

Well, I Shouldn't Say No...
An Anthology of Poetry and Prose

Composed by the 2015 ADVANCE Creative Writing Course

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My name is **Caroline Adkins**. I'm fourteen years old, a second year in the ADVANCE program, and I'm about to go into the 9th grade. I live in Shreveport, Louisiana and will attend Caddo Magnet High School in the fall. I love to draw, read, and write in my free time. I also enjoy playing soccer and lacrosse. I aspire to be a forensic pathologist and hope to go to Harvard University for college. I hope you enjoy our collection.

Wren

A Carolina Wren sits in her cage—
slender spiraling tendrils soar,
sparsely coated in flaking silver leaf,
parts of which scatter intricate patterns
of reflected moonlight across her body—
a prison of her own creation built for her with sturdy hands, bar by fragile bar.
So long ago—or so it seems in her short life—
so long ago that she was broken,
tiny and helpless in the unforgiving world.
A boring little bird in the vast abyss of exceptionality, beauty, wonder.
And so broken was this little wren,
that when sturdy hands scooped her up into precious safety,
she felt—briefly—the brush of beauty
against her feathered breast.
So much did (omit?) she craved this warmth
that she eagerly agreed to her beautiful prison.
Then a place of gleaming metal
encrusted in jeweled hues
more vast than could be understood in her young mind.
For in this cage she too was exceptional, beautiful, and a wonder.
So long has she been here, remaining pinioned by her own mind.
The world has grown in around her.
Leafy arms coax her out, Reaching through the bars.
“Jump”
“Jump”
“You will fly”
“Jump”
But she cannot jump
It has been so long since she has flown. Too long.
And now, trapped by the fear of falling,
She stays in her beautiful prison.

Pen Ink

For I will consider my pen my weapon.

For equally it is my ecstasy, my peace, and my salvation.

For in itself, specialness is not a priority.

For it gives the ability to spill heart, body, and mind onto a receiving page.

For it is a savior to those trapped in their own minds.

For one object can spill forth the universe into essence.

For the collective subconscious flows like a river in pen ink.

For all of this, I will consider my pen my weapon.

The Story

Mountains that surpass the clouds reaching for the sky as infants reach for their mother's breasts.

Fissures that have no end — black, ominous masses — stretching downwards into a world which cannot be explained.

Plains of grass ever expanding, a cradle for the creatures that crawl within it. They are slave to the wind that never ceases.

Moonlight that streams through clouds, it lights the path for another world unseen by day-walkers who are not worthy.

A young girl with flowers woven in her hair trembles in the air as she dances, only a thought in a person's mind.

This is a story yet to be explained, a story that needs to be told.

No Longer

My love whose eyes are honey from the comb to sweeten bitter dewberries plucked from the vine.

My love whose skin is dark as dripping amber to trap the insect on its journey.

My love whose lips are flowers taunting bees in the summer heat,

Just one little taste they whisper.

My love whose hands are tough and scarred from tending a wilted garden through winter.

My love whose heart is a drum for a wren to dance to when she cannot sing.

My love whose body stands tall and broad, guarding the cherry blossoms from the wild summer storm.

My love who has become Atlas, holding the sky, never shaking.

Don't drop it. Okay?

My love whose smile is the lightning in a dark spring night —flashing, there, gone.

My love whose embrace is a circle of oaks sheltering the fawn from the world outside.

My love....who no longer loves me.

Fear

Fear feels like the last kiss goodbye.

Fear looks like his back as he walks away.

Fear sounds like shoes squeaking on a cold tile floor.

Fear tastes like salt tears streaming down a tiny face.

Fear smells like the last whiff of cologne clinging to your shirt the next day.

Sweet Dreams

I dreamed of a touch so strong, yet gentle.

I dreamed of finding joy in the sound of a voice.

I dreamed of a happiness I still seek.

I dreamed of a canvas painted in two colors.

I dreamed of a warmth to keep me safe.

I dreamed of tomorrow.

Graveyard Hymn

Broken glass on the soft earth
Alone here, but never alone,
They speak in tongues of earth and air
while resting here for reasons unknown.
Fading labels, do they matter?
Broken landmarks hide bones of life.
Seated on a stone, I speak to them,
Softly and plainly.
Across the ground are the others
Loud and uncaring.
What would it be like under the earth?
Would I get flowers?
No.

