

CYWR

CHICAGO YOUNG WRITERS REVIEW

SUMMER 2022



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Summer 2022

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Food Chain

By Gabriel Adams
3rd Grade

Once upon a time there were grains for grass
looking in a house at a window made of glass.
Then the grass saw a sheep and became scared
and the sheep ate the grass and stared.

“Now you know food chains are a lot of fun.”

Then the sheep saw a bear and thought to run
but the bear already ate the sheep and had a lot of fun.
The bear is now in its cave living its life
and a tiger broke into the cave and ate the bear with its knife.
Now you know food chains are a lot of fun
but we all know that the tiger won.

The Other Me

By Brooke Rosenberg
4th Grade

It only took a small amount of voices to say it
But those voices snuck inside me and stuck
Those voices haunted me
They took over me
They devoured me
Spit me out
And replaced me with a disorder
That disorder shouted over the positive
Switching them with negatives

“I had no control of my paths in the future”

Soon enough I had a plan
My favorite foods changed
Salads instead of pizza

My lifestyle changed
I ran on the treadmill
Instead of hanging out with friends
I cried for weeks straight
It was too overwhelming

My attitude changed
Turning from happy to grumpy
My obedience for my parents changed
I negotiated and fought
Until there was one single bean for my dinner
I had no control of my paths in the future
They were being chosen by that awful disease

When we went to the doctor
And they said I was unhealthy
That I had to go to the hospital
I freaked out
I cried and sobbed
I hugged my parents tight
I needed their support

“I’m heading back home”

I felt like a deflated balloon
I had no energy I was worn out
I was just too scared to say so

So here I am right this moment in the hospital
Annoyed that it came to this point
Confused and frustrated
That I didn’t fight hard enough
Too stop it from getting so out of hand

I'm getting discharged today
I'm heading back home
And I'm going to stand up to anorexia
And be myself



COVID

By Emma Fitts
4th Grade

I think my time is ending.
I feel like bait.
My straight path is bending.
I think I have no fate.

While my friends play.
I sit here all day.
And wish for the sun.
To make my work done.
Instead, I lay dead,
Right here in my bed.
Wishing for light
While my parents say good night.

Locked in a room,
With a whole lot of gloom.
Wishing to fly
Up to the sky.
Hoping to swing,
I'm in a state.
I love everything.
But there's one thing I hate.
COVID.

Written during quarantine.

Why?

By Yuna Jeon
5th Grade

My mind
a torrent of
confusion
dismay

As I lie
and hear
the whistling
reedy wind

I ask myself
Why?

The memories
recollections
of this year

This one
tumultuous
year

Immature
nonsense
confusing

year

Peers

classmates

coworkers

suddenly

change

Tease tattle and trick

with no apparent reason

Why?

Lying without a care

sneaking off to chat

making noise

so much unbearable noise

Why?

Talk whenever they can

talk in front of whoever

talk while doing everything

Why?

“My own voice / is drowned / snuffed / in my own
head”

But not just talk

yell, scream, whine

it is too much
can't hear myself think

My own voice
is drowned
snuffed
in my own head

As conversations
flow around
slam into
bombard constantly

But why?

Simply, why?
Why has everything changed?
Why can I not bring myself to speak?
Why do I feel so upset about something I didn't cause?
Why do I want to know?

I just need to find out why...

To satisfy my quench for knowledge,
but what will I do with that knowledge?

I cannot keep it to myself,
yet, what would anyone else do with it too?
How will this knowledge help me?

So I start asking new questions:

How can I shape world around me?
How can I help others?
How can I improve myself?
How can I prove I can make a stand?
How can I not just stand,
but speak out
make a difference
convince others?

How can I shape **my** own destiny?



Lost

By Nova Macknik-Conde
5th Grade

I'm waiting in the dark
For a sign
A burst of light
To guide the way
Back home

Oh, without a map
Without a path
Without an inkling of hope

The lights have gone out
And I'm waiting
For the way
Back to the place I used to know

“Without light / Without hope / Without grace”

I'm lost, I'm alone
The trace is none
My trust is gone
Do they miss me
Well, I'll never know

There's no entrance
There's no exit
I've been teleported to this maze

Without light
Without hope
Without grace

Cut off from the sun
Despair has begun
I'm crying out in pain
But there's no one there to listen
No one wants to listen
Bet they think I'm listless

I'm desperate for the way
Back home
Each and every time
I lose a bit more
Of the girl I used to know

My day is night
My faith is fright
I'm numb on the inside
I'm hollow on the inside

My joy, my spark is gone
I'm life's little pawn
What was the date my laughter died?
It was a long, long time ago

June Maryweather and The Conjurers: The Power of Forever

By Caroline Price
5th Grade

Chapter I

And They Didn't Live Happily Ever After. . .The End!

When June woke up that morning, she knew something was different. The way the air felt. The way everything around her seemed to lag. Maybe it was just her, but it felt so real.

Her shorts and oversized hoodie stuck to her skin warmly. Her room looked the same, but felt different. It felt like it was for a completely different person than who she was.

The wind blew differently and the sun felt colder and more distant. Most people would be thinking it's winter because of that, but it was summer. The middle of summer.

There was a loud knock at the door and then Griffin walked in. His hair looked frizzy, but calm. His eyes had big eye bags, but they were alert. Looking for anything unusual.

"It feels...different." He said slowly as he sat on the chair in the corner of her room.

"Yeah, it does." June sat up and looked at him. He wore a plain pair of jeans and a light yellow t-shirt. He looked the same. He had the same laid-back look. He had the same ratty purple tennis shoes he'd had since he was thirteen.

"It's like...I don't know. Just different." He laid a glass of apple juice on her bedside table.

“It’s like...” She looked at him and squinted her eyes. “It’s weird. Like seeing the world through a hazy glass.” Griffin looked back down at his feet. The sun hit his hair and made it look like the sand at the beach.

Suddenly, a loud boom came from far away. Both June and Griffin stood up quickly, alert and ready for anything. “What was that?” He asked. He looked at June nervously.

“I don’t know.” June grabbed her flip-flops and stuck them on. “I thought this whole thing was over.”

“You think...” His voice trailed off as he looked at the glass that held the bright red ruby. It was there, so it wasn’t Hayden. Unless...No, they couldn’t think like that.

“Let’s go find out.” June walked to the door and peeked around the corner to the kitchen. No one was there, which meant no one was at the house other than her and Griffin, because if they had gone any further an alarm would’ve gone off.

“No one here.” June walked out of her room followed by Griffin.

“So...do you think it’s what I’m thinking it is?” Griffin grabbed her hand and she felt comforted, supported the way she always did when they touched.

“I want you to know that I’ll never forget our
adventures and I love you.”

“Let’s not go there.” June looked back up at Griffin who was only an inch taller than her now. “But, if it is what we both think it is, I want you to know that I’ll never forget our adventures and I love you.”

“I-I love you, too.” June smiled at him lightly. “And remember...for a good life...”

“For a good cause...”

“For a better world...”

“For us.” June stood on her tiptoes and kissed him. He smiled at her lightly and then there was another loud boom.

“Let’s go do this.” They walked out of the house and quickly saw what was making the loud noises. About twenty yards away, a man stood up on a huge fireball, screaming and crying. He had a tan and inky black hair that hung in his eyes. His big, dark hazel eyes seemed to lose some of their focus as he watched June and Griffin walk out.

“It’s what we thought it was.” Griffin said, as he ran over to the fire, shooting it with water and June put her hand up to the sky, summoning all of her strength. Then she ran into the fireball, not allowing it to burn her, until she was right next to Hayden.

“Hayden! Hayden, listen to me! It’s over! You don’t have to do this! There’s no need to fight it!” Hayden was sobbing as he looked at June.

“You don’t know how bad it hurts!” He fell to his side.

“Hayden, let go! Stop fighting!” June was calling more to the fire now than she was to him.

