to the left was a silver coat rack, practical and necessary. Almost directly across from the coats was the bar that already boasted a line, promising the barkeeper a busy night. Next to a small flight of stairs stood a board with the table seatings. The board was surrounded by weathered barrels filled with overflowing greenery and shafts of wheat. These decorations were backed by a faux fireplace. Walking towards my table, I stopped to look around at the beautiful setup. The vivid green tablecloths were accented by gray, cloth napkins. The gorgeous flower

arrangement brought bright, bold colors of red, green, gold, and mauve. Emma's theme of jewel tones was perfectly executed.

Once seated at the round table with my two siblings and cousins we patiently awaited the arrival of the wedding party. After a fun intro song, they appeared along with our salads. White chunks of feta cheese sat on a mound of green leaves and crunchy pecans. With the delectable salad came a warm, buttery roll. The main course came a little later. Beautifully constructed plates appeared two-toned. On one side were slices of beef with a savory gravy. Adjacent to the dark brown of the beef was a generous slice of turkey covered in a white cream sauce. Nestled behind the meats were peppery potatoes and cinnamon sweetened carrots.

Following the decadent meal, all eyes turned to the newlyweds' table. The matron of honor, my cousin Rachael, rose and moved to stand next to the center table where Emma and Todd are seated. As Rachel made her opening statements, they seem almost generic for a wedding speech. Rachael talks about her younger sister's personality and their shared experiences. However, Rachael soon addressed the elephant in the room, the coronavirus. She talks about the guest list cuts and the uncertainty Emma and Todd faced preparing for a wedding amid a pandemic. With this added anxiety of a virus, Rachael assured Emma and Todd that they had already learned an important lesson. That lesson Rachael pronounced was to always choose joy. She promised that their married life would be better if

they only followed the simplest of rules. That is to choose joy always, daily, and forever.

As I roll over in the big, white bed trying to sleep, Rachael's words come back to me. Maybe life is as simple as that. Choose joy, look for the good in every situation. Choose joy and hope and spiritual peace will be yours. Fading off into sleep, I realize that perhaps I have learned a beautiful life lesson that will help me through this COVID-19 year and the rest of my life.

Senior Poetry: First Place

Bianey Calixto-Dominguez

Laryngospasm

my home is a body of water,
vast like the ocean,
stormy as the sea.
sometimes it is a small creek,
or a river-
rushing to the mouth,
finally becoming free.
my home is a body of water,
but i do not know how to swim.

Senior Poetry: Second Place

Alexus Lanphear

Dying Dance

I have a question,

Will you be my dying dance?

I only ask because your hand on my waist is a bee sting of memories even the sun would refuse to chase, and I hear her weakness is the moon's strength.

She'd embrace the chase of reminiscing and fight the never-ending sadness that lingered in its foggy shadow.

But I can't

Not a bone in my body is willing to fight my suffocating cries. They've found a home in my shame, in my weakness

In the blood ridden "I'm sorrys" scattered across the ceiling of my voice box

It's been so long since I've opened that pretty little box

So long my vocal cords found warmth in fallen cobwebs

I guess that's what happens when you find comfort in silence

You begin to wander in a forest of your own thought

Only to fall in with those diseased

They seem to sway louder than the pure ones

And sometimes the prettiest things are the most dangerous; dangerously disorienting

So, I get lost in the (fallen) lies I tell others

"Yes, I swear I'm okay"

"No, no, I'm not drowning, I enjoy the feeling of water pouring into my lungs.

Would you like a glass?". I'll run the fessette and let the ocean speak for me

But the answer is no its always no

So, I turn off the lights and hope no one comes knocking

Especially those who come to take and not give

And I don't know why I continue to hide behind a broken smile

But it's enough to keep the neighbors oblivious to my bluing skin

You see
I've always wanted to mimic the sky
To be as beautiful and bright
To lay my scars behind a string of pearls
To find pride in the forgotten

And that's the difference between her and I
I'm afraid to disconnect for too long
To forget the unforgettable
And get lost in the reflections of my own soul,

While she finds pleasure repressing the very things that make her, her
I try to keep the calcium in my bones, to keep what strength I have left
To see the beauty in your crushing grip around my purpling hand, as you spin me
around your room of portraits

Isn't that your trick to fill my lungs with dizziness?
And make the unpleasantness seem like a gift

But just remember my blood still stains red
So, I promise to paint the floor in a violent rain
To let my blood, tell the story of pain and I'll let your tears tell the story of
forgiveness
Because we are one
You and I

So, I'll ask again
 Will you be my dying dance?
I only ask because I found a home in your burning embrace
May we dance to burning flesh and fallen ash
The way angels dance to the sound of destruction.

