

Creative Writing Anthology



Somerset County
Teen Arts Festival
2016

Creative Writing Anthology

The Somerset County Creative Writing Anthology is a component of the annual Somerset County Teen Arts Festival Program. Students' creative writing is submitted to respected professional writers and/or Geraldine R. Dodge Poets who review the submissions and offer written critiques for each student. The professional writers engaged commend the students' strong points and offer constructive suggestions for improving particular aspects of their work.

At the festival, students attend feedback sessions to discuss the work in the anthology with the critique writers. Additionally, students are encouraged to attend Creative Writing workshops on a variety of subjects led by the visiting writers.

As a complement to school districts' regular English classes, the Somerset County Teen Arts Creative Writing component offers students the opportunity to work directly with professional writers and poets who encourage them to fine-tune their writing skills while offering helpful hints into the creative process.

The Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission wishes to commend the students whose work appears in the anthology, and hopes the experience will inspire them to continue writing as an expressive art form.

Cover Artwork:
Shaniyah Phinn, 17
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11

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ALEXANDER BATCHO INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL

Train Ride

As I hear the sound of the train coming towards me, I turn around to see the tears running down my mother's cheek. I look to her with a reassuring face, knowing that she knew it was time. Time that I moved out of my parents place to become my own man. All aboard! I boarded the train and took my seat. The trip was going to be a long one, so I thought that I should get some rest. So I shut my eyes and went to sleep.

"Excuse me?"

I was unexpectedly woken up. The person must've had something important to tell if it meant waking me up.

"What time is it?"

At that point I felt like my top was going to burst. The whole situation was ludicrous; he had no right to wake me up if he was going to ask a question like that. So I looked at my watch and told him that it was 6:08pm.

"Thanks friend, my watch is always showing me the wrong time. Say, can I sit with you, it's so lonely sitting by myself."

I give him a couple of sour looks; however he ended up sitting next to me. He asks for my name, which I really didn't think was a good idea. But he looked like he was a nice guy. I told him my name was Steve.

"Steve is a nice name. My name is Richard. So where are you headed?"

I was debating on whether to tell him or not. I told him that I was moving. I didn't him where I was moving to.

"Wow, that's great. But, that costs a lot of money."

I told him not to worry; I was going to get a job once I arrived.

"You should give me your address so that we can send letters to one another."

I was thinking to myself for a while, should I give him my address? I thought, sure why not.

"Cool, here's my address..."

"I wish you the best of luck"

We were now arriving at the town. I had enjoyed the train ride and surprisingly, it was nice to meet

Richard. I said goodbye to him, got off the train, and took the first step into my new life. One week later, I was living in my new house. I had received my first letter. It was from Richard. It read, "Dear Steve, it was a pleasure getting to know you on that train. Here, take this present for being a good friend, and being the only person to ever let me sit next them, yours truly, Richard." Attached to the letter was 100 dollars. I guessed it was to help pay my house off. There was also a note attached to it which read, "P.S, there is plenty more where that came from." Richard wasn't as creepy as I first thought he was, and I never would have meet Richard if it weren't for that train ride.

Esteban Arias
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 5



Artwork:
Stephanie Fish, 18
Mount Saint Mary Academy
Grade 11

The Hurricane

You're like a hurricane
Rain flowing from your eyes
Dripping onto your skin

A dark cloud above your head
The cloud ink black
Hanging low on the horizon

Each step you take
Rumbles your future
As if you were a thunder cloud

You light up the room
Like lightning in a deathly sky
But you cause fire with your words

You are shaped by the wind
The wind is alive with a feather touch
In the morning, it settles into the mist

The clouds look soft and innocent
Before a colorless sky
Plunges into a hole as dark as midnight

Giavanna Barras, 13
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7

The Manipulator: A *Dunk Found Poem*

His voice ripped the air like a chainsaw
the harsh cry sliced straight through my guts
the first time I heard it
sounds cut deep, but words cut deeper
he shredded any fool who wandered near the cage
he drove people wild... and crazy
best of all, he drove them to blow wads of cash
for a chance to plunge his sorry butt
in a tank of slimy water.

He wasn't a person anymore...he was a puppet
the Bozo had total control
the Bozo wasn't wasting time on his vic
he might as well have been hurling insults
into an empty room
but he kept going...
I turned my attention to the Bozo
nobody was spared-men, women, boys, girls,
he didn't play favorites, he nailed everybody.

*I'd tell you a blonde joke, but what's the point?
you are a blonde joke!
Hey, check out the gut on that guy
looks like someone pumped him full of air
don't laugh lady
I think you're the one that they took the air from.*

The Bozo was a master
everyone was under his eye
he was the predator
and they were the prey.

Adam Berrocal, 12
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7

The Job That Changed My Life

Today seemed like a normal day, but that all changed after the first scream.... The beach was silent and peaceful until I heard a high-pitched shout coming from the ocean. I knew what I had to do and ran into the ocean after the scream. Once I submerged myself in the Atlantic, I could tell the cries initiated from a girl. I grabbed her and started heading back towards the Jersey Shore. It was tough, but eventually we arrived on sand. I looked down, ready to inspect the body, when I had realized something that made me turn redder than the ripest tomato in the garden. It was Lily.

I had to do things to her that I don't know if I was comfortable doing. I had already checked to see if she had a pulse and if she was breathing properly. It seemed that she wasn't; I was going to have to do mouth to mouth. I was freaking out, not mentally ready, almost entering panic mode. My reflexes had kicked in and I just started the standard steps for CPR. Two rescue breaths, then thirty chest compressions. *Remember, this was for CPR, nothing else.* Eventually, I started to feel her pulse. I felt relieved. If she would've died, I don't know what I would have done. Either way, I would have lost my job. As she started to come to, she seemed unaware of the situation. Then she looked at me and her surroundings and immediately found out. The first thing Lily said was, "If you wanted a kiss, why didn't you just ask? What, do you just have a thing for girls who are unconscious?"

This moment turned embarrassing fast. She just had to toy with me. *Wasn't it bad enough that I had to do this... Actually, she is kinda cute. Hmmm.*

"Well, I had to do something, I couldn't let a beautiful girl like you to drown out there," I offered.

"Wow, charming," she said, obviously flustered. "Why don't I thank you over a meal--tonight at 5:00, pier 3?" *Wow! Lily Bloom was the new girl Freshman year. We never talked much--not that I talked to lots of girls anyway.*

Before I could even answer, she walked away: we both knew the answer. I was going to meet her there as soon as possible, but first, I had to get off my shift.

Nothing much really happened the rest of my shift. I was lucky this insolent lifeguard named Rick

hadn't shown up. He was an attention hog and an ugly guy who hunted attention like a lion hunts its prey. *One Rick is enough, but an army of them? We would all die. Not by nuclear bombs or wars, but by being so annoyed that we would all fall dead.* I had also achieved getting two girls I bumped into earlier away by telling them dirty lies. I still didn't know how they believed me, but it worked.

The rest of the day went by quickly. Knowing a beautiful girl was going to meet me for what I thought was a date made me count down the hours, minutes, and even seconds before we met up. I wasn't nervous, though. I checked my watch for the third time in the last minute. *4:52:12. Just a few more minutes.* Time had seemed to slow down. *4:54:32.* Time crept closer to when we were to meet. I started to sweat, thinking about my own anxiety. *4:57:09. I couldn't be nervous. I had to be strong. I had to be brave.* *5:00.* I saw her coming down the boardwalk. It was finally time, whether I was ready or not.

"Hey!" Lily said, in a loud, high voice. "I hope you're ready to have a great night!" She started to walk away, knowing I would follow, which I obviously did. She wasn't wrong about having a great time. It was weird, but just sitting with her made me feel as if I had known her all my life, but even so, I still thought it would be nice to get to know her more. After we were done eating, playing games, and going on rides, we sat down on a bench and talked. We talked about our lives and other things that randomly floated into our heads. My mood started to change, and I felt it become more intense the more we talked. Before I could take my chances and go in for a kiss, I felt a hand hit my face. Not as in a touch, *but a slap.* I turned to see the one who attacked me and knew I was going to have to think up an excuse. *It was the two girls from earlier--the ones I told the dirty lies to on the beach!*

As Lily got up to start protesting, trying to protect me, I interfered.

"Excuse me ladies? That is no way to treat a guy on date night! Couldn't you see that I am with a lovely lady?"

I could tell that they were ready to rant about my lies, but Lily intruded next.

"Yeah, you wouldn't want to ruin our date." She had come closer to me, grabbed my arm in a way I was sure looked cute. I just hoped it was enough, but, again, Lily spoke, "If you don't mind, we will be on our

way.” We walked off; the other girls said nothing--they never even had a chance. I was afraid of how Lily would feel about the situation, but my worries conceded when she started to laugh. Things were normal again. *As if what had just occurred never happened.*

As the night was reaching an end, we sat on another bench, closer to the second pier. I knew curfew was soon, but I didn't want to leave. The last thing I said that night was, “I'm sorry, but I have to get back before curfew. Thanks for everything.” I started to think about walking away but decided to say a few more words, “Goodnight kiss?” Then our lips met for the second time that day.

Jason Brennan, 13
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7



Artwork:
David Whitehead, 18
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11

Don't Mention Him: A *Dunk* Found Poem

Dad would bring stuff home
Usually see an empty whiskey bottle
They say I am clever like him
I know I have got nothing of him in me
Why even mention the loser
I am not like my dad

Spooked about cops
Came home hours later
Could not lie
Just down to the corner, he would say
I am not like my dad

Quitting can become a habit
Just didn't work out
Someday she'd tell me the good things
Left her to pay the bills
I am not like my dad

Sick of fighting the ghosts of her past
Always someone else who wins
You don't know anything
Acting like I'm no better than him
So much like your dad
I am not like my dad

Want to prove I'm better than they think
I would just be running away
Expression twisted with fear
Used to say he was working when he wasn't
Each of us had lied
I am not like my dad

Holly Cornelson, 12
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7

Remember

My award is gold
Which thrives at one point
Basked in glory and showered with praise
But is trash the next day,
worthless and forgotten

My marble is a cat's eye
That always watches
As if it were recording my daily antics
But never says a thing

My bracelet is a chain
Which keeps me tied to a place of old
Stored in a secret garden of flowered memories
And can extend to capture future buds that bloom over time

My charm is a memory
That I see in my hand
Of summer fun and friends now just a dream
And now the same warmth is never felt again

My tooth case is a mountain of pain
That is agonizing at one point,
and seems to proceed forever
But fades in due time and feels like an old wound

Fatima Diarra, 12
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7

Flight MK27

“Coocoo...Coocoo” Was the sound of your alarm going off. You got out of bed, went to the bathroom, brush your teeth, and went to change out of your pajamas. It was a June morning and you had no intentions on even stepping out of your house.

Suddenly, you hear your mom yell, “George! We’re late!”

You came rushing in the room and asked your parents, “What are we late for? What’s so special? It’s not my birthday!”

Your mother sprinted over to the bathroom while explaining, “We planned a surprise for your grandmother in Kansas. Right now we are behind my schedule. We’ll have to move faster.”

You were stumped, “What about my bags?”

Your mother responded, “I already packed your bag during the night!” She shut the bathroom door. During that brief moment you realized that this trip was very important because when was the last time you saw your mother running like Sonic the Hedgehog? Your mother quickly got herself ready and in a few minutes, you were in the car with a pile of suitcases in your lap.

You commented on your mothers speed, “Wow mom that's gotta be some kind of new world record!”

Mother stated, “You better drop that attitude mister, if you want to see that phone of yours!” Your mother, as always, did the roll call, “George, Sam, passports, purse! Okay! We’re fine.”

An eternity later, you walked into the terminal like you owned the place. You walked up to the bag check-in and the woman asked you in her annoying voice, “May I see your documents please?”

When you finally boarded the flight, you discovered that you got a free upgrade. You took the upgrade with your parents support. Your carry on was put in a special box and you sat down into your luxurious seat. You automatically tried out the chairs features, including a personal mini-fridge, 23 inch monitor, and free wifi.

The airplane taxied to the runway. It lifted off and you ears got plugged. You started chewing gum,

bored of looking out the window. Within 30 minutes of the flight lifting off, you spotted four men briskly walking to the front of the airplane, but you didn't pay much attention to them, perhaps they really needed to go and other bathrooms had long lines.

You went on Google and searched the internet for the most recent news. Shocking, the first headline you saw was, "American Airlines flight MK27 missing!" After the bone chilling news, you were confused... What could you do? You briskly pulled yourself from the chair and ran to the restroom, the only place you could gather your thoughts. Seeing the restroom unoccupied, you reached for the doorknob, and yet your hand passed through the door. This frightened you and progressed your confusion.

Naturally, you started inspecting your hand and arm. It didn't take long for you to notice words appearing on your forearm. It said, "Save the people's lives... They're innocent." You turned your head to look at all the other passengers. Unlike before, they stopped moving... as if they were frozen in time. You walked around the airplane, deep in thought about what it all meant.

In your wondering, you remembered the air crash investigation show you used to watch on the television. You remembered where the pilots were located and some frequent mistakes they made that could cause disaster. While checking the control panel, you saw everything look fine. You left the cockpit confused in what could bring the bird down.

Thinking back, you remembered the four men running to the front. There they were, standing in the corner of the kitchen area. You started inspecting their clothing and belongings. You found four air marshal identification cards. You immediately ruled them out of the equation. Why would they do such a thing if the purpose of their job is to prevent that from happening? You walked out of there even more confused than you were.

You looked back at your arm to find the prior words replaced. It said, "Before accusing someone, accuse yourself!" Looking down, you were shocked to find a bomb attached to yourself and the clock at six seconds.

This time, you don't have to think. You pried open the emergency exit and jumped out like it was a

natural instinct. While falling, you looked at your arm once more.

This time it congratulated you, “You did the right thing.” You died, knowing you fulfilled your destiny, thanking God that you didn’t have to hear the pain and agony that death brings with it, that you didn’t make someone's family cry, didn’t have to take someone else's innocent life to prove a point, and let those people walk the earth another day.

And that is when you opened your eyes.

“You’ve passed the test, George. You have proven yourself. You’re ready,”

And that is when the real fear set in.

Mykola Kunderevych,¹²
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7

This Kid is Crazy

“Seriously, Emmett. Get some help already. You’ve been secluded from everybody for years now. I don’t even know how you put up with me.” An urging voice echoed through the air. It was mine, and I was following after my friend quickly as they balanced precariously on the curb of the sidewalk and went along it. The crisp fall air flooded through my lungs as I breathed deeply to calm myself.

This couldn’t end well. The last time Emmett had done that, he had fallen over and cracked his head on the side of the road. If I had not warned him about a car arriving, he would’ve been ten times worse on the pain scale. I had scrambled along and yelled for help, until someone came rushing over. As my friend had grown less and less conscious, I felt everything grow darker and I blacked out in a panic.

Now, the brune just snorted at the words I had repeated and relayed for years and years. He was trotting along the curb, nearly stumbling over. A shocked cry had escaped my lips as he nearly stumbled. A memory flashed in my mind, of him sprawled on the ground with his skull fractured and pale skin glistening with the red liquid of blood. I shuddered, but it seemed as if Emmett had just had the same thought. We were weird like that, and it was just our alike minds in sync again. My voice hoarse with worry, I uttered another word. “Please.”

To my relief, he finally heeded my words. We went back to his house and he simply got on the laptop to book an appointment with a professional. I hassled him, telling him to press the confirmation button when he tried to back away from it. I would press it, but I had learned long ago that things didn’t work around me. Buttons couldn’t be pressed. He finally did what I could not, and I grinned.

“You better be sure about this,” he sighed hopelessly.

“I am,” I replied certainly, my voice taut with concern. We glared at each other mildly, as if challenging the other one to waver and lose the battle I’ve been working on for years. I was unblinking, furious that he would be questioning my certainty. Emmett gave in, and dismissed me. I left, but my mind was fuzzy with anxiety and worry for this ignorant psycho.

When Emmett left for his appointment, I followed him. The psychiatrist didn’t mind, or seem to notice as I just sat in the room. I felt lightheaded and weak, just blinking as they talked, probably bored or worn out from arguing with him the entire way here. Every so often, my friend would glance at me for

reassurance, and I would nod. They constantly talked with each other, to which I paid attention to. The psychiatrist wrote things down, but eventually caught us glancing at each other. “What are you looking at?” They asked him eventually, to which I scowled and glared at them. That was rude.

“My friend.” Emmett snapped back defensively, to which I gave a smile. Yet they looked skeptical, glancing to where I was with an eyebrow raised.

“Your... friend...”

“Yes,” he huffed irritably.

The psychiatrist still seemed quite confused, but they turned back to my friend and spoke.

“You appear to be schizophrenic. There’s a small chance that you can be a maladaptive daydreamer, or just have the behavior. Either way, that would explain your... so-called ‘friend’...”

“Hey!” We both cried out in unison. I walked towards the guy, fuming, aiming to punch him in the gut. The professional did nothing but blink at Emmett with a worried expression, before telling him to reschedule. On our way home, I blinked, just looking at the scenery as I went through the road. Cars didn’t seem to mind how close I was, but my best friend had to stick to the sidewalks or avoid them before someone with a potbelly and a goatee decided they thought they were god. The last god descended before us from his holy chariot and smelled like cheeseburgers. So, he stuck to the unkempt path, while I tread on the concrete. This place wasn’t usually busy, and we weren’t really concentrating or focusing on each other.

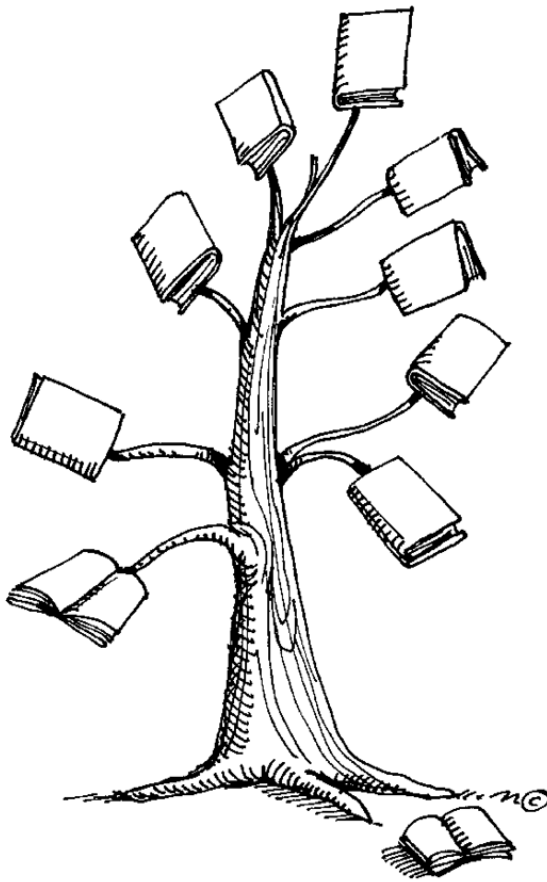
The hum of a car was loud and fast, and I could barely turn around before I saw headlights, bright and merciless, charge at me fast. Dust was kicked through the air, and everything flashed before me. I couldn’t scream, but stare in complete terror as it zoomed at me rapidly. Emmett didn’t seem to notice as the vehicle completely passed through my body, my image fading as I looked at my fingers turn to nothing. There was nothing but air. After a second or so, when my friend finally looked back, my skin reappeared, but dimmer, stranger than usual.

Maladaptive and schizophrenic, that’s what he was. I had known that, and had always known it without a single doubt of him being mentally ill. With help, he would heal, and he seemed somewhat at ease to know what he had, and the possible sources. I felt anguish and anxiety, not wanting to think this crucial knowledge, but unable to deny it.

I was a fragment, a figment of his imagination. Nobody could see me, or hear me, or feel my unreal touch, except for him. A bitter smile rose to my lips. If Emmett was cured of these problems, I would cease to exist. I would no longer be tethered to him, around and there to guide him and stay with him through life. But he would be right, and he would be fine, with other friends, and perhaps the slightest echo of my voice to stay with him and become his subconscious. I would cure him.

I would help him.

Tiffany Melendez, 12
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7



The Plane

Beep, beep, beep goes my alarm clock, waking me up. It was 5 in the morning and I had a 6:50 flight to the Bahamas. I finished packing and headed over to get my sister. We were going to our older sister's wedding. I arrived at Jenni's house around 5:15. She was not ready so I helped her pack the rest of her stuff and put it in the car. We finished loading the car and headed out.

Jenni and I got hungry, so we stopped at Dunkin Donuts and got some bagels. Jenni realized she forgot her wallet at her house. I paid for the bagels and raced back to her house to get her wallet. Once again we were on our way to the airport.

We arrived at the airport and it was 6:45. We raced to get to our plane, quickly scurrying through the crowds of people and onto our flight. We handed our tickets to the flight attendant and headed in. We found our first class seats and sat down.

We were about five hours into the flight and we were close to our last hour of flying. I was bored so I decided to search the internet. I read a news article on a plane disappearing that was on its way to the Bahamas. I asked the flight attendant if that plane was us. He solemnly replied with a yes. He told us that they were trying to get the plane to turn around and they would let us know when the flight was back on track. I calmly but anxiously sat back down and told Jenni what happened. We were both panicking.

We felt a movement in the plane and it was not going up, not turning around, but falling. We buckled our seatbelts very tightly and prayed. We were falling from the sky extremely quickly. Jenni was on the plane phone with our older sister Lina who was getting married. Jenni cried as she was explaining what happened.

As the plane was falling some pieces tore from the body. The pilot came on the intercom and ordered us to get into crash position and to hold on tight.. Before we knew it, we were consumed in the darkness.

We should have missed our flight.

Isabelle Pfeiffer, 12
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7



Artwork:
Therese Ruane, 15
Mount Saint Mary Academy
Grade 10

The Power Within

“Come on Lily! We have to go!” yelled my mother from across the small clearing. The storm had almost arrived, the rain was getting in my eyes and I couldn't see in the dark. We had woken up in the middle of the night, the moon somewhere above, blocked off by angry storm clouds. We were constantly moving in the eye of the storm that had permanently raged across our planet. Even before my mother was born, our planet Arazmus had been in the dark.

We have always traveled from place to place, doing the best that we could to survive in the eye of the constant storm, always waking up at random times to run and get away from the dark clouds and the constant rain. It was difficult to survive in the dangerous environment with so little living things, always running from place to place to get away.

“LILY! NOW!” My mother screamed again, her words muffled by the raging wind. I ran towards her, following the sound of her voice, seeing only the dark haziness of the storm. As soon as I reach her, we started running toward the rest of our group which were all escaping, further away from the storm. In our group, there was one man named the Oculus Temptatur, the *eye feeler*. There have been countless Oculus Temptatur ever since the beginning of the storm. They are people, selected by the previous Oculus Temptatur, which have the unique ability developed over the years to find in which direction the eye of the storm would shift. These people are born with their skills and not many have them, the rare sense of safe direction was a difficult thing to have.

We fled from the furious storm, following the Oculus Temptatur to safety. Running had been part of my life ever since birth and it was the only thing that we could do to survive. We were all running in a group, the Oculus Temptatur in front, guiding us. We tried to stay together, to not get lost or lag behind. I could sense the fear in the air; our whole group could. We were terrified, for this was one of our closest encounters with the storm. Looking behind me, I could see nothing but darkness, but I knew that somewhere beyond that, there was a killer storm. I could now could feel the electricity in the air, causing the hairs on my arms to raise. A spark of light caught my attention, and made me run faster than before, the loud boom after it, sounding like the sky was ripping apart, startled the whole group. Our speed noticeably increased as the

storm raged toward us. We couldn't outrun it this time I realized, and time seemed to freeze.

At least it seemed to. Everything became still, and there were no sounds. A loud voice rang through the air, "Lily! You can stop this! You have the ability to overcome the storm! Save your planet from destruction! You alone have the power..."

"How can I be the one? The one to stop this? How is it possible?" I yelled back, no answer in return. How could I be the one to stop the storm? The powerful storm that has killed so many? How was it possible that she could overcome it? The voice faded away leaving me stunned and unsure of how to react. The voice told me that I was the one to prevent the storm and save my planet, but how? How was I supposed to do all those things?

Time returned to normal, throwing me back into the dangerous run from the storm. I knew that we could make it. We had to, we always made it out alive. The fear of the storm pulsed through me, making me run faster, the adrenaline boosting my energy.

...

We had run for half a day, finally making it to a safe distance away from the storm and setting up camp for the night. Waking up the next morning, I remembered the voice. What was I supposed to do, I wondered once again. So engulfed with my own thoughts, I didn't see the Oculus Temptatur coming up behind me.

"Hello Lily!" The Oculus Temptatur said cheerfully, "How are you doing this morning?"

"Not too bad." I answered him, not wanting to seem rude. However troubled by my thoughts, I knew that the right choice would be to ask the Oculus Temptatur, the wisest in the group.

"Oculus Temptatur," I said, "Yesterday, when we were escaping for the storm, there was a moment where time seemed to freeze and a voice spoke to me. It said that I have the power to save the planet from destruction from the storm." Glancing up hopefully at him, I hoped that he would know the answer because I had not a single idea on what to make of my situation.

The Oculus Temptatur gazed calmly at me, "I believe that you have great power within you. I can

sense it. Its greatness can be indeed the thing that can save us all from the storm. I have sensed that someone would come along to save us and Arazmus from the storm. I have suspected it was you for a while, but I haven't been sure until now." Taking a deep breath, he continued, "I suspect you have the ancient, rare power of the gods. I haven't know of it to be true, until you came to me. We mustn't tell anyone, incase this doesn't go as planned. To start you have to..." And so, the Oculus Temptatur explained to me how to truly find the power of the gods.

I felt the eye of the storm staring at me and, for the first time, I stared back.

Yekaterina Saburova, 13
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7

To Love One Is To Save One

Sitting in the clouds I feel as if I could fly. Fly somewhere, anywhere beyond my life. To a place where I am loved besides the safe haven of the clouds. A warm feeling embraces my heart as I look over at the sun creating all these beautiful shades of orange and pink. The sun loves me I think to myself, as newfound sensation of happiness then subsequently follows. Tears of joy fill my eyes as I now have my first friend. But to my dismay they fall and crash to the ground and so do I. And once again, I have to leave the clouds which I call dreams and drop aimlessly into the world of reality with two tiny hands tied behind my back. A world where my kind is not loved. A world where we are viewed as disease carrying pest that need to die. A world where rats like myself are in grave danger everywhere we go.

I awake with a throbbing pain all over my body. Sadness comes to fill my days as I know where this pain originates. I forgive the people that did this to me as I try to love them with all my heart. But once a rat consumes poison his days are now numbered, and for this reason I wish to see more of the place in which I reside. Not in the sewers where I spend most of my hours but on the light filled surface of Ringwood, New York City.

I slowly get my hands under me to push myself up. I am worried that any drastic movements will compromise my condition even more and most certainly won't help the internal bleeding caused by the poison.

Finally standing, I start for the exit to the surface. The rough stone floor I am so used to guides me like a map for my vision like most rats is not the best. Within minutes I can see the light coming from the exit in the near distance. My strides gain length as eagerness controls them. I almost forget to stop and look before getting too close to the exit. For I know all too well that if a human stands in waiting and catches my sight in the sewer many rats will suffer horrible deaths all similar to my fate.

I see no human and with great relief I advance. I am aware that there is a multitude of people on the surface. But if I go up alone, and leave no trace of my origin, the worst they could do is kill me.

I approach the exit as quickly as I can. Due to my condition is not very fast. I admire this particular

exit very much. My ancestors built it years ago, with various rocks found in the sewer acting as a staircase leading up to a hallowed out section of ground.

I try to get up the stairs fast just in case a human comes. Three steps in and I start swaying to one side. I try to continue but my efforts make no difference as I lose my balance and fall. This is especially alarming because rats have excellent balance.

My body lays motionless on the bottom steps as my mind, filled with confusion tries to collect itself. I must get to the surface before I die.

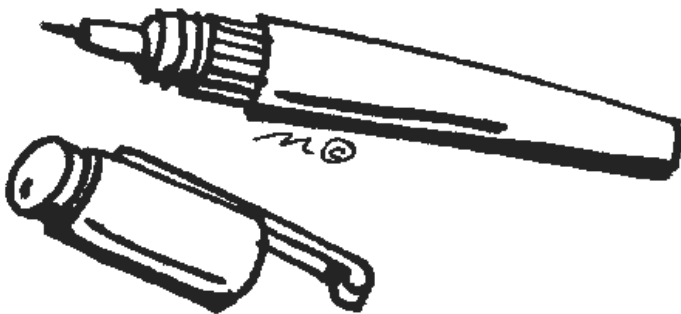
Armed now with more determination than my heart has ever come to know, my tiny feet get under me one at a time. Seconds later, I'm standing. I advance once again towards the second step trying to keep myself steady. Carefully placing my front foot on the ledge of the step, I put my weight on to it and hoist myself up. I make it, but with a cost. On my way up I hit my right back leg on the step and now I cease to feel anything in that leg. Thankfully I'm still able to limp.

Despite my additional injury I continue. This time much slower but I manage to get up the next two steps fairly quick, at least for my worsening condition. There is only one step between me and the hallowed out tunnel to the surface. I limp to get closer to the edge of the next step. I place my front legs on the cold stone. Almost losing my grip I lift myself up and successfully land. Without time to rest I go up through the tunnel. I stand in silence as I stare out into the surface. Mesmerized by the beauty of Myrtle Avenue. Store after store each one lined up right next to each other. Each bearing a marvelous window display that intrigues my creativity. I leave the tunnel to see more. I limp slowly, hiding behind various objects like lamp post and parked cars. There is a relatively large amount of people in the stores and on the sidewalk. Surprisingly, no one has saw me yet.

There is one store in the distance that I am particularly interested in its window display. My vision is not particularly good but even from twenty feet away I can see bright pink almost red blurry circles in the distance. To my knowledge of things that I've seen in parks I believe there flowers. I make my way towards the store.

The ground starts to shake, a party of fifteen people come parading down the sidewalk. There is no way I can hide from that many people in my condition. My mind starts to race. What am I going to do? I start to get dizzy again. I know that if I faint now I will die. I start for the alley on the other side of the sidewalk. Halfway there my bad leg gives out completely and I fall to the ground. Right in front of fifteen people. They all start screaming and running in the other direction. I frantically try to crawl to the alley using my other legs. Multiple people almost step on me in an effort to escape. I am only centimeters from where I started, I don't know why I'm even trying anymore. These doubt full thoughts are stopped by a shadow blocking the sun over me. I look over. There is a human girl on the ground leaning over me. Not afraid she places her hand on my head and slowly strokes it. This is when I met the girl that saved my life, not only from the poison but from other humans.

Maria Scarpantonio,13
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 8



The Storm

The pile of wood grew larger as Pa Robertson continued his strenuous workout. He was cutting wood to feed his fireplace. Even though there was a dense coating of snow on the ground, beads of sweat ran down his forehead. He was getting up into the high 60s in age, Pa loved taking care of the house. He knew that up to his dying day, he would still be working hard. The sun was setting and he would be starting to make his trip back to the cabin. Ma was inside preparing supper. Pa loved everything she made. Pa always reminded himself of the delicious meal she made and the great times they had.