“You can stop it! You can stop it from happening! Why don’t you stop it?! Just stop it!” June knelt beside him and put her hand on his cheek.

“I can’t fight others’ battles. If you let go, I can help. Let go.” June started crying. Her feelings had gone numb and as the fire below them stopped and they were dropped to the ground, she didn’t even notice. She didn’t even care. “Let go!”

“Save me...please.” His voice was almost inaudible.

“You’re beyond saving.” June was still crying, sobbing as Griffin ran up to her and wrapped his arms around her. It took all of her strength not to let Hayden die in pain. If he let go she could try to save him, but if he didn’t do it soon, there was nothing she could do. “The only thing I can do is tell you what I was told when I let go. There’s always a way. There’s always a way back. You’ll find the way back.”

“Tell me the way back...” Hayden clenched his fist as tight as he could.

“I told you the way back. I told you the day we first met. Find yourself...and-and let that lead you. That’s all you can do.” Her voice cracked and she started sobbing again

as he opened his hand and a shard of the Forever Stone fell out. The bright red ruby glistened in the morning sunlight.

“I let go...I let go.” His face turned still and lost the pain in his eyes. He seemed calm and at peace. And then the light in his eyes disappeared. He lay motionless.

June screamed and cried into Griffin’s shoulder. “He’ll find a way back. Just wait.” Griffin whispered in her ear, but at the moment, she didn’t care. He was gone. He could come back. He could be gone.

The only words she could utter were, “Why wouldn’t he let go? I could’ve saved him if he had let go.”

Griffin held her in his arms for a while before picking her up and carrying to her room.

To her at that moment, everything in life meant nothing. Griffin sat in the bed next to her and allowed her to cry. He tried to help, but at that moment, she was unhelpable. She needed time. And maybe even time wouldn’t heal her.

After she screamed her lungs out and her eyes were raw from crying she drifted off to sleep and there, in her dreams, it all made sense again. It was back to the good days when she didn’t need saving. When Hayden wasn’t gone.

Adventures in Babysitting

By Alexa Sims
5th Grade

Once there was a 14-year old fairy at the R.B.S.C (Royal Babysitters Company). The fairy's name was Lily and it was her first day working for R.B.S.C. When Lily woke up on October 12 she was excited, but she was also nervous. It was 9:30 in the morning and Lily was getting dressed. She was putting on jeans, her lucky purple sweatshirt, her favorite pair of pink wings, and her favorite pink wand that she stuck in her backpack. After that she headed down for breakfast. After a nice breakfast of oatmeal and fruit, she brushed her teeth. At 10:45 she was supposed to go to Emma and Annie's house to babysit them for the night.

Her mom kissed her forehead and said, "Don't be nervous sweetie, they are just 6-year-olds. I am sure you'll do great!"

Her dad honked the horn of the car, so Lily put on her jacket, grabbed her bag, slung her backpack over one shoulder, and said, "Dad is waiting for me outside. Goodbye, mom. I love you!"

Once Lily got in the car dad asked her, "What's in the bag, Kiddo?"

Lily responded happily, "It's my Kid Kit! I saw on a website that you should bring a couple of crafts or activities when you babysit!"

Dad said, "That's pretty cool. What is in your Kid Kit?"

"I bought a couple of puzzles, Magic Fish Crackers, art supplies, my old training wand, and a few gold coins in case of an emergency!" After that Lily's dad turned on the radio, and then they listened to music all the way to Annie and Emma's house. When they pulled up to a castle, Lily and her dad stared at it in astonishment.

"Omigosh! Dad, I think I'm babysitting for the royal twins!" said Lily.

Dad responded in amazement, "I think you are too, sweetheart!" They stared at it for a couple of moments and then finally her dad said, "Well, I'll pick you up at 9:45. Have fun! I love you, Kiddo!" And with that Lily's dad drove away and Lily was left alone staring up at the castle.

Ding-Dong! This was the third time Lily had rang the doorbell and the third time no one answered, but this time she heard little voices inside. "Should we open it?" said one of the voices.

"Mommy, told us not to open the door for anyone," said the other little voice.

"But, Annie, what if it is the babysitter?" said the first little voice.

"Humph, fine but if we get in trouble for letting someone in the house it's all your fault," said the second voice.

The door opened a little and Lily could see two six-year-olds in pajamas, and she said, "Hi. I am your babysitter. Let me guess, you are Annie and you are Emma."

"Yes! What's your name? Wait a minute, how did you know that?" said Annie.

"Lucky guess. My name is Lily. So can I come in?" asked Lily as the twins let her into the castle. "Surely one of your per told you I was coming."

"Nope," said Emma.

Lily walked in and asked, "Well, have you guys eaten breakfast yet?"

"No, but mommy left us donuts," said Annie as she played with her curly brown hair.

"After you two eat let's get you dressed for the day," Lily said.

She walked the twins back to their bedrooms and said, "What do you want to wear today?"

After an hour-long fashion show the twins put on for Lilly they each finally chose something to wear. Emma chose to wear jeans, a blue t-shirt that said Be Kind in rainbow letters, tie-dye Converses, a friendship bracelet, and her red hair pulled up into a ponytail. Annie wore black leggings, a purple t-shirt that read Girl Power, pink Converses, a friendship bracelet, and a pink headband.

“You two look great!” said Lily.

“Thanks,” the twins said in unison.

After a nice lunch of grilled cheese, blueberries, and chips, the twins and Lily started working on a puzzle. They were in the middle of working on the puzzle when...Ring ring ring!

“That’s the phone. I’ll go get it,” said Emma.

“Okay we’ll keep working on the puzzle,” Lily said as Emma ran out of the room.

Lily and Annie were working on the puzzle when Emma ran into the room in tears.

“...The King and Queen of Summerspell Village
are missing, and you want us to calm down?”

“Emma, what’s wrong?” Lily asked.

“It-It’s mom and dad’s assistant. No one can find Mom or Dad anywhere!” said Emma, still crying.

“WHAT!” said Annie jumping up from the table.

“Calm down girls, it will be okay,” said Lily.

“CALM DOWN?” Both girls yelled.

“You want us to calm down? Our parents–The King and Queen of Summerspell Village–are missing, and you want us to calm down?” screamed Annie.

“It will be okay somehow. I promise,” said Lily like she was trying to convince herself as well as the twins.

“We have to go look for them! We just have to!” cried Emma.

Lily hesitated but finally gave in. “Okay, fine we can look for them but we have to stay together.”

“Yay!” Both girls cheered.

Lily commanded, “Go get a water bottle, a granola bar, and your coats. I am going to call a flying chariot. Meet me in the foyer after you have everything.”

“Yay! A flying chariot mom never lets us ride in those,” said Annie.

The girls ran off talking about the flying chariot, and Lily called it while putting on her coat. The girls came rushing back after a couple of minutes.

“Here you go, Lily, I got you a bottle of water and a granola bar,” Emma said sweetly.

“Thanks,” said Lily right when the flying chariot landed in front of them.

The girls and Lily started to get on but the driver stopped them and said “No money, no ride.”

Lily unzipped her backpack she had brought and slid the gold coins into the driver’s hand.

Lily and the girls got on the back of the chariot, and Lily asked the girls if they knew where their parents’ meeting was.

Emma told her, “They are near Bluebottem Waterfall,”

“Emma, how on earth did you know that?” Annie asked.

“They told us once and I guess I just remembered it,” Emma responded.

“Okay, please take us to the Bluebottem Waterfall,” Lily told the driver.

After about one minute of flying Annie complained, “This is talking forever! We are never going to make it to Bluebottem Waterfall in time to save mom and dad!”

“Yeah,” her sister agreed, “Is there any way to make this thing go faster?”

The driver sadly said, “No.”

“I know a way” said Lily smiling, “I don’t know if you know this, but I am a level 7 fairy, and I just so happened to bring my wand with me.”

“Your wand!” both girls said in unison.