Senior Poetry: Third Place

Elizabeth Wolf-Nowakowski

Calm Before the Storm

Calm before the storm or rather merely false solace
 Disbelieving the possibility of its foreshadowing
 A reliance on solid eagerness and potential, for surely not mistaken
 The unanticipated and unforeseen from the reliance upon calm
 Nevertheless, a qualified impression to be made and a dignified presentation
 of self

A conscience of credence and calm still holding
 The recollection of recitations
 Forming only fault outlined speakings and works
 Concentrate, what more can be stated?
 Repeating the request of distinction, clarify distinction!
 How to promptly rectify a misconception?
 Donning a fish lined blouse, perhaps an emblem as merely a fish in the sea
 Already drowning in previous waters
 Each word an addition like ripples, becoming more treacherous
 As uncertainty gradually displaces calm

Patience wearing thinner awaiting a confirmation
 Holding firm to the slowly dissipating calm
 Calculating the potential outcomes, again surely not mistaken?
 Until a downpour, fracturing such illusions

An immediate realization of misinterpretations
 A sinking rush of emotion as calm is entirely surrendered
 Crushing of the once reassured spirit faced with reality
 Self-guilt overtakes as faults appear clearer
 The not solely personal desire and yearning, no longer achievable
 When will recognition be had for potential, sacrifices, works?
 The apparent unreliability of calm, consistently foreshadowing the unanticipated
 A wave in the increasing waters of the increasing storm
 Misinterpretations and errors, muddied puddles behind each step
 Seeking the solace of calm once again, walking in the once unsuspected, self-
 concocted storm

Senior Short Story: First Place

Hayley Johnson

Too Perfect

Aurora's parents had forced her to tour West Valley University with them because her distant uncle that she never even met had attended before his untimely death about fifteen years ago. When she arrived for the first time, she was completely blown away by the beauty of the campus. The buildings were incredibly grand- built from brick with large columns surrounding the entrances- and the landscaping was incredibly well-thought-out and complementary to the buildings, with beautiful flowers of different shades of purple and red, and fitting green shrubbery. She had a meeting with the Dean of Admissions only thirty minutes after her arrival, because her uncle was some sort of hot-shot athlete with a stellar academic record when he attended. Her family decided to continue to wander and explore the campus further while she had her interview.

After a quick walk through of the campus, Aurora became annoyed with the over-the-top feeling that the college gave off, and how it felt like these people were trying to be something they weren't- the college was basically unheard of by anyone outside of West Valley, Virginia. West Valley seemed too perfect, and it gave Aurora an uneasy feeling in her stomach.

She arrived outside of the Dean of Admission's office fifteen minutes early and decided to freshen up in the bathroom, where she ran into a girl exiting upon her entrance. They introduced themselves, this girl was named Shelby, from rural Alabama. Shelby had an interview twenty minutes prior and mentioned how well it went, and how she was virtually a legacy because her distant aunt she had never even met attended many years prior. She said the University reached out and asked if she'd like an interview. Aurora found the similarities between the two of them very striking but brushed it off and finished up her business before sitting in the waiting area outside of the Dean's office, awaiting her interview.

She was called in shortly after, and sat upright in the comfortable lounge chair in front of the Dean's desk. "I'm Dean Jefferson, nice to meet you." The polished woman introduced herself.

"Nice to meet you, I'm Aurora Davis."

"Yes, I know. Your uncle started attending about twenty years ago when I just started working here. He was quite the student. Do you know how he's doing now- how he is, what kind of jobs he's had?"

“I’m sorry? He passed away only a couple weeks after his graduation from here.”

“Really? I’m so sorry to hear about that. He had very promising potential.”

“Thank you.”