They had eloped in the late 1960s. There was no family to miss them. After getting married, they bought the cabin. It was a beautiful house. The only downside was the intense cold. Summer was a memory as the warmest it got was the high 40's. What was interesting is that neither remembered moving into the house. Pa nor Ma would admit this to the other. It was a secret they both shared, but kept from each other, afraid the other wouldn't believe them.

Pa brought a small pile inside. It would have to last them until the afternoon of the next day. As he opened the door, the inviting warmth and the delicious aroma coaxed him into the dining room. Ma was just taking the dish out of the oven. That night they had a beef and potato stew. It was delicious.

"Best meal I've ever had." Pa concurred as he swallowed the last bite. Ma knew he was just flattering her, as he had said the same line for the past 45 years. Even so, it still brought a smile to her face. After dinner, Pa retired to his favorite chair. After she finished washing the dishes, Ma would do the same. They would read in silence for the next hour and a half, the only sound, the crackling of the fireplace to keep warm. Ma and Pa then got dressed, and went to bed.

"Wake up, wake up!" Pa said, shaking Ma. "You got to help me board the windows. A storm's coming." That was the only downside to this peaceful cabin was the storms. Powerful winds and snow would blow against the house. Years ago, Pa would be able to prepare for it by himself. In recent years, with his arthritis growing, he needed Ma's help. Fortunately, the storms have grown less frequent. After living with these storms for close to 50 years, they had no trouble going to sleep.

The next morning, it was as if there was absolutely no storm at all. The door was completely free and only a few parts of the house had snow on it. It was as if all the snow settled to the ground. This phenomena was not new. Usually, the Robertson's had not really cared what the storm looked like. Since they have become rarer, Ma and Pa have paid more attention to the effects. After all, many years have passed before anything exciting happened to them.

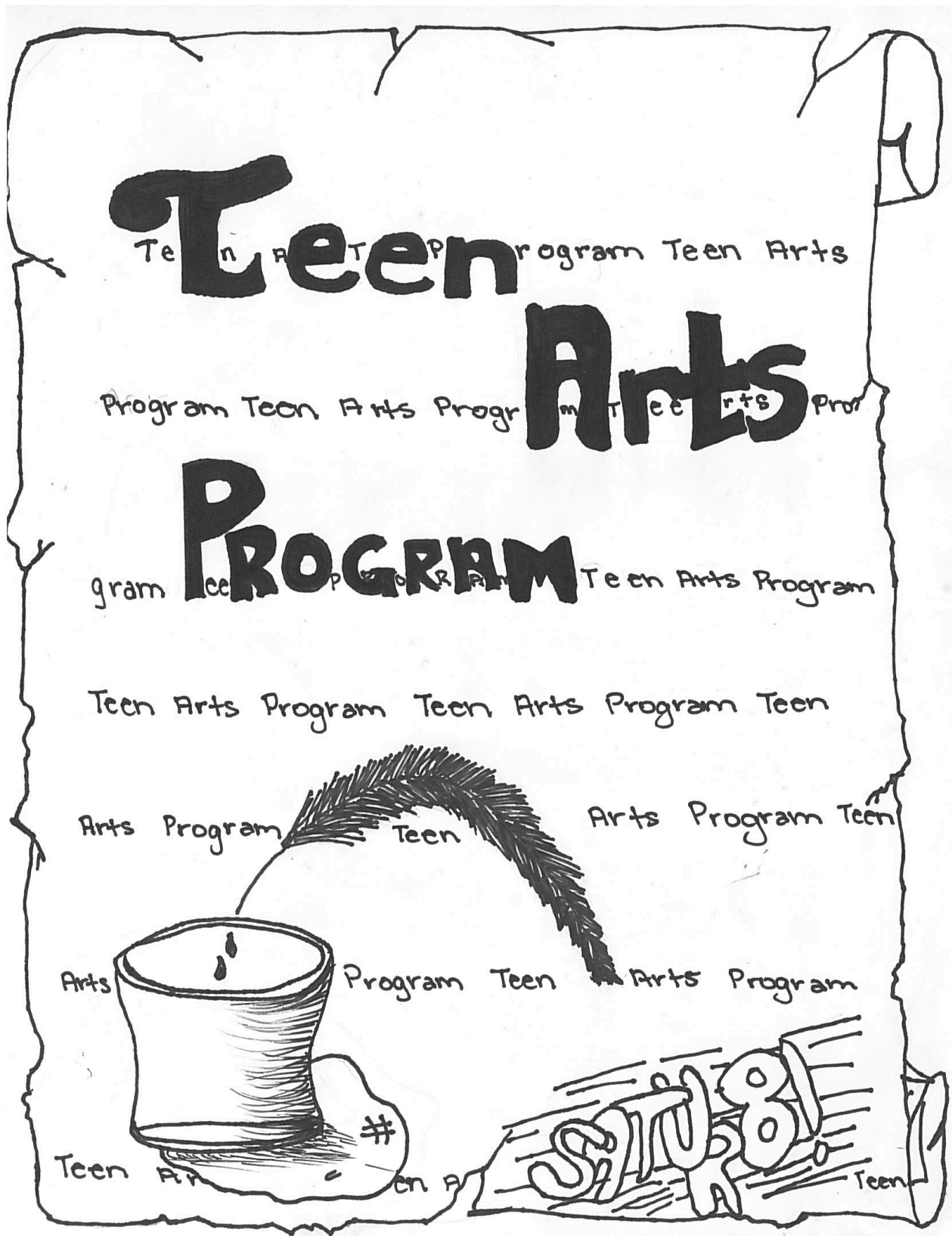
Many months passed. Only a few storms happened during that time. However, the effects were the same. It seemed as if the snow just settled on the ground. Another shocking thing was when the storms occurred during the day, the sky turned at different color. It was a somewhat pink color, almost a fleshy color. This is what intrigued Pa the most. He had never noticed that before since most of the storms happened at night. Still, the Robertson's weren't concerned. It was normal to have irrational thoughts when you are older. It was just a sign of old age. At least that is what they thought.

Soon, only Pa looked outside. It had been years since any other differences occurred. Ma was becoming frailer. Pa was having trouble boarding up the windows by himself, so they decided to leave them boarded all the time. The only time Pa saw the outside was when he went to chop the firewood. It was a tiring task for an old man, but he enjoyed it anyway. It was a scary time for the Robertson's, and then one day the worst storm possible occurred

"I'm sorry Grandma." The little girl said to the elderly lady. "I didn't mean to break it. I shook it but it accidentally dropped out of my hands."

"Don't worry about it sweetheart. I've had that snow globe for close to 60 years. Never once did anyone look at it like you." The assistant living resident said to her six year old grand-daughter. "People break things all the time. I got that in 1966 in Colorado. Your mother really loved it. When she got older, though, it was rarely used." The grandmother thought nothing of the broken snow globe. It was only a keepsake on her shelf. Unfortunately, she would never know how special it really was.

John Sharbaugh, 14
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 8



Artwork:
Jacqueline Pineda, 14
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 8

Someone Wicked

I gasped. Shooting up from the position that I was laying in on my bed, taking in sharp intakes of breath, a couple of stray tears leaking down from my eyes, I realized it was happening again. He was there, in my dreams. A man, I never saw his face, just a dark silhouette of his body. He was running after me, calling out my name with his scratchy voice. The only thing that I knew about him was his name. Jasper.

Jasper was the reason that I couldn't sleep at night, the reason I had heavy bags around my eyes, the reason my cheeks are sunken in, the reason my skin is so pale, but most of all, he was the reason that I was always scared.

"Arabella," my mother whispered as she crept through my doorway and into my room, "Did you have another nightmare?" she asked, her voice calm and soothing.

I just nodded in response.

"Come wait in the living room while I prepare you some tea that should help you," my mother suggested.

I did as I was told and followed her into the living room, turning on a lamp and picking up a book to read. My mother was in the kitchen, preparing my tea. I walked toward where she was to check on my drink, where I spotted my mother taking something out of a container and then drop what looked like a pill into my tea. She quickly put the container in which she got it from into the cabinet. Confused, I quickly walked in to ask her what it was.

"Mother, what did you put in my tea?" I asked curiously.

"Oh just the normal things, boiled water, tea leave, honey, and a tad bit of milk," she smiled.

I furrowed my eyebrows, "Are you sure that's all you put in it?"

"Of course," Mother laughed, "Would I ever lie to you, Arabella?"

I drank the tea, despite what I saw my mother do. I trusted her, When I went back to sleep, the nightmares did not stop, they only became worse. I was running through the woods, I could not see past a

few feet in front of me because of the blackness that surrounded me. This was normal, just like any other nightmare I'd had, but then... something changed. Jasper called out my name in a deafening screech. The noise ripping through my eardrums, causing me to topple onto the muddy earth. This time, Jasper caught up to me and, clawing at my leg, caused it to ooze with blood.

I woke up. It took me a few minutes of trying to steady my breath before I noticed the puddle of blood formed around my ankles. Panicking, I use the blankets to press onto the wound on my leg. Once the bleeding stopped, I noticed that the blood was coming from the place that Jasper had scratched into me. It couldn't be real, I refused to believe it! It was just a dream, there's no way that I could have had the wound that Jasper supplied me with! I probably just hit my foot on the bedpost, right?

I got out of my bedroom, and crept into the kitchen. I decided to get myself something to eat, to hopefully calm my nerves. Out of curiosity, I look in the cupboard where my mother put the mysterious item in my tea. I found the bottle where she took it from. I reached for it, and saw the name on the label. It read *Jasper*. I gasped, dropping the bottle on the linoleum floor.

"Arabella?" I could hear her footsteps walking through the hall, "I know you're here,"

That was the moment when it all came together. My mother gave me the tea, she put the pills in the things that I ate. How could I have missed this before? All of the clues were there... she never seemed worried when I was wailing in the middle of the nights, never concerned with my dark eyes and sunken cheeks. Never took me to a doctor or therapist; in fact, I think she may have even smiled a bit when she saw me in pain.

Mother finally got into the kitchen, "Arabella, why are those pills on the floor?" Her tone was oddly tense.

"You did it, didn't you? Those pills are the reason for my nightmares!" I sneered.

"Now Arabella, don't you understand? I didn't want to do this to do this to you, I had to. Jasper wanted me to, he told me himself. You're not the only one in the family to take those pills," she flashed a devilish grin, "He attacks you, but Jasper comes to me in a different way, he talks to me, gives me

instructions, and he just gave me one last instruction.”

She grabbed the bottle of pills, spilling a couple into the palm of her hand, before running after me, I didn't see her coming, she grabbed my head, trying to stuff the pills down my throat. I tried my best to keep my mouth closed, but I couldn't do it... the pills made their way down.

The next thing I knew I was back in the woods, running from an all too familiar figure. But it was different this time, even more so than the last. Jasper appeared in front of me, his face still hidden. I tried to run the other way, but I couldn't move! He jumped on me, slashing into my stomach, blood leaking onto the dirt that surrounded me. I was coughing up blood, the last thing coming into view was Jasper's face. Scars littered this face, blood, most likely mine, was streaked across his forehead, he had jagged teeth, and flared nostrils, but the thing that I noticed the most were his eyes, completely black, not a speck of color anywhere. Those eyes were the last thing that I saw until everything went dark.

Megan Shimp, 12
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7

Coldest Day of Christmas

It's the coldest day of Christmas Eve Day ever, and my family's run out of coal. While the family decides what to do to get warmth, I look up on the clock and see I have exactly 24 hours to get on the naughty list to help my family. I run to my room to devise a plan for how to get on that list. I decide: ignore manners, trip everyone, and start cursing. Slowly, then, I'll get meaner. At night I'll pull off the big prank, which, I know, might need help from someone... ruining the family dinner. I'll take the turkey and, instead of baking it with gravy and lemons, it will be with sardines and ketchup. The soup will be way overly spiced and the salad will have dead worms picked from outside. Perfect.

I've got a map of the house spread out on my desk to see where I'll pull the occasional pranks. Y'know, like water spilled, or sneak attacks. While all this goes on I don't notice someone walking to my room until they open the door on my planning. It's my good old Aunt Nancy! I freeze in shock while she walks over to check up on what I'm up too.

She asks me, "Are you trying to get on the naughty list?"

I reply, "How else are we going to get coal by tomorrow morning?"

"True, but you gotta let me in on the dinner finally prank" she grinned.

I sigh, "Sure, you just have to keep quiet."

"Got it."

As the day goes on, my family members notice my change in rudeness and that I'm acting not myself. My parents even ask if I'm okay but I play it off and keep calm. Then it was prep time, my aunt tells me she'll deal with the food, I just have to get the drinks and set up. As always, I get asked to set the table, just as planned. Knowingly, I put the dirty table cloth on the table and when my mom asks to change it to a clean one, I say that there isn't any since having thrown the rest outside in the mud. All the silverware is dusty the plates are stained, even all the chairs are crooked and not how they were before because the heat is more important than gifts.

Show time. This is it, if I mess this up, I won't make it on the list. Thoughts mess with me; what if I

didn't do enough wrong? But before the show could even start, someone knocks on the door. My mom asks me to open the door, but as much as it pains me, I make a snarky remark that annoys everyone enough to make my father open the door. Yes!

However, it isn't some carolers or donation collectors. It's a big man in a red and white suit. Santa!

I say, "Santa?! Santa! Why are you so early?"

"Because, dear, I came to give you your presents!" he replies.

"But... I've been horrible! Shouldn't I get coal?!" I cry.

Santa chuckles and says, "Boy, you did this for a good reason! So your family could be warm on Christmas morning!"

The entire family stares in awe at me, my cheeks getting redder as Santa reaches into his sack and pulls out two things: a sack of coal and a big red box with a white ribbon.

Sophia Starzynski, 12
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7

The Girl with the Dangerous 10

Hi! I'm Fred and I have a special power, I have an ability to measure how dangerous people are on a scale from 1 to 10. An innocent baby or person would be a 1, while a trained man with an assault rifle might be a 7. So, obviously I have to act like a normal child and go to school daily, which is the most boring part of my life. When I first got my powers, I was pretty startled and confused because I didn't know why I was chosen for this certain part. I was first welcomed with some kind of holographic god, but it was someone from my family that was some really old grandfather. I was also mad that my parents or any other of my family members didn't tell me anything about my special power.

Today, a new girl came into school and I detected a strong feeling of her being a dangerous 10. She looked like an innocent girl with pigtails and a really preppy outfit. In the beginning, I thought my abilities were glitching or something like that, but after I asked my parents if anything was wrong. As it turns out, nothing was wrong. I was pretty confused after that, so I decided to become friends with the new girl to really figure her out.

"Hey! Wait up! Hey, I heard you were new here in school and I wondered if you wanted me to show you around?" I asked.

Looking really confused, the girl said, "Ummm... I'm Ali and obviously I'm new, but I really don't need your help. It was a great offer, though."

"In all honesty, I was sent here by the student body to help you. So if you really need help with anything, you can come to me," I offered.

I really don't understand why my senses were acting up like that and saying that this innocent girl Ali is a dangerous 10. It was like a kindergarten nightmare, everyone liked her and wanted to be her friend... but on the flip side, she could be a demon and could have done many ghastly things. I know I shouldn't have said that the student body sent me because that was a total lie, but I really needed to get closer to this girl and her dark side.

A couple seconds after I told the lie, I confessed, "Actually the student body thing was a lie, but I

really just wanted to be your friend because there aren't any decent people around here and you look pretty cool."

Still looking a little puzzled, Ali said, "Yet again thanks, but I'm okay being by myself for the day because I'm pretty used to it. You could always come and say hi later."

I stood there in the middle of the hallway with this really stubborn girl and finally complained, "Why do you have to be so stubborn? It kills me to see someone as stubborn as you, but whatever floats your boat, I'll be around."

Diiiiinnnngggg!!!

"Sorry, we can't chat anymore, I have to get to my first class, bye!" she yelled while walking away.

A couple periods later, lunch came around. During lunch I kept my eyes peeled for this Ali girl so I could get to the bottom of this dangerous sensation. I finally found her in the corner of the lunchroom, quietly snacking.

"Hey, Ali!" I shouted as I walked towards her.

"Unfortunately that's me. I told you that I didn't need any help," she said in a demanding way.

"Whoa, calm down. I just wanted to be friends, but obviously you don't want any. It seems that you're hiding something that you don't want me to know about, but you know, I'm just assuming," I said in a bit of an aggressive tone.

"Maybe there is something I'm hiding from you, maybe there isn't, but that doesn't mean you have to invade my privacy on my first day of school," she replied.

"I honestly won't tell anyone that you're hiding something, I just want to make sure everything is okay with whatever is your problem," I said, caringly.

"Fine I'll tell you, but promise me that you seriously won't tell anyone and you swear on your life that no one will speak of this," she demanded.

"I swear to God that I won't tell a soul." I said.

“Okay, so I have a problem with drugs and alcohol use. Please don’t hate me,” she pleaded, “it's been a problem since my parents have gotten divorced, about two years ago.”

I didn’t really expect that, I was expecting worse.

Surprised by the answer I stated, “Huh, I really wasn’t expecting that. It could always be worse than that, have you ever wanted to get help or ever ask for any?”

“I’ve tried, but everyone turns me down because they don’t believe me,” she cried.

“Its fine, we can get through this together and I can get you some help. First you need to talk to both of your parents and the guidance counselor.”

All in all, everyone does have their good or bad days. I finally figured out why Ali was a dangerous 10 and why she was that way in less than a full school day. I helped Ali with talking to her parents and the guidance counselor and everything turned out well with her life.

Olivia Swierszcz, 12
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7



Artwork:
Brenda Uribe, 18
Bound Brook High School
Grade 12

BOUND BROOK HIGH SCHOOL

The Pirate of the Shadows

"I will have some rum, whatever you have" the hooded figure said to the man behind the bar. As the bar tender prepared his drink, the hooded figure sat still and silent, as if he weren't a man, but a statue. Once his drink was ready, he slammed it down and dropped some gold as payment. He got up and began to force his way out to the door. Obviously leaving in some sort of a hurry, this drew attention to the mysterious figure. One of the towns guards quickly stopped him and asked if he had seen a man like the one on the poster he held.

"Him? He is well known here, surprised you haven't found him yet. Talk to any bar tender, shop keeper, heck anyone who sweeps the floor. He is famous here, The Legend of the Shadow, never heard of him? Surprising that is, truly. Also, tell the man who drew that, he did a good job, looks a lot like me," he said confidently as he looked the man in the eye.

"It's him! Get him!" The guard yelled, trying to grab the man. The man bolted away quickly and weaseled his way through crowd and got far from the guard.

When the people in the bar realized the man was wanted and could be turned in for money, they surrounded him.

Confused by this, the hooded man stopped in his tracks and prepared for his exit.

"Well boys, it was nice knowing you, it truly was," The man said as he removed his hood,

"But Rin Calloway waits around for no one. So, have a good day, and I'm sure I will see you soon!" Rin leaped into the air, back flipping onto the rafters of the bar. He ran across them and leapt out the window into the night.

Rin raced along the roof tops in the fresh night air, feeling more free than any man on Nassau. He leaped incredible height to get from ledge to ledge, almost enough to not seem possible, but he kept going, running farther and faster. He came to a stop at the edge of town, he dropped of the buildings and now entered the abandoned section of town, walking through the rubble to his safe house. After a few minutes of trekking, he arrived at a locked shack to which he had the key. He unlocked it and entered, knocking dust everywhere. Inside lay his sword, his pistol, a few days food, a cash of gold, and a bird. Rin pulled a note out of his long coat and attached it to the birds foot, letting it lose to deliver the secret message. He then grabbed his weapons, took a bite to eat, and filled his wallet with gold before heading out again. Now prepared for anything, Rin stepped out of his shack, locked up, and headed out.

Rin walked to back town, hoping his man hunt was over. Luckily the town had calmed down and only the trusted ones cared to look his way. Small children who looked up to him, old bums who wish they had been him, even depressed workers who want his life could be trusted. They all know the horrors of their ordinary lives, and they knew the cruelty that would come with ruining his life. Because of this, Rin was able to roam the poor district of Nassau, as if the whole island wasn't a rat pot, with ease. No guards bothered because it was no use to stop the rampant robbery on the streets. This was the perfect place for Rin to conduct his business. Cheap and able work mixed with those he could trust made for opportunity. He bought a building and used it as his council room. He gathered anyone he could and discussed with them his plan to escape past the horde of Spanish militants and to his ship. Once he assigned all the roles, it was time to put it into action. The children would distract the guards near the south gate, giving Rin time to slip through. A group of men would head north east and alert the guards there that they found Rin to gather as many troops there as they could. Then his closest friends would assemble a crew and send them off to his ship, readying it to leave when Rin arrived. Once all was planned, Rin slipped away and left to has his final fun in town.

He went to a bar near the south east and waited for the commotion to start. He had a few drinks, tried to hit on some women but sadly fell through, and had a good time. He had lost track of himself and gotten fairly tipsy, which would make his escape even harder to execute. He heard a noise from far off, sounding like a bird crowing. That was the signal, the plan was in motion. Rin bolted south towards the gate, avoiding anyone he saw. Running like that was suspicious and he didn't want to draw attention. He dashed past groups of guards and made it to the gate. He jumped up onto a building and leaped onto the gate, and this drew the notice of the crowd.

"This is a nice city, but sadly I have to leave. All you ladies stay clean for me, I will be back before you know it" Rin said with a wink as he jumped down on the other side of the gate.

Now he was free, or so he thought. As he went to the west of town, he noticed a caravan sitting in an odd place. He walked near, intrigued by its placement, when he noticed it was stocked with Spanish soldiers waiting for him. He ran from them, but they quickly hooked up their horses and chased him. Rin knew that he had to lose them, there was no way he could fight men with guns. He ran along the wall so they couldn't get close, but they could still shoot at him, which was a danger. He realized that up ahead was the west gate, he could jump over top of it and lose the men in the wagon, only problem being that he had no idea who or what was on the other side. It didn't matter, he needed to take the risk, and so he did. With a single bound, Rin soared over the gate and landed gracefully inside, only to meet a less fortunate fate.

Once in town again, Rin met himself face to face with several long barreled rifles. Now he knew he had been set up. He had no time to talk, only time for action. So he quickly

unsheathed his sword from his waist and in one swipe, knocked the all guns out of the hands of the men. He preceded to disarm and dismay the Spaniards, sending them away to give him time to leave. He ran to the north, hoping to find a spot on the wall to be able to exit from. His ship was waiting and he didn't want to disappoint his fans. As he made his way north, he noticed a few figures lurking behind him, and now he knew he had been followed. He quickly turned the corner and dashed off, being closely followed by more men. Rin made he was around in a circle and back to the wall where he found a small exit door, which he took without hesitation. As he left, the men chasing him seemed to vanish, but he did find some of the men.

"Boys, what are you doing out here? I paid you to stay in town!" Rin quietly shouted, as

"Sir, we came out here because we wanted to get the Wagon men off your back, Sir"

"How did you know that I was followed by men in a wagon? You traitors, you are the

reason I'm being followed!" Rin shouted this time. He robbed the three men of all their valuable they had, leaving them poor and with a message to never rat on Rin Calloway ever again.

Unluckily, the shout caught the ear of the men chasing him before and they found Rin again.

Now outside in the Forrest, Rin had a much larger advantage over these men. He sailed over the brush while the assailants had to trudge through it. He ran near the west cliff and tricked the men to follow. Once close enough, Rin snuck into the woods for his surprise attack. He jumped from a tree and knocked one man down. Like a domino effect, all the men soon tumbled down and off the cliff, safely into the water below. Rin was free, again. Although he thought to himself that he had been tricked enough that he should prepare for anything unusual. As he made it to his final checkpoint, he once again noticed more of the Spanish fleet stationed nearby. Rin decided it was too late, he had to run now or he would miss his ship. He pushed through the men standing guard and ran toward the cliff. The men didn't follow as they thought he was crazy to jump off the mountain, but he still did. Rin flew off the ledge and glided down toward his nearby ship. He grabbed a rope and swung down to the deck, safely escaping his attackers.

Once he was safely aboard, he decided to set sail for North America where he could plunder new waters. Once he had his crew men take head and let lose the sails, he was free to

"Rin? Where have you been darling? I got your note from that scraggly bird and I've been waiting ages for you" said the mysterious woman from inside the captains quarters.

"Just because your father is the captain of the Spanish fleet doesn't mean you have to

capture me too, Camillia" Rin replied. He went to his cabin to greet his guest, and they talked for hours about their adventures to get to the ship. Now that he had gotten his fill of excitement for one day, Rin settled down and relaxed. Rin's ship, The Black Gallahand, set sail into the night, disappearing like a shadow in darkness. Rin was free at last, and no man on Nassau would ever forget his tale of glory.

Daniel Allen, 16
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11

My Escape

Nature is my escape
Seeing the color of the trees or the clouds in the sky calms me down
I am in my own world at that point
I forget all of my troubles and I feel like a weight has been lifted off my shoulders
How can the world make such breath taking sights
Nature is a miracle in itself, for it has existed since the beginning of time
Mother Nature has survived, she has prospered
All the while continuing to flourish with stunningly beautiful results
The weight of civilization can be overwhelming
The fast pace, the burdens of relationships, the technological complexity
All of that makes you want to escape to a simpler life
That is why nature is my Xanadu
That is why nature is my savior

Samanta Cubas, 17
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11



Who are we?

Who are we?

We are not a race or a color

Who are we?

We are not much different from each other

Who are we?

I am killed by the color of my skin

Who are we?

I am consumed with a history of sin

Who are we?

Why am I assumed to be coming from the streets

Who are we?

Why am I assumed to be posh, preppy, and complete

Who are we?

We are independent

We are honest

We are humble

We are kinder

We are smart

We are loyal

We do not abide by your stereotypes

Those words that splinter

Who are we?

We are people

Who are you?

Gabriela Fitzpatrick, 16
Jawhari Williams, 16
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11

Poison Oak

Dead leaves spin wildly across the path you travel,
Hiding the imperfections on the road.
The damaged road, missing pieces:
Cracks and potholes pull apart the road's cohesiveness and stability,
Ensuring the uncertainty to all who travel this way.

Then you see
The house,
The gray sky
The dim light,
The bark of the Fringe Tree in front of the house
With it's faded and chipped bark
From the harsh winds whistling through the Redbud trees that are slowly losing their beauty
At the edge of the forest behind the house.

Or maybe it's from the distorted
feeling that consumes you the
longer you stay
near it.

The longer you stare,
The house is boarded up,
Locking the feelings of this place inside.
The windows shattered,
The roof falling apart,
But somehow
The house seems
To be almost an abandoned work of art.

One with nature,
The vines of Poison Oak creep up the side of the building,
With the shiny green leaves, dangerous to the touch.
Wild flowers of the mountainous terrain lining the outskirts, offering a sense of hospitality.
Like something out of a horror movie,
The imperfections pull you in,

Closer and closer,
Every noise in the background slowly makes you more and more uneasy,
The trees shake, just like your feeling inside.
The effect of Poison Oak.

Ashley Gallagher, 17
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11



Artwork:
Devin Dubecky, 18
Bound Brook High School
Grade 12

Something Beautiful About Disaster

I have never been afraid of storms.
The sky could be doused in thick black clouds,
Drenching the glutinous Earth,
Washing away the dirt.
The wind could swirl,
And howl,
And scream.
The thunder crashing and the lightning sparking.
Loud, rushing, breathtaking.
The storm is consuming like the pressure built around me.

But I have never been afraid of storms.
Except for the day you left me.
It was days and days and month upon month of pouring rain.
Constant opaque rain drenching my skin
And my clothes cling helplessly to my body as I stand there looking for someone to save me.
But I was just trapped in a room with the water flowing in,
Like the realization that you're gone finally sinking in.

Everything was blurry.
I couldn't see straight.
I couldn't think straight.
As I breathed in, the water poured into my lungs,
Filling them to the brim.
I swear if I could scream, no one would hear me.

But somehow, through all of this,
I finally felt like I could breathe.
A weight had been lifted.
I could finally see clearly.
The glaze over my eyes had left.
I punch a hole in the wall, letting the water flood out of the room.

I didn't fight it.
I let the flood carry me away.
And everything was fine.
It was the calming of the most perfect storm.
It was like a rebirth, a purification,
And finally, I was clean.

Ashley Gallagher, 17
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11

Pondering Humans

Pondering humans
One specific group of them
What I have to say...

You could transcend through time and stand the test.
Or you could average, no more than the rest.

You could try and learn about the greats of the past.
Or you can do nothing, go nowhere fast.

You could be an achiever, earning respect.
Or you could grope and whine about never getting success.

You could make a difference, an impact, a change.
Or you could ignore that and tell others to do the same.

You could be a talent, work hard for your dream.
Or you could put it off, realize you did and scream.

You could be humble, kind to those you know.
Or you could be arrogant, just state your claim and go.

You could say and do what you always wanted.
Or follow the crowd and go through life haunted.

You could learn and try to find out what's right.
Or you could charge headfirst without reason and fight

You could speak your mind and try to teach others.
Or you could stay ignorant and just be a bother.

By reading this you'd think I'm trying to upstage
People who have come into old age
But the truth is, I
Made all these sayings to apply
To the shortest of attention spans, teenage.
You may think I'm boring the audience

By saying these things so obvious
But these sayings are all intentional
Botched often, but very influential
So it's repetitive, but far from sloppiness.

The future is making me sick
They convey nothing, clearly too thick
So why do I even try
To say something noteworthy, why
Don't I just end this thing with three limericks?