Chasing Cars

(Based on the song "Chasing Cars" by Snow Patrol)

The day had been long, time moving more slowly than a cranky child. Too long was the day, and now they were here. An old train car, rusted and covered in fading graffiti, abandoned on the tracks. There the seven of them gathered surrounded by pillows and blankets, the accumulation of years of long days. Two sat in the corner, sipping strawberry moonshine and letting their hands wander, not caring what was thought or said. One rested half-cocked against a wall, sipping a cheap beer and cradling a girl to his chest. She held a blunt loosely in one hand, taking drags when the moment felt right. The tall one stood, vodka bottle clutched in white knuckled hands, as he spilled his rant loudly into the night air. A girl sat, sketchbook balanced precariously, loosely etching out the figures around her as another boy lay next to her silent. In this place, time was still. In this place, together, there was peace. Here they were. Wasting time. Chasing cars.

Tinfoil Constellations and Cellophane Stars

Barefoot, dancing on a wooden earth is a whirling dervish of girl with flowers in her hair. As he watches, his fingers coax a tune — from a beat-up guitar — from which her tiny feet find their wings. Often they would be here, figures making their outlines in the world as the sun sinks below the horizon, painting the sky, red, orange, purple, blue; color fading to black under the wide eyes of a moon, wrapping a blanket of night around the dancer and her musician. In spring, they stay letting flower petals rain down on their heads. In autumn they sit on dense mats of leaves. In winter they perform through snow and sleet. In summer, they remain content in company, content in the sun, and content with each other. They play the game of counting stars high above, finding constellations one by one. Come together, count the stars. Be together, count the stars. They stay through the night, dreaming of sleep; yet, when morning comes, they count the moments 'til they stay awake again.

Figments of the imagination of a little girl, they dance eternally. And even now, sitting in class, she stares vacantly out of the open window and dreams of the dancer and her musician meeting again. Her notebook is askew on the desk, filled with the doodles of her mind. For so long, this is what has occupied her mind. In boredom or anger, sadness or pain, the dancer and her musician play, always reflecting the world. Now they rest, leaned against each other as the dancer stretches her tiny feet, preparing to dance through the hard day.

The bell rings and they're on their feet, ready to go. Little girls have no place in crowded hallways, so flashes of annoyance turn into harsh leaps, toes pointed like knives, and then into the next class where forgotten homework and angry teachers turn to spins ending in harsh falls over and over. Her poor little dancer will end the day bruised; perhaps tomorrow there will be a rest day. Impatient glances at the clock and bouncing legs become piques and jettes, arabesques and padashas. More leaps and then to lunch, where girl and imagination rest contentedly. Until the bell rings, which signals the release of the little girl from classes, her dancer remains restless. Then they both smile as the musician prepares his new performance. A bus ride home means a new melody, as beautiful as her dancer, spreading through her mind.

Home is quiet. The little girl moves quickly into her room to copy down the musician's melody before she forgets it. Finally, she prepares for the best part of the day. Two hours: the countdown begins. Her dancer warms up. Her musician warms up. One hour: she stretches out the tightness from the day. Thirty minutes: into the car, bag in hand. Ten minutes: the little girl goes into the studio where simultaneously she and her dancer lace up tiny pointe shoes around delicate legs.

This is where the real peace blooms, when she and her dancer move as one with the musician playing his tiny heart out. Three hours of peace until she had to return home. Night was falling. Her dancer and musician were figures against the sunset once again. She looked up at the dark blue ceiling from her bed, counting the tinfoil constellations and cellophane stars tacked high above her before closing her eyes for the night.

Jolie Boudreaux: I live in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I am 15 and I am going to be a sophomore at Saint Joseph's Academy and this was my second year at ADVANCE. I think one of my favorites of my writings is "My Friend Whose." I loved Creative writing so much; 10/10 cats would recommend. Thanks.

My Friend Whose

My friend whose eyes are glass stained light blue in the window of an abandoned chapel,
Whose eyes are water drops on leaves,
Whose eyes are light sunlight on waves.
My friend whose voice is like the wind and rolling tides.
My friend whose smile is a firefly's glow on a cool summer midnight.
My friend whose mind is a sailfish,
Whose mind is a fountain gushing crystal water with coins glittering at the bottom while
catching flyaway sun rays.
With words of light reaching to the forest floor in spindling spider web shapes,
With words of thunder.
Whose hair is a forest fire's smoke billowing into the clouds, twisting and turning and rising.
Whose freckles are snowflakes,
Whose skin is sea foam.

Four Different People - Four Different Sentences

Your cool blue eyes are filled with so much courage; you support all of us on your shoulders.
Your piano hands artfully dance through the air as you talk.
Your laugh is contagious, your knowledge of celebrities extensive.
Your mind connects with your pencil bound hand, sending it spinning, creating art that is envied.