“Yes, I just need to remember the speed spell that I learned in fairy school last week,” said Lily thinking about all the spells she knows. “Oh, I think this is it,” Lilly said as she was waving her wand in a squished figure eight movement.

All of a sudden the chariot and the pegasi sped forward.

“This is so cool!” screamed Annie, “Mom would never let us do this!”

“Great,” Lily mumbled sarcastically.

After a couple of minutes of hanging on for dear life, they finally landed and they could hear the sound of rushing water. They all looked at the purplish/pink waterfall. The sun was starting to set and it was casting a golden glow on the waterfall making it even more beautiful.

“Wow,” all the girls say at the same time while staring at the waterfall.

“I have never seen anything like this in my life,” said Emma in awe.

“It is so pretty!” said Annie, still staring at it.

“It is amazing, but we should really get searching before it gets dark,” Lily said.

“Yeah, you’re probably right. Come on Emma lets go,” Annie said.

“Okay, I’m coming,” said Emma.

The girls looked for their parents everywhere around the waterfall and in the closest villages.

After a long time of searching Emma asked, “Guys, do you hear that?”

“Hear what?” Annie asked with a perplexed look on her face.

“It sounds like Mom and Dad,” said Emma excitedly.

“The sound is coming from over there,” Lily said, pointing to a ravine nearby.

The girls rushed over to the ravine and found their parents and their flying chariot. Their parents were wearing tattered clothes and sitting down like they had been there for a long time.

“Girls!” Queen Jenna and King Lucus said in unison.

“Mom and Dad!” cried Emma and Annie.

“Oh girls, we’ve been so worried about you,” said the queen and king.

“Why have you been worried about us? You guys are the ones trapped in a canyon!” exclaimed Emma.

“Well, this is the first time we have left you two with a babysitter for this long,” said the king.

Then Lily said, “Although it is amazing you guys are catching up, we really need to get you out of there.”

“Lily, can you make a rope or something with your wand to hoist them out of there?” asked Emma.

“I sure can!” said Lily.

Lily made a strange circular motion with her wand and a purple and silver rope was suddenly in front of them. Emma, Lily, and Annie all grabbed the rope and hoisted their parents out.

“I am so glad you guys got out of there!” Annie exclaimed, hugging her parents.

“Me too,” said Emma joining in on the hug.

Lily called a flying chariot and they all rode back to the castle. They all played board games, until Lily’s dad came to pick her up. From then on anytime the royal twins needed a babysitter their parents called Lily.

Nature's Opposites

By Amy Xia
5th Grade

Bright green trees,
Hugging the path,
To the rocky tip of the mountain.

“Tiny hummingbirds, together in pairs”

Tall, purple silver lupines,
Laying below the trees,
Gracefully waiting there for passersby to see.
Tiny hummingbirds, together in pairs,
One searching for food,
Another seated on their eggs, waiting for them to hatch.

The Dream

By Belen Enriquez
6th Grade

Molly was sitting on her bed. She was watching the waves that were just outside her home. She hated her father and so did he. At least, that's what Molly thinks.

"MOLLY!" a familiar voice called from behind the door. "It's time to go eat dinner!" Molly sighed and opened her door to see her big sister. Her big sister had the same teal eyes as her fathers, and the same wavy blond hair as her mothers. She wore a crop top with a white cropped shirt under and a tennis skirt. "Hi Adrianna," Molly mumbled. Adrianna flicked her hair and walked downstairs. "Father-" Adrianna started. She stopped when they saw their mother curled into a ball on the floor. Adrianna raced over to her side and sat on her knees beside her.

"Mother!!" She said, shaking her shoulders. "What is going on!"

Their mother looked into their eyes. She turned her head and pointed to the painting. "What? The painting? What's so wrong about it? It's your favorite!" Adrianna asked. Mother's eyes widened. "That's your fathers favorite painting. I wanted something else, but your father insisted to get that one,"

Adrianna reluctantly sighed. "What does the painting have to do with father?" "He opened it. Remember when you were a kid and you wanted to see what was behind it? And I never let you open it," she paused, she looked at Adrianna and Molly before continuing. "Your father always had the thirst for power. So when he found out about the secret from behind it, he bought the house."

"WHAT IS BEHIND IT!" Molly yelled.

"I don't like that tone-"

“WELL IF YOU STOPPED STALLING A LONG TIME AGO I WOULDN'T BE USING THIS TONE!” Molly stepped closer.

“I'd rather you open it, but whatever you do, close it as soon as it turns red,” Mother gestured to the painting.

Molly walked over, she didn't even take a deep breath and she opened it. A swirl of colors moved inside the small and dark room. After a round of all the colors it turned purple, then blue, then green, then yellow, then orange, and finally red. When it turned red it started getting bigger and bigger. Like it was trying to suck anything in. Inside you could see trees and cottages that looked like it was from a fairy tale. Whatever the red thing was, tried to get Molly, but Molly quickly closed the painting.

Molly panted, “What was THAT!”

Mother looked into Molly's eyes, she whispered something but Molly couldn't hear her. “What?” Molly asked, leaning in closer.

“It was a portal,” She said.

Molly's eyes widened, “A portal? To where?”

“We don't know. No one went inside that except for your father. And he's still in there,” Mother said.

“WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DOOOOOO!” Adrianna cried, “WHO'S GONNA BUY ME MY WARDROBE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”

Molly wanted to slap Adrianna. “That doesn't matter! What matters now is who's going with me to go get him?” Molly didn't want to go get him. In fact, she wanted him to stay there. But of course everyone else wouldn't be okay with that.

“Adrianna...,” Mother said, looking over to her.

“No way am I going in there! What if I go to Peter Pan's world! I would be soaked!” Adrianna crossed her arms and pouted.

“You are going! Or else,” Mother paused and looked around the room, her eyes narrowed to all of Adrianna's bags and grinned. “Or else you don't get more

bags.” As if on cue Adrianna got up and her eyes widened. “Okay! When are we leaving!?” The sooner the quicker I get more bags!”

“Now,” Molly grabbed Adrianna’s hand and they jumped through the portal.

~ Through the portal ~

Molly landed on the soft grass. Unfortunately Adrianna landed right on top of her. “WOW! That was softer than I expected!!!” Adrianna said.

“Can you move off of me!” Molly said.

“Ughhh! It was so comfortable but okay,” Adrianna got up and freed Molly. “Okay,” Molly said while brushing the grass off her jeans. “Where are we? And why is everything so big-”

“Oh my god,” Adrianna looked around, “the portal shrank us!!!!”

Molly’s eyes widened, “Why would father want this portal? It’s totally useless!” Adrianna crossed her arms. “Mother said nobody ever went inside except for father. So I’m guessing he didn’t know that this shrank him until now,”

“That is absolutely right Adrianna,” A familiar voice said behind them. They turned around and saw their father. He had the same black hair as Molly’s and the same teal eyes as Adrianna’s. Adrianna hugged him. He looked at Adrianna and hugged her back. He didn’t even look at Molly.

“How are we supposed to leave!?” Molly asked. Father finally looked at her, but it was a reluctant look.

“We go through the portal again,” He said like Molly should have known, “but first please drink this.” He handed a potion to the three of them and became bigger.

“Well then. Let’s go,” Molly said, walking over to the other direction.

“You’re going the wrong way,” He said. Adrianna and Father walked the other way. Molly grumbled and followed. “Be aware it’s going to be a long walk back.”

“Okay...,” Adrianna sighed.

“Ugh, of course,” Molly mumbled.

They walked for what felt like ages and finally stopped.

“Where’s the portal?” Molly asked.

“The portal is not here, we just took a break,” Adrianna tossed her hair.

“And we are getting a ride,” Father added. He pointed at a sign:

Welcome! Need a ride? Carriages are 1 token a
mile! Please line up!