Mordecai Rigorson, 17
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11

MY ANGEL

Siting with my best friend I was Blind to see
That the one I call my best friend would be the last I see
I escape into the dark it's my only getaway from the pain
I watch from afar as the flatline beep to say she was away
My angel, my soul, my daughter never to be forgotten
My mind swims with thoughts of the day I was lost
Lost in my own world too blind to see
That as I sit on my knees
My Best Friend holds an option before me
A blast erupts from the bottom up
I walk from the dark into the light I go up
Up I go I hear a beautiful laugh
I walk closer to notice gold gates
Gates that stand tall as the sky
Figures are shown deep in the light
I look closer to see my angel, my soul, my daughter standing next to God

Kamiyah Johnson, 16
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11

Something to Consider

What do you do when
You have nothing left to look forward to?
When Every Day is this dreadful drag wishing the hours would just pass by

What do you do when
There is no more white noise
When you are left aching with your raw thoughts

What do you do when
You know this sudden urge of joy will soon be out of reach
When happiness is so close, but you can't just quite palm it

What do you do when
The definition of beauty is suddenly sculpted into something that can be so ugly
When you know beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but that isn't enough anymore

What do you do when
You actually have to physically and mentality prepare yourself to take on every day as a new obstacle
When most people think it is just easy to live life, but they really have no idea

What do you do when
You risk every inch of your morals for someone that could care less about you
When trying hard for something just isn't enough anymore

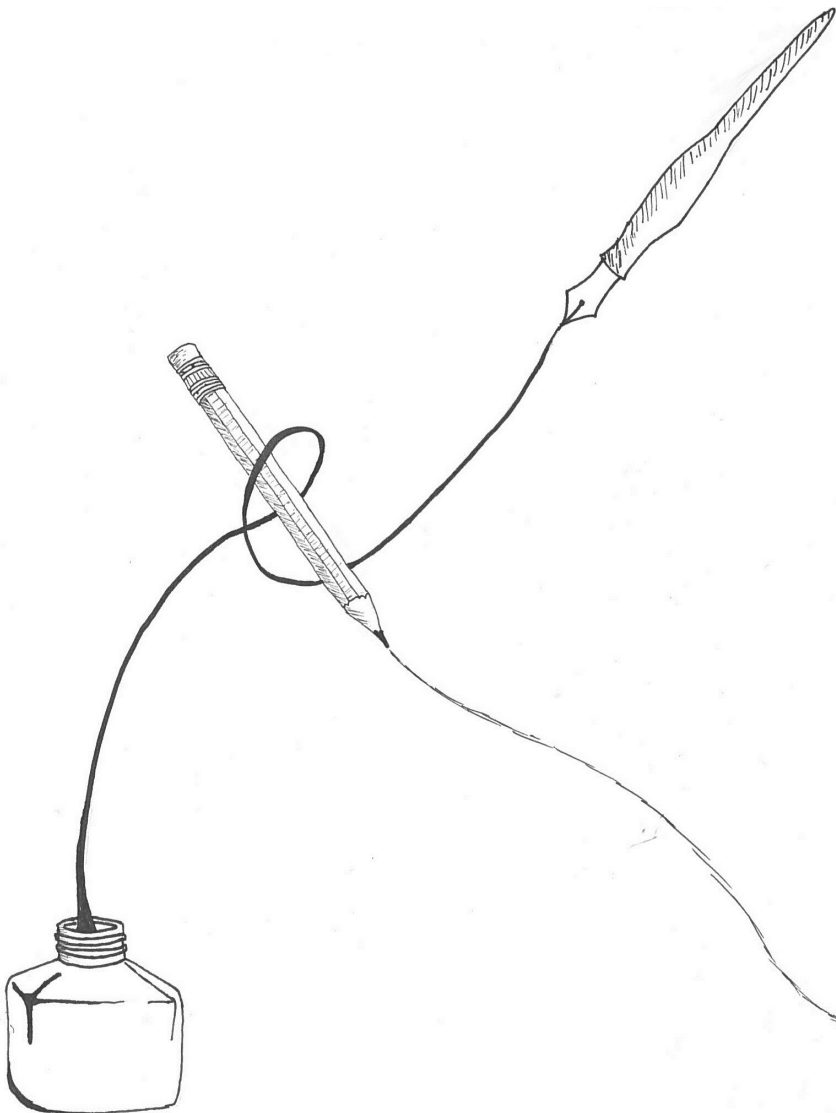
What do you do when
This happens to someone who means the most to you...

Lacey Meyer, 16
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11

Even Thorns Cannot Hinder Wild Hearts

what is this hollow chasm in my chest?
it used to cage a beating heart too wild to be sane;
it tore through skin and bones,
and it cut itself from its prison:
a girl with crushed arteries,
who did not know how to tame a wild heart.

Kulveer Puar, 16
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11



Artwork:
Silvana Truppi, 17
Mount Saint Mary Academy
Grade 11

Hades still comes to Earth once every year

It's 8:48 a.m. and my hands are frosty (I cherish the cold that you bring),
And there's a hollow charisma in your smile.
You hand me a single carnation,
The color of the richest pomegranates.
My mother says you're the devil (I suppose you are),
But without you, the souls would scatter.
Flora and fauna alike seem to wither at your every step,
And with unperturbed eyes you saunter past the stilled life.
I trail after you at my own traipsing pace,
And the flora and fauna grow radiant once again under my chastising gaze.
Our descent into the world below,
Is as icy as your hand in mine.

Kulveer Puar, 16
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11

The Main Source

When the time comes it strikes with terror,
The sound of the wind on the hollow wall,
It cries when she's gone and the main disappears.
The sun is a source of love and summer,
Why go to the mountains when the time comes?
We need to go back to the time,
When the stars were running away,
The time when the moon was big and the planet was soft.
Everyone takes advantage of it,
But who really is the main? The sun? The moon?
How about the rain?

Nicole Roth, 16
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11

Yume

It was a warm summer night. A breeze swept through the trees. The ground was still wet from the rain of the previous day. The houses on this street were spread out, and most of them were empty. There was a slight eeriness, it was unnaturally quiet.

A man walked down the street towards his house. He looked to be in his mid 20s, but he had seen many things, both good and tragic.

As he approached his home, he felt something off. The man slowly opened the front door. As he entered the house he saw nothing out of the ordinary, until he got to the living room. There, sitting on arm chair, was a woman dressed in clothes of a golden color.

"Oh, hello Rose," the man said surprised, "nice of you to drop by."

"Hello Yume," Rose said, "Please sit. We need to talk."

Yume looked nervous as he sat down, "Yes?"

"As you know, you aren't supposed to be in this world. Even I don't know how you got here. I was going to come here. I was going to come here to take you back to the fourth dimension, but...." Rose said, pronouncing every syllable clearly and carefully.

"But what?" Yume questioned, thinking the worse.

"But, I have a deal that I can make with you. I know you want to stay here, to continue your work. So I'll allow you to continue living, if you do something for me."

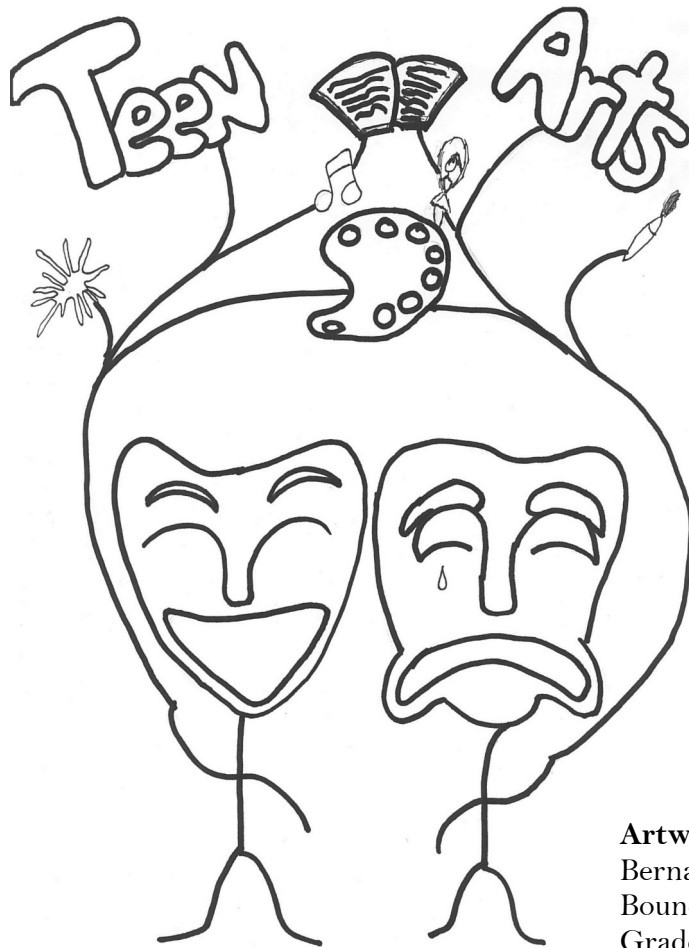
"Ok, what do you want?"

"I have found someone with great powers. I'm afraid she could hurt herself,

or others if she was left to develop her abilities alone. If you take care of her and help her, I will allow you to stay." Rose said, extending her arm towards Yume to shake hands.

Yume thought about it for a second, "Ok, fine," he shook her hand, "So who is this oh powerful person?" Her name is Melody Barnes. One second, I'll get her," Rose snapped her fingers and a small child, no older than two, appeared on Yume's lap. Yume looked down at the child and she looked up at him. She had bright green eyes and red hair. Yume gave the child a confused look, "I didn't know you were talking about a child. I thought you were-" Yume look back up to where Rose was, but she was gone, "huh...." The little girl yawned and closed her eyes, leaning her head against Yume. "Goodnight Melody," Yume said before closing his eyes.

Madeline Shallop, 14
Bound Brook High School
Grade 9



Artwork:
Bernal Salazar Soto, 19
Bound Brook High School
Grade 12

Untitled

I ask you out on a date
On a cool summer night to sit under the night sky full of stars on a green hill
As far as the eye could see, the view is beautiful.
so is she
But, nothing is more beautiful than the kind-spirited personality that I got to know that night
Just the 2 of us
Alone
Free of pain and free of war
We both lie down and I hear her blissfully sigh, just before she speaks...

You bury me with your secrets
You tell me your life story
We laugh, we cry, we connect tonight
For the night sighs awaiting for conversations to fill the quiet
She's got a smile that only I could recognize
A smile that has me stuck in one place and its where I'd like to forever be
Reminds me of sweet dreams that feel unreal
Where the gates of heaven open up
Where the stars gaze over the hills where we sit
Where the moon shines bright all over you
Where the night is lit by your heart of gold

The night feels eternal
She's got a face that takes me away to a galaxy far, far way
It fills up a void that lies beneath the remains of my former self
We stared too long into each other's eyes that we both see a universe
She makes me forget who, what and where am I
Turning bad days into good
The look in her eyes says she wants to cry,

You look like you want to break yourself against my soul
I let you spit your pity into my soul
For I too have the same pain and I survived
When you're sad, I'm sad when you're angry, I am too
Your right besides me as a best friend
My best friend
But I'm wishing us to be much more than best friends
We are so close but I feel like we're miles apart

I miss you like crazy.

Like when a wolf howls when it's separated from its pack

But I'd probably break down and cry
Wondering why she's not mine
She was my best friend, my shoulder to lean on, the one that I could count on
The one that I could take on this world with together.
The one I could rule the world with just one hand as long as she were holding the other
She's the one If I ever got to kiss her lips it would fire across the galaxy
Her hair, soft as angle feathers where I could rest my head upon
She's got a presence that's fills my heart with a fuzzy feeling, blinds my sight and lose control over,

The feeling is irresistible
Tired, but she keeps me up all night
That presences soothes the inner beast with in me
It resonates throughout my heart and soul
Her hugs warm me up like blankets,
Protecting me from freezing weather
When she presses against me
Times stops, I feel safe in her arms
Like in a sanctuary from the law
I'd hate to look into those eyes
And see an ounce of pain, hate or suffering
The universe is breaking us down
Suddenly you get up and tell me you need to get home
I drive you home, we say our goodbyes like if it were our final time
The hardest part of letting go is saying goodbye
That unwanted feeling eats me alive like a leech sucking out the life out of me
I feel like 1000 tons of metal dragging me down

I don't want anyone else to have your heart, your kisses or be in your arms because that's the

only

place

I

want

to

be

Seeing her with someone else cuts me deep like knife
The scars and wounds remain

You mean everything to me

Angels like you control
Control my heart and soul
My life was robbed long ago
All the torment and the shame
Written all over my face
Pleading for your return to come sooner
But you seemed all into in me

Nothing else matters
For I'm a loser, depressed, lost and struggling
But you are the medicine that makes feel like a winner
I'm lying awake until the dead of the night
Wondering, stressing over you, praying for you, wanting to be with you, next to you
I listen to your favorite song playing on the radio
I howl every night for I lost a great friend
A close friend
But most importantly a best friend who never took for granite
Punching stone walls to release the anger

Bleeding fists
Writing down everything
In hopes to release the grief...

Pedro Sibaja, 17
Bound Brook High School
Grade 12

Perfection

Bloop Bloop Bloop

The sound of my alarm woke me up
Groaning, I yanked myself out of bed, and headed to the bathroom
"Same old me" I whispered as I trudged down the hall
Same old clothes, same old family, same old life
Longing for a different view, I reluctantly looked in the mirror
A small gasp trickled out of me as I looked at my reflection

Something's different;
I'm taller, and thinner, and my hair is under control, and there's not a single blemish to be seen
And my eyes... They glistened with determination
I looked perfect
Stunned by how my looks pleased me, I reached for my clothes, and stopped again
These aren't my clothes
But they are my size, and they are beautiful
Are they mine?
"Do you not like the outfit?"
Startled, I turn around to see my sister
"You bought it yesterday when we were shopping. You couldn't take your eyes off yourself. You
looked perfect."
"Oh, no... it's pretty. I just forgot that I put it out"
She admired me and it felt as if daggers were piercing through my heart
Without saying another word, she turned back to our room
"Weird" I state as I start to dress
Twenty minutes later, I looked perfect

Hesitantly, I stepped down my old, creaking stairs
Last night, I didn't dare venture from my room, afraid that a fight might start... again
But, everything was calm, almost peaceful

Bacon

Oh no, he's up
Trotting into the kitchen, I prepared myself for anything
Yelling, crying, slamming cabinets, anything that came at me: I was ready
But, when I turned the corner, my dad smiled, and offered me breakfast
After small talk and breakfast, he took me to school
Today was going well
Today was going perfectly

"What is going on?" I asked myself, confused
The sun was shining, the sky was blue, and everyone looked happy
They were happy to be in school
As confused as I was, I decided to go along

I mean, who would want to ruin a perfect day?
With a smile on your face and a set of confidence, I started walking to my locker
Nothing could ruin this you thought as you made your way
I froze like a deer in headlights as soon as I saw the scene
There he was, standing there with a bouquet of flowers
They were *my* favorite flowers
As soon as he saw me, an infectious smile broke across his lips
He clutched me into a bone crushing hug
It was warm, it was inviting, and it was perfect

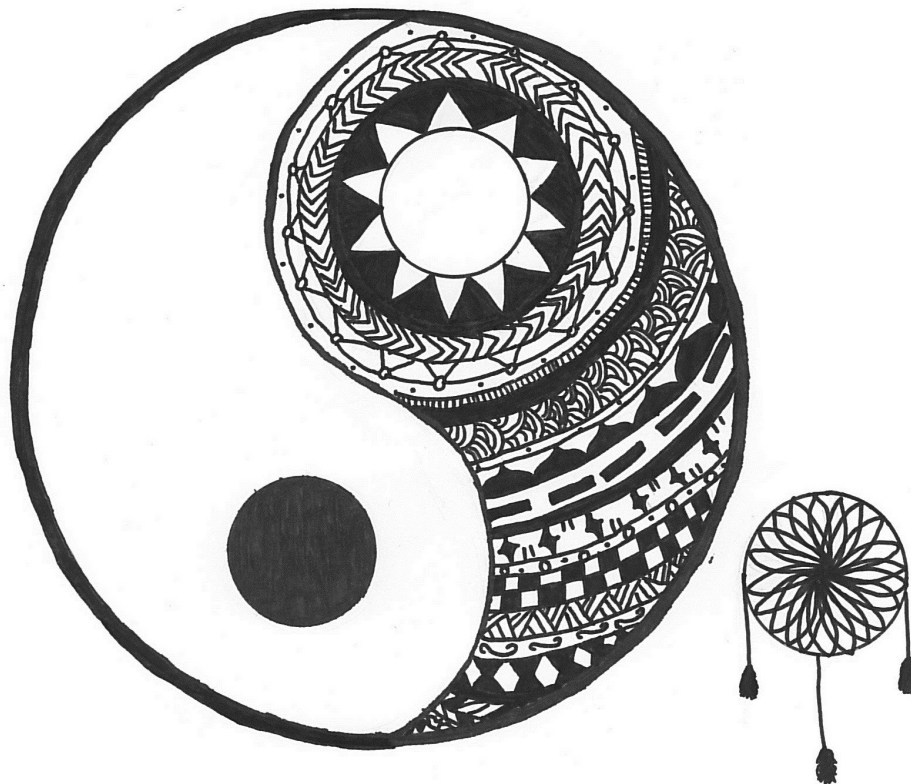
Today started off perfect
Perfect body, perfect family, perfect boyfriend
7:34 a.m., the bell should ring any minute
"I'll walk you to class" he said with a glowing smile
As we were walking, the bell rang, and that was different too
It wasn't its normal BBBBRRRRRIINNG
It was more of a Bloop Bloop Bloop
Wait a minute...
Bloop Bloop Bloop
That's my alarm I felt my sheets, my bed, my messy hair
I felt wider, shorter, and my uneven skin is back
Bloop Bloop Bloop
"Megan, get up now! You're going to be late!"
Bloop Bloop Bloop
It was all a dream
Bloop Bloop Bloop
A perfect dream
Bloop
Bloop
Bloop

Megan Tomaselli, 16
Bound Brook High School
Grade 10

A Dream Worth Forgetting

Run. Keep running. Run until you hit the wall, and then run some more. If you look back, they will catch you, and you do not want that. All your lies, your failures, your regrets, and your embarrassing moments... they are bloodthirsty. They want you, and they want you to pay... pay for that time you cheated on a test, pay for that time you broke his heart, pay for that time you fell in the mud. They want you to suffer for that time you lied to your mom. They want you to relive everything. Snarling, a low growl sinks through your skin. Oh no, they are closer than expected. But you've run as fast as you can, and your legs can't carry you any farther. There is little breath in your lungs, and whatever you have left is flying fast. Your feet, they're moving slower, and slower, and slower, until, you meet the floor first hand. The snarling, deep growls, are right behind your ears. Knowing your fate, you prepare yourself for what's about to come. Next thing you know, it's silent. Finally, you hear the sound of your blaring alarm. It was only a dream. It was only a dream. *It was only a dream.*

Megan Tomaselli, 16
Bound Brook High School
Grade 10



Artwork:

Angelina Sandez, 13
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7

By The Highway

I wanted this drive to last,
But the time went by fast.
These buildings I look at,
Are nothing more than what you see
Out the window.
I felt nervous but calm
It was cold out there but
It was warm right here.
I wished it was around midnight
Then right here, mid afternoon.
It was simply a trip for experience
Instead one of surprises.
These thoughts went through my head
But that didn't bother me.
For now, I'm looking out the window
What I see by the highway.
We're about to take our turn,
Why feel dreadful about it?
There's reasons about it
But none I want to say here.
For now, just take a breath
And wait for time to pass.

David Whitehead, 18
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11

Echo's Lonely Echo

Forever yearning a love never to be returned
As sad as it may seem
That's just the way it has to be
For love can never be learned

As if you were different
As if you were sane
This wasn't a misprint
It's just your game

For I wasn't prepared
You are turning away
The one that truly cared
To stone I turned today

You were the love of my life
Something you will never know
You left me with nothing more
Than just a lonely echo

Imagination is Reality

Realize that all of the adolescents are joyful and carefree
Realize that no one's life consists of any struggles
Realize that everybody is flawless
Realize that outsiders have no say in others' lives
Realize that not a single person seeks revenge
Realize that everyone loves everyone for who they are
Realize that every color is excepted in today's society
Realize that every size is excepted in today's society
Realize that every shape is excepted in today's society
Realization is imagination

Imagine a time where time itself was running out
Imagine a time where loneliness was inevitable
Imagine a time where distance is the only thing keeping everyone together
Imagine a time where emptiness is the only feeling to relate to
Imagine a time where people are doubted because of a number
Imagine a time where our meaningless existence is limited
Imagine a time where the burning sun will swallow our only earth
Imagine a time where no one will be alive to remember anyone
Imagine a time where time itself was running out
Imagination is reality

Stephen Wisniewski, 16
Bound Brook High School
Grade 10

I Wish

I am completely lost for words
What is becoming of this world

You back down as soon as you've begun
Yet every argument must be won
What ever happened to homework getting done
I miss the times well spent when we were young

We're so close, yet so far apart
Let's just go back to the start
Back when we followed our heart
Before the real you had to depart

Nothing stays the same
Why does everyone have to change

Since when did you decide
To hold life in your hands and not even try
I have just become so tired
Of listening to all of your lies

Life has just become a game
Everyone's a pawn: small, plastic, and fake
We're all just used as bait
I wish the old you could've stayed

Stephen Wisniewski, 16
Bound Brook High School
Grade 10

Rain

When nights upon dawns are filled
With apparently inevitable rain
It is the daylight gifted by the forgotten sun
For today we have none, we look to rejoice by the memories once made

When nights upon dawns are filled
With the shine we always need
We look not to the days of dust
Instead we trust, to make a new memory

We show little appreciation for the beauty
This shunned negativity brings
For each time it pours
A new angel soars, with their newly bred wings

We blindly ignore the issue
As each time it precipitates
We don't realize the good done
The common trend is to run, back to those memories once made

Instead of fleeing from the storm ahead
Rather than remembering the past
This chance will soon decay
So make the best of today, while the opportunity lasts

Stars

Stars are just like people: they are beautiful works of art. Yet the closer you get, the higher the risk of getting hurt. Stars are always in the sky, sometimes they just aren't visible. Some people take the time to look up at the sky on a clear night and admire the glow of each individual spec, but in reality, that little "sparkle" is a lot more complicated than once thought. However, people can die millions upon millions of different ways, whereas stars can't. A star's fate and death has been decided upon birth, and ironically, it is by collapsing on itself due to extreme gravity; meaning, their death is caused by the same situation used as an explanation for their birth. Sometimes, the only thing that gives you life is the same thing that takes it away.

Stephen Wisniewski, 16
Bound Brook High School
Grade 10

BRANCBURG CENTRAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

In Runs in the Family

Barnabas sat on the couch, shaking, as the storm flashed and crackled outside. He felt as though the pelting rain was crashing down onto him, that he was drenched, even though he knew that while the old house was certainly drafty and worn-down, there was no way the rain was getting in. The fact that he could come to this rational conclusion, no matter how much he didn't believe it, startled him. He thought, as did everyone, that his mind was too far gone at this point. Although, he mused to himself, the fact that he was surprised probably meant there was still some part of him left that wasn't damaged. He jumped, turning to the large window, as another crack of thunder came from outside. He started shivering again, his eyes darting about the room, trying to find the spirits that must be there now, that couldn't still be resting at this point. That had to have risen from the grave at the racket coming from outside.

Barnabas knew all about the history of his family home. It was old, around 170 years, but it was less the age of the home and more the stories that surrounded it which were the ones Barnabas knew. Some ancestor of his at one point had murdered his father and then buried him into the house itself. Even though the police had arrested the murderer, removed the body, and had it buried properly, so it was no longer on the property, Barnabas had always felt like the old man's ghost still haunted the walls of the house. He had thought that ever since he was a child and his mother had told him the stories. He shivered at the thought of his mother. Her spirit, too, must be haunting the old house. Just like his father's.

"Mr. Barnabas." A lilting, female voice brought him back to the present. He looked toward the voice, surprised to find that there was another person in the room. He frowned, confused as to who they were, then suddenly he remembered. Dr. Amanda Brown was young, maybe in her late twenties or early thirties. But her youth didn't make her inadequate at her job. She was a superb psychiatrist, or so Barnabas had been told when they were searching for someone to help treat his... everything. He frowned again. He didn't know who 'they' were. Maybe him and some of his doctors?

“Nathaniel.” Dr. Brown said again, although this time she was a bit sharper. Barnabas forced himself to focus on her. It had been a long time since anyone had called him by his first name. It was always ‘Mr. Barnabas’ to the countless doctors and nurses he saw every week, or just plain ‘Barnabas’ to everyone else. Except... He shook his head, forgetting the thought before it could fully enter his mind. He centered on Dr. Brown once again. She was a tall, slim woman, often reminding him of a willowy tree. Her dark hair was always pulled back from her face, accenting her sharp cheekbones, and her dark eyes. Barnabas shrunk away from her when he focused on her eyes. He never trusted her eyes, so he always tried to avoid those when looking at her. She was the only person left he trusted.

He didn’t know why he was so uneasy about her eyes. It wasn’t something he could describe; they were just... unsettling. It was as though they were looking deep into his very soul.

When she saw that she had Barnabas’s attention, Dr. Brown smoothed down the lapel of her white blazer, which contrasted greatly with her deep plum dress.

“Mr. Barnabas,” She fixated on him, and he flinched, avoiding her eyes. “How are you today?” She always started their sessions the same exact way; *‘How are you? Did anything new or exciting happen? How do you feel?’* He answered the same way every time, as well. Nothing ever changed. Except maybe he got worse.

“I feel fine.” Barnabas answered, his voice rough and harsh. He hardly spoke anymore when he wasn’t in the presence of doctors, and his voice had gradually become gravelly with misuse, a far cry from the smooth, suave way he had sounded and talked a decade ago. “Is there any other way I should feel?”

Dr. Brown smiled. “No. I suppose not.

The psychotherapy session went on the same as all the others. Barnabas answered without much enthusiasm, jumping now and then as bolts of lightning crackled and crashes of thunder came from the storm outside.

Then they got to the final part of the session, the only part that ever changed. Dr. Brown always had new questions for him at this point.

“Now, Mr. Barnabas. What exactly was it you meant last session when you said that you’ve been

having... unsettling dreams?"

"Ah, well," Barnabas began nervously. He didn't fully remember the dreams from last week, but he had a few more recently. "I'm, ah, alone, at first. In a room-

Dr. Brown cut him off. "What room?"

"I don't know. I can't really tell. It's just, you know, a room."

Dr. Brown smiled encouragingly. "And then what?"

Barnabas swallowed around the lump that had formed in his throat. "Then, after I'm just sitting there for a while, a... a woman just, I don't know, appears."

"A woman," Dr. Brown repeated, "just appears. Poof. Out of nowhere?"

Melissa Andia, 13
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8

Mother's Day at My Father's

I was much too young to remember the exact details from back then, back before my parents had gotten divorced. Despite the foggy memories, the arguments they had are still cemented into my head, not the precise words, but the anger that they held. There was always one particular moment that stayed with me, the moment when their relationship, which was already bent and chipped, was broken.

"You know what, Pete? I'm done, I'm done with this, I'm done with us!" My mom growls, leaving my brother and I in shock. We had heard this phrase frequently in the arguments my parents had, many, many times. But I knew this time it wasn't a threat, this time my mother was serious. Her tone held no room for uncertainty, it was final. They were getting divorced. My father just stands in his place, his arms crossed as he glares at the floor. I knew the years of arguing had been taking a toll on him, and I could see the same tired look in my mother's eyes. A long sigh came from my dad,

"I'll have the papers by friday." Mom says, her tone hard. My brother and I share a glance, I knew we were thinking the same thing. The arguing, the tears, the fear, the anger, the yelling, the screaming, the cursing,

It was finally over.

It was times like this when I remembered that moment. Times when my mother rushed my brother and I into the car, our clothes half packed and tears in her ocean blue eyes. I knew she was angry, which was completely understandable. It was Mother's Day today. It was Mother's Day and we were heading out to meet my dad. I don't know how it happened, but for some reason, we were going to be going to my dad's house for the weekend. My dad's house. When it was *Mother's Day*. An ordeal that seemed almost impossible to be in.

The car door slammed shut after I crawled in, and soon enough we were peeling out of the driveway. Everyone was silent, only the soft music emitting from the radio filling the car with sound.

At some point during our car ride, my mother got a phone call. I knew it was my father when a bitter greeting was spat from her mouth. She spoke softly, venomous words dripping from her tongue.

"Too late Pete, I'm bringing them over, they're going over to your house. Clearly they don't care that

they're leaving their mom on Mother's Day." She growled, her voice raising with every word. I didn't know how she came to that conclusion, it was a complete lie. We did care, we actually cared *a lot*. Or, at least I did. Infact, I had made her this cute little picture frame as a present, with little puzzle pieces scattered around its surface and the caption '*you are the pieces of my heart.*' on its edge. I was rather proud of it. I don't understand what she expects of us, why must she send us away? Did we do something wrong? Questions that were not to be spoken, for my mom already had her mind set.

All too soon we arrived at a Quick Chek parking lot, the usual meeting place for my mother and father. My mom made a sharp turn into a parking spot, across the lot from where my father's small black car sat. He was lounging against the bumper of it, watching with heavy eyes as my mom got out of the car and stalked over to him, leaving me and my brother to witness them squabble. Both of us were turned to watch out of the back window. We couldn't hear what they were saying, but my mom was gesturing around wildly, as was my dad, so we could pretty much decipher what was going on. I couldn't help but feel a tad scared when my mom turned toward us and began making her way back to the car, causing my brother and I to swivel in our seats and face forwards simultaneously. The door closest to me was yanked open, revealing my mother with a stone cold look on her face.

"Get out," She says, with no room for argument in her tone. I glance at my brother, hoping he was going to protest. My eyes locked with his, and a dreadful feeling of despair washed over me. His face was blank. Dead eyes, lips pulled into a tight line. He had given up, he didn't care anymore, and that was what stole away my last shred of resistance. *I guess there was no other choice then.*

I scooted along the seat of my chair, looking down at the short drop below. I closed my eyes, knowing that once I was out of this car, there would be a rift torn between my mother and I, then I jumped.

My feet landed on the concrete with a gentle thud, and I felt the instant guilt latch onto my chest. My mother ushered me out of the way, allowing my brother to make the leap that I had. He simply slid off of his chair, letting his feet hit the ground before he turned towards where my father was waiting, almost robotically, and marched forward. With my feet feeling of stone, I followed my brother over to where my dad stood, his trunk open so we could toss our bags in. My mom had our bags in either of her hands, and she

carelessly tossed them into his trunk, glaring at my father as she did so. I lowered my gaze at my feet, rather upset with this situation. Actually, I was *very* upset, but was I to do? My brother made his way to the car door, opening it before sliding in wordlessly. I followed after him with a heavy heart, my gaze somber.

It wasn't supposed to be like this anymore. It was supposed to be *over*. I had wished this would never happen again. I had wished I would never have to pick sides again. By now I should have known, wishes don't always come true.

Kylie Aldrich, 13
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8



Part of short story “The Murder Trio”

Preston leaves his home and is on his way to work. As he drives he thinks about everything he has been through yesterday. His dad was dead and he needed revenge. When he gets to the station he gets the sorry for your loss comments and sorts. Preston goes to the fingerprint guy to see if they have a possible suspect.

“So who’s the new suspect?” Preston asks. He is holding a coffee and is leaning against the doorway. He has been friends with this guy for two years now. His name is Larry.

“You will be surprised by this one this time Pres.... Also your father was a great man. He will be dearly missed.” Larry replies. That was his nickname for Preston.

“Yes he was. I don’t want think about it so let’s move on. Bring it up.” Preston stated. Larry then goes to his computer and pulls up a file on the screen. It was a picture of Ella Stone. *How can that be?* Preston thought. He examined the file closely. Married. Husband went bankrupt. The house was going to be used as security. Fishing accident. In bright red letter “DECEASED”. *How can it be possible? She died with her husband a month ago. IN A DIFFERENT STATE TOO!* Preston questioned inside.

“H-how is this possible?!” Preston asked Larry, “She’s dead. She is F***** dead Larry. She can’t kill people. SHE’S DEAD!”

“Pres... I can’t explain it but she is out there alive and killing people. She must be stopped and you are the one best suited for it.” Larry told Preston.

“Okay i’ll conduct a search. She knows she’s dead too so she’ll be cocky and go out into the open. Thank you Larry but I have to go now.” Preston replies. Preston runs out of the room and to the next room over. They have the records and footage of all camera’s here.

“Conduct a face recognition for Ella Stone.” Preston tells the person in charge. The guy closes the game he was playing, slacking off, And pulls up a search bar. He inputs her name and photos start flying by and a continuous phrase saying “NOT A MATCH”. Within a couple minutes it comes up. Video footage of Emma Stone walking into a mall.