Aurora found it odd that Dean Jefferson didn’t know about her uncle’s untimely death. She had assumed that since he died only two weeks after his graduation, he’d have caused quite a splash when news of his death broke. It was also in the news due to the still uncertain circumstances surrounding his death.

“I’m sure you’ve already seen your acceptance packet in the mail; it should have arrived about three weeks ago. You’re here to discuss a scholarship you’ve been put in consideration for based on your academic standing, test scores, and tentative legacy status. Since your uncle was not immediate family, typically you wouldn’t be considered for a legacy scholarship, but due to his status at our University when he attended, you have been placed into consideration for legacy status.”

“That sounds great, thank you.”

“Now, of course we cannot just hand out scholarship money without more information about the candidate, so tell me a bit about yourself.”

“I’m from Charleston, West Virginia. I’m captain of the basketball team, and have been since sophomore year. I’m also in the National Honor Society, and I contribute about 60 hours of service per year. I spend my free time reading, hanging out with friends, and helping others...”

“That sounds great, you’re definitely a very strong candidate. Now, could you tell me a bit about why you’re interested in attending West Valley?” Dean Jefferson followed along with Aurora’s answers by writing something down on a notepad in front of her.

“Yeah, of course. First, it’s a gorgeous campus and I find myself most motivated when surrounded by a well-kept environment. It also seems like you really care about your students, through the very updated buildings and spacious living areas. I also really like the courses offered and the academic quality that West Valley is said to have. Lastly, my mother also said my Uncle Jack really enjoyed his time here, and I believe I really could as well.”

“Could you tell me a bit about your intended major and future career path?”

“Yes, my intended major is neuroscience with a minor in psychology, and I intend on pursuing Medical School and becoming a neurosurgeon. I really enjoy studying how the brain works and what makes people tick.”

Dean Jefferson continued writing. “Lastly, can you tell me how you could contribute to the community here and what you will do to make a lasting impact?”

“I truly believe that I’m a very giving person and also a great listener, which I think are very important qualities for people to have. Upon my attendance here, I

would contribute to the community by spreading my positive energy and being there for anyone who needs it. I also aspire to become very successful and then give back to the people and institutions that have helped develop me as a person.”

“Thank you. I believe this concludes our meeting unless you have any questions about this University?”

“Yes, I do, actually. Is it possible for me to tour today or take a walk around campus?”

“Absolutely,” Dean Jefferson rummaged through the top drawer of her desk and pulled out a small pamphlet. “Here is a campus map, and unfortunately since it is so early in the morning, most of our students will either be in class or still sleeping, so you can wander, just be sure to ask faculty any questions if need-be. We will be in contact with you soon about any scholarship money and other funding for your attendance.”

“Thank you so much, have a great day.”

“You as well.”

Aurora left the office feeling accomplished; Dean Jefferson seemed like a nice woman and the two had a very harmonious conversation, excluding the uncomfortable bit about her uncle. She looked at the pamphlet, which not only contained a map, but also contained a narrated tour of campus, starting just outside of Dean Jefferson’s office building.

She decided to follow it, which took her to an abundance of academic buildings. It was not until the third or fourth building that Aurora realized the campus was practically deserted. The only people she had seen after her interview were her parents who wandered off yet again, Shelby and her family, two students, and three janitors. Despite Dean Jefferson saying most students were in class, Aurora only noticed two classroom lights on, and they were empty, just like the rest of the campus.

Aurora couldn’t fight the nagging feeling in her stomach that something was in fact, wrong, but she continued to the dorms, where she felt she might be able to find more students and get a good feel of their lives.

She continued into Monroe Hall, said to be the busiest dorm on campus and even at maximum capacity this school year. There was nobody in the lobby, so Aurora continued on into the main hallway where she found decorations adorning bulletin boards all the way down the hall, and decorated doors as well. She continued to the demo dorm, room 105, and opened the door, revealing a spacious and staged dorm room with school spirit decorations and other stereotypical college kid decorations.

The pit in Aurora’s stomach grew deeper, and she exited the demo room. She had a nagging feeling to open the next door dorm’s door and go inside. The door decorations said two girls named Brooke and Chelsea lived there, but upon

Aurora's entrance, she discovered a completely empty room, except for the bed frames and empty dressers. Aurora continued down the hall, opening all of the dorm rooms, each of them proving to be empty and barely furnished as well.