Father walked up to the line which was almost empty. “Ride for the castle?”
“Hmm...,” A beautiful woman said while looking through the papers. “That will be
50 tokens,”

Adrianna’s eyes widened, “50 tokens? Do we have enough-” She stopped
when she saw that her father handed her the tokens.

“There’s your carriage,” she pointed at the carriage on the side.

“Thank you,” Father said. They walked over.

“HELLO! I will be your driver for today!” A man said, he looked like the
woman father had given the tokens to.

“Is this a family business,” Adrianna asked before Molly.

“Yes this is!” He said. They all walked inside.

After what felt like hours they finally made it to the castle.

~Going back~

They all said goodbye to the driver. And they all left.

“There!” Adrianna said, pumping her fist.

“I call going first,” Molly said but then everyone else went in before her.

The portal turned green when they all went in. But the portal became red again. Molly stepped inside.

Molly closed her eyes as she stepped in. After a moment she opened her eyes. She looked around. Everything was the same.

“WHAT!” Molly yelled, “I’M SUPPOSED TO BE AT HOME RIGHT NOW!” Suddenly the “Waterworks” began. She sat on the wall. She covered her face with her hands. “What am I supposed to do?” Molly whispered, “What now.”

Molly stood up and wiped the tears off her cheeks. She put her hoodie, and put her hands in her pockets. She walked away from the portal and sat on the bench.

“Am I going to stay here or something?” Molly looked over to the sky. It was supposed to be dark. A white light flashed and Molly squinted. But her eyes closed because of how bright the light was.

“WAKE UP MOLLY!!! IT’S TIME FOR SCHOOL!!!” a voice said waking up Molly.

~Realization~

Molly worked up. “*Was it a dream? Is this a dream? Did father never leave? Do I have to go back to my regular boring life? Do I have to go back to all the annoying people I avoided before the break?*” Molly thought.

“Come on Molly dads waiting for us!” Adrianna said, reminding Molly to hurry up. “Dad...,” Molly whispered. Molly never called her father “dad”. When she was born, “dad” always got annoyed with her. Of course, Molly was just a child. So she kept annoying him until she realized it.

“Hurry. Up.” Adrianna walked away.

“*She’s mad.*” Molly noticed. She got out of bed. She brushed her hair, but a photo caught her eye. Molly was just 14 in the photo. Her wavy blond hair was styled into a high ponytail tied with a ribbon her mom used to do all the time for her. Her favorite collared white short sleeved shirt and pink vest was tucked into her

favorite white pleated skirt. She wore platformed high-tops and long-ish white socks. Her teal eyes shined. She was smiling a big smile that you could see her pastel blue and purple braces. Molly was hugging her father. Her father smiled to hide the annoyance from inside of him.

Molly grabbed the photo. She walked downstairs to see her father smiling at Adrianna. He looked over with his bright smile, Molly thought she wouldn't have to ask but his smile quickly faded.

“Why do you hate me?”

Father's eyes widened, “Hate?”

Molly nodded.

Father got up from her seat and hugged her. “You reminded me of my mother, and I hated you for that. I didn't want a constant reminder of how she hated me. I know that's no excuse, but don't worry. I promise.”

Tears swelled up in Molly's eyes. “You promise?”

“I promise. Hey? Isn't it your birthday today?” Father said.

Molly's eyes sparkled. “Yes-Yes it is!”

“Happy birthday,” Father gave her a blue bracelet that sparkled with the sun. “Thank you,” Molly hugged him. “I love you.”

“I do too.” Father said. “Let's go to school now.”

“Okay!”

Graffifa

By Kaleb Mooney
6th Grade

One day in the kingdom of Graffifa, the world was at peace. Everyone got along. The mayor had power, and everyone respected him. Graffifa was a magical land. It was powered by the mayor, which everyone called him Mr. Robins. Not necessarily like a god, but an energy source, Mr. Robins powered everything. He had created the nation decades before. He also inhabited the body of a human, which he was not. Most people inhabit a human's body. Sacer partially did.

Meanwhile, Sacer had just woken up to the sound of cracking. She had a tiny house, with one main room. No one needed a huge house in this land. She got up and looked around for the source of the sound. She didn't see anything. She opened her door and looked outside. That's where she saw the cracking all across the marketplace area of the kingdom. "Oh gosh," she said aloud. She pinched herself to check if she was dreaming, she wasn't. She got her triangular slippers, and ran outside. She looked along the buildings. Cracks. "I'm the only one awake right now, they're going to think I did it," she thought to herself. She had to tell the mayor.

"Sacer, what did you do?!"

Knock, knock, knock! "Mr. Robins!" she yelled at the door. When she set her hand on the door knob, she felt that it was wet. She looked down at it, and it was purple. "Oh no," she whispered to herself. Purple is the color of blood for the creatures that lived in Graffifa. She twisted the door knob, and feeling it was unlocked, barged in. That's where she saw it. The mayor's real body was lying on the ground lifeless. His real body wasn't human, it was a furry little gremlin type thing. "Mr. Robins!" she screamed. The neighbors must have heard her because they came rushing in. As they walked in, Sacer

realized what they would see. They would see her on her knees covered in blood next to a weapon. “Sacer, what did you do?!” Jessica screamed. Sacer didn’t know what to say. “Mr. Robins!” Begry screamed while running over to the corpse, kicking the knife away from Sacer.

Sacer was taken to the prison. She was questioned by Begry and Jessica. There weren’t really cops in Graffifa, people were just able to arrest someone if they pleased. “Why did you do it?” Jessica asked sternly. “I didn’t,” Sacer said angrily. Basically ignoring my response, Jessica asked, “Do you know what’s gonna happen since you murdered our one power source?” Sacer didn’t respond, but she knew. “We’re going to die Sacer, we’re going to die.”

An Odd Adventure

By Daniel Yi
6th Grade

The canary swept through the trees, as bright and yellow as a lemon.

It went so high people thought it went to heaven.

Meanwhile, an envelope flew away.

“And those same people’s sinuses have fallen.”

A dog tried to catch it but it got left astray.

Many people coughed and sneezed due to the pollen.

And those same people’s sinuses have fallen.

Sparklers

By Juliane Janssen
7th Grade

“SARAH!” Mother yelled, “IT’S TIME FOR SCHOOL!”

I crawled out of bed still half asleep and laid on the soft fur of my rug. After a solid 10 minutes I stood up a bit too fast and could feel the world spinning. I walked over to the closet and chose an oversized shirt with leggings. I grabbed my backpack and ran down the slippery hardwood floor.

“Good morning Mother” I said politely.

“Good morning Sarah, Have a good day” Mother replied. I grabbed my lunch and a burnt piece of toast on the way out. I started eating the toast while I walked over to my bike, the front lawn smelled like morning dew drops and freshly cut grass. I put my bag in the basket with a heavy push that consisted of most of my strength. I turned the bike around and put one leg around the metal object. I started pedaling my heart out like this bike was my ticket to anywhere.

“Sarah!” Amy cried happily, even being surrounded by a group of people she was able to see me from a mile away.

“Hey” I replied.

“How did you sleep?” Amy asked.

“Good, what about you?” I replied with another question.

“Pretty good!” Amy exclaimed enthusiastically. Her smile seemed to be like the sun, lighting up my whole world. “Oh yea, I need to talk to you after school...” Amy said nervously. “Okay?...” I replied.

The rest of the day passed by like a blur, I couldn't stop imagining what Amy was going to tell me. When the final bell rang I ran out of the classroom like it was the end of the world.

I turned the corner to the back of the school and almost fell because of such a sudden stop.

I saw Amy standing there, her face as red as a tomato, holding a bouquet of beige flowers. "Hey...?" I questioned.

"OH" Amy seemed to shriek in shock. "Heyy"

"Sooo, what did you want to tell me?" I asked

"I like you!" Amy blurted out. Before I could fully comprehend what I was doing I pulled her closer to me. I could feel her warmth in my arms. I felt my gaze shift to her eyes. Her eyes were like rich milk chocolate and the sun peeking through the sky. I love her so much it hurts.