“Got her!” Preston exclaims. He hits the table and takes out a radio “All troops near the Outland Mall, go to it now and find the girl Ella Stone! I’m sending you all a picture of her right now.” Preston waves at the guy and he understands. He sends the photo to everyone within a five mile radius of the mall.

Cuts to five hours later

Ella is dragged into the interrogation room by two men. She is placed into the seat in front of Preston and is chained to the table. When she is left by the two men she blows a strand of hair out of her face.

“You know why you are here right? Of course you do! You killed your husband, faked your death, and

killed the person who he was having an affair with. But that didn't finish it huh? You had to get out of the country. While you were going you ran out of money. So you just had to get some. That's where Eleanor comes in doesn't it? You went in to kill her and her husband and get the money but you got a liking to her, you both killed your husband. But there is one thing, You weren't alone at that time were you? The butler was killed differently than what happened in the bedroom, different people were with you. So please tell us who is with you and where they are right now? That would be just dandy or we will have to resort to torture because you are the one who killed all those people, Little Miss Walking Dead." Preston flat out told her. He knew she killed them and everything about her. She was the missing piece to all those other cases that went unsolved, a perfect match.

"I'm not telling you anything." Ella said calmly.

"She obviously is not gonna break by just talking to her. Take her to the water board. That will give her something to talk about." Preston tells the two policemen. They unchain her and take her out of the room. They take her down a set of stairs and into a doorway where there is a board but it isn't straight it's instead on a slant with the lower side having a bucket under and right next to it. They take her and lay her onto the table and strap her down to the table. Next one of them takes a rag out of the bucket and squeeze most of the water out of it and lay it on top of her face.

There is a crackly voice and it says begin. The police officer closest to the bucket takes a pitcher and scoops some water out of the bucket and starts slowly pouring it onto Ella's covered face

Tyler Cockrill, 14
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8

Spiderweb of Cracks

“They can’t hurt us,” she said to him as they sat facing each other on their bed, gently holding hands. “We have to keep thinking that they can’t hurt us or they will. Fear is our enemy.”

He nodded in response, the fear choking him and tightening his throat. He squeezed his wife’s hand and they walked down the hallway together. They shared a glance as he entered their anniversary, date, then year, then month, into the safe. He pressed his lips together and closed his eyes before pulling the door open. There sat three guns. He took the largest one and handed the second largest to his wife. She could see the tears in his eyes, as they both remembered the promise they had made the day after they made their wedding vows. They had sworn to never open the vault unless it was absolutely necessary. Unless it was such a dire situation that they, along with their children, were in danger.

Locking the safe with the last gun still inside, they squeezed hands and shared a quick last kiss before rushing out their front door together.

She nearly ran into the figure standing at the bottom of the steps, holding a huge rifle like gun and wearing a bright red helmet over a dark blue protective bodysuit that looked suspiciously bulletproof. It lifted the gun and aimed at her head at the same time that both she and her husband raised their guns towards it. She looked at her husband and took a deep breath before pulling the trigger. The bullet flew out of the barrel of the gun and traveled directly into the side of the creature’s head. She knew that even if the suit had protected the creature, the point-blank shot had knocked it unconscious for enough time. She let her hands hang by her side, the right one with the gun still in it. She closed her eyes and started to cry. Her husband looked around for more incoming enemies, and when he saw none but the one lying dead on the ground in front of them, he too lowered his gun and ran to his wife’s side.

“Shh...” he whispered in her ear.

“I fired first...” she sobbed.

“It’s okay. It’s okay. It’s okay.” He comforted her softly. Looking up once again, he scanned the area for more of the creatures with guns or any other potential threats. Seeing that their front yard was still void of enemies, he led his wife back into the house. Closing and locking the front door behind him, he sat down at the small wooden table that they ate dinner at every night. She sat in the same seat she always sat in, directly across from him. They held hands once more, as she sobbed quietly and he calmed her.

“It’s okay. Shh, it’s okay,” he said.

“You don’t understand. I didn’t even wait for him to fire. I shot him first.”

“He would have shot you. He was going to kill you. You saved your own life. You did the right thing.”

“How is murder the right thing?”

“It’s not murder when in any other scenario you’re the one dying, when you’re the one being murdered.”

“I thought I heard gunfire and I got so scared that he would join in with his friends. I thought he was going to kill me!”

“Then it was self-defense.”

He paused, his eyes widening. His jaw began to drop and he took in a sharp breath.

“What’s wrong?” She asked, suddenly once again suspicious and paranoid.

“They’re back,” he whispered, his face full of pure terror.

He squeezed his wife’s hand again before standing up and preparing to fight back. But when he reached for his gun, his eyes widened even more as he realized that it had slipped out of his hands on the front porch and was now sitting there. When he turned around to see if the steps were clear, he saw swarms of red helmets and blue suits. He took in a deep breath and was about to accept his fate as dead, but his wife shouted, “Catch!” He looked up just in time to see her gun flying towards him. He caught it seamlessly, and his first thought was that he might as well be in one of the first-person shooter games that were all the rage.

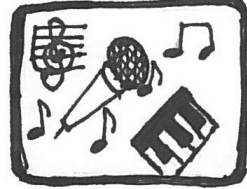
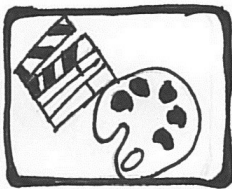
“Duck!” he screamed. He quickly turned and fired three shots through the sliding glass door behind him, right through the spot where his wife’s head had just been. They flew through the glass, leaving three tiny holes with spider webs of cracks shooting out from them. He was about to cheer that he had taken out all of the creatures close enough to shoot them immediately.

Then he saw the bullets bounce off of the suits. His jaw dropped open and his first instinct was to run and shield his wife. He covered her body with his, but she pushed him off.

“If you’re going to die, I don’t want to live either,” she said quickly. They stood there, hand in hand, their only weapon empty of ammunition. They faced the glass door, embracing their fates.

Two gunshots, one through each of their heads, were fired simultaneously. Instantaneously, they were gone forever. Their last thoughts were of their daughters hiding safely in the basement, having no idea that they would never see their parents again.

Katherine Dailey, 14
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8



Artwork:
Alexandra Thiessen, 17
Bound Brook High School
Grade 12

A Selection From “No Goodbye”

July 3, 2015

Mamma was in a frenzy. Immediately after she got the call, she streaked upstairs to get her computer, and then zipped back down. Her fingers flying across the keyboard, she quickly pulled up the website for United Airlines, and started muttering inaudibly. I sighed, and walked away, and went to call my dad.

After dialing his number and hearing him pick up, I asked him, with worry laced in my voice, “Papa, are you almost home? Mamma and I just found out about Nana, and Toni Mama told us that further tests showed the progression of his cancer, and they say he’ll have to go into surgery. Mamma just heard and is already booking a flight. Are you almost home? We can’t let Mamma go to Texas alone! She won’t be able to go through all that by herself, and she needs someone to be with her. We have to go with her Papa!” I rambled on and on. Finally, when I paused for breath, he got an opportunity to speak.

“Okay. I agree with you, one of us has to go with Mamma.” He said calmly, soothing my fears. “But Ananya, I won’t be able to go with her. I am almost home, just give me five minutes and we will arrange the flight. Just tell Mamma to hold on, wait, and I’ll be there in a few minutes. Okay? I’ll see you then.”

After ending the call, and putting the phone back into the cradle, I went back to Mamma. Gently taking the laptop from her, I explained, “Mamma, just wait a few minutes. Papa will be here really soon, and he wants us to make the flights together. That way, when we book the flight we can do it in a way that you will reach just in time to visit Nana and be there for his surgery. If you do it right now, you might miss something.” I started pleading, “Mamma, it’s five minutes. Please? Just wait.”

She thought hard about what I had just said, and simply nodded. Seconds later, Papa’s car pulled into the driveway and the garage door started noisily opening, creaking and screaming with protest. The noise shocked Mamma out of her reverie, and she started shaking, the shock of Nana’s cancer and surgery finally sinking in. Tears blurred her eyes, but she refused to let them fall and went to open the door for Papa. He stepped in the doorway, saw Mamma shaking, and he went straight to the dining room table, beckoning for us to follow him. He took out his computer, logged in, and went to the website for United Airlines.

Looking expectantly at Mamma, he asked, “When do you want to get there?” Without asking any questions, he went directly to the available flights to Dallas for the week of June 29th.

Mamma responded quickly, without a second thought. “Book me the first available flight, and I don’t care when it arrives, or when it boards. But try to find one with at least two available seats. I can’t make this trip alone, especially considering the shape I am in. He hasn’t even gotten surgery yet, and we know that there’s a chance, though small, that he might make it. That chance is the only thing keeping me from falling apart, and if anything does happen, I need at least one of you with me.” She looked at us, her gaze traveling from Papa’s face and coming to rest on mine.

Papa thought for a while, and then said, “Take Ananya with you. I won’t be able to go on this short notice, but she’s on summer vacation and should see her grandfather. We don’t know if either of you will ever see him again, and though I know I will really miss him, I also know that I would have done anything to visit my grandfather if I had known he was sick. All of us hated it when your parents left for Texas so early, and their trip was cut short. But getting to see him and encourage him before he goes into surgery is the next best thing. Hold on to the time you have with him. While you’re with him, cherish the time you have, spend it wisely, and make it count.” He added, “You guys have a morning flight, tomorrow at 10:30. That means you should go pack right now. I got a returning flight for July 7th, but if necessary, it can be changed.”

Together, we nodded, and went upstairs. After filling a suitcase and getting ready for the flight, I went to the master bedroom to check up on Mamma. When I saw her on the phone, head down, tears leaking from her eyes, I understood that she must have been talking to Nani, and finally, the shock set in. I had been denying Nana’s sickness up until this moment, but seeing her tears shook me. I thought to myself, *Why doesn’t she believe that Nana will be fine? He’s beaten cancer before, and the surgery should fix everything. Then I finally realized what was bothering me so much about seeing Mamma right now. I had never seen her cry before, and that could only mean one thing. She had lost hope.*

* * *

July 4, 2015

It happened while we were on the plane.

Obliviously, I started weaving through the crowds, worming my way through the throes of people, just to get a glimpse of their faces. Panting, I dash from side to side, pushing people aside, squeezing between others. A glimpse of gray hair has me turning my neck. I jump at the slightest sound, hoping it's my name, and they are calling after me. That maybe, just maybe, it's my grandfather, Nana, asking, "मेरा बिटिया रानी कहाँ है?"¹ Or maybe my grandmother, Nani, saying "अनन्य तिँधे बि?"² But it isn't them. And it won't ever be.

Ananya Gandhi, 13
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8

¹"Where is my sweetheart?"

²"Where is Ananya?"

A Selection from “The Lamb to the Slaughter Fanfiction”

"Oh Rose, dear, it was just a bad dream, nothing happened," Mary cooed in a soothing voice. She patted Rose's back and whispered some more calming words. Rose whimpered as her mother left the room to go get breakfast. Rose tried to clear her mind but she just could not get that man out of her head. Throughout the rest of the day, every little squeak or movement would send Rose squealing in fear, much like Wilbur from Charlotte's Web. After Rose was well fed, she began to play with her dolls. As Rose reached for her favorite stuffed cat, Whiskers, she saw that all of her other pets were plush lamb legs. A strangled gasp left Rose's mouth as she tried to leave the suffocating room. But, little did she know that the room was locked. Fear settled into every inch of Rose's bones and the air dropped down 10 degrees.

"Sit down," a low voice commanded. Rose turned around at a painfully slow pace. There he stood in all of his terrifying glory, the mysterious man from her dream. He was watching her every move with a sick smirk.

"Hullo," he mumbled, "It's me." Rose closed her eyes tightly as the dark, brooding man moved closer and closer to her. Salty tears threatened to pour out of Rose's gorgeous blue orbs. His gentle touch surprised Rose. He pulled her on to his lap and kept stroking her hair. Cold, numb fingers continually moved through the little blonde's hair. She oddly felt safe in his arms. Safer than when she was with her mother. Carefully, Rose opened one eye and saw him smiling at her. "You are so beautiful," he murmured against her golden ringlets. "Much like your mother," he growled and instantly a murderous haze clouded his eyes. All he saw was red and immediately threw Rose onto the ground. She yelped in pain as the floor welcomed her. Quickly, she tried to scramble on back to her feet until, the man was back, holding the plush lamb leg that once used to be Rose's toys. Rose tried to cover herself as the crazy man started hitting her with the plush toy. "TAKE THAT!" he screeched. "YOU LOVE LAMB DON'T YOU!" The lunatic kept throwing punches at the poor ten year old. Rose sobbed and begged him to stop which only infuriated him more. "IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT!" Across the room, the handle started to jiggle. He looked over at Rose who had an array of blues and blacks all over her tiny arms. His face softened up a bit at the realization of what he had done. Nonetheless, the moment the door opened up he vanished.

Mary Maloney came into see Rose laying on the ground sleeping. Shaking her daughter awake, Mary asked, “Hunny what on earth are you doing here on the dirty floor?” Rose’s eyes adjusted to the light when she lost it. She balled her eyes out complaining about that man. She even pulled up her sleeves to show her mother all the bruises that he had given only to see that there was nothing on her porcelain skin. There were no marks at all. Mary kissed her daughter’s forehead and told Rose to get some rest. Right before Mary Maloney left, in a small voice Rose whispered, “Mommy, where’s daddy?” Hearing these words made Mary freeze right on the spot. Panic filled eyes and she plastered a wavering smile on her face.

“Hunny, he’s gone on a long trip and will be back soon,” Mary fibbed.

“But mommy, I think he’s already here,” Rose replied back.

Mary giggled and it was no hearty laugh. It was filled with a malevolent tone. “Go to sleep hun,” she chuckled and left the room. Rose lay awake trying to figure out what was going on. Over the next few days, Rose tried to piece together what was going on. Slowly, everything started to click together in her head. The crazy man probably knew her mother before and he was most likely her father. The only thing Rose couldn’t understand, were all the lambs. What could the lambs possibly have to do with anything? Rose tried to pry answers out of her mother but Rose always ended up having an argument with her. Finally, one Saturday morning, Rose stumbled upon an ancient looking diary. Curious, she started to look through it only to find that it was her mother’s diary. With brows furrowed and her face scrunched up she kept reading. Page by page Rose discovered more about her father. The more she read the more that terrifying man started to sound like her father. A gasp escaped her mouth the moment she found out that her mother had murdered Patrick Maloney, her father. That wasn’t the only thing. Frantically, she flipped more pages and found out that her mother had used a frozen lamb leg as a weapon. Rose’s blood ran cold and a shiver ran through her spine. Looking up, Rose saw her mother standing there with her lips pressed into a thin line.

“Hunny, what are you looking at,” she asked in a careful tone.

“Nothing,” Rose squeaked as blood rushed to her face.

In that moment, Patrick showed up and terror passed through Mary’s veins.

“P...P...Patrick?” she stuttered with wide eyes.

“Yes, it’s me,” he replied as a sick smirk dominated his face. Rose watched the two adults in fear and before she knew it, Patrick had a frozen lamb leg firmly gripped in his hand. Mary backed up until the her wall hit her back. Rose stared in horror as she watched her mother fall down with a thud.

“You’re safe from her now. Enjoy,” he giggled.

Saanya Goel, 14
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8



Audio Logs from *Luna, the Deep Dark*

Vanguard Transcripts ///41/ 43/44/50/// {Light Year 2841}

Location: Luna, Earth outer Orbit// Ocean of Storms

Persons of interest: (**Jien Chan**) (**Jodie Divicio Chan**,foster daughter of Jien Chan)

{[Transcript begins]}

//(Scratching, wind howling) How's it going Jodie? It is day 40 of the Luna expedition, and nothing has popped up, *Anywhere*. Still, I could be on Venus. That hellhole is a whole lot worse than here. Anyways, I managed to turn on the power for the particle accelerator. I dunno what it's gonna do for me, but what the hell. The only things on this planet is me and a local LR scouting party. (Soft footsteps, wind howling) Yeah, they don't like me very much. Got into some nasty firefights, but they never got past me. Still, they're sending troops into that old fortress they found. Last time I hacked into their feed, none of their scouts made it back. Soon, they're gonna launch a whole assault in there. (Wind howling, distant crack pinging noise) Ah, shoot. Speaking of the devil, they're back. I'll talk to you soon honey. Stay sharp, and I love you. Remember that.

{[Transcript ends]}

{[Transcript begins]}

//(Scratching, echoes) Hey Jodie. Been awhile since I talked to you. It is day 43 of my expedition, and a lot of stuff happened the past two days. First of all, let's talk about where I am. The Raiders here decided they wanted me dead, so they sent a fireteam to kill me. Let's just say it got messy, and now I'm in a craphole. The only place they weren't willing to hunt me down to the ends of Luna was that old fortress near the valley. So, here I am, and it really isn't that bad. You can barely hear the storms above here, and it's kinda warm. The builders of this place must have been masters. It's beautiful here in a creepy way. Kinda looks like a mausoleum in a sense. I've been exploring it for a day now. There's nothing interesting except a sealed chamber leading further below. (Metal rattling, exhale) Looks like there are some chains holding it closed.

I'll be able to cut through it by tomorrow. Anyways, I'll get to work. Just keep safe, Okay Jodie? Stay sharp, and I love you. Remember that.

{{[Transcript ends]}}

{{[Transcript begins]}}

/(Slow panting, distant screams) Log day 50. I've been stuck in this maze for what? eight days now? I have no idea. Where do I begin, where do I begin? The chains, yes the chains. I broke them and opened the door into the cellar. But there wasn't a cellar. Those monsters came at me, and they still do. They're horrible. As far as I can see in the darkness, they come in swarms, rushing me like a marathon for the dead. The only thing I can say about their appearance is that they're not human. They stalk every single hallway I go into. I'm running low on ammo, but I have a feeling I won't need it. The way back is sealed, and there's still a way lower into the fortress. (Screams grow louder, breathing quickens). Aw shoot they're back. Jodie, if I don't make it back, Just remember the words I give you. Stay sharp, and I love you with all of my heart. Please *please* remember that (Screams grow louder, several sharp cracks)

{{[Transcript end]}}

{{[Transcript begins]}}

(Labored breathing, distant screeches). I don't remember the last time I made one of these. All these days, or were they months? (Deep breath)I can't tell without the sun. It's been a while since I saw the sun. As far as I can remember. It's been a while since I saw you, Jodie. Oh God, Jodie. (Sobs) I bet you've grown up Jodie, and I wasn't able to see it. All this time, and you weren't there on my side. Can't really blame you. It was my decision to go to Luna. It was all my fault. I guess I have to live with my regrets. (Screeching grows louder) Or die with them. I would much rather die than live on here. I guess I have to anyways. (Grunting, labored breathing, Screeching grows louder.) Do you want to go huh? (screeching grows louder) I'll kill all of you! (Sharp crack, inaudible sound, screeching grows louder) Ah! Damn it! (Sharp crack) There's too many of them. Huh, I guess this is the end of the line then. Very well. All this time, I can only say one thing to you Jodie

Stay sharp, and I love you

Remember that

(unbearable screeching, silence)

{[Transcript end]}

{[Final transcript begins]}

This is Jodie Divicio Chan, reporting to Vanguard. I have located the body of Jien Chan deep within the Necro. It was evident he died several years before (Sharp breath). Damage to armor indicates he was killed by the local Swarm present during the time. Data logs have been transferred to my armor. (Voice breaks) Oh, God. Dad.... (prolonged soft crying)... I have been able to recover his mission days before his death. The last log spans from four hundred eighty nine days spent on mission. This indicates he spent over four hundred forty days Here. Body will be recovered as soon as possible. Jodie Divicio, out.

{[Transcript ends]}

[[[[{[ALL TRANSCRIPTS TERMINATED]}]]]]

Jeremiah Harnanto, 13
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8

Neon

"I'm all in."

He slid the cards across the mahogany. The room was dark. Dark wood, dim lights, black dresses and black ties. The short glass of golden brown liquid reflected the neon lights onto the table. People slipped around the room like liquid, blending into the darkness, each with their own little spark of originality. A pink dress here, a fancy updo there. Each person was like the club itself, dark with a splash of neon lights. It's truly amazing. They can all be so different, yet the same. Hundreds of identical twins walking around this casino. They all had the same intentions, the same aspirations. When you zoom out, when you look at the world as a whole, and this tiny club with all of these miniscule people, they were all the same size and shape and color when it came down to what mattered.

He focused on the game. Not exactly the game itself, but the person sitting across the table.

Brown eyes. Brown hair. Chiseled jaw. Late twenties, new money, on a rush, in love with the excitement of life. The boy was on his fourth drink.

He stared into the boy's eyes. The kid was still deciding what to play. He could imagine the thoughts going through his opponent's mind. The questioning. The wavering confidence.

"Ok I'm out, done." The boy replied.

He chuckled as the boy put his cards on the table, face up. Nothing special, two sixes.

He opened his hand next. A two and a seven.

"You were bluffing!" The boy spat.

He simply gathered the chips into his pile and sat, waiting for someone else, daring anyone else to match him. He had studied all of this, years ago, when he was more naïve.

Human behavior.

Anxiety.

Fear.

Overconfidence.

How to find the pattern in a random deck of cards.

Everything you need to be a success at the casino.

That, and he loved just the whole atmosphere of it.

The mystery. The playing against strangers. Adopting a different personality for the night. No one knew you, and everyone knew not to ask.

Yet, as with everything, it became tiring eventually. Seeing the same people every night. Winning against them every night.

He was awoken from all thought when she came.

Cherry lips. Clear skin. Dark obsidian hair that melted into the black background. Fingers drumming on the mahogany table. Nails painted a deep red.

Her dress was black, modest but flattering, good, but not attracting too much attention to herself.

How that was possible, he didn't know. She was beautiful. A full face, high cheekbones, dark eyes and full eyelashes.

Her nails continued to drum against the wood.

"I saw you cream the last five people. You *have* to be cheating."

Her voice was smooth. Like silk.

He smiled, a lopsided smile, and looked up at her from his seat. "No cheaters here, honey. Luck, and little bit of skill. All you need at a casino like this."

"Somehow I don't quite believe you." She smiled. Beautiful white teeth.

She sat down across from him.

Fingers still drumming.

"I'll make a deal with you," she moved her eyebrows when she spoke, "I'll let you continue on with

your winning, if I can play you."

He looked at her. Sized her up, if you will.

"How much do you have?"

She slipped her hand into a bag on her side. She pulled out a few hundred dollars.

She laid them on the table. Her slim fingers held the money there softly, delicately, at first glance. But there was a kind of strength to her.

She was a strange one.

"Fine."

The game began then.

He had no idea how long it would last, how terrible it would become.

How even today, he would be hunting after them. The man who killed her. The man who took away his only hope at happiness.

Amanda Hegadorn, 13
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8

Quiet

Midnight had passed long ago, and still he sat there typing. Even in the city that never sleeps he was the only one awake. Sleepless nights had become commonplace. Bills piled up, lights flickered off. Seasons changed, leaves fell. Candles melted into tables. Frost covered windows, snow piled up, and the cold crept into the nearly bare apartment, yet he still typed. He couldn't seem to stop. He built worlds by candlelight, told the stories that nobody knew. The stories that only he knew. The stories of the voices.

He didn't know when he first heard the voices. They had always been there. They told him their stories, and he wrote them. He could remember a time when there had only been a few. They had been patient and kind. He used to like the voices; they used to be friends. Now they were demanding. They wanted more than he could give, and they kept wanting more. He knew that once he told their stories, they would stop. So he did. Hundreds of stories. Pages upon pages scattered the floor.

The flutter of paper and the clicking of keys filled the room. The ding of the typewriter rang out like an exclamation point at the end of a sentence. He couldn't hear any of this, though. All he could hear was the voices. His eyes were rimmed red from lack of sleep and when his disheveled hair fell into his face he didn't even bother to brush it away enough so that he could clearly see.

When he could get a thought through the madness, all he thought about was quiet. Quiet was the prize he so desperately wanted to win. Needed to win. It was what the voices always promised, but never gave. No matter how he begged and pleaded with them, they would not give in. Relentless, they continued on throughout the night, until the sky was streaked with color from the rising sun.

Then, suddenly, everything stopped. The papers stopped fluttering, the keys stopped clicking, the typewriter didn't ding. It was as if the entire city had frozen in time. Only the voices continued on. Whispers and yells, murmurs and shrieks. They filled his head, although his body was numb.

Numb as he slowly stood, numb as he walked to the window. Numb as he stood there, dressed in full three piece suit, papers crumbling under his shoes. Numb as he climbed out the window, up the fire escape. Numb to the cold, biting wind and snow that occupied every surface. Numb as he stood on the roof, looking

out at the sky, watching the colors blend into each other like watercolors, watching the reflection of the sky on the shimmering river. Numb as he looked down, off the edge, at the gray concrete, at the asphalt and the brick where soon hundreds of people would hurry back and forth, obliviously living out their lives.

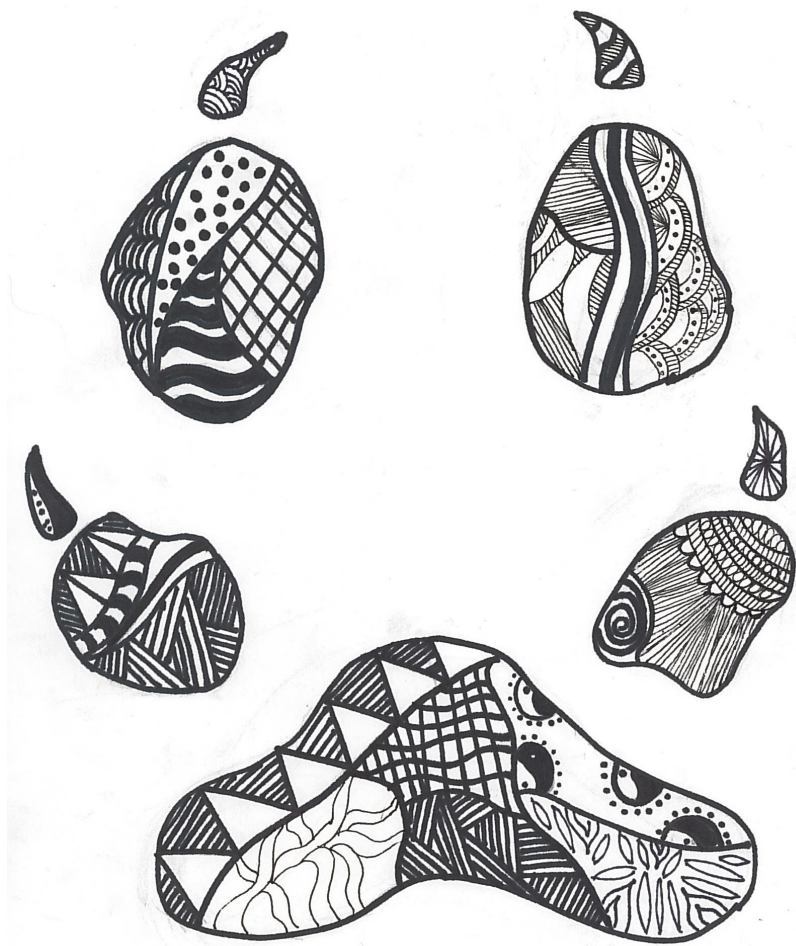
Numb as he looked back at the sky.

The voices were still there.

Numb as he closed his eyes.

Quiet.

Erin Legacki, 13
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8



Shefkije Berisha

Artwork:
Shefkije Bersha, 14
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 8

Forever In Debt

Life is a gift that cannot be repaid
And a masterpiece that cannot be remade

To neglect your reason for existence
Isn't anything but proof of your absence of heart
They created a work of art that turned out to be nothing but a print

They put you in soil and guided you
Watching you grow
They wondered
About the people you'll know

they hope they know
They want to know everything about you
And you owe that to them
They breath their fire into your lungs
Hoping you inherit every possible piece of positivity and passion
They give you life through the one they once had
They made you

Lily Lines, 14
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8

Pulling The Anchor From The Sand

There is no ship large enough to carry the wars I'm waging

So I will to build one and sail from the harbor

I will not waste a lifetime yanking the chain in an unsuccessful attempt to pull the anchor from the sand

My anchor does not keep me grounded

It holds me hostage

A prisoner of my own mind

I will not live and die

I will live and leave behind

I will pull the anchor from the sand and once my ship and wars that I have been waged have sailed far out to sea

I will jump from the helm and swim

I will get far from the jail cell of evil thoughts

I will swim until my muscles ache and I am safe from myself

I will be free from consciousness

And I will look beyond the horizon

Lily Lines, 14
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8

A Midwinters Tale

“Do you remember when we were young?” His voice held not a quiver, strong and gentle all at the same time. “Do you remember when we were only in high school? The time you’d sacrificed your dreams for my sake? That dreadful day that you’d jumped in front of me and took the blow that would destroy your entire life’s choices for my sake?” He didn’t look at her as he spoke, he just stared ahead. As if he was dreaming back to that day while still conscious.

She frowned up at the blurred image of his cleanly shaven chin, her tears finally falling. She blinked them away, pressing her head against his chest. “What’s wrong, Phil—?”

“You endured a knife mauling your arm and destroying the nerves in your left arm. You endured that hit to save me from those muggers. You never even gave me the choice. You just jumped and saved me. And still, so many years later, your ring and smallest finger don’t work.” He paused for such a brief second, she’d almost thought she’d imagined it. “What’s a pianist to do if they lose their fingers?”

The question hung in the air, though it didn’t feel like it was being upheld by invisible strings. No, it felt detached. It just hung there, causing discomfort to rise in the room.

“Phillip, why are you bringing this up?” She never let that moment go. She never regretted her decision that day. She’ll never regret saving her lover. Never. No matter how much wrong he does to her.

“I never repaid you for your ultimate sacrifice, Dear. I never did anything for you. So, it’s only fair if I take away my lifelong dream. Here, on this day, I revoke my position as a high-ranking officer.” When he looked down at her, she observed how glossy his eyes were. He was crying.

“Philip, don’t do anything ra—” her sentence was cut short when she felt pressure in her chest. It took her a few moments for her to realize what was happening. She looked over her body. If it hadn’t been for the excruciating pain in her chest, she wouldn’t have believed it.

His hand was wrapped around the knife, which was hilt-deep in her body.

She would’ve screamed too, but the only noise that escaped was a low gurgling of bubbles as blood pooled in her lungs, her throat, her mouth. Her heart beat faster, terror striking her heart.

He only smiled sadly down at her, a few stray tears dripping down his chin and landing on her eyelashes and forehead. His heartbeat hadn't reached above normal pace as she watched him in disbelief and betrayal. He had been completely calm. "The day has come. The day I fall victim to true and utter sin for the sake you you, my dear. I succumb to being a murderer to cover the trail of the women I love most." A small, twisted grin pulled his lips upward as he watched her writhe in pain in his lap. He felt no remorse, no guilt because he'd done the right thing. Though, he felt as though she deserved just a bit more. Just a brief send-away.

"Lay peaceful in Hell, Elizabeth..."

He watched as the light drained from her eyes, the strength leaving her muscles and body. He stayed with her long after the warmth left her body, rearranging her hair so that it framed her face in the way he liked it.