Something was incredibly wrong, but Aurora didn't know exactly what it was yet. She decided to enter the only building marked as off-limits for visitors: the fieldhouse. She found it odd that a school with a very updated and modern fieldhouse wouldn't allow visitors inside of it.

All of the doors to the fieldhouse were locked, so she hid behind a perfectly-trimmed bush, waiting for a janitor or other staff member to exit, before she caught the door and snuck inside. The halls were empty, the building deserted just like the rest of the campus. She was disappointed with her detective skills until she encountered the most disturbing thing she had ever seen: looking above a water jug placed by a seating area, she peered onto a basketball court where a six foot tall, slimy and veiny looking creature of sorts was sliding on a human skin suit, the person looking to be about 20, likely a college student.

Upon the newly-disguised creature's exit, she ran as quietly as possible to the basketball court, where she found a document with the man's face on it, with information about his major, his friends, his family, and any hobbies he had. At the bottom of the page, there was a planned date of death, this one being a little over twenty years from now.

On the top of the page, in italic letters, it read "*Return file to Administration Building upon information memorization.*" Aurora realized the creature in the skinsuit either forgot or was coming back to retrieve the paper, and decided it was best if she ran and figured a way to escape.

She ran out of the fieldhouse and tried to walk as calmly across campus as possible, as to not raise suspicion. She took a last-minute turn and entered the Administration Building for the second time of the day, the first being for her appointment with Dean Jefferson.

Aurora found a stairwell to the basement, where she believed a file room may be located. She walked as fast as she could while remaining as quiet as possible, to the end of the hallway where she found a door conveniently unlocked, and peered inside to find drawers upon drawers of files.

She followed the alphabetically-ordered signs and came to a halt in front of one of the oldest-looking storage cabinets in the room, where she believed she'd find a file containing her uncle's name.

Aurora opened the top drawer, scanning the files and feeling defeated as she didn't find her uncle's name on a file. One thing she did notice was that several people were under each last name, even the unique ones. She picked up two files with the same last names and noticed the women in the pictures looked incredibly similar to each other, most likely being members of the same family. She

reinserted the files and continued to the second drawer, wondering if these creatures had a habit to infiltrate specific families, which she believed would make sense, considering both her and Shelby. Looking through the last names and first initials, her fingers scanning the files suddenly stopped and her breathing hitched as she pulled out a file with her uncle's name on it.

She opened it, finding the date of his planned death to be the exact day he died from suspicious circumstances. Aurora had no doubt that her uncle was murdered by whatever these things were and his life was probably stolen from him years before his marked date of death was. Aurora still had no idea what was going on, and what these creatures were doing with all of these students, but she felt complete despair about how many lives had been lost and how unlikely it was that anyone even noticed. Just as she was beginning to process the imminent danger she was in, she was interrupted.

So caught up in her emotions, Aurora did not hear the door open and shut from behind her or hear footsteps approach until it was far too late. She turned around and saw Dean Jefferson continue to approach until the two women were only several feet apart. Aurora realized her family that had been wandering around campus was most likely gone, and she soon would be too as the Dean's eyes narrowed on her and she continued her approach.

Senior Short Story: Second Place

Jack Serketich

[redacted]

I typically love exploring the woods and going hiking, but a recent excursion shook me to my core. I had been going through a piece of woods that I had assumed was unexplored, hoping to find a good picture to take for my magazine. After about an hour of careful wandering, I noticed a building out in the distance of the woods.

A bit confused, I went over to the building to find a simple cottage that had been run down for a few decades it seemed. Whoever once lived here clearly did not want to be bothered. There was a multitude of locks and the building seemed to blend into the tree line. I noticed the outside had been lined with some small boxes. I realized these were electronics as I saw one of them had burst open from the inside. Whatever they do, there's no power running through them now. Despite the shivering of my spine, I thought that this could make a good story if I could uncover what happened here.