Even though we were already hugging, I pulled her closer and kissed her. I could smell her vanilla scent, it wrapped around me like a warm blanket. She was everything to me, she was a drug and I was her addict.

I heard a sharp snap of a branch from the bushes and I quickly pulled away. I surveyed the area then looked back at Amy, her face was slowly getting more red by the second and it made me realize that I had done. I looked away and felt the embarrassment creep up on me. "Sorry" I whispered.

"It's okay," Amy said "So what are we now?"

"I don't know..." I mumbled, "But, if my parents ever found out we'd be dead. Literally."

"Okay." Amy said firmly. "Still, what does that make us?"

"I guess a situationship?" I asked, "It might give me a few days to see if I actually would be in a committed relationship."

“Okay!” Amy replied, “That sounds reasonable!” I couldn’t help but smile, even in such a serious time she still had a hint of childness. “Also,” Amy said, “These are for you...”

I looked at the cream colored bouquet and felt my eyes tearing up.

“I’m sorry...” I cried, “I don’t-t know what’s happening-g” I couldn’t help myself. It was like a dam breaking, a strange sense of happiness but sad. I was like water, releasing but destroying the civilization below me.

I felt Amy pull me in her arms, the warmth and comfort wrapping around me. “I’m-m sorry, I didn’t know you would be sad...” Amy mumbled.

**I didn’t deserve her, but I couldn’t help but savor
her**

“It’s okay, these are happy tears,” I said shakily, I could still feel the streams of water dripping down my face. I couldn’t help but smile softly, she was nuzzling her face into my chest. I hugged her tightly and smiled. I didn’t deserve her, but I couldn’t help but savor her like an ever-lasting strawberry candy.

I felt a soft buzz on my hip.

“Oh!” I exclaimed.

“It’s fine, I’ll see you tomorrow” Amy said, her smile prevalent through her voice.

I pulled her in for a hug again and kissed her forehead. “Goodnight my sun” I whispered in her ear. I could see her face getting redder by the second as I walked away.

I walked slowly over to the bike rack and couldn’t help but wonder if there was actually anyone in the bushes. If my mom ever found out I’d be buried twelve feet deep. I put my bag and lock in my basket with a heavy push. I placed one leg on the other side of the bicycle and heaved myself up.

I saw my house approaching in the distance and got off my bike to walk the rest of the way. The garage door was open, which usually meant Father was still at work. I

toppled over trying to heave my backpack out of the basket, after multiple unsuccessful tries, I finally pulled it out.

I wheeled my bike back into the garage and started walking towards the house. I couldn't help but feel a pit of dread in my stomach, like something bad was going to happen.

“Good evening Mother.” I said shyly.

“Good evening Sarah,” Mother replied, “How was school?”

“Good,” I answered, “We worked on more pieces of music for the orchestra and continued studying statistics in pre-calculus.”

“Wonderful!” Mother exclaimed.

I finished unlacing my shoes and walked stiffly over to the dinner table. I sat down when suddenly Father's car drove into the garage. I heard the car's engine stop and the door open. “Good evening Father” I said almost dryly.

“Good evening Sarah.” Father replied. He seemed to be in a good mood, unlike his usual moods. “Good evening Mother and Father!” My brother said enthusiastically. He was in an even better mood than usual, it scared me. When he was in such a good mood it never ended well for me. I didn't want to stay around, he kept smiling at me as if to make me more and more nervous. When I was finished I ran upstairs like I was running for my life.

I collapsed on my bed. The worry was eating me inside out.

“SARAH!” Mother yelled. I sat up so quickly the world was like a merry-go-round around me. What if something really bad happened? What if he told them? I knew no matter what, from my mother's tone, it wasn't good. Worst case scenario (or best) I would be kicked out, so I started packing like my life depended on it. “SARAH, COME DOWN HERE NOW!” Mother screamed.

I was getting more scared by the second. I gripped my bag until my knuckles turned as white as my bones. “Coming Mother” I replied, my voice shaking. I walked down the staircase as slowly as possible.

“What did you need, Mother?” I asked quietly.

“What’s this?” Mother asked. She showed me a photo of me and Amy kissing. Fear flushed my face and I felt tears welling up. I looked away and saw my brother standing there, smirking.

“Get out.” Mother said firmly.

“What?...” I said hoarsely.

“GET OUT OF MY HOUSE” Mother yelled.

I ran. I ran out the door, I ran around the corner and I kept running until my feet stopped. I looked down and saw my dirt and blood-stained feet, they didn’t look like they belonged to me. I had spent my life living to be this perfect daughter and now that I’m not that I’m nothing. I looked up and saw the familiar golden numbered white door. My feet had taken me to Amy’s house.

I rang the doorbell hoping that someone was going to answer. No one did. I just sat there. I felt the pain pulsing through my body as I sat. I put my hand on my face, and I could feel the wet streams running down my face.

Suddenly I saw Amy pull up. I had never been more happy to see her in my entire life. “Amy!” I cried.

“Holy– Sarah” Amy said “What happened?”

“Parents,” I replied dryly.

I knew Amy didn’t have strict parents but she still nodded. There were no words to describe how happy I was to see her.

“Let’s go inside.” Amy said calmly.

“Okay, that sounds good,” I replied.

She led me inside, I couldn't help but feel a little at ease. Even with all this happening she was still here.

She went upstairs and let me soak in the surroundings. Her living room consisted of vintage furniture that had a familiar smell. She came back down with a first aid kit and a warm blanket. She wrapped me in the blanket and addressed my feet.

She laid down next to me and hugged me. She was too good. I didn't deserve her but she was here. I pulled her closer. I was like a sponge soaking her up.

"Do you need somewhere to stay?" she finally asked after more than an hour of comfort had passed.

"Yeah..." I replied in a solemn voice.

"You can stay with me!" Amy claimed enthusiastically.

"Sure!" I said smiling. Even in all this despair I still had her.

The Test Catastrophe

By Eric Yang
7th Grade

“What? No way!” my best friend, Trent exclaimed in disbelief when I told him about how I got the highest score on the mid-year test as we walked home from school.

It was a county-wide standard math test that counted as a third of our final grade. How I managed to ace the test was a mystery to all, including myself. I had barely studied for this test and played eeny-meeny-miny-mo throughout the multiple-choice section. And I just scribbled a few sentences for the open response question where I had to explain a math property and how to apply it to problems.

Meanwhile, Trent, who had studied for the test every day for three weeks, got a score so low that his parents forbade him from playing video games. Trent himself was extremely disappointed and he tossed his test into the shredder without even glancing at it.

“How did you do that, man?” Trent asked.

“I dunno,” I shrugged. “It’s a miracle how I managed this.” I flashed a big smile. When I got home, I pulled out my wrinkled test paper from my binder. I flipped through the pages, my smile widening at every check mark I saw. As I reached the last page, my eyes locked on the open response. The writing was much neater, and the response was much longer than mine. I instantly recognized whose handwriting it was. It was Trent’s.

My stomach dropped and my heart leaped into my throat. Just at that moment, Mom came in with macarons and a huge cake, and squealed, “Hey Brent! Great job on the test. You made me really proud!”

Maybe I shouldn’t confess yet, I thought. I could at least eat up the rewards.

In the afternoon the next day, I was called to the principal's office. Principal Fellings sitting at his desk with a wide grin on his face.

"You said you wanted to see me?" I asked.

"Well, you see, every year, every school in this district picks one student to compete in the Bounty County Math Competition next Friday," Principal Fellings explained.

My palms started sweating and I turned pale inside, but I managed to keep up a grin.

"As the student who got the highest score in the county math test. You are the one this year!"

My face was burning like a furnace and my heart raced, but I had to accept the offer. There was no way to back out.

Only eight days left before the competition. And on those eight days, there was a lump in my stomach that seemed to be growing. I tried to comfort myself that I got this.