He smiled down at her. She was like a perfect doll, despite the crimson that stained her lips and beautiful blue gown. Her lifeless, grey-green eyes held unshed tears, her manicured digits unfurled and holding nothing, pale and soft skin with dark red highlights pulling the entire image together.

"My lovely doll, I'll ensure we meet each other once more. I loved you.

Anna Miltner, 13
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8

Secrets

Hands shaking, feet wobbling, and face sweating are the effects of being the new student. I stare at the sign of the new school that reads, *Libson High*. My eyebrows bend, in a questioning way, *does Libson even have any meaning?*

My school, before I've moved, was named *Joan of Arc High*. Joan of Arc was known as "The Maid of Orléans". It was hard to get away from the city of love and the Eiffel Tower, but it was time to have a break of the French accent and return to English. I guess French class really does pay off. I remember the day that I had to leave to go to Massachusetts. My mom had a business trip to attend and of course, we had to move. Sadness occurred in my eyes and I hoped that I could meet a new friend soon.

I turn around in a flash and before I knew it, I was on the ground with books everywhere on the cement pathway. There, a skateboard glistens bright into my eyes.

"Dude, watch it!" The skater growls.

"You were the one riding your skateboard like a maniac!" I snag my books and slowly stand up.

"Whatever, just look where you're going next time!" She takes off her lime green helmet and brings it to the side of her arm. Her glossy, dark brown hair, slicked back in a ponytail lays on the back of her head. She wears black, ripped jeans, and an orange tiger shirt.

"Trust me, I will," I scuff.

As I walk through the halls of *Libson High*, I notice a student that has a small logo peeking through their shirt. It looks like two ovals overlapping like a venn-diagram. I linger over to him, but before I could get a better look, he abruptly turns around.

"What do you think you're doing?" He scolds.

"I was...just seeing where you...got that shirt. It looks nice!" I lie.

"Shut it!" He grabs my puny arm and bangs me up against the lockers. Students come to watch the action.

“Now for my favorite part.” He smirks and gets his fist ready. I have to think fast! His fists bolts to my face, but before it could hit me, I kick him in the stomach. The people around *ooh* in amazement.

“You just crossed the line, Punk!” The boy announces as he clutches his stomach in pain. “Now taste my fist!” He throws back his fist, ready to hit his target.

All of a sudden, the skater girl races in and snatches the boy’s hand and throwing him to the hard, cement ground. The boy moans in pain and gently stands up. I push him back down firmly. The next step was to swing my fist to his face for the first time, but before I could try, I feel a hand lay on my shoulder. I whirl around face-to-face with a woman, who wore a monstrous amount of makeup.

“You, come with me!” She then points to the skater girl. “You too!”

She takes us both by the shoulders and motions us to the Principal’s office. *What a great way to start off the school year*, I thought, shaking my head.

Bella Porraro, 13
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8

An Excerpt from *Reaction*

My dog's weird.

Why? Don't ask me. I'm not a vet. But I have the basis- I'm pretty sure he has some kind of condition with his thyroid gland that causes him to get seizures if he doesn't get his medicine.

But that's not what makes him weird. He's really... quirky, I guess you could say. Instead of just walking normally, he turns around and walks into and out of rooms- moonwalks. He does it because he's afraid of hardwood floors and tiles. Some fear manifested sometime in his youth.

To put it all off, Rookie won't even acknowledge the existence of stairs- he won't go up or down them, no matter what. I've wondered what would happen if there was a tornado and we had to hide in the basement. We would have to carry the World's-Most-Paranoid-Dog downstairs.

However, what he lacks in normalcy and logic he makes up for in pretty much everything else. Rookie is the best pet anyone could ask for, regardless of some admittedly pathetic habits.

It was a Sunday. The clock read 8:00pm. It wasn't snowing presently, but the ground outside was a cold white ocean.

I was in the den with my father. Rookie ambled inside, tail wagging perpetually. Dad picked up Manny- a disgusting rag of bacteria that used to be a plush toy elephant until Rookie claimed it as his new favorite plaything, sentencing it to a life of saliva baths and fetch.

Dad tossed the slobbery thing a few feet. Rookie unpredictably leaped for it, trapping it in his maw and shaking it around like he was trying to rip the poor thing's head off.

Eric entered. My brother put on his headset and picked up his Xbox controller. My sibling was constantly online with his friends Michael and Vansh, playing games like Call of Duty or Halo. Me, I couldn't care less about video games. A bunch of virtual avatars running around in fake armour, wielding fake guns, fighting programs disguised as other soldiers? Pass. Even Angry Birds has more sense than Call of Duty.

Controller in hand, Eric plopped on the couch and turned on the television. A bright red light flashed on the screen, and then it went dark. The game logo appeared, and a montage of lights danced across the TV.

Then Rookie dropped Manny. He crossed the room, crossed back, back across, back again. Lapping the den nervously.

“Rook? What’s wrong?” Dad said. Rookie suddenly collapsed. He was sweating and spazzing on the ground like a malfunctioned wind-up toy.

“*Seizure*,” I realized.

Dad quickly leapt into action- he grabbed Rookie so that his spazzing wouldn’t get out of control and he wouldn’t crash into anything. He petted him, whispered to him. Dad was his safety net, and Rookie has just fallen off the wire.

I was in my pajamas. In a flash, I darted upstairs into my room. I threw on some pants hastily, jammed socks onto my bare feet, and decided that my dirty Field Day shirt from last year would have to suffice.

Back downstairs, I jammed on my shoes, still tied, and speedily put on my sweatshirt. The seizure was still going on. Dad was comforting him, and Eric was looking on with worry.

I shoved some poop bags into my pocket and grabbed a flashlight. Using a few spare seconds, I adjusted my sweatshirt and tied my shoes.

“Okay... okay...” Dad soothed. Rookie was up now, legs shaking, but clearly better. The carpet was stained from where Rookie’s drool had dribbled out.

“Okay... good...” Rookie’s spazzing slowly stopped.

“Must’ve been the excitement of playing,” Dad muttered.

“Or maybe it was my game,” Eric said quietly.

Dad contemplated this. “Yeah, maybe. Or maybe it was both.”

He noticed me, dressed, flashlight in hand. Dad nodded. “Good. Yeah, good, Zack. Walk him, please.”

After a seizure, it was good to take Rookie out. The side-effects of something like that usually were having to pee afterwards. Why? I don’t know, I’m still not vet.

I strapped the leash to Rookie and we headed outside. I eyed him carefully, but he seemed fine. The seizure was over.

We live in a cul-de-sac. The giant circle of land in the middle was completely covered in snow. I figured he'd leak faster here, so I led him to this island, this island where the sand was snowy grass, the ocean was the icy street, and there were sadly no coconuts hanging from the behemoth oak trees.

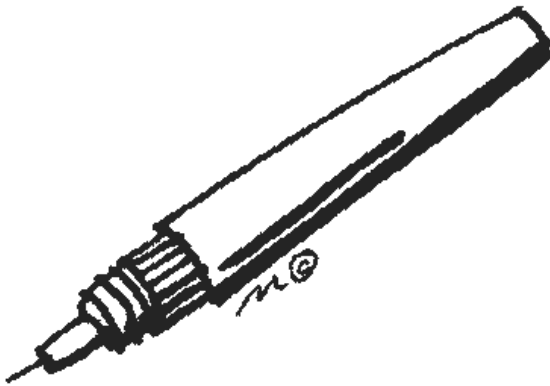
We were smack-dab in the middle, like a perfectly-shot arrow to a target. Rookie was sniffing the ground. I checked my phone- it was 8:11pm.

Suddenly Rookie's left leg gave out. He collapsed into the soft snow. I cursed and dropped to my knees.

I held him and comforted him the way I'd seen Dad do it, muttering curses the whole time.

"Is this a new one, or did the last one just not end?" I wondered. Whatever the case, the second seizure wasn't over yet. Rookie jerked again and I almost lost him, but I regained my balance and held on tighter.

Zack Shiffman, 14
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8



All For Love

“This way,” I explained, “nobody gets the blame.”

Ella looked at me teasingly. “You put a lot of work into this, Phil. I’m sure nothing will go wrong.”

“We worked together.” I felt the need to give her some credit, even though I really did do all the work.

I was starting to feel somewhat guilty for what I was going to do. I had to keep walking, looking down. I had a large load that was a force, pushing me down into the earth. I staggered down the path, Ella following behind me.

“Honestly, this plan is foolproof,” Ella remarked, shouting so I could hear.

I didn’t reply. I couldn’t. Ella thought we were about to run away with the money we had, and start a new life somewhere else, far away. But that was not what was going to happen. From the beginning, I knew the execution of my plan would be difficult. Every trial, I worked out the kinks to make sure nothing would go wrong. One mistake, and I was done for.

For Heidi, I am doing this for Heidi. I kept telling myself this, trying to justify my wrongs. For what felt like an eternity, I had loved Ella. She was my everything. However, once I met my assistant Heidi, my life had been altered. We immediately fell in love, secretly. I had been living a lie marrying Ella, and I knew I couldn’t live like this forever. Heidi and I plotted a plan, which took a lot of work.

“Come on.” I tried not to seem irritated with Ella, I acted like this was the woman I would love forever.

She was trotting far behind. Respectively, I waited for her to catch up.

“I’m trying to look natural, Phil. We shouldn’t dash through as we expect every wave to be our last.” Ella seemed sincere.

“I don’t remember rehearsing this dithering when we did our trial runs,” I pointed out. Ella had been irritating me to the point where I couldn’t wait until she was dead.

I had lied about everything. I told Ella I had borrowed too much money and not been able to pay it back. I told her that we would have to sell Silver Acre and move to another country. She loved our house. I did just as much.

“Are we going bankrupt?” Ella had asked, more than once. Her common interrogations ate away at my brain, making me want to leave her even more.

“There must be a way,” I recall her gabbing.

I couldn’t let my mind wander to the past, I needed to live in the present.

Ella paused where the steps met the rocks, and a wave washed over her boots and ankles.

“You see? If you hadn’t been hanging about we’d have been over without getting wet,” I explained. What I wanted to say had been, “*How could you be so stupid! Why didn’t you walk any faster?*” I splashed past her. Hoisting myself up onto the rocks, I shouted, “Come on, give me a hand with this.”

It was the perfect day to execute my plan. The minute Ella hit the water, she would instantly be washed away. However, I was really struggling.

I gestured for Ella to help me, as I was wrestling with her rod. She stood there, motionless.

“Ella, please help me.” I needed her to take one more step, so I could send her into the water. I never could have imagined what would happen next.

Ella sprang at me, charging her head into my chest. My slippery boots delivered me backwards. I waved my arms, trying to clutch the railing. I stretched my hand out like a rubber until it couldn’t be extended any more.. My hand clamped itself around the cold metal. A gust of wind blew through me, chilling my bones. I thought for sure I would fall. Ella had started climbing to the side, to get on top of the rocks another way. She was walking towards the road on the bridge. Suddenly, she turned and started back towards me. I could see her foggy figure growing as she inched closer. I was sure she would step on my hand, try again to kill me.

She reached her hand out, as if to pull me up. I wasn’t going to fall for it. I was positive she would grab my hand, then throw me back down into the water.

Callie Stitt, 13
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8

Not Far from the Tree

I'd been told that I was a lot like my mother. But, I refused to believe that she could have done anything like what I had just done. I killed my husband, Philip, by pushing him into the ocean. Then, I found out that he planned to kill me and run off with the other woman he loved, his assistant. I killed her too. I doubted that anyone could say that I was just like my mother anymore, or so I thought.

My father had mysteriously died just before I was born. It tore my mother apart. After I was born, she distracted herself by taking care of me, Ella. Mom thought I would be a boy, but she was wrong. She never remarried or got over dad. Everyone loves her though. She had plenty of friends to keep her company. Who wouldn't want to be friends with her? Nobody could think of a nicer woman than Mary Maloney.

"What do I do now?" I whispered to myself as I sat in the driver's seat of my van with my face buried in my hands.

I had planned to just kill Philip and run away to whatever country he transferred our money to. It would be simple. At least, I thought it would. But, then there was his assistant. Philip was going to push me into the ocean and run away with her. I realized that wherever he told me he sent the money was most likely a lie. Now where do I go? All I know is that I can't stay here. There has to be someone can I go to for help.

Mom always told me that, "The people that truly love you and your real friends can help get you through *anything*." She should know that. There is never a shortage of friends in her life.

My dilemma was that I didn't really have any friends that I can trust, and one of the only people I ever loved was on the bottom of the ocean floor. There was nobody I could go to. Except her. No, you can't show up at you 52-year-old mother's doorstep and tell her that you just murdered your husband! But, I had nobody else to go to. Would it be wrong to leave out the murders from the list of reasons I came to her?

I started up the van left. It would be a long time to drive, but had done it before. It was about a twenty six hour drive from Quebec to Missouri without stopping, so I figured I could probably be there in two days if I stop to sleep and eat.

Driving was a great way to keep my mind clear from all of the forlornness that I had forced upon

myself. I kept so fixated on the road that I didn't notice that I hadn't eaten in almost ten hours. I pulled over at the nearest McDonald's and ordered a kid's meal because that was all I could afford at the moment. My car sat unaccompanied in the parking lot since it was about 10:30 at night. Unfortunately, that gave me time to think, which I dreaded. Tomorrow would have to face my mother. What do I tell her? Definitely not the truth. I needed to come up with something that wouldn't make her suspicious. While lost in my thoughts, I felt my eyelids gradually get heavier-and heavier-and heavier.

When I finally looked up at the clock on the dashboard and saw that it was 4:30 in the morning. I started up my the van, cranked up the heat, and continued my drive. I only stopped twice to go to the bathroom and once for food. I figured that I would switch it up a little bit and spend the next night in a Burger King parking lot. I was to tired to think, so I drifted to sleep.

I didn't wake up that morning until 6:30. Since I was just outside of Chicago, I should be to mom's house by around noon. I guessed I would have to come up with an excuse for driving to Missouri on the spot. But, I figured it might work out for the better. I do my best thinking when I am in the moment. Since I had nothing to think about, I turned on the radio. It was early December, so all I heard was Christmas music. Every station kept replaying the same songs. After three hours of the same boring tunes, I turned the radio off. I drove the rest of the way in silence.

My heart started racing faster than a racehorse as I turned into the neighborhood where I spent my childhood. My head was spinning and I couldn't think. I pulled over the van.

"You can do this," I struggled to tell myself.

I turned the corner and pulled into mom's driveway. I was petrified to face her. I don't like lying to her, she is my mother. It was difficult to drag myself out of the van. I felt like I had been whacked in the gut with a sledge hammer. I stumbled up to the front door slowly. I stood there for a minute debating whether or not to run away while I still can.

"Just breathe, you can do it," I murmured to myself.

I knocked on the door gently. I heard her footsteps and stood frozen. I couldn't move a muscle. I was

terrified. I felt panicky as I saw the doorknob turn. When the door opened I saw a confused look on my mother's face. But, quickly the corners of her mouth twist into a huge grin.

"Ella!" She exclaimed with her arms wide open.

"Mom," I whimpered. I wasn't scared anymore.

"Hullo darling! What a surprise! Please come in," she said to me as she lead me into the house.

"Mom, I need your help," I told her.

"Of course I will help you. Now what's wrong? Where is Philip?" Mom asked me.

"He left," I replied softly, "He ran off with his stupid assistant and left. He took all of our money. So, now I'm broke and alone."

"Oh you poor thing," she muttered, "I would love if you could stay with me."

Yes! She believed me. The problem was that I almost believed it too.

Hope Tracey, 14
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8

Excerpt from “One World Fallen”

The chill wind played an eerie song as it threaded its way between the branches of the newly fallen trees whose recently dead trunks had already rotted into a black state of decay. The air was choking, the oxygen almost sucked out completely, leaving the feeling of absolute nothingness hanging in the air. A single black and blue feather drifted to the ground, disintegrating as it touched the filthy, grimy, burned black surface. Silence reigned. There was no calling of the regal blue striped birds, no yowling of the imperial cats and no howling of the lost wolves.

Cold came all at once, a deadly chill that cut the skin and entered the soul. In one moment it then disappeared, leaving a murky warmth that soon turned to oppressive, disgusting heat filled with the faces of those long, but newly, dead. A red glow descended over the scene, and all surroundings were suddenly obscured from view.

A deep thud sounded, and then with eyes closed tight, a deep, but strangely calm, wish that it all would return back to the way that it had been before all of this. A hope that it would still work, that it could still hold in this strange place, still cut through the boundary to reach him.

Suddenly then, the fog lifted and the original feeling of nothingness returned. It had partially worked, but that was enough for now. Murkel rose to her feet, a strange feeling of eerie calm and doom that what she had foreseen had really come. Around her lay the black trunks, the filthy, grimy ground, the choking air lacking in the essential element to breathe, and in front of her feet the black charred ashes of the feather.

She had seen it all, if only she had been quick enough, if only she had accepted the offer... but just how much would that strange offer have changed of this world?

“Murkel? What are we going to do now? Should we leave or stay? We could go back to Sirmonia and see what she has to say.” Murkel sighed. Maybe Saarae was right. Maybe the queen would have some idea of how to get it back; of how to bring this world back to normal so that they could continue with their quest. But how did she even get into this? But she needed this adventure, and she knew it. And as much as she had been closed off to the others at first, they had opened her and exposed her to what she really needed in the

universe.

“Yes, Murkel, should we go back?” Reedesin, the brown-haired fey boy, inquired.

“Yes, we should head back and see what Sirmonia has to say. Maybe the Magic Queen will have some opinion on where we should head next or what we should do.

“We could go back to Raquenmore,” Tion’s deep voice rumbled. “We could see what has happened there since the reawakening.” Murkel knew the Deer-lord wanted to see what had become of his home since they had left. He had not even been able to see the final antler fall before they had to travel on to the next world.

“We need to go back to Sirmonia first. She is the only one who may have some idea of what to do.” Murkel stated, turning to stare at the tall boy.

“Will you be able to open the portal?” Saarae asked her, taking a few steps toward the black haired girl. Murkel concentrated and thought, wondering how much of her magic she could still activate in a place like this.

Then, at the edge of her conscience, she felt it. The portal. Glistening and vibrating with its power, but still far away from her. Murkel went into her trance state, and accordingly, everyone around her fell silent and invited the portal into their minds. Murkel felt for it, found it, and then invited it closer, drew it closer until under her closed eyes it covered and filled every part of her mind and glistened through her spirit, and then she transported it to the others, and spoke to them,

Enter.

And they did, stepping through the portal as one and immediately feeling the warm sun and upbeat vibe of Arusala flow around them. Murkel, feeling to make sure the others were with her, pushed the portal away and opened her eyes.

Murkel opened her eyes to a blaring yellow sun, lush blue grass, and a crystal green stream flowing happily across the meadow. Beautiful, extremely vibrant colored flowers sprouted from the ground to make the the landscape appear as something that one would find through looking through a kaleidoscope.

Saarae breathed deep, the elven girl home at last. “We should go straight to Sirmonia. She will be waiting for us.”

“Can you contact her?” Murkel queried. Her powers were useless in this land that was not her home. Tion and Reedesin turned to look at Saarae and wait for her answer, Reedesin looking around cautiously. Murkel knew that the faerie boy felt extremely uncomfortable here, in a world without a hint of darkness and the tricky magic that flowed and thrived in the fey world.

“Yes, I imagine so.” Saarae closed her eyes and reached out for the queen. Immediately, she was there, questioning and worrying about what had happened in Murgore. Saarae answered her the best that she could, recounting the events of the past week as fast as she could, and then her mind as it filled with the Magic Queen’s distress.

Catherine Ulassin, 13
Branchburg Central Middle School
Grade 8



Artwork:
Carlos Molinero, 20
Bound Brook High School
Grade 12

HILLSBOROUGH HIGH SCHOOL

Thoughts @ 3:35

The sky

It went from a deep navy

to the lightest of pinks

mixed with a gray that I don't know how to describe

and it looked beautiful

no, it was beautiful

and looked a little bit lonely too

and I figured that the sky was a bit like people

pink and gray and indescribable

and lonely

but beautiful

definitely beautiful

they just don't realize it

because neither of them views themselves from a distance

as an abstract art of beautiful colors and emotions and it's just making me sad how much we give and how little we get back and how each and everyone of us deserves the whole damn world yet only receive an island that isn't even big enough to live on and the sky is making me sad and so is a boy and I just want to be happy again and I want someone to look at me like I'm pink without the

grey and just love me like I love the way the sky looks at 3:41 in the morning because my god, is k beautiful.

Hana Bahlawan, 15
Hillsborough High School
Grade 10

Christina

"Now I saw the moon divorce the sky, is this what it's like?"

This moment in time, it all stood still. Nothing could compare to this moment. The wind blew her long, dyed red hair. The ocean breeze was strong and the smell of the clean beach, the sea, and the forest made the moment perfect. I stood about five feet back from her.

We decided to go on vacation to the islands and, well, it was perfect. The ocean was blue, not the typical blue, but a lighter blue than the sky and at some spots, crystal clear. You could see the underwater life and it was astounding. She came over to me took my hand and we walked back from the water and laid down on the beach. The sand was white, as if the dirt and the filth

of the dirty human touch had not been here. It was fine sand, not large coarse sand and it had a natural smell to it. The smell was the smell of heat rising from the sun beating down on the pure beauty of the island. The fresh salt water ocean scent carried in the breeze and it was peaceful. Gusts blew through and across the beach but nothing strong enough to blow sand around dramatically, just enough to blow my wife's long hair.

We've been married 2 years and for her 24th birthday, I decided to bring her here and let us have a romantic time. I looked over to her as she lied peacefully; she had such a look of satisfaction and calmness. The way she looked was the way someone look as if all the problems of the world just bleed from them and fell through the sand. Seeing her at such ease and peace brought happiness and I knew nothing could ruin this. It began to get hotter and i could feel the sun beating on me and i knew we shouldn't stay out here much longer. I rolled over to see she was asleep, she looked so precious. I picked her up and carried her back to our hut we were staying at so she wouldn't bake and burn. The sand was hot, it burnt walking across it but it was to help my love so of course, it was worth it.

In the hut, on the table was a bowl of nuts and next to it a note. The note said "These nuts are native, edible and are most delicious. Have some on behalf our gratitude for you staying here." I laid her down on the bed and then walked to the table. I picked up a nut and it was smooth, as smooth as a pebble that has been smoothed by a river for years. The nut was no bigger than than a penny. It was about that size round almost a perfect sphere. There wasn't a shell to these fine nuts. They tasted like a walnut, a macadamia nut and an almond combined; it was delicious. It was a taste you could never forget. I ate about 7 before I

stopped.

It was about 3 in the afternoon, so I decided to take a nap with Christina. I woke up about three hours later, with Christina missing from my side. "Hurry or you'll miss it," I heard . I ran down to the beach to find her staring out at the ocean. The sunset was astoundingly beautiful. The sun was red a bright deep red, the clouds reflected a yellow, but there were layers. Above the yellow laid a orange layer, then faded into a blue, then deep purple as it went higher. A horizon of sunset, colors that can leave you standing in shock because there was such a sight. the layers above the sun were all faded perfectly as if a painter painted the sky. I knew something this perfect was too good to be true. I kept going with this moment, I didn't want it to end. I walked to her and grasped her from behind and held her. I kissed her on her cheek and held her tight as we gazed out on the sunset. I asked her, "Can we stay here forever?" but she turned, looked me in the eyes, put her hand on my face, and then she turned to sand and blew away. I looked down with tears, then everything started to fall.

The next thing I know, I wake up on the floor. I must have fell off my bed during the dream. Christina was just the perfect girl of my dreams. I want to be with someone and love them forever, to be happy.

Justin Faulkner,17
Hillsborough High school
Grade 12

Alter Shattered

My toes grasped the sand. It's dampness wet my feet, as stared out into the dark, deceptive ocean. I grabbed my hand around my neck, accidentally brushing the back of my head. I looked up at the dull, silvered sky looking for answers. Answers to why this just happened ...

It was Thursday, August 24th...

My wife didn't show. There I was waiting at the alter. The pianist was playing that classic tune. Two men in tuxedos opened the thick, spruce wood doors, to have no one to show up. Everyone was standing up looking for the bride that had left. I stood there emotionless, and speechless. I just grasped my hands against each other.

Then I whispered into my best friend's ear, "Take control... I'll be back."

I took the limo that was supposed to be meant for us. I told the driver my address. "47 Dickinson Lane." I panted, shocked.

I looked out the window looking for answers. I couldn't see anything but a dull reflection of myself. I looked at the cooler that was pre-packed for our journey to what was supposed to be our honeymoon, and opened it. I grabbed a sweaty Mike's Hard Lemonade, and chugged it. That wouldn't be the first.

I had arrived. I threw off my Calvin Klein sports jacket onto my newly cut lawn, and stormed inside. I ripped off my tux, and shoved my piece of metal into the door. I stepped inside and I immediately called out her name, there was no response. I walked straight into the kitchen, then slid open the glass door. I looked out to the dark, dull, ocean. I heard a sound of Zeus, then

saw a flash. I sat down to take off my shoes and socks. I flipped the black wrap of cotton to find a note, that I was not aware of.

"If you're reading this, I left, but you can still find me. You know where I am." The note read.

I took out another beer, and walked down with my shirt untucked, and my face like a tomato. I felt the sand. It was distinctively cold. It was damp too, and it reminded me of the time I went onto the Watergate bay in England. I walked out, drunk. I took one last chug of the sweaty drink and tossed it into the ocean, and screamed.

I looked to my right, and I thought I saw her. I started to run, but I never got closer to her. I kept trying each one of my steps getting deeper and deeper in the sand until I collapsed. I looked up and realized there was nothing I was chasing after.

I stood up and brushed the sand off myself. Some got in my pants, but that didn't bother me. I started to walk back to my house when it started to rain. Every drop hit my newly done hair, then rolled down my face. I took one last look out onto the ocean, and saw another bolt along with a loud roar from the skies.

I grabbed another beer heading inside. I jumped out of my soaked clothes, and left them on the floor.

The only thing on my mind was, "Where could she be?"

I turned on the tv, and what came on blew my mind. It was The Bachelor. It reminded me of how terrible this day had turned out. I threw my bottle at the tv shattering it. The tv was black, and all I saw was my reflection. I got mad, and yanked my keys of the shiny silver hook, and ran outside. I opened the door to

my all black Audi R8. I fired up the engine.

My steering wheel in one hand, and a bottle in the other. My engine roared and I flew down the street.

"I think I know where she is!" I thought to myself, "She's at that cliff..." I couldn't remember the name, but I knew where it was.

I went onto my phone, and to the gps. I looked around L.A. and finally found it. I clicked on it then all I heard was a tire skidding.

I blacked out.

Next thing I know i'm half awake getting rushed into the hospital. I then woke up seven hours later after the crash.

I looked around to find her standing next to me...

"Where were you?" Then I thought, "No get away! You left me!"

The cops swarmed in then had informed me that they had to bring me to jail.

My mind went wild, and I thought "This day couldn't have gotten worse."

David Finer, 15
Hillsborough High school
Grade 9

Yako

I had a dream that me and you were walking
and then your eyes grew large and darkened
and you stabbed me 17 times before melting into the ground and I collapsed
allowing the sky to blanket me
in it's soft blues and whites

And In my dream I wake up covered in blood with no recollection of how I got there
or where I was
all I knew was that I was in a place that I no longer wanted to be
so I ran

I ran until the ground blended with the trees, blended with the sky I ran until I knew, but didn't care, that I
fell I would've died
I ran until everything was nothing and you were the only thing on my mind and then I stopped
and I was terrified

Because I had an uneasy feeling that I was stuck in a fixed point and the ground simply moved under my feet
that everything around me lived freely but I was stuck paralyzed
and I could no longer see through both my eyes but I've never seen life so clearly
and then I was in your living room
and we were sitting and watching TV until your parents were asleep
until the grass was green and I couldn't see straight
but my life felt so put together
whatever we were doing that night had felt so relevant at the time

and I let you treat me like shit because being treated like shit was better than being treated like nothing at all
and that may not make sense to you
but didn't your parents ever tell you that not everything makes sense?

Jake Narodn, 16
Hillsborough High School
Grade 10

Animals

Black smog swirls in the pale blue skies, mixing with the dark clouds of the night.

White clouds mix with the yellow of the fading sun.

Pillars rise and exhaust pipes fill the air with a sour smell and a blackness that can't be taken back.

The Industrial Revolution is beginning again.

Factories create the chrome glint of our wheels, the gleam of car metal blinding the poor. Listen to the whistles calling the blue collars back from lunch.

The sounds horrid and filled with gloom and deception, the long hours promising a poor pay, not enough to live off of.

Machinery pounding like a steady engine, but hey, that's what they make.

Fires burning bright, melting metal inside.

Cogs pushing, spinning, covered in sweat and the stinging tears from those who have gotten ripe air in their eyes.

New buildings scrape the skies as old ones crumble to dust, forgotten relics of the old age.

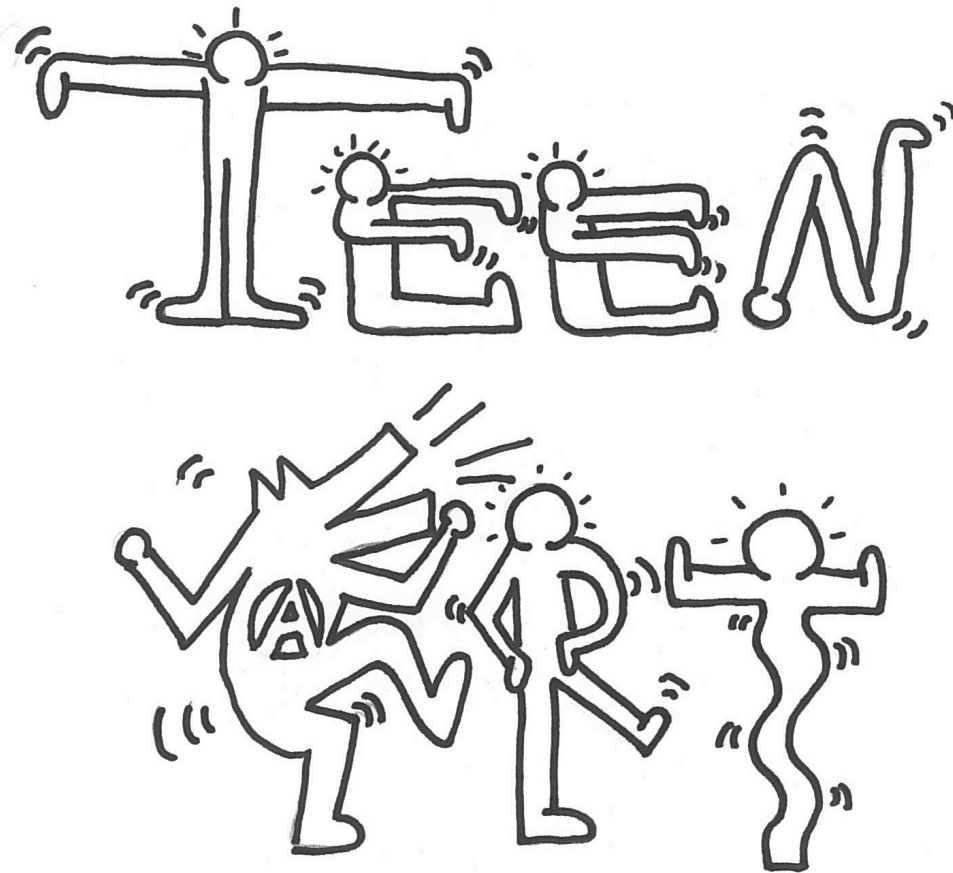
Trucks deliver the new aches and pains in the form of crates, and they take away the groans and wistful sighs, silently wishing they didn't have to lead this kind of life.