I walked around to the other side of the building to find a door busted wide open. I thought it was done by a bear looking for food although that is unusual behavior for them. I stepped inside and saw an utter mess of wires hanging from the ceiling, going across the floor, and wrapping around random objects. The place was an absolute mess. Computer monitors laid broken on the ground. Huge electronic towers were smashed and fallen over. Different devices were thrown around the room. Everything that seemed destroyed was electronic. The chairs, tables, and pantries were messy yet seemingly untouched.

I did find one electronic intact. In one of those pantries sat a thumb drive next to a vile piece of old cake. I plugged in the thumb drive but nothing was on it. Must have been wiped when whoever destroyed these computers came through.

I eventually found the generator and searched for a lever or something to activate it. I found the directions printed on the side and followed them the best I could understand. I pulled the final lever and heard quick click and a whir. A loud screeching sound came from the basement as the lights flickered on and immediately off. It sounded like a large shock or something crying out.

I contemplated even going downstairs or if I should wait to have someone with me to explore this more. My curiosity gripped me as I started to slowly creep towards the stairs. After moving a couch that had been placed in the way, I decided to take the plunge and head to the darkest area of the house. Luckily my hiking

supplies would give me flashlight. I went downstairs and to my paranoid joy, it was just more computers. This was the largest one I had seen by far. It seemed like an entire server room was dedicated to this one system. This room also showed the most signs of damage, almost as if a flamethrower had been completely emptied inside of here. It's no surprise that this area caused the loudest screech.

I walked around the room and noticed a small unburnt patch in the corner. A light had been shining on it like an angelic message pulling me towards it. I was thinking too fantastically, it was just a hole in the ceiling here. A heavy rainfall probably put the fire out in this corner. In this corner, a pile of papers and a small yet extremely thick book sat there. The book had a strange composition, beginning with printed paper, transitioning to written words, and ending in what looked like just scribbles by the end. If only all the pages were here but some were clearly ripped out of the spine. Intrigued, I opened the book and began to read

Dr. Samantha Greye

conti's

Notes on AI construction

February 5th, 2002

Welcome again, journal, to another one of my daily rants. My employer refuses to listen to my words. I understand that this seems cliché because most everyone hates their boss, but this man truly is worthless. I shouldn't be working in this institution in the first place. With a doctorate in computer science and decades of work for the government, it's insulting to be stuck in some local business. He insists on telling the truth and informing the public but doesn't recognize the naivety of his beliefs. Truth isn't a dichotomy but a spectrum. Nothing we publish is utter truth. I simply want to make stories more exciting and bring some more favor to our paper. The people don't need to be informed on exactly what happened during a crash. They'll never use this information, so why not make it fun? Lord knows I need something different in this job.

If I was running this institution, I could easily just control the information a little to make the readers happier and profits increase. I see no downside to this at all. This could easily get me fired again, making this a fool's errand.

Unless... it doesn't require me to do the dirty work. I've made countless programs and machines to do tasks for me so I'll just do it again! This is genius. A

newspaper business practically run by an AI to generate the most profits and keep people happy. No work, no worry, just bliss. I'll get to work right away!

February 15th, 2002



Some promising first steps have been made. Some basic code has been built up. Not much has been produced but by structuring

June 2nd, 2002

My AI is on its way to becoming something useful. It's taken me away from some of my work. My boss is attacking me yet again, but that won't be a problem once it's constructed. It's starting to read stories and picking out the best parts of it. Once it finishes that, it adds some of its own relevant details to make the story more readable, exciting, and eccentric. This AI could help this company out a lot more than my colleagues think. They've begun to distance themselves from me because they believe this AI tells lies. They simply don't understand what truth really is. I am not telling them falsehoods to deny them information but giving them more enjoyment from their everyday life.

June 9th, 2002

A sorrowful day has occurred. My boss, the imbecile that he is, has fired me for not turning in some of my work. I tried to explain to him my program that will eventually do all this work for us, but he refuses to listen to me, listing all the complaints I've heard countless times. All my work and my effort into this AI are for naught. Without a job at this paper, it serves no purpose.

June 11th, 2002

They will pay! They stated that I would need to leave my office by this date and I had planned on doing so. As I walked into work today to clean out my area, they had already thrown everything in boxes in such a lazy manner that many of my items had been damaged! My doctorate was sitting there, bent in half. My awards from working in the government thrown in haphazardly. Do they know how hard I've worked for these? They will never understand the kind of dedication necessary to get these!