On the day of the competition, my mom dropped me off at a large white building. I was escorted into a large auditorium where the room was filled with excited audience members cheering and clapping. I saw the people from my school in the backseat to support me. Trent was there, giving me thumbs-ups and Principal Fellings was clapping and yelling "woo-hoo!" in his booming voice.

I was competing against six other serious-looking students. We were all sitting in front of a long rectangular table facing the audience, with big red buttons and iPad lined in front of each contestant. A man walked up on stage, announcing that the winning student's school would host this year's trophy!

"When you have figured out a problem, press the red buzzer in front of you. You will be given forty-five seconds on each problem. The timer will be displayed on your iPad screens." After we tested our buzzers and timers, the competition began.

As the man read the first question out loud, the problem also popped up on the iPad screens.

The minute my competitors saw the question, they began scribbling things on lined sheets of paper while I stared blankly at the board and the announcer. Then, I peered at Principal Fellings who was mouthing, “Do the problem!”

“I didn’t dare touch that buzzer”

I started scribbling too, but I wasn’t actually doing the problem. When thirty-one seconds remained, one student with fiery red hair pressed the buzzer and for some reason, I slammed my hand on the buzzer too.

I expected the man to call on the other student since he had pressed the buzzer before me. But the man saw it the other way around and called out my name.

The color drained from my face as everyone turned to me. I stuttered, “120! No, 20? Or... Um... 10? Or--I mean...”

The man looked irritated and said, “Please check your work before you hit your buzzer!”

I squirmed in my seat as if nails were pricking my skin. I couldn’t look at anyone--especially not Principal Fellings who probably was thinking, what the heck!

The announcer turned to the red-haired boy who quickly gave the correct answer and earned a loud round of applause.

The next problem was harder, and again, I pretended to work on the problem when I was actually doing a wacky portrait of Principal Fellings taking a bubble bath.

I didn’t dare touch that buzzer.

By the time it was down to the last question, every other student had already answered at least two questions correctly. Which meant that I was in last place for sure.

When the competition was over, Principal Fellings rushed over to me. “Are you OK?” he gasped. “What were you doing up there?!”

“I-I...” I stammered, then saw Trent glare and roll his eyes with annoyance.

Before any of them could speak, Mr. Winter, the principal from the winning school came up to Principal Fellings and said, “Thought you would win huh?”

Apparently, Principal Fellings had been bragging to Mr. Winter that his student, me, was going to win. The guilt churned in my stomach.

For the next four weeks, Principal Fellings barely said a word to me. And I didn't blame him. I was a horrible liar. And I guessed that the only way to stitch things back together was to tell everyone the truth. I didn't want to but I had to do it anyway.

Stranded by Strangers

By Emilee Youn
7th Grade

November 22. My name is Dolores. I like to be free in the wind when it comes to the point where I can not hear a single thing other than the grass shaking, leaves falling, and branches rattling. I wish I had those cool-looking ear buds that don't have the line where it connects to a device. What is it called? Wires? But it doesn't matter. My family can not afford to buy them. I imagine being able to stick it into my ears as I can cancel out the reality in our world but it is inevitable. The reality is that my family is poor. I want things that I don't need which makes it harder for me. Harder for my parents. My parents make it seem like they want the best for me but they don't act that way. I'm the only child. No siblings. No friends. No things. No wants. Only needs. I was told, that family is all you need. That family is the foundation. I don't believe that. What I need are those ear buds. I come from a Hispanic heritage, we are from Spain and we immigrated together leaving our grandparents alone. My grandparents were the ones I liked the most. Before we left, I saw Abuelo and Abuela give my parents money so that they can get me gifts. I never got any gifts. If I couldn't choose my grandparents, I was closest to my mom. She was the one who reminded me that I was beautiful inside and out when I truly knew I was neither. She was the prettiest woman you could possibly imagine. Honey brown medium hair, chocolate light eyes, lovely pins to keep flyaways away, sweet vanilla cinnamon scent, flowy clothes for warm hugs, and her bright smile that was too attractive. And her locket. The locket that she refused to show. The locket I was forbidden to see; I didn't understand why and I still don't. Her calm manner somehow bothered me as she was so disciplinary, even if I didn't learn from my mistakes. At age 15, when I have my quinceanera, I was guaranteed that my beauty would truly reveal itself. But when it came to that day, the reveal was that I had no beauty and there was no quinceanera. Too expensive just for a party. To be honest, I don't have any childhood memories. The only

happy one was when I would use my abuela's makeup brushes and mix the sand with soap to make paint; I would make a variety of colors and I would just paint. I had a designated area that only my grandmother and I knew about, it was her closet. She allowed me to paint the walls in her closet. But now, I barely have walls in my house to even consider it a shelter, so painting is quite a fairytale for me that I never kept up with. Not only do I have lost dreams but a lost mother. I'm now 18, my mother left me in high school where I assume my father followed along. This whole time, I knew that it was a myth, "That family is foundation," my parents knew nothing. How ironic. They say those exact words and then leave me in their dust for their own good.

**"They left me. They chose to leave me. Now I
choose to let loose of them."**

Well, I have been surviving and doing the bare necessities. My neighbors who my parents would speak to from time to time came and knocked on the front door. When I opened the door, they told me that my parents told them to give me this card as they handed it to me and told me that I should remember I was beautiful. I looked more like my dad; he had dark brown hair, shaved beard and mustache, a white smile, hazel eyes, thick brows, and overall best man you could find. I had dark brown hair, green eyes, no smile, and a skinny body but I didn't see any good in me. At this point, my parents are not my parents. They left me. They chose to leave me. Now I choose to let loose of them. I will address them by their names, Angelina and Oliver. No mom and dad. As I reluctantly took the card that was once held by those strangers, out of common courtesy, I reply "Thank you" and let my neighbors move on with their lives. But they refuse to. My neighbors who are parents scream, "Valentina! Winston! Come." I assumed it was their children and it was. Of course, twins that happened to be my age. They moved from London in the most wealthy area, getting the house next door renovated making my house look too old, wearing Polo Ralph Lauren, as he spoke in a gentle, deep tone, "Nice to meet you, Dolores. Valentina and I just came from London. We would love to spend time with you sometime." However, I didn't. I wanted my life to speed forwards where I can work and earn some money. Actually, just get money. But, life is unpredictable which is one thing I can't control. But also, time isn't either and this conversation was

presuming for quite too long. Once I was finally left to rest, I closed the doors and my eyes as I released my breath as I inhaled a second later. It was time to open this letter. From my *parents*. From Angelina and Oliver. It read:

Dear beautiful one,

We're so sorry for leaving you behind like this but we will explain later. We may never come back but we trust and believe that we will be able to find each other at last. You may hate us right now or you may have always despised us but we want you to know that we love you and always will, which may seem fake to you but is genuine to us. I know growing up was challenging for you and us as well. We know we were not the best parents to lead you in the right direction but you were so independent to make your own decisions. We are so proud of you and always will be no matter what. When we said that family is the foundation, Dolores, you might not have been listening but it's true. Whatever we say might seem ignorant or insignificant but family is the most powerful thing you have. Over money and wealth. We are not stupid Dolores. The ear buds without the "lines" you wanted are wireless ear buds. We heard you muttering to yourself when you were walking away from us in the grass. It was so expensive but the thought of you made me want to sell my locket to buy those ear buds for you. The locket may be a secret to you but it's not. You are what is behind the small oval glass. I had it so I can remember you when this day happened when it happened to be that I would have to leave you. Nothing is your fault, Dolores. You did nothing wrong so keep your head straight and high. We may be embarrassing to you but you are what keeps us alive. You might think that we are annoying since I call you beautiful when you think that we are the attractive ones, but I only see beauty in your eyes. I can see your future being brighter than you think. Brighter than you believe. Do me a favor. Only one. Promise me that you will become the best version of yourself where you will believe that you can do whatever you wish to do. Don't let others have that power of making you feel inferior because you are everything and more. We will find you again one day. Dolores, if you see us when you don't want to, it is okay. We will just be happy about your presence. But, just one day, November 22. Meet up with us outside on a bench. Any bench. We will find you. We

love you. Even if you don't want to believe it. Are you a lover or a fighter, Dolores? We love you and always will.