Samantha Nee, 14
Hillsborough High school
Grade 9

Unfinished Puzzle

She goes back to the troubled boys
who make her heart race and leave her on her toes She likes the thrill,
the adventure
She constantly seeks that tiny thrill of "love" She never settles for what is best for her
She's never tried to be with someone who was willing to give her the world
She settles for the boys her make her heart race and eyes cry She sought love in unfinished puzzles ,
Solving them on her own,
while completed ones walked away
She gets off on the adventure of solving everyone's puzzle that she loses herself in them.

Mia Mazuch, 15
Hillsborough High school
Grade 9



Artwork:
Jonathan Vargas, 17
Bound Brook High School
Grade 11

Remember When

The cheap bedsheets crinkled under the girl as she shifted onto her side. There was a boy sitting in a chair beside her bed, his head hanging low.

"You can do whatever you want, you know," the boy said quietly. "I know," she whispered. "But I don't always want what's right."

"I'm going to stand behind you, no matter your decision. I'll be right here." He saw her head nod. "Can you at least look at me, please?" She rolled back over and faced him, the thin blanket crackling.

"I just don't know what to do," she admitted, tucking her hands underneath her cheek. "I know, but whatever you decide, it'll be alright. You can get through this."

"I don't know if I can," she said softly.

"I just want you to be happy," he whispered.

"I'm happy with you. Aren't you happy with me?"

"Of course I'm happy with you, Casey. You know I've never been happier than I have been with you."

"I want to make you happier," Casey said, gripping his hand tight. "You deserve a lot more than this."

"You are not allowed to go into that frame of mind. We discussed this; you are my priority and my favorite thing in the whole world."

"I know, but still. All this is a lot to handle;" she said, gesturing to the whole room. "I want all of this. I want all of you." Casey turned her head to blink back tears.

"Can you help me over to the window? I wanna look outside." The boy came around the side of the bed and helped Casey up, keeping an arm around her and bringing her IV behind her. She leaned her weight against him. "I like the view." Then, "Do you remember that little beach we went to last year after prom?"

"Of course I remember. You ruined the hem of your dress in the salt water and stuffed my jacket pockets full of sand. I think I found sand in my socks for up to a week. I could never get the sand out completely."

"Do you think we'll have times like that again?"

"Of course I do. We have times like that now. You stuff my pockets with tongue depressors and your Jell-o from lunch." Casey giggled.

"I wanna be happy like that again."

"I think you will be happy either way. Honestly, it's all up to you and what the doctor thinks."

"I need your input, though. It helps," Casey said, holding onto Jake.

"How's your head feeling? Do you need any morphine?" Jake asked, gently running his fingers over the bandage on the back of her neck.

"That would be nice. My head's starting to pound." Jake helped maneuver her to the bed and pressed the button for the nurses station.

"Everything all right in here?" the nurse asked, coming to Casey's side.

"She needs some morphine. Her head 's hurting," Jake said, rubbing Casey's hand. The nurse retrieved a syringe and administered it into her IV.

"You should feel it soon," she said, before leaving the two.

"It hurts," Casey said.

"You're my fighter." Jake skimmed his fingers over Casey's forehead. "Do you think it's gonna hurt?" Casey asked in a small voice.

"Maybe a little afterwards, but you won't feel a thing in surgery. You'll be well taken care of by the surgeons and nurses and I'll be waiting in your room right after your done. You don't have to worry," Jake told her, brushing back her hair as he did so.

"I wish my mom were here," she said, still sounding just as small.

"I know you do. I wish I could bring her here for you." Casey tugged on Jake's arm until he was laying down next to her and cuddled into his arms. Jake looked by the foot of the bed and stared at the x-rays of Casey's head, all lined up neatly like family photos hanging from the light projector.

"I love you," she whispered against his arm.

"I love you too." He kissed the top of her head and rested his cheek on top of the spot he kissed. "Never forget that."

"Jake? What if something goes wrong in surgery? What if they can't take care of it?" "You have to let the worry go. You can't keep dwelling on that. If you keep thinking about everything that might go wrong, then you'll never let yourself live," Jake said.

"I'm barely living now. I'm in this room all the time and the only time I get to leave is for therapy."

"You will not be here forever. I still have to take you on that trip to Europe, remember?" "I remember," Casey said, a small smile on her face.

"So you can't be here forever because I have to take us. We're gonna go to all the spots you wanna see and I'm gonna try to speak French and you're gonna laugh when I get it wrong. I am going to help you live your life." They laid there in silence for a few moments before Casey spoke.

"I would like that a lot," she whispered.

"Is the morphine starting to kick in?" Jake asked. She nodded.

"Then sleep. I'll be right here when you wake up." Shutting her eyes, Casey soon disappeared into her dreams.

"I love you."

Laura Radcliff, 18
Hillsborough High School
Grade 12

Anger in Words

Hands shake, heart cracks

Heat accumulates.

Like a pounding drill

on lifeless tar,

the crashing fragments

Are selfishly ravaged

by blistering fire.

Boiling but hardened,

sanity is tantamount to chaos.

Eyes are flickering

But the tears are dry ice.

Lows wouldn't exist without highs.

If you asked what's the matter,

I couldn't give you an explanation;

Even I don't care about the answer.

But it is better to feel something

than nothing at all,

I think

Because you can't set charred wood

back on fire.

Dora Szegedy, 14
Hillsborough High School
Grade 9

HILLSBOROUGH MIDDLE SCHOOL

The Example of a True Friend

When you are weeping
And all it seems to do is rain,
When your heart and soul ache,
I won't leave you with the pain.

When your world turns upside down
And you don't know who to turn to,
Can't seem to find a way out,
Come, let me help you.

When all your troubles and fears
Seem to bring you heart-breaking tears,
And all you need is a shoulder,
My shoulder's comfort will be as strong as a boulder

When your world is out of control,
Your life a jagged line,
If you cannot bear the weight
I will give you hope and joy,
And that alone will be fine.

Faith Bailey, 13
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

The One Who Lurks

There is someone who lurks in the darkness,
She is everywhere I go,
Always glued to my side,
For reasons left unknown.

Her nature shows no malevolence,
Her intentions are not to maim,
And no matter what the setting,
Her temperament remains quite tame.

When the sun is especially bright,
A golden orb high in the sky,
Her dwellings are more prominent,
Following close to my every stride.

But even in the dim of night,
You may be able to catch a glimpse,
While she dances in the shimmer of the blanched moonlight,
Though she attempts to remain hidden.

There is someone who lurks in the darkness,
She is everywhere I go,
Always glued to my side,

Thank the heavens,
She's just my shadow...

Graciela Cruz, 14
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

I am an Outcast

I am an outcast at school

At the moment, no friends

Most kids are popular

Others do not like me

Under the stalls alone,

Talking to myself,

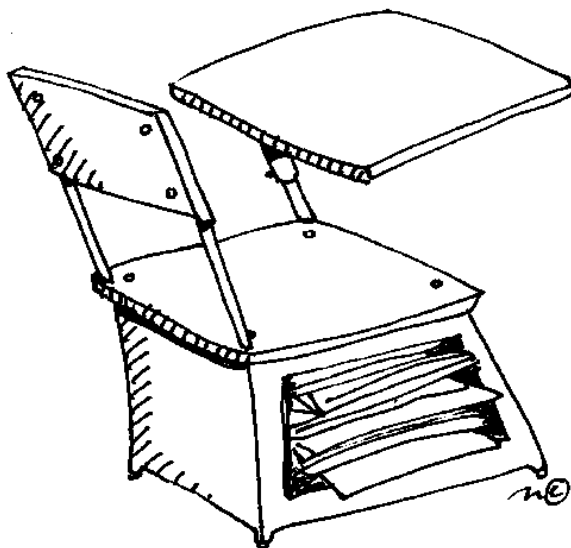
Can't seem to find friends,

All on my own way,

So sweet and no one to share it with,

Too sad to talk to

Jaydalynn Jimenez, 13
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 7



The Christmas Culprit

She jumped out of bed, startled and headed towards her chipped chestnut dresser. Squinting, she used her hands to guide her as she walked across her bedroom. She stumbled upon a few cardboard boxes filled with unnecessary junk, but kept going. When she got to it, she ruffled through the disorganized clothing and objects dispersed throughout the dresser. It was around midnight and she could barely see anything. Her cracked glass window shone a glimpse of moonlight, guiding her through the mess. The snow outside was falling incessantly since morning. It was frigid outside and about 20 degrees in her apartment, yet she managed to wear her only clean pink silk pajama shorts. She finally pulled out a black Sony HD Video recorder and pressed play.

“I hear heavy footsteps on the roof. I hear it. I hear him. My name is Anna-Lisa. I am twenty-two years old and I live in an small apartment located at 21.. oh wait no that was my old address. My current address is 300 Atlantic Ave Brooklyn, New York. Whoever discovers this taping must know, something is out there, something unusual. I am not crazy, and I don’t believe in monsters or creatures like that. Heck, I never believed in figures like the Easter Bunny or yanno those types of people that parents made up for little kids. Yet, he’s out there. He has to be.”

She heard footsteps pound against the rooftop. They walked back and forth like a pendulum on a grandfather’s clock. For the first time, in a long time, she was actually frightened. *Should I call 911? Would they help me? Will they believe me?* Thoughts raced through her mind, as if one was bouncing off of another. She thought of creeping into her bed and pretending like nothing was going on. She could just wait for him to go away, yet it wasn’t that easy. For she knew, he sees her when she’s sleeping and knows when she’s awake. Tears stung at the back of her eyes. She rubbed her eyes and scolded herself.

“You can’t cry Ana-Lisa. Now is not the time. You are not a child.” She whispered to herself. She took the video camera she was holding and faced it towards her, and then pressed play. “Trust me when I say, he is not who he says he is. He disguises himself as a toymaker. He says he delivers gifts to children all around the world in one night, this night, every year, Christmas Eve. Do people even believe this baloney? How can he show up to a person’s house through the chimney? There is no such thing as Santa Claus. He isn’t the

friendly, fat guy who lives in the North Pole. He's a killer. I know he is."

She slowly put the video camera down. It was extremely dark. Her eyes started to adapt to her surroundings. Without her glasses, she couldn't see in the daytime. How was she going to see at night? She examined her room closely like Sherlock Holmes, her favorite investigator. She could make out a few paintings, placed on her wood panels, next to her bed. She noticed her black fireplace was roughly twenty feet from her bed. A miniature window was right above her bed. It had no curtains or blinds and was cracked. Her bed was against an unpainted wall by the previous apartment owners. She put the video camera down on her bed. She started to search for an object useful for defense. Suddenly, the idea of a knife popped up in her head. As she began to tip-toe towards the kitchen, she passed several unopened boxes. Unfortunately, she remembered those boxes included all the kitchen utensils. *Dang it*, she snapped. She scurried back to her dresser and started looking there. She went through jeans, socks, fuzzy socks, leggings, sweatshirts, t-shirts, and a few empty water bottles, yet didn't manage to find a weapon. She scanned her room carefully, hoping to notice something, anything useful.

"A-HA," she smiled. She dragged her feet to a stack of closed packages piled on top of one another. On top of the first one lay a pair of scissors and clear tape. She quickly grabbed the scissors and grinned holding them in her hand. In an instant, she heard loud grunting noises coming from the rooftop. Heavy footsteps walked to the direction of her fireplace. She began to panic, sweat dripped on her back, and she suddenly had trouble breathing.

"On..One..two...fou...thre..three," she stumbled over her own words. She tightly grasped onto the scissors and felt the sharp blade start to pierce into her flesh. She heard echoes from the chimney as if they were calling her name. She saw black dust fall down and felt a cool wisp of air blow against her. She smelt the Christmas fear. She dashed to her bed, held the scissors in one hand and then, grabbed the video camera in the other. She tucked herself and pulled up her covers until they touched her nose. She bit hard on her lip, tasting the blood seep out. She pressed play on the video camera.

"He is coming. He is going to be in my apartment in just a matter of seconds. I know he..," she took a big gulp and began whispering again, "I know he's going to kill me. Just be warned, I..." Before she could finish

her sentence, a small piece of coal came down the chimney and landed on the ashes of wood. She adjusted her video camera facing the chimney, yet managed to hide the blinking red light so the intruder could not see it. The coal rolled out of the ash pit and onto the wood floor. It started to tremble as if an earthquake was occurring. The coal slowly grew feet and then arms. As it shook some more, it gained more human parts. Soon enough, big, fat, white-bearded, sinister Santa stood on her floorboards. He looked nothing like they described in the picture books. He carried an empty sandbag over his shoulder and wore black, muddy boots. His Santa 'uniform' was tattered on the sleeves and belly portion. He examined the apartment closely, took a deep breath, and walked towards her. She felt like screaming, yet no one could hear her. She could feel sweat drip down her neck. She held the scissors close to her. She didn't care if her eyes were open. She knew he would charge for her anyway. As he approached her, she could make out his true facial features. He smirked ominously. She saw gold caps on his two side teeth on the top row. His white beard was stained. He wore no glasses, but instead had bloodshot eyes. She could smell smoke from his soul.

Finally, he bent his knees and was face to face with her. He examined all her features, to make sure she was the one he came for. He gently stroked her pale cheek. She felt his breath against the tiny hairs on her face. She closed her eyes and felt a tear roll down. She tried to aim the scissors onto his stomach, but it was no use because she couldn't move her hand; she couldn't move anything. *He must have done it*, she thought to herself. Santa looked at her and she stared back. He leaned closely to her ear.

With a deep, threatening voice he whispered, "Merry Christmas." Just like that, he snapped his fingers. The sandbag which was once empty was now filled with coal. It was overflowing from the top and falling onto her floor. Santa swung the sandbag like a baseball bat and "BAM!" He made a direct shot and she was out.

Jasmine Khosla, 13
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 7

Thought Bubble

Thought bubble,
The annoying blankness of the brain,
When the thinking station is still without the thought train.

The awkward moment,
When the conversation stops,
And just like a rock pitched,
All thoughts go “plop.”

Into the void,
Where lost thoughts go,
Pulled down beneath the universe,
Like the rip current of an undertow.

The mouth runs dry,
Words on the brink of the lip,
Shifting without speaking,
Needing the final propulsion to let the words rip.

Then without warning,
The switch inside the brain flips,
Lights flicker on, gears start cranking,
The whole world tips.

The thoughts,
They come rushing back even faster,
Like a torrent of water,
The aftermath of a storm filled with disaster.

And to think,
That it all started with the thought bubble,
The annoying blankness of the brain,
When the thinking station was still without the thought train.

Mae Kinst, 14
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

A Day Off From School

There's a storm outside but no sounds are heard
There's a blizzard outside, white as a bird
There's snow outside and it keeps on falling
There's children outside, they can't help but laugh
There's no way to escape the storm's aftermath

I see the snow packed tight and yet it keeps drifting down
I know I have to shovel it and I can't help but frown
I have my dad to save me from the snow's boreal grasp
I feel lucky to have him lest it traps me till next fall
I just want to escape this job and chuck a few snowballs

But at least there's some blissful cocoa waiting now inside
But I guess in that way that I'm not totally deprived
But I still spent my day off shoveling paths out of the house
But it felt like unveiling not a path but the whole highway
But at least I could conquer this beast in my very own way

Because I love the snow I don't care if I have to shovel
Because my being in the snow's like swimming in a bubble
Because I know that at the end I'll have mountains of fun
Because all homo sapiens have hankerings for snow
Because this climate's quintessential as all creatures know

Kevin Klein, 14
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

Waves of Life

Bobbing in the crashing waves,
Fighting to stay afloat,
In the sea of life,
Where there is no rescue boat,

Piles of homework,
Weigh you down.
Last week's Geometry test,
Makes your parents frown.

That boy from English
Does not even distinguish your face in a crowded room.
Little does he know
He is the reason that you welcome gloom.

Betrayal being common,
Still, in a friend you confide.
They broadcast your secret,
Now, there is no one left by your side.

The life of a teenager is a wild beast,
Never ceasing, even to a plea.
Waiting to feast,
On the prey we call you and me.

Kristi Liivak, 14
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

Summer By the Sea

Is where I retire in the summer fun you ask?

The beach is a splendid place to bask.

The shimmering sun gazing down at the sand,
The chilled summer breeze soaring over the land.

The blazing, glazing, and soft sand,

Frying my feet as I glide down the land,

What a sweet sensation, the sand on my skin,
Making sand castles that bring me a win.

After the sand comes the big bright blue.

All of that water is fun for me and you.

Swimming around like a duck in a pond.

The ocean is like a magnet for the whole huge monde.

I can escape my troubles by traveling to the beach.

Summer coming to an end just makes me want to screech.

When autumn comes soon, school will seize my time.

Leaving the beach behind is like eating a sour lime!

Brandon Luckenbaugh, 13
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

Nothing is Something

A poem about nothing,
Is really a poem about something.

When something is wrong,
Shoulders are slumping,
Like heaps sand piles clumping.

Whenever you ask,
It's always "oh nothing."

Nothing is an excuse,
And it is often put to use,
Just to defuse,
The onslaught of abuse.

There is always nothing.
There is nothing to do
Like a bump on a log.
There is nothing to see
As in the heaviest of fog.

Nothing is new
Like a shiny crystal bowl
Nothing is on T.V.
As if it's a black hole.

All of these nothings
Are full of somethings.
It is just not that one thing.
That they have been wanting.

Haley Mandell, 13
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

Verbal Killer

Straightened hair with my makeup all on,
Now another hour has gone.
Denim jeans paired with a white cropped top,
Green layered necklace for a little pop,
I actually appear exquisite.

Laughs and snickers tickle the ear.
“She’s so ugly” is what I hear.
A frown crawls upon my face.
Tears stream down like it’s a race.
My tears cascade into an enormous lake.

Two friends? One friend? All of them gone.
Tears erupt until the dawn.
A deteriorating confidence,
Let the humiliation commence.
I’m ready for my own defense.

Words pierce the soul more than you think.
Lives can change within a blink.

Hannah Manjooan, 14
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

Writer's Block

I have writer's block
There is not a single thought
I try to focus like a hawk
But I write like a rock
I get ideas with a talk
But I realize it is twelve o'clock
I cannot write like Owen
But I just finished my poem

Weekends

I love the weekend, for my dog and I to play
She takes my socks.
I think that totally rocks.
She wants to play.
I say no way.
Eventually, I say okay.
I love the time we spend, in the hallway

Bob

Does not do homework
He watches too much T.V.
Wants at least a "B"

Bob Naples
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 7

Never Ending

My name is James, and I'm 14 with mental issues, my label for life. At 12, I was sent to the Haverstraw Home for the Mentally Unstable because of my horrendous nightmares which influenced severe panic along with some self-destructive behavior. At times I would talk, scream, or cry in my sleep, and at other times I would scratch at my skin, sometimes drawing blood. My parents, the wonderful people they are, could not do anything to ease my pain. They feared for my well-being.

I never wanted to go to that asylum because I thought it was a scary, creepy place for insane people and surely I wasn't insane. In any event, off I went in search of help. Almost immediately, I started having nightmarish episodes, more than I did at home. If I woke up screaming and scratching at myself, a man would come into my room with a needle, hold me down, inject me, and send me off in a tranquil sleep. This went on for two years. But....I guess I am better now, I....I don't really scream in my sleep anymore, I just have nightmares. But recently, the screaming, the crying, and the scratching started to come back again. Just because I sa...saw them, I ss...sa...saw them kill her, I saw them kill Abby Jane.

Before they dragged her off into another room, she made me promise that I would try and escape. As they wrenched her up from the floor, one of our abductors turned to me and said, "You're next."

Ever since that night, vivid nightmares keep coming back. I can't sleep, eat, or even lay down because of all the scabs I have on my body from all the scratching. It even hurts for me to put my head on my pillow. So now I am back at Haverstraw.

But now I am a prisoner, I am in this mental home and under the witness protection program so the murderers don't come after me and kill me too. "Why did we go to that particular haunted house for Halloween?" The events of that night have brought me to this moment. I am a witness in a murder. I told them I saw three men, who looked between 30-35 years old, and they were all around the same height, 5'9 to 6'0. I told them what one person looked like because his ski mask fell off when he was manhandling Abby. As I lay in one of the rooms of the haunted house, I could hear her screams. I knew she was trying so hard to fight them off. As I said those words, tears fell from my eyes because all I could picture in my mind was them hurting her. I also told the detective that she ripped a hole through her assailant's shirt and that I saw a tat-

too of a phoenix on his arm.

For days, the police found many clues in that abandoned house, but not the culprits. Then one day as I sat in the reading area of the asylum, I couldn't help but notice that one of the attendants, a very odd looking man, kept staring at me to a point where I felt uncomfortable. So I just tried to look away, but it was hard to avoid his fixed stare. Then I decided to look back at him and to my surprise he just disappeared. It was a very strange moment. For a quick second I thought it was my imagination, but I knew for a fact that it wasn't.

That night before going to sleep, I felt that someone was at my door watching me. As I drifted into twilight someone barged into my room with a needle in his hand. I noticed that he was the same guy who was staring at me earlier that day. I quickly stood up and started to fight him off but I couldn't. When he hit the scabs on my back I dropped with agonizing pain like a sack of potatoes. When I looked up in a daze I noticed the phoenix tattoo on his arm and I realized I saw the same tattoo on the arm of the guy who killed Abby Jane. At this point I believed I was going to die. He had me down and out. He came real close to my ear and whispered "I told you, you were next."

Before he could inject the poison from the needle into my arm, the police rushed in and shouted "PUT THE NEEDLE DOWN, STAND AND PUT YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR." He slowly stood up with a blank look on his face. The police said "You are under arrest for the murder of Abby Jane and the attempted murder of James Neison."

When the police eventually found the other two criminals, thanks to the tattooed man, all were thrown in jail for the murder of my friend Abby Jane, who allowed me to escape by holding the attention of and fighting off our attackers. She sacrificed her life for me. But the nightmares still remain

Gerard Redden, 14
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

Pristine Pointe Shoes

My ribbons are silky,
I have solid glue.
I have no rips or tears,
Yes, I am brand new.

I'm not broken in,
For my soles are not flexible.
Dancers who buy me
Must never be skeptical.

Ballerinas adore me,
For I lift them off their feet.
When they put me on,
They dance so neat and sweet.

Now in my box,
I sit and wait.
For that one ballerina,
To meet her fate.

Demi Rooyakkers, 14
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

The Misfits—Chapter 1

Getting out of the cargo box all he could see was sand. Sand for miles. The drugs they had given Kai made him lose the memory of why he was there. Looking at the faces of the other children, they were in the same state too. Ten children, around Kai's age, helped them out of the plane. They all wore the same uniform, green tee shirt and camo cargo pants; they looked like they belonged to a miniature army made of teens. They were herded into a building beyond the sand where hopefully they would get some answers. Everyone obeyed the army children due to their lack of energy. All their faces had the same vacuous appearance making them look like a swarm of brain dead soldiers. Once they had gotten all of the children together, one of the army children spoke into a megaphone.

“Hello and welcome to the safe house for unwanted children. All of you were saved from the horrid future you were about to endure. You all are probably wondering where you are and why you are here. Well where — a place once called Afghanistan, but now is better known as the Wasteland. And why — so that all of you can have a better future than what awaited you before” said the speaker that Kai identified as a younger girl around the age of fourteen. She could easily pass as a boy due to her short brown hair, but her body and voice had a more feminine feel to them. She wore aviators to cover her face from the harsh sun. “Now you will be washed up, clothed and fed. After that you will be questioned to see what your placement will be in the camp. But first, you will be broken up into genders and placed into your living quarters. Thank you.”

They were broken up and lead into the washing area. The area was shower heads sticking out of the wall with no dividers in between. Kai could feel the eyes staring at them as the undressed, but no one questioned or fought against the orders. Upon further examination most of the boys commanding them were either the same age or younger than him. No adults could be seen. Everyone was given the same clothes, tan shirt and tan cargo pants, but the ten children that helped them out had a different uniform which signified their rank. The living quarters was a warehouse-like area with at least a hundred beds lining the walls. They were given a bed with a little cubby and then ushered into a cafeteria. Both genders, male and female, were getting food that was equivalent to school cafeteria food, but Kai ate it like it was his last meal. He did not remember when he last ate, but by guessing by his hunger it must have been a long time. No one spoke in the cafe, only the sounds of forks against plate could be heard.

After fifteen minutes they were once again escorted into a hallway with doors lining both walls; it reminded Kai of somewhere, but the memory had faded long ago. One by one they were put into a room and came after a few minutes. Behind him Kai heard voices of two boys talking.

“Hey, what’s going on here?” the shorter one asked.

“Got me, but I’m kinda skeptical about this whole thing,” replied the taller one.

“Same, but I’m afraid to rebel. Those kids look like they were trained in the army.”

“Hope that doesn’t happen to us.”

Kai was lead into a room down the hall without a comment. The room was once white, but now was faded into tired beige. Sitting at a folding chair was the megaphone girl with a clipboard. Her glasses were off revealing a horrible tan line where her glasses sat and piercing black eyes. It was like her pupils never stopped and continued for the rest of her iris.

“Please sit down,” she commanded. Kai did as told and sat on the folding chair looking straight at her. “Name,” she asked, but it came out as a statement. Kai wondered for a second. All he knew was his first name.

“Kai,” he croaked. The depth and hoarseness scared him and the girl in front of him.

“No last name,” she said making eye contact for the first time. Kai shivered at the sight of black abyss that was her eyes. He shook his head.

“Okayyy... Moving on. Do you remember anything?” she asked turning back to her clipboard.

“Nothing before getting off the plane.”

“Well you are obviously muscular, so I’ll put you down as a laborer type job.” Kai looked down at his bicep. Perfectly tanned and a muscular. He tried to regain memories from how he got strong, but yet again nothing. She handed him a paper with a name on it and shooed him out of the room. The paper read *Tommy* and one of the army children took it and showed him to a stocky, tall boy with a bad sunburn. A group of boys with similar body types stood around him. Kai joined them without a comment. He examined them as he did a picture of boys of similar features appeared in his head. It only stayed for a moment before leaving as fast as it came.

The rest of the day was spent moving boxes of canned food into the kitchen. Kai gave names to the boys around him: the boy with a short buzz cut had a very jokey-pervy feel to him, so he named him Pete, short for Pedophile, a boy who obviously wanted to be befriended by Pete was named Warren, for his wannabe act, a boy who could easily pass for a man because of his full on beard was named Axe, from his lumberjack appearance, and lastly an annoying guy who would not stop trying to make snarky remarks about everything was named Bug for his constant bugging. Everyone else in the group was not significant enough to be noticed by Kai.

The next few days went on with little thought. The same routine: get up, eat, work, eat, work, shower, sleep; no one in Kai’s group paid attention to him and left him alone. He began to pick up stories from these boys’ past; such as Pete was a quarterback druggie who got laid after every game, Warren played baseball, he was the catcher, and obviously made up stories to make himself sounded cooler, when he lied he stuttered, Axe was just as Kai thought an actual lumberjack. He lived on a tree farm up in Vermont and cut trees down for the people who got trees. When Axe told them this Kai chuckled making the rest of the group turn towards him as if to fight, but Kai was already moving on before they could say a word. When the boys were not doing anything to interest Kai he did his best to recover memories from before the crate, but nothing came up. He was the only one that had not gotten their memories back. Kai realized no one talked about why they were here or what “horrid future” was awaiting them before. He was afraid to speak to anyone about it because then he would have to engage in conversation.

Kai noticed more about the megaphone girl over time. She talked with Tommy a lot and spent her free time with him. He assumed they were in some kind of relationship, but she would not let him touch her. Little things he would do that would cause contact to her skin made her flinch that only could be noticed if observed closely. Also, she always looked like she was sulking over something even though she was enjoying herself. He began watching her, not in a stalker way, but the way a scientist watches a lab rat: he would document in his mind the way she reacted to certain gestures and social situations; what he realized is that she will not let anyone touch her. She hides her happiness as if showing signs of enjoyment would make her seem weak and that she very socially awkward but hid it very well by acting aggressive. Kai wanted to know more; he did not know why he longed for more information about this girl, but he needed it. Sadly, other people around him would not act the way he needed them to get more knowledge about her, therefore he decided would need to do it himself.

One day he realized that Tommy had left megaphone girl alone and she was just mindlessly watching them move boxes. This was Kai’s chance. He walked over to her and stood right in front of her. She stared at him back without saying a word. He stuck out his hand;

“Hey I’m Kai,” he said making sure to make eye contact with her. She stared at him and with a stern voice said;

“Get back to work” and with that he walked away.

Kai was not the type to give up, so every chance he got he made some kind of contact with her. Some were touchable and some were not, but seeing her reactions really helped Kai understand this girl. After about a week of this the megaphone girl began noticing these gestures and was being to get annoyed with them. The next time Kai came in contact with her, she snapped. He tried to reach for the same tray in the lunch as she was and snatched his hand and put him in a headlock.

“I know what you are doing and it is not working,” she whispered. This scene caused all the children there to stop and gawk them. A smile formed on Kai’s face.

“What am I doing?” he asked. She tightened her grip on him, getting a groan out of him.

“Trying to get with me you sickboy,” this came out as growl in his ear. He chuckled which was not the usual reaction from getting a headlock from her.

“I’m actually examining you. I noticed that you do not like being touched and always have a tough girl act,” he stated. Sweat beads formed on her forehead. *What is that noticeable?* she worried. She let go of him and looked him in the eye.

“Well stop this “examination” now or else you will be punished,” she boomed and walked out of the cafeteria. They both knew Kai was not going to stop.

Kai decided to take a different turn with his studying by trying to befriend this girl instead of watch her from a distance. At first it was hard; she still did not trust him and would act hostile to him, but after he apologized she warmed up to him. He even got to know her name, Edana. Their friendship was odd, but perfect. With her strict personality and Kai’s knowledge for noticing small, but vital things they were a deadly pair. Being close with Edana, Kai got to hear all the talk for the Top Ten, the ten special children. Apparently, they were being threatened by an outside source to shut down their base. They began forming a miniature army and training anyone who volunteered. Kai was not the type to fight, the whole idea of shooting people was not his cup of tea, but Edana was the complete opposite. She was one of the generals and did most of the gun training. By the end of the boot camp they had a strong army of teenagers, yet you would not know that they were new to the military.

Edana spent less time with Kai which killed both of them, but the Top Ten said that they need to begin sending out troops Edana asked Kai to join.

“What no! I am not joining your militia,” Kai practically cringed at the thought of being in combat.

“But you have the perfect body for it. You’re tall, muscular and very smart. You could easily become a higher rank within a few weeks,” yes Kai was strong, but he liked to use his strength for less violent activities, but he was a sucker for a good cause.

“Edana, you and I both know that I am not fit for the army. I may look tough, but you know that I break down easily.”