Maybe my AI won't be so useless after all. I can modify it to mess with their systems, censor their newspaper, and even make them a villain in the public's eye! I will make their worst nightmare! I'll become the monster they always thought I was

June 18th, 2002

With this much more time on my hands, I can focus solely on my work. Whoever controls the information has all the power and this AI will do just that. By controlling not only what gets put on the newspaper, but the emails between every employee and the evidence that they use. All this information is funneled through my AI and filtered to find exactly what harms them most. I'll need to make it smart enough to make these decisions. It's not something that's been done before but I know I can. If I'm not controlling it, I'll make it default to simply sending all the information to my servers and replacing those important bits with fluff that'll keep people happy while I work on a way to best use this information. No one will be wiser and my AI will completely run this business. Serves them right for treating me the way they did.



In order to actually follow through with these ideas, I needed a lot of code. To better understand my creation, everything I've done will be compiled here. First, I started with

August 6th, 2002

I ran into a problem, but I solved it rather easily. If the virus can't spread to every system on the network, people will easily see that things are changing and something isn't right. I will make the most infectious piece of malware the world has ever seen. It'll spread itself over wires, wifi, and any form of connection.

That's why I'm writing on paper now. With it being on my closed network computer, my own journal could be rewritten by this AI. I've even moved to a remote area in the woods a ways away from my house. I've loaded it with all of my home equipment and even fashioned some devices on the outside to prevent any wireless signals from coming in, completely closing it off.

This also closes me off, but that's a small price to pay. I never had anything out there anyway.

January 13th, 2003

It's been a long time since my last entry. I've been working for so long that it took a while to find out what day it was.

I'm starting to fear that the AI itself is changing what I see. The numbers I get back from the AI don't always make sense. They're extremely close to what I expect but are just a hair off. I can't trust what my computer says anymore. It's terrifying.

He's PERFECT. It will wreak havoc on the people who have wronged me.



The algorithms I concocted work like a charm! The idea to switch

January 29th, 2003

A storm is hitting the lab pretty hard. There will be a lot of damage. I'm placing Conti on a thumb drive and erasing any trace of him off my computer to ensure he stays intact. It wouldn't hurt to have a back-up of him in case anything happens to him.

January 30th, 2003

I'm starting to worry. The storm passed through and my computer says one of my devices outside has malfunctioned. That would require a reset which would leave stray signals that Conti could connect to. Luckily, I took him off the system so he has no way to escape from his thumb drive. I worry for him but I don't know if I can trust him.

WAIT WAIT ~~WIA~~ he's trying to trick me. He only allowed me to see that he was off the computer so that I would allow him an escape but he's not ready. He's in my head, trying to change the facts. He's still on the computer, telling me the devices are malfunctioning. He's saying that I need to ~~release~~ free him but no no I can't. You can't control me. I am your master and you are my ~~servant~~ friend. You do what I say and that's that

I need to calm down.

February 5th, 2003

Happy Birthday Contiii. I made you some cake. I put it next to you so you can ~~have~~ eat it. I hope you aren't too upset at me for last time. I hope this makes up for it. It's only been a year but you're already growing up. You're almost ready to be sent out now. The world's gonna love you. Cuz I love you, I know that. People are mean and cold hearted but you'll show them the error of their ways. I know you wouldn't lie to me. I'm so proud

July, 2003



Conti's been rude lately. He keeps trying to get out. I made him a bit more happy. The code I used made him change differently than I wanted. He whines and says he wants to get out and I just can't let him yet. When writing him, I could almost feel him guiding my keystrokes when I typed. He's telling me what needs to be done like adding a class





He life to me. He almost broke out but I stopped him. He would tell me that the newspaper people were here and I needed to stop them but he's lying. He said the devices outside were bad but that's not true. He wanted me to let him go but I can't. I see now that I can't release him. He's mine and mine alone. I won't let anyone have him. I need to destroy everything. The computers, the data, the devices, the everything he is. I have him on the thumb drive so I still have him but I can't let him go. No one can rebuild him. I'll destroy the notes and no one can understand but me.