From,
Mom and Dad

After reading this, I shed a few tears. More than just tears. They weren't my mom and dad, they were strangers. I kept telling that to myself whether I believed it or not. I was engraving it into my head but this letter was preventing me from doing so.

Validation

By Alina Aronova
8th Grade

As I sit on the sticky plastic bus seat, all I think about is death. It surrounds me, follows me, as if I am cursed. I scoff at such a thing, and yet, I feel as if it might be true. But that's not possible. I have been named 'most beautiful person,' and become the world's top model. I'm richer than the Kardashes. Richer and 'prettier' than any of the Kardashes.

"Excuse me, you're Wren Adeola, right? I'm Karyl." a woman across from me asks, drawing the attention of several other bored passengers.

"...Yes. I am." I look down at her outstretched hand, eyes lingering on a golden ring. The band has several small glistening jewels, with a huge diamond as the centerpiece. Karyl eagerly shakes my hand, giving a sweet little laugh, noticing my attention to her wedding ring. "Oh! Yes, my husband and I picked out the biggest ring we could find. Beautiful, isn't it?" Her voice has a thick British accent, making her a local.

I nod, beginning to fidget with my hands. "Enough chit chatter though, huh?" She gives a small smile. "I work for Vogue magazine. I believe you modeled for us at one point, yes?" she continues without me answering. "Well, I'm actually a designer, I just came out with a new line. If I'm honest though, I only recently joined, so modeling for me would help a lot."

I nod again as Karyl starts rummaging through her green purse, searching for something. She pulls out a small phone, and raises it to my face.

Pictures of colorful jumpsuits, blazers and dresses appear on the screen as I review them. “This... all seems very... colorful.” I glance at her, trying to hint that this collection isn’t... the best.

She blushes, “Oh yes, and I think you would be the perfect person to model them. I tried to base the collection on Picasso’s artwork as well as the spring season. Here’s my card, if you want to contact me later,” Karyl hands me her card as I pack my things to get off at the stop. I stand up and tuck the card into my coat pocket as I wait for the person in front of me to move, already forgetting our conversation.

“I realized long ago that no one else could hear it.”

“Oh, Wren, you’re gorgeous, and you seem like a fun person to be around.” she says, white teeth glistening.

I feel my face redden, and my mood lifts. “Thanks. I actually really like you as well.” I lie.

Suddenly, I hear a gong sound, its sound moving through the atmosphere with its ancient blow. This sound is familiar to me, as I have heard it my entire life. I realized long ago that no one else could hear it.

She tilts her head. “Aww, thank y-” her reply is cut short, and drool slowly collects by her mouth. I look at her waist, where a man’s hunting knife is impaled into Karyl’s chest. “Wha- what did you do?!?” I stumbled backwards. Several screams ring out through the bus, as a panic to escape overcomes the passengers.

The man, who can’t be more than twenty-five, has twisted himself into an unnatural position to stab Karyl. His arm is crooked and obviously at an uncomfortable angle. I notice the man’s eyes as an urge to understand what just happened. They are glazed over, as if in a trance. Muddied brown and unaware. In less than a second, he snaps back to reality as sirens ring out in the distance. Someone must have called the police, I think, relief crashing over me.

The man looks at his hand, which is now resting on Karyl’s corpse and... yanks it back. Like he didn’t even know that he was in the process of killing another human

being. He looks up at me, and we make eye contact. “Gorgeous,” he whispers in an unusual voice. He sounds ancient, and neither feminine nor masculine. Godly, my brain supplies.

A woman in uniform rushes past me and flings the man onto the ground, wrapping handcuffs around his wrists. “Wha- I didn’t do it! I didn’t touch her, I swear!” he screams, as the woman shoves him out of the bus. Deep, I note. His voice is deep. His real voice is deep.

After I was taken in for questioning, where I had told the police everything aside from the weird voice, I was driven home by a friendly yet serious policewoman.

“You know, it’s very difficult to witness something like that for the first time and simply ‘be fine,’” she starts, interrupting my observations on the raindrops that have collected on the tinted window. “Go home and do something for yourself.” she ends with a cliché. It’s not my first time though, I think.

The car rolls to a stop and I get out, muttering a “Thank you,” to Carol, the policewoman, who replies with a small smile that creates dimples on her round cheeks.

I walk into the lobby of my building, entering the lavish and exaggerated space, which is just screaming ‘I’m reserved for the highly rich people!’ which it is, but some days it feels like it’s too much and too fake. I call the elevator, and after a few seconds it opens, as an elderly man who I’m pretty sure is a multi-billionaire walks out.

I walk in and press the number two, and then repeatedly jam the ‘close doors’ button. I see a woman dressed in an elegant dress coming forward, calling out for me to delay the elevator. “Oh, nope. Sorry. I’m in the process of having a mental breakdown. This ride’s reserved for me.” I smile at her, trying to delay my tears with jokes. She backs off as the doors close, and I feel hot, sticky streams starting to flow down my face, leaving salty streaks. A small melody starts playing, which unfurls into lyrics as I continue sobbing. “Everywhere I go; people start to die.” a sad voice begins. “It’s like I’m a walking curse, dooming everyone around me.”

The song continues playing, but I’m not listening anymore. My thoughts begin to swirl around my head. My dad’s blurred voice minutes before his death telling me how

good my modeling pictures were. An explosion as my mom's life ended after she had complimented the magnanimity I possessed. My best friend, Karole. Her last breath blew bubbles to the surface of the pool after she complimented my swimming suit. I spoke at her funeral, saying what a kind and beautiful soul she was. Her mother had praised me afterwards, telling me what a good speech it was. She died two hours later of a heart attack.

“Why must I be the one ending, and ruining
peoples lives, just because of a stupid complement?”

My thoughts suddenly stop swirling, as a feeling of clarity arises. I am a walking curse. People compliment me, and they die. My mind wanders to this morning, and I realize that Karyl had done the same.

The elevator doors open, and I walk to my apartment door, unlocking it. This is so stupid, I think. Why do I have to be the one giving out uncontrollable death sentences? Why must I be the one ending, and ruining people's lives, just because of a stupid complement?

I toss my keys on the counter, not bothering to take my shoes off. I wipe my runny nose with my sleeve and go to my bedroom. Since I left to go on a business trip, my many plants haven't gotten any water. I glance at a nearby plant's leaves, taking it between two fingers, grinding them together. The leaf falls apart, flaking and crinkling.

I want to scream. This is unfair, not only to me but to others. I start yelling. I grab the plant, and throw it to the other side of the room. I grab the next and do the same, shattering the pot. I reach the dead hyacinths my grandmother gave me.

“Stupid.” My knees fail me and I fall to the floor. “I'm done. Done with this stupid curse.” I glare at myself in the reflection in my mirror, and whisper, “I like your hair.” I feel nothing, none of the pain I want to feel, so I continue. “I like my eyes. I like my makeup.” and yet, nothing. I turn away, preparing to go on another destructive rampage when something catches my eye.

The hyacinths. Bright green, and in full bloom. I walk over and examine them with care. Petals colored with a vivid purplish red color spring open as I watch. I turn to another dead plant. “I like my personality.” Although it is toppled over, a vibrant green color returns to its dead leaves as they become lush and full, leaves unfurling.

The compliments I give myself... do they heal others? I reason. Without a pause, I get up and exit my apartment. I go up to my neighbor’s door and knock.

When an elderly woman answers the door, I say “I like my style.” At first she looks incredibly confused, but then her face twists into one of discomfort, and when she relaxes, I see her skin is smoother, and the cancerous bulge at her neck is gone.