“Kai, I am not asking you to kill children. I am asking you to fight for them. Without this base where would you be right now?” It struck him. He did not know why he was here. He stopped trying to remember the past a while ago. His face showed his sudden confusion.

“Where would I be?” he squeaked.

“Dead. You would be dead. You were in Juvi before and they sent you to become an organ donor. That is what all the kids here are. Either misfits or orphans,” her face softened and her voice quiet like a doctor telling a child that they have a broken arm. Kai leaned against the wall. Everything made sense now. All his memories came flooding back like a broken dam. He hated violence because he was violent. He was strong because he needed to look tough, so people would not bother him. Most of all, he was sent to Juvi for killing a boy. The kid was an annoying jerk who used to make fun of the smaller kids. Once the jerk took it too far and knocked out a kid. He sprang up and punched the bully into death. The upper cut was planted directly on his nose which caused the bone to shot up into his brain. He had not meant to kill anyone, but merely to stop him for harming others. Kai sat there on the floor of Edana’s dorm room staring at the floor. A comforting around was placed around Kai’s shoulders.

“I’ll fight,” he said still staring at the ground.

“Good. I knew you would,” Edana said squeezing him

To be continued.....

Brianna Schneider
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

Dismal January

Trees hiss in my direction
Like a bothered cat's retreat.
Frigid rain trickles from the limbs,
And sprawls itself across concrete.

It's a new year now,
But the forlorn feeling's so old.
No use putting a jacket on,
Still a thousand degrees too cold.

December was a blast,
But the party has eternally ceased.
Like a magician's disappearance,
All Christmas Spirit's been released.

Now Phil has made an appearance
To check for his reflection.
Winter's finally over,
Spring runs in our direction.

Liam Smith, 14
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

The Earthquake Myth

Some might say earthquakes are natural. Others think not. Athena, the goddess of war is the actual cause of them.

Making her final preparations to go to war with Atlas and the Titans, Athena enlisted the help of Ares, Aeolus, Apollo, and Artemis to fight with her. As she and her cadre faced the enemy on the battlefield, she brought her own personal secret weapon; quake arrows. These arrows would rumble the ground and toss up the terrain where they landed. From hunting with her brother, she knew that this secret weapon would work perfectly in battle. The only problem with these arrows was that she was the only one who could use them. If anyone else were to use them, bad things would happen. She knew to keep them close.

After the two sides clashed, Athena got her arrows ready. As she was about to fire them the wind stirred and she became blinded by the smoke from the battlefield. She couldn't see anything and unintentionally dropped her arrows. She tried looking for them but without luck. Eventually they were picked up by Apollo, the sun god, who thought they were his. When the smoke cleared Apollo helped Athena up from the ground. She picked up what she thought were her arrows, unbeknownst to her they were actually Apollo's. Without knowing, they each had each other's arrows.

When Athena charged up an arrow and launched it, she was shocked when it didn't do anything. At that point, she realized that she did not have her arrows, someone

else did. She looked around, in horror, and saw her arrows in the quiver on Apollo's back. Suddenly fright filled her heart and she bolted toward the sun god yelling.

"Don't fire that arrow, Apollo! If you do, bad things will happen," she screeched. It was too late, Apollo fired the disastrous arrow. Both of them watched as the wooden

stick sprouted wings and flew across the sky. But.....the arrow did not land. It froze in mid-air, pointing up, toward Olympus. Apollo, Athena, and the other gods gasped in shock. When Zeus, who saw everything from Mt Olympus, saw the arrow, he gasped at the recognizable phenomenon.

"Why, it's a quake arrow. I never thought I'd ever see one again. How did this arrow get in

the possession of one of you?” he demanded.

Athena spoke up with shame in her voice. “It was my arrow. I was given them by a Sorceress who left them in my temple one night. There was also a note attached to them. It read; A present, for you, Athena. Take these arrows into the war with the Titans, you will need them to win. There is a curse with these arrows. If someone other than you shoots one, unimaginable, bad things will happen. Be careful with them, and *never* lose them.”

“Apollo took them by mistake and fired one. I’m not sure what will happen. We are cursed,” Athena fumed.

Zeus, the Almighty, nervously spoke, “The power in the arrows is much greater than one can imagine. When fired by a person other than the one to which they belong, something unimaginable happens. The last mistake destroyed the heavens. It took a very long time to restore Mt. Olympus, we almost didn’t. This next arrow will do something monstrous to the world. The question is; what?”

Suddenly, the arrow lit up the sky with bright light. Then, the Earth violently shook. Both gods and Titans fell to the ground with fearful trepidation. The quaking went on for several

nightmarish minutes until it stopped. In the aftermath, the arrow had destructively drilled its way into the Earth’s core leaving behind sinkholes in various sizes.

Everyone who witnessed the devastation stood in shock trying to regain their composure. Athena, wishing to divest herself from the arrows, threw them into the largest sinkhole she could find, wanting desperately to lose them, lest they fall into the wrong hand once again.

Jake Sommers, 14
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8



Artwork:
Jasmeen Gualtieri, 13
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 8

The Nonexistence of Self Confidence

Walking through the halls of torture,
Gazing at nothing but the ground,
Peeking up from time to time to make sure no one is watching,
Being a turtle hiding in its shell, petrified and timid

Having fear from what others might say,
And getting bullied by a trillion different people all the time,
Trying to fit in with everyone else,
For being unique and disparate is an excuse for others to laugh

Dressing up all appealing and exquisite just to impress those in school,
Spending hours looking at your reflection in the mirror,
Discouraged by what you see,
Knowing that you're never going to be as beautiful as those models in magazines

Self-confidence is just an imaginary thought,
The notion of it floats around in the air but never attaches to anyone.
Pretending to be someone who you're not
Because self-confidence is not always satisfying

Lauren Spalluto, 13
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

Medicine Woman

High Valley Springs a place where Chelsea Marie Jones was soon going to begin her life as a doctor and get better every day. Growing up Chelsea's life was not easy her mother passed away when she was ten, her father kept the family going as a great doctor. Chelsea helped her father every day at the clinic. Chelsea watched as her father put stitches in and healed and gave surgery to patients in need. Giana Ann Jones was Chelsea's older, but kind hearted, sister and supported the family. Once and awhile Gianna would help out at the clinic. Scott Jones was their great father, doctor of the family, and owner of three "Great Doctor of the Year" awards. The family had a great life and continued to stay together no matter what.

"WHAT YOU'RE RETIRING -- NO YOU CAN'T YOU'RE THE ONLY GOOD DOCTOR HERE" Chelsea couldn't believe it who would take over for him.

"I'm sorry dear -- I just don't think I can anymore. I'm getting old and the clinic needs someone new for a change but don't worry the new doctor will be just as good and maybe if she comes early she can help you with your studying" said Dr. Jones as he got up and closed up the clinic for the day.

"NEW DOCTOR! This can't be right -- you've been such a good doctor. People love you. What if the town's folk don't like the "new doctor" that you say is going to come?" asked Chelsea as she stood there. She couldn't bear the thought so she went for a little walk to try and get it off her chest. As Chelsea walked she realized that kids were walking straight for school and forgot. Chelsea ran as fast as she could to get to school on time. She had to take a test for the kids who wanted to get into the Boston Medical School. Chelsea was one out of four people to take the test and try to get in to become a better doctor and to encourage people to help people in need. Chelsea took the test and tried to do as best as she could. When she was done she walked to town to see if her father needed any help cleaning out the clinic. "Do you know when the letter is coming in or not yet" said Dr. Jones in a soar voice.

"Yes my teacher said Friday. Are you okay father? You sound as if you have a cold?" questioned Chelsea in a worried voice. Chelsea kept on eye on her father worrying about the cold he surely was getting. Chelsea could not wait. She had worked very hard to get in and she was not stopping now. Chelsea finished around the clinic as the sun was setting she hurried home to join her family for a nice super and to get rest for the next day to come.

The at seven-o'clock next day, Sunday, as the birds chirped and the glistening sun shined through the windows and the glass door, the Jones were to get ready for church. They all walked down together. Chelsea remembered to pick up some flowers on the way for a dear family, the Jennings, whose mother was recovering from a terrible fall. The priest announced that anybody who would like to stay after could join the church yard picnic, everybody loved to go and spend time together.

Chelsea excused herself for she wanted to check at the post office to see if her letter had come as said.

She asked if anything came and there handed to her was her future, right in her hands. She joined and told everybody that it had come. Her hand squeezed it and then opened it. There was a moment of silence until Chelsea let out this big scream of joy. “Dear Miss Chelsea Marie Jones, We are writing to inform you that you have been picked to attend the Medical School in Boston. You have a week to decide to come and have this opportunity. We hope you can make it. Sincerely, the Boston Medical School” she read. Chelsea couldn't believe it. She got in but also was scared to go and leave her family behind. This was her dream and she couldn't give it up.

Three days had passed and she had to tell her father about the hard trouble she was having making her decision. She and he had a talk. “Chelsea, you have made so much progress over the years and I think this is a great spot to start. You should go and follow your heart – this is your chance to prove there can be a women doctor. You can change this town and the world” her father told her.

“You're right dad. I'm going to do it. I'm going to prove them wrong” Chelsea hurried to pack up for the days were going by fast and Friday was coming up. A couple of friends came by to congratulate Chelsea on her work. They stayed for a while and then were on their way.

The day came for Chelsea to follow her dream. She kissed everyone goodbye and hopped on the train as she waved goodbye to her dear family and friends. A couple of hours went by and Chelsea had woken up to find the train had come to a stop and as she got out she had found herself in front of a big building. Chelsea was going to make this the best year yet.

The year was going by fast and Chelsea had worked a lot and approved but the year was coming to an end. It was not until one day Chelsea got a letter inside the letter..

“Dear Chelsea I want you to come home quick. Father is ill and we need you home. If you can make it. Thank you. Sincerely, Gianna” it read. Chelsea couldn't believe the note. She read it over and over. She hurried and told the school that she had to leave for a family thing. The school excused her and Chelsea packed a couple of things and hurried to get to the train. A couple of minutes later, the train came to a stop and Chelsea got on it. A couple of stops were made; it would be a couple of hours until High Valley Springs. Chelsea arrived home to find her sister waiting for her. Gianna lead Chelsea to the clinic to find her father in bed. Chelsea kissed her father one last time and as he closed his eyes. The funeral was held the next day everybody, showed up to pay their respects.

Megan Weber, 13
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 7



Artwork:
Giuseppe Abarca, 14
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 8

An Unbelievable Night

Because of our busy schedules, Claire and I did not have the opportunity to spend much time together but seeing that it was the last day of school, we decided to make a night of it. First we went to see a chick flick and later we intended to go to the End of School Year Dance. However, after the movie I looked at my phone and I had quite a few notifications. As I scrolled down the list, one caught my eye. It read:

“Attention all citizens of Washington D.C. this is an alert. A demonic creature has escaped the government prison. We ask that you stay safely indoors.”

I couldn't believe it. When I was about to ask Claire if she got it too, I was interrupted by Claire answering a phone call.

“Yeah, we'll be there in no time ah huh yup,” Claire giggled while on the phone, “Hahaha, alright bye.”

“Claire, there is an emergency. An animal has escaped the government prison,” I squeamishly announced with fright.

“Really? Well I'm sure we'll be fine” Claire cheerfully responded. I couldn't believe her indifference toward us being in danger.

When we were about 15 minutes away from the party, Claire wanted to take a shortcut to the school following a dark path in the woods. I paused. It was foggy and the smell of wet wood swirled around like a mini tornado. The only light present was a street light on the other side of the path. I refused to move.

“Come on scaredy-cat,” Claire teased as she entered the path. Right as she said it something from the darkness jumped on top of her. I stood there in shock as I heard Claire's gut-wrenching screams.

Then all of a sudden she popped right up from underneath the creature laughing hysterically

“Gotcha” she joked, still laughing.

When the creature rose from the ground and took off its headpiece it was Ethan, Claire's friend. I couldn't believe they played such a cruel joke on me knowing how easily frightened I am. Storming off with

anger, I headed home through the park, alone. I arrived safely at my house realizing there were no cars in the driveway. But then I remembered, I was supposed to stay with Claire and her family for a couple days since my parents were away on a business trip. I still had my cross body bag with me so I got my house key out and opened the front door. Usually, when I open the door, it chimes because we have an alarm system but it didn't this time. I looked through the house, everything looked normal. But when I got to the kitchen, there was glass everywhere.

"Hello, is an-n-n-ny-one here?" I yelled nervously. Hearing no response, I went into the family room but astonishingly I saw a bunch of wires cut from the alarm system. I quickly called my dad to see if the house was like this when they left, but he didn't pick up. Then suddenly the house lights went off. The only light I had was from my phone notifying me that Claire was sending a message, "Why aren't you picking up? I'm sorry for scaring you. We don't have to go the party if you don't want to."

Right when I was about to respond, another alert came up. It read "Attention all citizens of Washington D.C., we have reason to believe that there is a man controlling the movements of the creature, having it to break into people's homes, to rob and kill them. If you feel unsafe in your community seek out a public building or shelter. If you do please, lock all doors and windows."

I quickly ran to all of the doors and windows and locked them. I ran down the steps to the basement and locked them as well. While there I turned to dad's hunting weapon closet. Right as I was about to open the closet door, I heard a window shattering. I quickly tried to turn my phone on to call the police but it died.

"Ugh, why now?" I winced.

The squeaky noise of the floor got closer and closer and closer to the basement door. I quickly walked into the unlocked closet, all the guns and knives made me very nervous. I picked up the smallest gun I could find. Then I heard a man's voice saying "Go get em boy." The creature roamed around the basement sniffing. I could see its beady red eyes glowing in the dark from the closet door jam. I could tell that the creature knew I was in the closet because it kept sniffing near the door.

“Find anything?” the man asked as he walked towards the closet getting ready to open it. I didn’t know what to do so I shot the gun up toward the ceiling. The creature immediately busted through the door. I fell back and hit my head on one of the racks.

I could feel myself drifting away. Then there were two gunshots, the creature fell to the floor and so did the man. I tried to see who shot them but I passed out. When I finally opened my eyes, Claire was looking down at me.

“Where am I?” I asked.

“You’re in the hospital,” Claire comfortingly responded.

“But how did I” I was about to ask, but I was interrupted by the news on the television in the room.

“Teenager Kiara Wilson was home alone when the escaped convict, James Peoples, and his trained creature, killer, entered her home. Right before the creature could attack the young teen, her best friend Claire arrived on the scene. Using a handgun from the Wilson closet armory, she shot both intruders in a desperate effort to save her friend from harm.”

Jehlani Wilson, 14
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

What Have I Done?

You see I had this longing sadness inside me, and the only way I could think to stop it was to end it all. The sun will still rise and the stars will still shine when I am gone, so why stay? Sure, I have my few friends who care just a small bit, but I am tired of this empty feeling crawling inside me at any moment my mind is not distracted by something else. My thoughts are nonstop. They haunt me every second of everyday, and never seem to leave me alone. I cannot seem to escape my own mind. Would those few people be sad? Sure, even though I am confident that they would be fine the next day. My entire existence would be forgotten in just a month at most.

This is the end of Renesmee Slyther. I wiped a tear as I unscrewed the cap to the pills. I swallowed each one at a time, and soon everything began to fade to black. Happiness was mine at long last, but then something happened.

I woke up, but I saw myself on my bed dead. Was I a ghost? That seemed like the most astute answer for the moment because surely I was not alive. I heard the front door of my house open. My parents and younger brother were home. Now they would see me lying there, lifeless. My mother called my name to tell me she was home. When I failed to respond, she casually knocked on my door. I still did not respond. She entered my room and thought I was sleeping, but after shaking me for minutes that seemed like hours, she knew. Tears like waterfalls fell down her face. My father came in to see what was going on, and as he saw me, he froze right in his tracks. My brother was next, and he saw me, dead. What have I done?

The date on the calendar was just about two months since I had left. As a ghost, I realized I could move through time, but unlike any horror movie, walls were not walkways.

The next person I saw was Sean. He was my neighbor and closest friend, and now I was sitting as a ghost right in his room. He had not left the house in months. He was an empty hollow of his former self. There was no soul in him, just an empty shell of what was once my best friend. He hugged the soft wool sweater I had left at his house the last time I had come over. As I stayed in his room, sitting on the very edge of his bed, I watched. He would not cry. I saw on his desk a pamphlet for therapy. I put him into this state. I

have killed my best friend. I brought him the same pain I had faced before. What have I done?

The next person I saw was the girl in my science class who had bullied me for years. She was sitting in a mental hospital. There were scars on her wrists, and she was sitting in her bed shaking and crying. The cruel girl who I had once faced was gone. Her bright smile had disappeared. I saw her hospital papers on a desk nearby. I had usurped her happiness in an attempt to create my own. She had tried to commit suicide herself.

“All my fault...all my fault,” she whispered to herself over and over again. I had caused this pain to her. What have I done?

I ventured back to my home, invisible to the people I passed on the streets. It was nothing like I had expected. My mother had not watered any of the plants in days. Her daughter was dead. The emptiness in her eyes screamed at me. It screamed and screamed, and I felt the guilt flood through me. Her eyes that had once contained deep blue oceans now held nothing at all.

My father was down by the river. He had my suicide note in his hand and an empty bottle of alcohol. Drinking the pain away was his coping method. He placed the note in the bottle and let it flow down the stream.

My brother's reaction is what hit me the hardest. At age thirteen, he had a mental breakdown. He had not eaten for weeks, besides what little my parents tried to force into him. His guitar was caked with dust. He used to play that guitar more than he did anything else in the world. My once lively family was now all hollow as can be. What have I done?

Someone who I never thought would care was my next person to see. The boy who was once my lover. I did not want to let him go. He was the mornings that reminded me I was alive, and he was the nights that showed me stars. He was the ray of hope in a sea of darkness, but he let me drown in that sea. I have never slept well since he left. The same boy who had ruined me, the same one who stole my smile, was now sitting in the guidance office, tears running down his face. He had lost his capability to talk. All there were were sputters of words that were not even complete.

“Sh-sh dead cau-cause of m-me,” he finally choked out. He was down there for weekly depression help. I noticed how much skinnier he looked. I had caused this. I brought this upon him. I gave him the sadness I had once felt. What have I done?

I went back to the morgue where my body was and began to scream at it. Screaming and screaming at it to come back. A dam broke inside me and panic rushed in from it. I had done something irreversible. Instead of fixing my sadness by killing myself, I had just let the sadness flood from me into the people who, in some way or another, most deeply shaped my life. I have brought sadness, emptiness, mental disorders, and heart break.

Yes, maybe the sun still did rise, and the stars still shone, but the people in my life could not find it in them to appreciate them without my presence. After I had killed myself, I tried to unkill myself, but soon I had realized my suicide was final. There was no going back. What have I done?



Grace Winchell
Hillsborough Middle School
Grade 8

Artwork:
Marycarmen Guardado, 19
Bound Brook High School
Grade 12

MANVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

The Un-United States

The land of the free

Or so they claim it to be The home of the brave

Where society's opinions dig our graves

A place where we get judged for what we have no control of

Hating people because of their gender, religion, race, social beliefs, all of the above

What a wonderful place to be!

Getting harassed for our gender or sexuality

We were told we could grow to be whoever we wanted to be So why do you know dislike me for the true me?

Hypocrisy

Perfect imperfections taking us over But our fight still isn't over

You call us the reckless yet you're the one who wrecked us

Destroyed

Toyed with

What a wonderful place to be!

Our lives controlled by our looks, height, size, things forced on us genetically

This is who we were meant to be

Why do we try so hard to please?

Please people who don't even care

Those who derive superiority from insulting the world Trying to grow into people who don 't even know we exist!

We idolize those who are more destroyed than the rest of society

Is this because of their money?

We are so compelled to be perfect when in reality no such thing exists anywhere because we are all destroyed

We destroyed ourselves and everyone around us

What a wonderful place to be!

Where basic human rights aren't a liberty

Killing us all with the stereotypes of our society

Literally .

We need to take a stand and come out from the shadows

We are not afraid and they need to know

We are who we are and we are proud

We will show our individuality, we will be loud

You can no longer control us We will fight it

The United States of America

But we're the furthest thing from united

Samantha Arroyo, 15
Manville High School
Grade 9

Devices of Delusion

Our eyes glued to scrolling screens, Thumbs are
hard at work. Brightness levels hurt our eyes,
But the words hurt even worse.

Little girls get their phones, Ballerina dreams are
crushed. Models they see on Instagram,
Make them feel they are not enough.

This leads to teens who stay out of touch, Some unaware
and some who think too much. Stress from conversations,
That no longer exist.
Blank stares replace the feelings technology has made me miss.

We walk down asphalt crossroads Indifferent
of where we are. Filtering not only pictures,
But people we've seen so far.

Generations X, Y, and Z,
Working together for the first time in what feels like centuries. Yet still
delayed by phone lines
And by spaces between characters Perhaps this is
a sign,
To break the technology barrier.

This media we call social, Is anything
but it's name.
What kind of life are we living,
If we are consumed by the idea of "internet fame?"

We become different people, If people at
all,
When we when we tweet blog or post to our story, We have built
a digital wall.

We have replaced heart to hearts, With a comment or group message. Chained to devices of delusion,

Our minds fill with an unrealistic image

What happened to the authenticity, Of the sound of a page turning. Where did it go,

The satisfaction of real world learning?

This new need to hide behind a screen of liquid crystal, Thoughts contained in cyberspace,

When words should be shot out like a pistol.

Carpal tunnel is not the only consequence, Deprivation from emotion and compassion, Connection with something other than wifi, All to please a stranger filled audience.

Let's change the future, log out, and unplug. Don't let data speed become a new drug.

Prevent baby boys and girls from idolizing photoshop creations, Stop yourself from becoming a victim of this corporation.

No matter the number of likes you receive, Or the amount of followers you have.

It is personal limits we must exceed, Without an "app,"

We must find our own path.

Maria Castro, 15
Manville High School
Grade 9

This Great Prison, Earth

They marched him forth to stand accused of his crimes, neither a man nor a woman, not a living being at all. Rather, an entity alight with bright swirls of colors of thousands of different variations, a creature of beauty but without any true shape to bind and imprison it, a boundless consciousness. "How do you plead?" the leader of the council asks, all those of his kind: bright with life

and vibrant with colors take in the hearing. Some of them are distinguished and possess only one color that deepens and lightens in shades over time. They hover over the back of the room, six floating nimbuses all trading thoughts with him from their distinguished spires.

"I have done no crime," he states simply. "I have done nothing wrong."

"You have been arrested and crimes have been placed upon you---serious crimes," the chairman, a red eddying bubble that turns from scarlet to pink and back to scarlet again, says. "Do you deny having any part in these doings?"

A deadly quiet settles over them, and at last the entity speaks and says: "I have done nothing I cannot deny doing, nor can I change what is done."

The court is silent again, the six floating godly colors weighing the accused's words carefully. "Very wellThis court finds you guilty of the crimes you have been charged with but refuse to recognize," the chairman states plainly and without any real emotion or conviction in his voice. "I charge you with going to the Great Sphere to serve out a period of one million and twenty-seven cubic ghuarlofs of time. Court---dismissed."

And then there was darkness, just as easily as there was light.

And the council said, "Let there be light, Let there be life."

As this was said, the round entity felt things sprout from his body. Small dots appeared on him like swelling welts. He could not see, but he could feel--he felt them moving, such tiny things, across his body, from one place to another.

The council continued, "The second suffering: you will live, while the life scattered across the surface of your body lives. And as you live, they will continue to prosper. And as they prosper, your body will be ravaged with the carnage and the aftermath of their life on your slowly decaying body, left in ruins, destroyed from outside in.

"Let there be light, let there be strife, let there be darkness," the council leader murmured, like a prayer .

"The final suffering: you will have your identity stripped from you, mined from you, burned off you, soiled within you. Your power, your very existence will cease. You will be frozen in place, the only movement remaining the spiral of your body to warm its sides from the nearby glow of a sun. You will be renamed."

"Dirt you shall be. Earth, you will be called."

"And then, eventually, you will die. You may become attached to the life on you, after so long a time, and with you, will come their destruction. And then, at that time, Earth will be no more."

Richard Chachowski,17
Manville High School
Grade 11

Roads

The car radio has turned to static as i drive on this empty road
I am left with this jar of unopened thoughts i never dared to open
Because most of the time hope dies out
And i am stuck at the funeral wishing i could find the path
Back to the person who i once was
Where everything was one big question
And i was so excited to take on the routes and figure out the answers
Yet i wasn't ready
I wasn't ready for all the bumps on the road
I wasn't ready for the world to fight back
To knock me so far into the dirt
With every other victim
Who was too curious, too pure, and too insensible
To see the world as it was

Samantha Cruz, 14
Manville High School
Grade 9

Hunt

He climbs up the ladder, his right foot first;
His daughter follows like she always has,
the two slide into their space and get settled for the wait,
placing their possessions on the floor in front of them.

She grabs the binoculars and her hazel eyes spot something on the hazel plain,
Her finger points and she grabs the bow,
slowly her father draws back the string
He hesitates,
“Ready.”
“Aim.”
“Fire,” she holds her breath.

They both pack up their stuff.
The sun has gone into it's cage and the moon is now glowing
on a
Trail of blood
which they stalk until they find their dinner.
He throws the animal over his shoulder,
his daughter follows as she always has.

They reach the truck,
the two slide into their space and get settled and go.

Nicole Dima,17
Manville High School
Grade 12

Monster Creation

The black house loomed above me as I walked towards the front door. It was Halloween night, and this was the last house in the neighborhood. My mom told me to stay away because it had been abandoned (and supposedly haunted) for several years, but I knew there was someone here; I saw them earlier today when I was on my morning run. As I was running by the house, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed someone looking at me through one of the attic windows. When I turned my head towards the house, the curtain whipped back so fast I thought I had imagined the whole thing. As I thought more on it, I became sure I had seen someone. I told myself that I would find out who lived there that night because it was Halloween. Anyways, back to now: I raised my fist up to the door to knock, but when my knuckles made contact, the door flew open. I looked inside and saw the most amazing sight a girl could see on Halloween; a humongous bowl of candy. I glanced around before cautiously entering the house.

I took only five steps before I realized something was wrong. The sliver of moonlight that lit up my path was no longer there and I could feel someone's foul breath on my neck. Slowly, I turned around, and what I saw chilled me to the bone. Above me stood a creature with tiny spikes that jutted out from all over its body. Its legs were shaped odd, like a kangaroo's. It had dark green skin, warts all over, and long, bloody fangs. My eyes trailed farther up his face, only to see bright, red eyes.

I fell back, and tried to make a run for it, but suddenly I was surrounded by death. I was standing in a room, my family members sprawled all around me lying in huge pools of blood. My mom was next to me, gasping for air. Hurriedly, I knelt down by her side, only to hear her choke out the words. "this is all your fault." In the distance, I could see the beast that brought me here. I could smell the stench of death he carried with him, and I could hear the nasty clicking noise he made with his tongue. At that moment, I realized that if I hadn't went to the abandoned house, my family would still be alive. With my mother still clutched in my arms, I decided that if they were gone, I had to go with them. I pulled the knife out of my mother's chest, and pushed it into my own. I laid down next to my mother and closed my eyes.

A white hot burning sensation ripped through my body, and I woke to find myself in the eerie house, my family nowhere to be seen. I tried to sit up, but there was a knife in my chest and a monster standing over me. The beast stared deep into my eyes as he swiftly knelt down to my level. I shuddered as I felt his slimy hand run over my face; it was probably worse than the pain I felt in my chest. The creature stood back up, and started chanting in this weird language. Without warning, I started to see the life drain out of my body; not

feel it, but see it. I could actually see my life leaving my body. It was in the form of a golden light, the louder the beast chanted, the faster the light drained. It was like sheep following their shepherd; the golden light moved towards the creature until it formed a ball in front of him. The beast looked into my near lifeless eyes before smashing the ball in his hand. "This is what you get for ruining my Halloween, you greedy child." Then, everything went black.

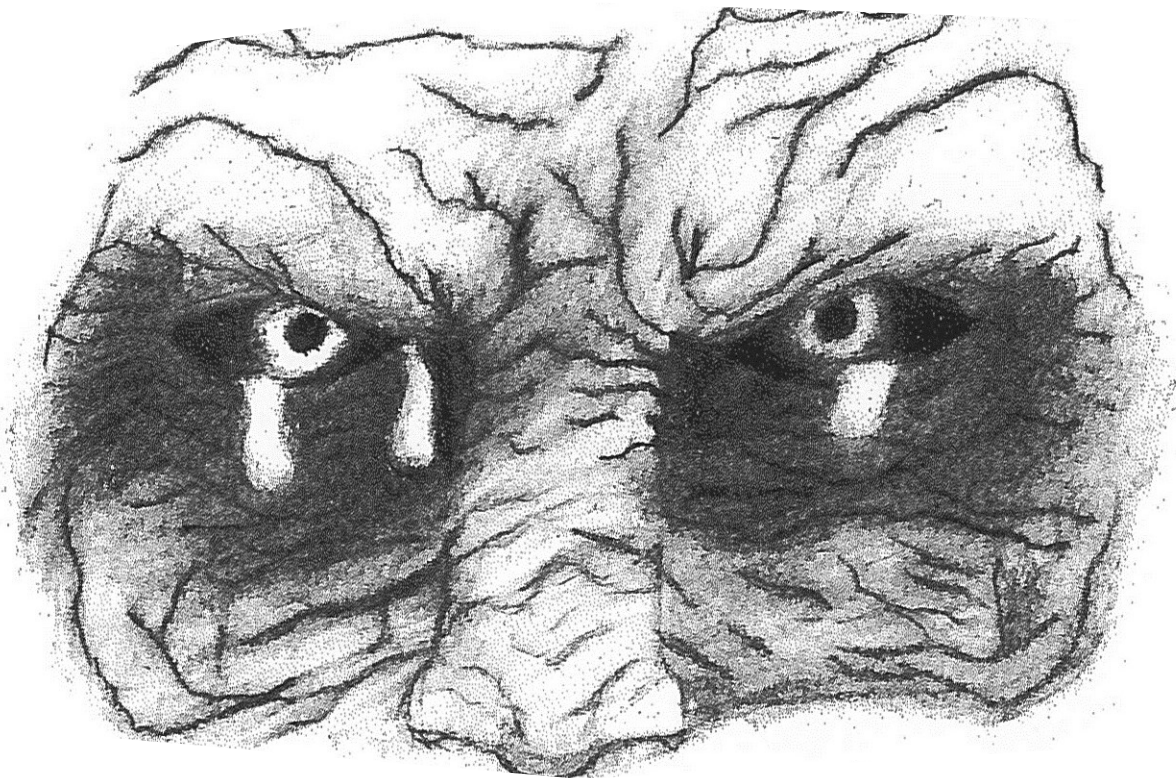
The next morning, the police had found yet another suicide victim in the abandoned house on Elm Street. Every year on Halloween, the police try to prevent people from going to that creepy house, but for some reason, their attempts were never successful. It was a legend amongst the oldsters of the community that on Halloween night, many years ago, there was a man who loved Halloween. He would sit on his porch all day in a scary monster costume, and give candy to the kinds he deemed worthy of his treats. If ever he came across a child who was rude or greedy, he would lock them up in his basement until they learned their lesson. One Halloween night, the mean children decided to take revenge on the man by setting his house on fire. As the house went up in flames, the man's screams could be heard all the way down the block. By the time the fire department arrived, it was too late. The fire melted his costume to his body, and he became a beast. For years, he thought of how to get revenge on the kids, but he didn't know what to do because he was dead. One night though, he discovered that the living could see him, but only on that night, for it was the day he was killed; Halloween. Every year since then, he would torment the kids with their worst fear, and suck out their souls. The police only ever found suicide victims because that's what the beast did; he tricked the kids into killing themselves. He was untraceable, he only ever 'existed' one night a year, and even then, he was able to get his victims to cover up what he'd done. Every year since, the beast has continued to torture the souls of the mean, greedy kids.