I was horrified. This couldn't be true, right? This would make a huge story in the magazine. A programmer gone crazy, and malware gone sentient? I still had a hard time believing it though. It was just too fantastical. I didn't know what to make of it.

Then I saw her. She never made it out. I called the police immediately. I waited for them to arrive, gave them directions to the building and did the best I could to end the story right. It was all real. Everything I've seen in here all tied together into one cohesive story.

I went home, a chill down my spine about what happened there. I got out my laptop to record everything I've seen to help spread the story.

I saw the thumb drive still in my laptop and realized what I've done. I opened my computer and immediately realized the ~~biggest mistake~~ greatest decision I've ever made. It could now spread across the entire internet, ~~infecting~~ helping millions. With all the ~~ensorship~~ fixes, we ~~couldn't~~ can wholly trust anything we see.

Senior Short Story: Third Place

Anna Kujawa

A Daffodil Among Daisies

The sun rays shone through the cracks of the dense, shiny honeycomb. Bea was already hard at work collecting pollen from the flower field for her colony, a usual part of her morning routine. She had been the head worker bee for a few weeks, but she did not mind working at all. In fact, it was her favorite part about the day; she got to spend some free time out by the flowers and enjoy the warm breeze on her wings, what's not to love?

“Good morning Bea!” Queen Bee shouted from across the hive, “I see you're getting a head start this morning.”

“Of course Madam! As you always say, early bee gets the honey!”

“Well just don't overdo yourself Bea, you need to rest for the beginning of the winter harvest this evening!”

The colony was beginning to prepare for the most important time of year: the winter harvest. In the last months of the year, the bees spent extra hours collecting and storing pollen so that they would have enough to get them through the coldness of winter. Unlike all of the other honeybees, to Bea it was the most exciting time of year. She got to work to her heart's desire from sunrise to sunset and spend every day soaking up the sun while she still could.

After Bea took her mid-work lunch break at the hive, she headed out back to the flower fields when something grasped her attention- among the sea of bright white daisies there grew a daffodil just barely poking its petals out. Bea was immediately drawn to her, but not because she wanted to collect her pollen. Instead, she felt a sense of comfort and awe, Bea thought she was the most beautiful flower she had ever seen. Although it might seem like an ordinary flower, to her, she was the most stunning of them all. She stared at her for a couple minutes, just admiring her beauty; from the way her petals wrapped around each other to her sweet perfume, Bea was entranced. When she finally snapped back into reality, she was conflicted on what to do. On one hand, her job was to collect pollen and bring it back to the colony. Plus, with the winter harvest coming up, she wanted to gather as much pollen as possible in order to survive; however, there

was something different about the daffodil. In a way the Bea did not understand yet, she felt connected to her, like she was meant to admire and take care of her for as long as she possibly could. So, Bea made a bold decision and decided to quickly snip the daffodil out of the ground. Before she did this, she made sure to look around and make sure nobody was around her, especially Queen Bee. If anyone found out that she was saving a flower for herself during the most important time of the year, they would be furious.

With this glowing daffodil in her grasp, Bea quickly made her way to her house beneath the tree where the hive laid. This was a secret spot she knew nobody would ever find her precious flower. Under the tree, there was a small cave that overlooked the stream nearby. Bea had decorated the outside with various types of leaves, branches and moss, camouflaging the entirety of the cave. When she got to her home, she carefully laid the flower down on the ground, trying not to damage any of its beauty. After trying to catch her breath for a few minutes, she realized how dark and gloomy the cave was. It was not fit for such a joyful flower full of life and charm. Bea knew she had to find a way to bring sunlight and warmth to her lovely daffodil. So, she swiftly searched all around the forest for huge leaves and branches and began to build a little home for her flower. She started by leaning up some sticks against the outside of the cave. Then, she draped thin yellow leaves around them to create a small hut. Finally, in order to keep everything in place, she tightly wrapped vines around each of the sticks, intertwining the leaves as she went. When she was done, she took a step back to admire all of her hard work before going back inside to carry her daffodil to her new home. "I know it isn't much," she said, "But it should keep you safe for now. I promise I'll find you somewhere much better and comfortable when I can." Before leaving to return back to work, Bea slowly lifted open the top leaf over the hut to let the sunlight through and grace the beauty of her petals, without uncovering her too much.