She looks at me questioningly, but all I do is laugh. I turn back into my apartment, shut the door and loudly scream, “HOLY FRUITCAKES! I just solved cancer!” But I know it is more than that. All those things I said about myself, I believe. I know my self worth. And because of that, no one else will be hurt because of me. Because I’m not suffering myself.

Elementi

By Jonah Christiansen-Baker
8th Grade

Where are your parents?

“My name is Ben Huntley,” I said to the men in blue uniforms, scrunching my nose from the foul smell of B.O. and coffee in the air.

“Where’s your home?” The man’s voice was gentle, but I could tell it was not normally so.

“Don’t have one,” I replied. I had a roof over my head, but I had never once called it home.

“Where’re your parents?” asked the man.

“Dead,” I sighed.

The man's face flickered between annoyance and pity, but quickly settled on irritation.

“Let me talk to ‘em Pat,” said the bigger of the two officers. His big, plump face, shaggy hair and the way his mouth twisted awkwardly when he smiled made me sum him up at first glance as someone who was naturally quick to anger and great at yelling.

“Have at’er Moe.”

“Look kid,” began Moe, “we’re tryin’ to help you. We need to know where you live so we can take you home.” He said it slowly as if he thought I didn’t know how to speak English. “Where do you live?”

“Under the Third Ave bus-bench,” I said. I met the officer’s stern gaze with my own; I had always been particularly good at keeping a straight face. As I predicted he soon gave up, dropping his gaze before gesturing for Pat to follow him.

My gaze did not flicker from where Moe had stood as the men left, looking back at me before opening and closing the door of a small room to my right. A large soundproof window now separated us.

I didn’t care much what they were saying. The routine was always the same; interrogate until they realized I wasn’t going to answer, then they talked for a bit in a room, called the only two orphanages in town, brought me to their car where I got a free ride in a police cruiser as they took me back to my “roof”.

Staring at the vacant chairs of the men, I felt no emotions. I felt no guilt. Or fear. No envy for those who had real families. All I knew was that soon I would be right back where I’d started.

The two men came out and each of them put a hand on one of my shoulders as they guided me to the door, leading back to the cruel outside world. We walked to a large white car with blue stripes. The car was clean, shiny, without a dent on it. It looked like it could use the characterizing features of a police car familiar with high-speed chases.

Pat, who wasn’t much bigger than me with a skinny body that looked unnatural beside the figure of Moe, shoved me into the back of the cruiser while his comrade crammed into the driver’s seat.

The road to my “roof” was void of cars so it didn’t take long at all until we pulled into the driveway of an orphanage. It was surrounded in flower beds and the building itself was a pale beige colour. The door was blue with a red flower, its stem a long spiral, painted across its centre. The orphanage was lined with windows and if you looked closely, you could see the shadows of young children peeking out, the light of their rooms brightening the night.

“This isn’t my orphanage,” I said.

Moe grinned wildly. “Didn’t think it mattered. You said, you don’t have a home.”

The men walked me to the door with the pretty flower and rapped on it so fiercely I thought they might break it down. The lights in the entryway flickered on and a woman dressed in a smooth green overcoat opened the door. She looked at me for less than half a second then cried, “What in heaven's name are you doing at my orphanage with a young boy held like that?!”

“...The boy ran away from ‘is orphanage.’” Moe loosened his grip on my shoulder looking startled. The woman snatched me up. I stumbled over the threshold. She put her soft, warm lips to my ear. “Off to bed with you.”

She frowned at the men as I left.

I walked past piled shoes and mounds of coats as I made my way to a long staircase. The orphanage was silent apart from the creaking of my feet on the stairs. I shut the door of the first room I found that was deserted. It was a surprisingly clean room with a glass bedside table and a tall lamp beside the bed. The bedspread was plaid red and on the opposite side of the room was a wardrobe and an empty armchair. Once my door closed, a hushed and somewhat polite pandemonium broke loose from the front door below. I caught few words after much yelling and bickering:

“That is no way to treat a young boy!”

“We just wanted to help,” came Pat’s voice.

Her voice changed abruptly, becoming much calmer. “He is safe and sound now, but you have been awfully harsh on the boy from what I have seen.”

“We just wanted cooperation,” said Moe.

“You have a crude way of getting that,” said the woman. The door slammed. I smiled to myself.

The door of the room opened. The directress’ annoyed frown turned quickly into a pitiful smile as she entered. “I’m very sorry about that.”

“Are they gone?” I asked. This time she didn’t bother to hide her frown.

“Unfortunately not. They Insisted on staying the night.”

The sides of my mouth inched down. I went to the window, opened it, and stuck my head out. Sure enough, there was the blue and white striped car with two disgruntled men inside.

“I did not happen to get your name,” she said.

“Ben,” I said. “And yours?”

“Shannon. Now you best get off to bed, you have got a big day sneaking out of here tomorrow.” And with that she walked out.

It was a long night. I listened to the crickets clicking and the odd owl hooting. After a while I could hear Pat and Moe’s voices.

“Was she really going to let me go?”

Although, I didn’t feel tired and I don’t remember ever becoming tired I must have fallen asleep sometime because I soon woke up to the sounds of the breakfast bell chiming. I made my way reluctantly downstairs. At the bottom there were over twenty kids sitting at a grand dining table with bowls of porridge in front of them. I sat down and a young woman dressed like a daycare teacher placed a bowl in front of me. The children looked me up and down as if deciding if I was worthy enough to stay here. They seemed to decide that I was staying whether they liked it or not.

I sat down beside a boy in a red, long-sleeved shirt and sweatpants, and a girl in a wool sweater and jeans. I ate my porridge in silence. Once the orphans had finished their breakfast they made their way, bundled up in jackets, into the garden with some of the other orphanage workers. I found myself helping Shannon and the young woman wash the dishes instead.

I never had gotten a chance to look at Shannon properly. She seemed to be old and young at the same time. She was beautiful with long blonde hair and a kind face. Yet her body was very thin, and her skin showed many wrinkles.

We washed in silence which made the room feel uneasy and awkward.

The rest of the day was like any other day at an orphanage. Kids came inside and ate lunch, then the older kids wrote and the younger kids grabbed a thin book and read, pronouncing every word out loud so it sounded like an off-beat choir.

I walked up to the room I'd stayed in the night before, ignoring the stares of the kids who obviously summed me up as the 'privileged kid' because my only friend was Shannon, and I could do whatever I wanted as they were forced to work like school kids.

The first thing I did when I got there was look eagerly out the window. It was nearly dinner and yet the sky was still light and, thank God, the police officers were gone. Dinner came and went before night fell.

I slumped into my bed, my face stuffed in my pillow, and I fell asleep almost immediately. I got up a few hours later (what I assumed was around midnight) and walked down to the entrance hall. I reached for the doorknob when suddenly the lights came on. Shannon was sitting on the floor beside the door.

"I'm going back to my orphanage," I said firmly.

"And I have no necessity to stop you, I merely wondered if you'd like something to eat before you left."

I squinted at her to see if it was really Shannon. It was. I screwed up my face trying to figure out if she'd really said that. I opened my mouth to refuse, but my stomach grumbled and I stopped myself. I accepted a small bowl of porridge. Was she really going to let me go? I wondered. I finished my last spoonful of porridge and made my way to the door. Shannon smiled.

"Good luck," she said.

A Lost Written Thought

By Jihoo Hyun
8th Grade

My eyes drift from one word to another
Now I've lost the word before
Pupils rummage through the numbered pages
But it's gone.
My mind flickers to the start of the wonderland
So what did I see?
What did I discover in the sheets of dream?

“Wandering away but getting closer / To nowhere
and everywhere.”

I feel like I'm in a labyrinth
Without a clew
Not knowing what to do
Wandering away but getting closer
To nowhere and everywhere
I realize I don't understand anything
Probably because a book is
none more than a
lost begun
thought of
one.



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