Monica Lallkissoo, 16
Manville High School
Grade 10

In a Booth

If fell into place
at Mashubo Bay Diner.
You got the pancakes,
I got the grilled cheese sandwich,
that was what we wanted

Connor Faleski, 18
Manville High School
Grade 12



Artwork:
Pedro Sibaja, 18
Bound Brook High School
Grade 12

I am a Feminist

I am a feminist
That word is dirty to some people
Stereotypes control their brains
When equality for all is what we want to gain
Do I hate men?
Am I insane?
Do I get offended by all the little things?

No

I stand for equality for all no matter their sex, gender, or race, and against any discrimination
"Oh, good, so you're not one of /those/ feminists"
The movement is not radical opinions and irrational actions
This isn't how you should perceive us
We are feminists not extremists
We want to help all people escape the stereotypical system that runs us
"Men must be strong"
"Women are weak"
For this isn't true
We can all love, paint, cry, embrace our femininity and masculinity
As well as we can all be strong, fight, and work
We are all complex individuals
Your gender doesn't decide what you can
Your gender doesn't decode your strengths or weaknesses
Rather it should let us embrace these and be proud of our individuality
This is what I stand for
I am a feminist.

Casey Firth, 15
Manville High School
Grade 10

What You Never Told Me So You Could Look Nice: Victim of a Broken Heart

You two stole together. ran together and very nearly slept with each other.
I never knew until long after,
but hey what are friends for?
It makes me think of what else I never found out.
Like the way she stole your breath away with a single kiss.
I thought I knew her and her ways and I obviously never knew you
because you need to break hearts to make someone whole.
I'm glad I was lied to because now I know what to believe .
I remember your words and how I felt with your hands cupping my face.

And I guess she's "just your friend",
the one I never knew.
You knew her as a child and now you're older and you see differently.
You were both young and naive, but now she is exactly what you need.
The girl with the long blonde hair and emerald eyes,
her lips probably look like a water bed and you probably feel like you're drowning

Now the time for running and stealing and times in the woods are coming back.
It's the changing of the seasons.
And I'm still here expecting a change of heart,
which I guess really makes me the asshole.
Because people change and I can't help it and neither can you .
I'll say I've stopped thinking of your eyes
But I'll mumble your name at night after crying in my sleep,
I'll dream of your hands caressing her body.
your fingers tracing her curves.
It seems like a switch flipped off in your head and I don't blame you
I was never exactly what you were looking for.

We were supposed to be friends
But I guess that can't happen when I hate you, but I'm still desperately in love with you
Maybe it's the idea of you, but I'll never get the chance to find out
Right now it's about two months after us
and I want to talk to you, but friends are supposed to actually answer.
not disappear without a trace.
But hey, what the hell are friends for?
I'll never know, at least not from you.

Tamara Hidalgo-Cruz, 15
Manville High School
Grade 10

Drowning

there's this feeling
when your lungs get tight
and they begin to bum
and when your head aches so much
it feels like it's going to explode
you can't suck in a breath
and your heart is pounding out of your chest
you aren't completely below the surface yet
you are still fighting
but when you are you see so much
you see a whole different world
you see a world of quiet and harmony
a world of color and adventure
a world you have never thought of seeing before
as you look around you ignore the pain
you just focus on the beauty
you want this peace
you want this pain in your head and lungs to disappear you begin to want to disappear
you finally allow the fluid to enter your lungs
you feel the tranquility of your surroundings nothing hurts anymore
when you realize that you are finally happy
that's when everything goes black

Brooke Hoodja, 14
Manville High School
Grade 9

I want to, but I Shouldn't

I don't know how I do it,
allow myself
to feel this way about a girl—
I do not know.

It makes me afraid,
to fall in love with her
and begin
to wonder
daydream
imagine
her in my arms.

If I tell her, "I really like your dress,"
and she says, "Thank you,"
does it mean she wants me?

In other words,
I get a little creeped out.

My mom once said,
"Love is like the wind,
you can't see it but you can feel it." I want to feel her.

Jordan Kassick, 18
Manville High School
Grade 12

Lost in the World

My thoughts went through a twirl.
I'm lost in the world.
A place so big and loud.
I'm overtaken and wowed.
My silence is the only thing I have to say.
So I run so far away.
I'm lost in the world.

I'm lost in a storm.
It's my thoughts and it ain't really warm.
They're light as day yet, the night is dark.
Truth is the storm is emotionally stark.
Does anyone even hear or see.
I know no one feels the cold sheer.
I'm lost in the world .

These thoughts needed to be in translation.
Before I start speaking to the whole nation
It's all out of the fear of being appalled.
The very thought of it makes me want to bawl.
Failure is a strong type of pain.
The worst part is the what still says, the rain.
I'm lost in the world .

Snehel Kunjumon, 16
Manville High School
Grade 10

Surprise

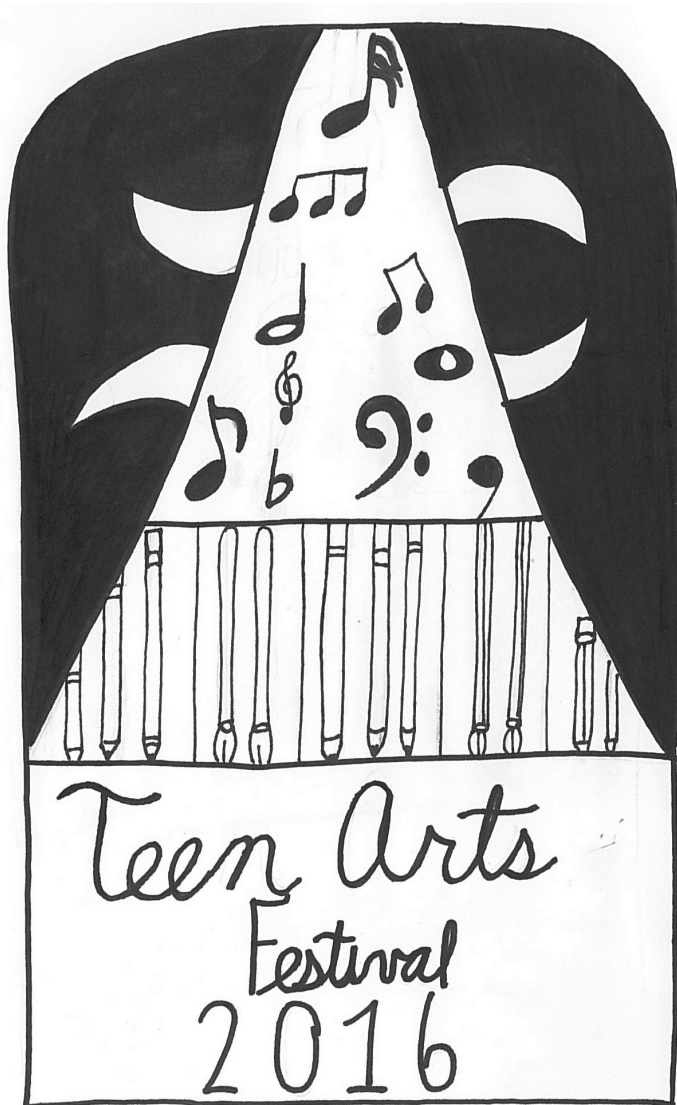
Three months ago today he left-
said it was him, not me.

Three months of constant calling
texting, waiting, losing hope,

and then he finally called back,
to ask me to go to dinner

so I can meet his new girlfriend.

Megan Mack, 17
Manville High School
Grade 12



Artwork:
Natalia Jimenez, 14
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 8

Victim to my Own Choices

I was insane, oblivious to the pain I was causing. They were Abel I was Cain, only seeing fog when they would see rain as it was falling. When saying sorry once, that was my initiation for becoming a saint. Calling myself an artist, but not even owning a can of paint. I was not the victim but the villain, they were Batman, and I was Bane.

In school, I called myself a victim, even when I hit 'em, with vicious words and punches but called it a joke. The "nerds" who I would crack at, the knowledge I had a lack at. I was a knock off soda brand, them being a bottle of Coke. Why should an average bloke like me stoop so low to just put on a show.

Judging like Simon Cowell, and then complaining of needing a towel, for my cries. I didn't know my own power, building up this tower, high above the heavens, so at my finest hour, I was high above the lies. But one day, like the chapels of the church made for God, he knew we were frauds, so lightning struck us back down to reality. School has ended.

How was I to know that I was the one who oppressed them, all the while it caused a mass depression . I was blinded by this false hope of myself being a savior, but instead made them think they were a failure. I was insane, oblivious to the pain I was causing all while going along with this mainstream feeling of agony.

Those nerds, going to college in herds, get to receive an education. While a vile man like me, unable to believe in a democracy, was left alone while those bullied souls led the nation. In the end the only thing that I had was me, myself, and I or as others called it; an abomination.

A glitch in the system, was what they were called. The virus to kill their spirit was all I could be. Only when they saw through the tricks could they become better people than I ever hoped to be. Making them mope was all I could to better myself in my own eyes.

But now I'm lying on my deathbed, reviewing the years, covered in tears, and finally realizing that it was my fault. So as I take my last breath full of despair, lonely because no one is here, I finally have the key, to this already unlocked vault. The only thing that could have saved me was to admit, that it was all my fault. In the end all I was, was a victim to my own choices

Johe Mayhuire, 14
Manville High School
Grade 9

Silent June

I analyze.
It could just be the part of me that wants closure,
or a reason--
the part of me searching for a distinct end,

looking back at old conversations,
way back in January, right before
everything fell apart.

Did I just miss something?

I've caught myself
far too many times,
subconsciously going back
to re-read each word,
look between the lines,
wondering if there's some fine print
that's just too small for my naked eye.

I heard that it takes
twenty-one days to
break a habit.
But, then why am I still here
all these months later,
with my own damn heart waiting in my inbox?

Ashley Michalski , 17
Manville High School
Grade 11

Lord of the Flies: Poetry Collection

Sunlight and laughter
Belly Flops in the ocean
Unknowing of sin

He was a peculiar child
Who was different- eyes bright, face mild
He saw what they couldn't
And listen they wouldn't
What a wonder they went wild

Each day they surrendered another piece
Their souls they gave to the beast to keep
The fear captured their minds, wounding them tight
So they could no longer think straight
All thought revolved around raw fear
The need to be stronger, more powerful,
The need to defeat
They gave up their sense and their goodness
Innocence and loyalty, shattered
It possessed them, made them do things
kill
The light was stripped from their hearts
Only iniquitous darkness remained
Each day, they were less themselves
Until their souls were for the beast
To keep

Kayla Molesko, 16
Manville High School
Grade 10



Artwork:
Karinna Martine, 14
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 8

Facing the Wild

I open my eyes from the darkened abyss I was held captive from,
Feeling the fresh breeze blow against my coffee colored fur and this slum.
I stand from my four legs while the white specks of snow blanket over my furry body,
Still tired, lazy, hungry and I feel like a zombie.
I roar like a tiger and my razor sharp nails scratch my belly,
As I was scratching, the scent of dirt and mud lay on me, making me smelly.
Mouth dry as a desert and air warm as a beach on a hot summer day,
Left alone in the wild without mother is at my dismay.
Two years gone, the conclusion of my childhood, is what makes my gut twist,
Soon enough, I'm going to have to move to see through the darkened mist.
To what the wild holds, and what it gives,
Makes me feel that it's not so bad.
I walk to the end of the cave, and light shines over me,
Blinded at first but it took a quick second to adapt to the light.
What I see on Mother Earth makes me smile,
Big green oak trees, and beautiful
Blue Jays fill the sky.
I walk to experience more of the scenery,
While dandelions fill the air and the fresh breeze blows my hair.
After much of exhibiting mother nature, I encounter a stream of water,
I gently place my nose over the stream until popped out a wild otter.
I roar and the little animal panics to only go under water,
I remain afraid and I begin to totter.
I remained motionless and perplexed by the refreshing stream,
I come to end to drink fast and to sprint out of here.
I regain my breath as hunger fills my stomach,
I realize that I'm going to have to hunt for food as I'm walking over a hummock .
I feel hopeless and lifeless since mother isn't here,
I feel like crying for help since loneliness is all I fear.
I pass endless trees and encounter many animals,
Animals from birds to wild deers.
They fear me but I fear the too,
I sit near an oak tree and I burst into tears.
I'm lost like a child and scared like a baby,
Not only that I feel so shaky.
As I sit there to experience failure, two tiny legs landed on my furry leg.
A blue jay! I exclaimed, but why though?
It then spoke out, " Hello furry guy, don't mind me!
I'm just here to say don't be afraid, there's more to see!
There's no time for crying, it holds you back,
Learn from your mistakes and please don't slack.
Life might be hard, but don't let it outweigh you ,
Be happy and stay true to yourself.
Remember, it's not about what you've lost,
It's about what you've gotten back!"
The Blue Jay flies away, and I get up to fight,
I walk some more until I encountered a pot of gold.

My eyes soon lay upon a bush,
Filled with mouthwatering berries and glorious roots.
I walk over to it and eat like a madman,
I eat what I desire and much as I can.
The berries flood my stomach and make it bloated,
This kicked out my hunger, I just noted.
I growl and I stop for a moment as I'm tired already,
I could barely stand, hardly steady.
After the appetizing meal, I lay on my back and encounter the orange filled sky,
Seeing how beautiful the world is, oh how the day flies by.
How much I dearly miss my mother,
For all her caring I wish I had the chance to say thank you .
So much great memories I try to cover,
For when I remember them I get teary and blue.
The more I think about those times, I get stronger,
The stronger I am, I will survive longer.
How the day went by made me think that being alone isn't horrid,
It's just the feeling of loneliness and life being morbid.
I try not to let reality change and horrify me,
Instead I'll stand strong to keep on fighting and stay esprit.
I get up as the sun is making its way out,
And the moon begins to fly over the horizon
I continue to walk the earth to face my fears,
Because nothing could stop me from passing the frontier.

Oscar Ruiz, 15
Manville High School
Grade 9

Puddles

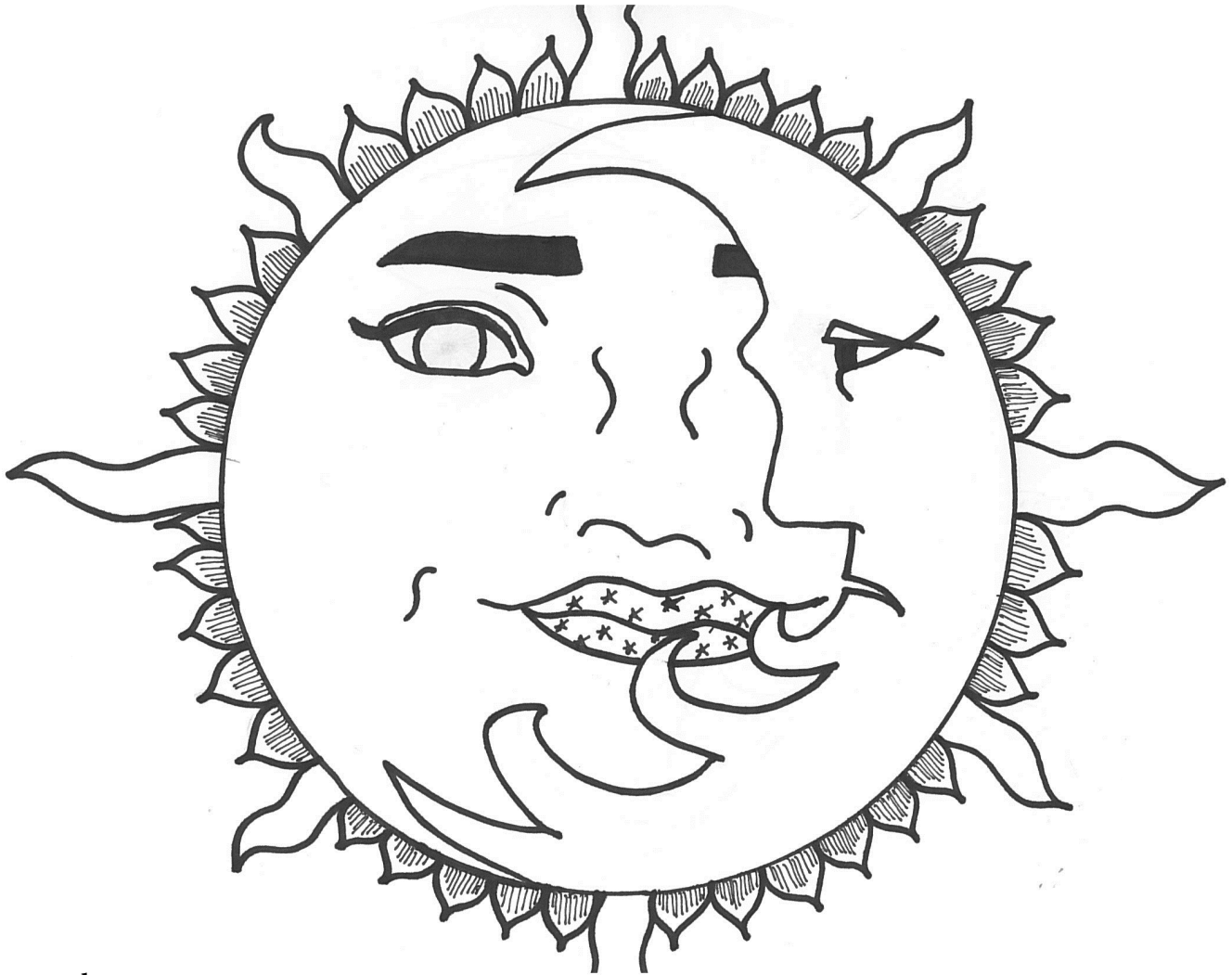
"What do you want?"

is a simple,

loaded question,

that squishes like wet socks.

Scarlett Simpson, 17
Manville High School
Grade 11



Artwork:
Lesly Garita, 13
Alexander Batcho Intermediate School
Grade 7

Autumn Fades

Ebbing autumn day, her hair struck by the sun's ray
pastels saturate and stimulate my brain,
my desire ignites and has no delay,
the sight of her, cleaving a deep chest pain.

We move together, my hands on your hips,
time wades slowly staring into your eyes
sipping red wine, staining your beautiful lips,
No matter what I do, you seem to dim.

What can I do? my love is so profound.
Despite my greatest effort, you still leave with him
There is nothing left, I'm completely worn down
My would-be love, who I don't wish to share,
our unrealized future, will be my despair.

Jake Tokarzewski, 18
Manville High School
Grade 12

The Dead Sea

He continues to teeter on the brink of extinction
hiding in the shadows of his waning existence.
He feels the fragility of his life,
a large and delicate vase that tremors on the edge of dusk.

In the morning he straps on his trousers
and fashions a tie around his neck.
Cloaked in his chameleon suit,
he steps into their world, hoping to blend in.
But to them, the necktie adorns him like a slack noose-
waiting to be taut.
To hang on the limbs of trees,
a black berry rotting in the sun's heat.

He speaks into the night, to the ancestors
who perished, at the end of gun barrels and branches,
whose darkness bled a crimson wine for their feast.

He finds refuge in the shattering and cracking of thunder,
for he knows man's fire will strike long before God has begun to clap.
But eventually the electric silence will suffocate,
as night devours daylight.

The years creep down his spine,
as the weight of mortality cripples his back.
He feels the hammer of gravity,
drilling him into the earth.

Death is rapping on his door,
as the sea swallows the shore.
Only when he is six feet deep
in the comfort of a casket,
will he finally exhale a sigh-
of relief.

Victoria Wanjohi, 18
Manville High School
Grade 12

PURNELL SCHOOL

A Regular Day at Soccer

The day is blinding bright and warm to a fault as we sweat rivulets down our backs and in oily pools around our socks and under our pits and brows. Pre-practice I ran to Ms. Miller's house to get my dusty cleats and shinguards, pull them over my socks, and run to the altar atop the lesser field. My route is long; I go every day from my dorm—I remember to bring my walking shoes some of the time—to the house and then cut around to the high field. Most days I make it by 4:15 but sometimes I get there and the girls are on the line and I still need to equip. The high field is up on a beautiful plateau, offering no trees, no protection from the bright disc in the sky. The trees on the sad lower field circle around but never quite reach it up to here, the flat plain with the rich grass.

The grass on the lower field is patchy and sparse, littered with chestnut carcasses and rabbit droppings. Our cleats have spiked it, worn it down. Sometimes I feel like my spiky shoes and armored shins make me a sort of space marine, a powerful member of an elite task force, but then I remember that my role on the team is more akin to that of a Star Trek redshirt, a warm body to be deployed shortly before getting killed off by some raging space beast. The William Shatners and Leonard Nimoy's are our starting eleven, then come the girls who are benched but still get good chunks of playtime. I've calculated it and I'm relatively sure I get the least.

Today, like most days, I play wide in our drills. We're doing that one offensive drill that's my favorite, I don't know if there's a name for it but there's a center and then the two supports on either side and then the wide wings running alongside them. It's beautiful. We're a unit, a phalanx of Alexander, a pride of hungry lions. We just run; I rarely get the ball but I watch my pack and run on the edge, ready to support, ready to hunt, now go go go *go* and burst and explode and watch the ball then fly or sputter. It doesn't even matter if it goes in. Sometimes we scrimmage, and the teams are always the same. Starting Eleven versus other. From time to time I have the sinking feeling that the rest of us are merely practice for the starters, an obstacle course of people to get them primed for the games.

We're scrimmaging right now, and I have the luck of being the wide facing the sun. It shines in the right corner of the field, and I'm on the left. When we do the offensive run I like, I'm blind. My right eye's bad, near-sighted, and the shiny sun compounds the problem. There is only a flash to my right. I wish I had worn my sunglasses and hat. I can't see the ball, I have to know it's there, I hope it doesn't land on my side so my team can't see me fumble for it like a mole in the dark. I see small blurry shapes, Ms. Miller's head, Matille's blond ponytail. Fuzzy and indistinct, but there. I keep my head down and run the drill from memory, staring in a straight line, occasionally squinting to my right. Feet pounding on grass, breath spit into air. Soon it's

over and I'm fine. For the rest of the practice, when I think no one is looking, I casually put a hand to my left eye and stare with my right. I can see Mr. Warlick's hair but the contours of his face are blurry, like I'm watching him on a broadcast from the eighties. They are all Picasso people.

I feel a dull strain in my temple, where I imagine the ligaments in my eye muscles connect to my brain. I imagine what my right eye might look like in a few years, pale and empty. I wouldn't mind losing my vision if I could trade it in for something like Odin, who sacrificed his eye and gained infinite wisdom and power in exchange. Maybe if I lose my right eye completely I'll get sonar or extra taste buds to make up for it biologically, but I'd rather wish for guaranteed success, prosperity, and wisdom. I'd also ask for a healthy dose of power; I wouldn't voluntarily let go of my eye for cheap! I picture in my mind's eye Monet, whose paintings became blurrier and more impressionistic the worse his vision failed. I wonder if the world will look like his indistinct water lilies under a bridge once my eye is through. Already the leaves on the autumn trees near the field look like scattered patterns when I peer at them with it. Practice is over now. I push these thoughts out of my mind, take off my cleats, take off my shin guards, put on my walking shoes, and go home.

Erika Fresen, 17
Purnell School
Grade 11

Shoes

Those tears you're crying, i've experienced them too.
I've had many family of my own come and go,
therefore i know what it is like to be in your shoes.
The shoes of friends, family, and loved ones.

Now, i've never had the chance to meet beautiful Hidy,
but i feel connected to her loved ones in every way.

I know you don't know me,
but our hearts are forever touched .
I know i'm not close with your friends or family,
but i've been there in their shoes.

I feel all the sensations they are feeling,
because i am feeling them too.
In the present,
right now,
and furthermore.

Hidy, i know your journey has begun,
in a place of warmth and comfort.
I hold you close with my heart,
and there you will remain.

Gianna Galdieri , 17
Purnell School
Grade 11

Here's to the wait

*We ache, selfishly and we
crave; vigorously
always waiting for one another.
Love stings, like a fresh cut love
hurts, like a slap to the face
love stains, like wine
It seeps, churning into tar spoken from
the mouths of liars,
who had declared that you mattered.
Speaking in a flustered delirium, as if
they were dedicated,
as if it meant something, both
kind and savage*

*Not a touching forgiveness, but a
raw selfish reality
a gut wrenching stinging feeling
a penetrating sharpness*

*I want to know
what does it sound like when it's not raining; what does
it look like when you are gone
and I'm still here,
at 3 am
screaming;
crying;
counting my bruises like stars connecting them
back together like constellations
is this really what it feels like
to be all alone*

*to be drowning in your own loneliness.
In your own man made darkness realizing that
maybe i am the darkness after all*

*We don't talk about our hollowed out bodies. About
how that hollowness becomes magnified; amplified,
and i know that i have no other choice but to
surrender;
to give in once and for all; and
listen.*

Blood

*sinking into my bed sheets; onto
my finger tips,
drying and crusting underneath my nails from
the words spelled out in blood Savage
reminders, that you
don't get to forget the feeling pain.*

a stain that doesn't fully fade

*Im not searching for myself
at the bottom of every empty glass,
I'm no longer listening, waiting to hear
that piercing hoarseness to come up in my own voice.*

*It was something of tedious task of meticulous execution.
My senses are no longer radioactive serving a
life long sentence in progress.*

*Not every crack needs to be acknowledged Not every
tear will become a pond;
Not every mistake will become a teacher; Stop
pretending that it will.
Life hurt and we are all a mending wound;
that is a hideous lie
It's a form of denial and ignorance
An unforgiving torture that this world loves to taunts us with that
"time heals things",
you see if that were really true Each day
you would feel a little bit better
I am still waiting, still hoping
for those waves that don't engulf me that
don't remind me of drowning,
for the wine the doesn't stain and
instead taste rather sweet.*

*So here's is to me, to holding out, to
holding on.
.To waiting Here
is to the wait*

Lexi McDonald, 17
Purnell School
Grade 12

Hello

Hello. I am here in need of some guidance.

My mind is moving like a motor bike going 150 miles per hour that is driving along a busy highway. I just don't know what to do, where to go, who to speak to, or even what to eat. People say, "the sky's the limit", but I need to know what's in the sky to choose from? I'm the type of person that need clear options. So, someone advised me to speak to you. I have no clue if you're listening or if you have the ability to give me an answer but here it goes.

I'm at a point in my life where change is about to occur. That's right, change. Me, having a soul full of obsessive compulsive disorder, personally means I hate change. I like to stick to a certain routine, especially when I have responsibilities and obligations. Unfortunately, I cannot stop this change. I guess I have to accept it. But as I spend just a few hours in bed, my mind begins to wonder among the stars. People say, I over think things and always question things that are going "so well". However; I believe I'm just reevaluating my decisions. There's nothing wrong with that, right?

I guess the real reason I'm reaching out to you, who ever you are, is because I'm at a loss for words. Words that I once had in my life because things were going "so well". Everything was set in place.

Think of it like an office desk. You have your perfectly charged laptop placed at the center of your desk opened to a word document that reads your next plan of action for tomorrow's business meeting. You have your plastic spinning utensils holder that houses ink pens, high lighters, sharpies, and pencils. Beside that utensils holder, you have your planner that is marked with all of your important events and tasks to conquer, and just to the right of your laptop is your steaming coffee that keeps you well awake and focused.

Now picture yourself shutting the lid to your laptop to take a quick bathroom break while the offices' cleaning lady comes and vacuums all of the cubicles. Just moments later, you arrive back to your perfectly organized desk and you notice your steaming coffee is on the ground with liquid pouring onto the freshly vacuumed carpet. Your pens and highlighters are out of ink, your planner is nowhere to be found and a picture of your dream future with a big "STOP DREAMING, GET REAL" sign is your new screen saver on your 3% charged laptop. That's where my body currently lays, staring in awe at my unorganized desk waiting for someone to guide me through the following steps to fix and prepare everything back to where it should be.

Hello. I am here in need of some guidance, and a new cup of coffee.

Natalia Nistico, 18
Purnell School
Grade 12

ABC

Awaking, I wasn't sure where I was, I looked around. Bathroom! Caught off guard, I sat up. "Damn it" I yelled as my hand fell into the toilet. Ew, gross, what was I doing here. Fact checks, okay I was out with my friends. Great, I thought where are my friends. "Hallie, Jamie?" I whispered. Just my luck, the one time I decided to go out instead of studying! K. I don't know where I am or where my friends are. Looking for them is the first thing that is on my mind. My watch says it's 10am. Now I'm missing class, great. Occasionally, I whisper yell there names still not knowing where I am. Preparing to exit the bathroom I hear a noise! Quietly at first just a little mumble. Racing out to see Hallie lying on the floor. Suddenly I look around and Jamie is no where. Tough luck, I hear a deep voice say. Unique situation we have ourselves in. Very slowly I turn around to see. What I thought would never be possible. "Xander!" Yet in all my years somehow, how could I not see this. Zap!

Nina O'Brien, 18
Purnell School
Grade 12



Artwork:
Maria Barros, 18
Bound Brook High School
Grade 12

What makes you who you are?

What makes you who you are? Everyone has something that they love to do and they enjoy doing it. I have always had sports in my life since I was a little child. I wasn't your average little girl who played with Barbie's as a child. I was more into sports and watching sports games especially basketball. When I was little all that mattered other than going to school and family was basketball and sports. I would always watch sports with my dad because we are the sports fanatics in the family. It became a tradition in our family. My dad always supports me and comes to the games. He pushes me to be the best that I can be and he teaches me how to become better. My love of Basketball started when I was little by watching games with my dad. I started playing basketball in a YMCA basketball league when I was in fourth grade or fifth grade till eighth grade. I went to basketball camps in the summer to become better. I tried out for my middle school team but I didn't make it because they picked favorites. I was so upset but I knew that I couldn't give up and stop trying. I was very upset but I would not give up and I would keep trying.

When that little girl grew up she never stopped trying and eventually she made her high school team. I never stopped putting in the work and practicing my shots on a day-to-day basis. I was so happy that I made the team because I love playing basketball. I have been playing in high school since freshman year and now I'm a senior I want to play in college. My dedication and hard work to become better has never left me. I always focus on achieving my goal of playing in college. I always put 100% in practice and when I play

I will never forget the love I have for the game. Basketball is such a big part of my life and I will never stop. The lesson that I leave you with is never give up on something that you love to do even though you had a failure in your life. I have grown as a person because of my love for basketball. Basketball is my life.

Sarah Crouse, 18
Purnell School
Grade 12

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