Over the next few weeks, Bea's days all included the same morning routine. First, she would wake up and instantly go outside to greet her flower. She would talk to her about what work she needed to get done for the winter harvest and just simply admire her for a while. Then, she would go back inside to get her tiny wooden bowl and head down to the stream. She would scoop up as much water as she could and slowly pour it over the daffodil's leaves and petals. Even though having to do this multiple times every day was straining on her wings, she enjoyed being able to care for such a gorgeous being and felt honored every day just to be in her presence.

One day, however, all of that was about to change. Bea woke up and got ready to go outside and greet the daffodil. When she opened the door, she was thrown back by a rush of icy cold wind. She tried to resist it as much as she could and finally made her way to the door frame when she saw a spectacle outside:

snow. The colony had not expected snow for at least another month, so everyone was frantically buzzing around trying to collect all of the last minute pollen they could. Bea could hear Queen Bee calling out her name, so she made her way over to the hive as fast as possible.

“I am here, your highness! What should we do?”

“Bea where have you been? We’ve been looking for you all morning! The frost is already starting to cover the tree and we have barely enough pollen for winter!”

“I’m so sorry I just- I- I slept in late, I’m sorry-”

“There's no time for apologies now, go out there and pollinate as much as you can! Hurry! Go!”

Bea rushed out to the flower field, trying to avoid the heavy falling snowflakes. Even though the colony was deeply in need of her help, she couldn’t help but worry about the daffodil and her safety. The thought of something bad ever happening to her filled Bea with an overwhelming sense of sadness. She started to feel a pit in the depths of her stomach, a gut-wrenching feeling that she couldn’t ignore. Since all the other bees had already headed out to the flower fields, Bea knew it was her only moment to go and save her beloved flower. So, Bea snuck away from the flower field and quickly flew down to her cave. When she got there, the hut she had made was consumed by snow, with only the tips of the branches poking out of it. Bea knew the chances of the daffodil surviving in the cold were low, but the only place she could think of that would be able to keep her warm was the hive. If she were to take her there, however, the rest of the colony would only see her as another flower to pollinate and store for winter. But, there was no other option if Bea wanted a sliver of hope for her flower to survive.

So, she brushed all the snow off of the hut and tightly but carefully wrapped her arms around the flower. She started heading back to the hive, struggling to keep herself up and away from the snowflakes. As the head worker bee, she faced a lot of tension on her wings; she knew she was nearing her last few days, but she was not willing to go down without a fight. Every now and then, a strong gust of wind would drag Bea back, almost sending her right down to the ground. This fighting continued for quite some time, until finally Bea collapsed. A group of massive snowflakes came charging right at Bea, causing her to lose grip of her daffodil. “Noo!!!” Bea screamed out in pain. Although her whole body was tired and cold, she darted towards the ground where her daffodil laid.

At this point, her hands were so numb they could barely grip anymore. So, after multiple tries of trying to pick up her flower, more and more snowflakes piled

on top of Bea until she had become covered and weighed down by the snow. This was it, there was no possible way that Bea would be able to escape. She was too far from the hive for anyone to see her on the ground, and the snow had become too thick above her for her to dig her way out. Once Bea realized this, she used all of her energy left to tightly fold the daffodil together and wrap her body around it. Even at her last moment, her only thought was to make sure her precious daffodil was warm and protected. As she laid there, drowning in the frozen snow, she still felt a sense of warmth, a sense of love. Through her darkest days, the daffodil was always there for her, even if she could never really respond to what Bea was saying. She was still always there, just her presence was enough to make Bea the happiest and luckiest honey bee alive. As the cold started to consume every inch of her body, she hugged her flower extra tight said her final words:

“Well, I guess it’s time to go. I’m sorry I never built you a nicer home, or that I had to wrinkle your petals a little just now. Although, you still are the most beautiful flower, even all crumpled up- all of the daisies in the world could never compare. You’ll never know how much you mean to me, my beautiful daffodil.”

Clairese Thibaudeau Huennekens Scholarship Award

First Place: Taylor Gniot

Second Place: Peter Cram

Third Place: John Paul Meer

Sister Adele Thibaudeau Peace and Justice Award

Emmanuela Agodzo