I Walk Carefully Now

I walk carefully, squinting at my surroundings even though I know that it won't help. I had the smart idea to put my contacts in during the drive to school. We hit a bump. I had been told that my eyes were permanently damaged, and I would soon become completely blind in both. I now know that "soon" was sooner than I thought.

One morning, I opened my eyes and saw nothing. I knew then that I had seen my sister for the last time, my mother's smile, the weird look my dad gives me when I say something odd, my friends' funny faces and mouthed secrets from across the classroom about something the teacher said. All seen for the last time. No more exchanged glances, beautiful skies, sunlight shining through spaces in between tree leaves. I won't be able to see. Sure I have my other senses but I would give nearly anything to be able to see. To be able to see me. To be able to see my parents' faces when my sister walks down that isle.

Story of a Song

I know you can't hear me now that you are asleep, but I love you. I love you so much that I don't care that I have been driving the whole trip. I want to let you sleep; you probably need it. I turn down the radio for you, and with every bump, I curse the world, I curse the government. Don't they know that you are the most important? The money I give them should be used to fill the holes in the road before you so that you can sleep soundly. I guess they can't see your beautiful face, relaxed and content. I tell you I love you. You can't hear me, but I don't care. You know already. I gaze at your soft, serene features. I lo-BAM

This is How to Live

Always do your homework first; take the trash out on Tuesday but gather it on Monday; fix your posture when you walk; don't take so long to make up your mind; this is how you do the laundry; this is how you set the table; clean your room; this is how you sweep the floor; this is how you make a bed; do not wear those shoes; *why?*; because I said so; this is how you shake someone's hand; you wanna pierce your ears yet?; this is how you pose for the picture; this is how you cook; this is how you sew an end seam; never smack your gum; this is how you vacuum; this is how you sit; this is how you drive; this is how you dress; this is how you act; he's cute right?; this is how you smile; never forget to put on sunscreen; stop using the steak knife to cut the avocados; this is how you straighten your hair; while you're at it, straighten your attitude; this is how you eat your food; this is how you hold your knife; we are not getting a snake.

Dynamic Character

I didn't know I loved the aquarium until I needed to go somewhere else or I would explode,
I didn't know I loved light pink until I let myself embrace the girly stereotype,
I didn't know I loved shorts and skirts until I let go of my jeans.
I didn't know I loved my friends so much until I made the right ones,
I didn't know I loved colorful clothes until I shed my black ones like a butterfly from its cocoon,
I didn't know I loved so much music until I listened to it myself.
I didn't know I loved nature and raindrops on leaves and lighting like ink running through cracks
in broken glass,
I didn't know I loved life and animals and conversations,
I didn't know I loved so many things, until I let go of what everyone else thought I loved.

A New Perspective

I look through an empty green bottle like a telescope into the tree above me. Teacups dangle from the branches, clinking against each other softly, when a gust of Virginia wind catches them. I put them there.

It was my mom's idea, but I don't know where it came from. I don't know where any of her ideas come from. One day she came home with chickens. We have a giant oak in our backyard, and had always wanted to hang teacups from it, but never got around to actually doing it. We had the right string, but never the right teacups.

My mom had a different way of looking at things. She was an archeologist; she loved to explore. My dad is an architect. They were perfect together; anything my mom wanted to create, my dad could make happen. So, our garden was magical; the only thing left untouched was the oak tree. But our teacup project was not something my dad could just make happen. These teacups needed to be special.

My mom traveled a lot because of her job. She loved it. Sometimes she would take me with her, but I usually wouldn't be able to because I had to go to school. Every so often she would send home a teacup that she thought was important. Sometimes we would pick one out together, or I would find one with my dad. We were getting closer to having enough for the tree; we almost had the right teacups.

One time, she had gone on a trip to New Zealand and had sent a letter asking me if she should get someone to fly her in a hot air balloon to the excavation site; she thought it would be an adventure. She loved to be eccentric and make things as exciting as possible. I imagined her looking into the sky surrounding her and to the earth below, sandy curls blowing and bouncing with the wind. I could see her smile, thinking of how much she has to tell us. The sun shines on the soft brown skin of her outstretched arms, skin much like mine. Of course I said she should.

Later, running home from school, I was excited to see if she had sent me a teacup or a letter this time. I wanted to hear about the balloon. My dad beat me to the door from the inside and surprised me by picking me up and swinging me around in a hug. He made dinner and we waited for her letter together.

No letter from her today, only a letter for my dad in a uniform blue envelope. I sighed, "Dang it," then went to get ready for bed as my dad smiled at my reaction. As usual, I had already finished my homework at school, mostly because I don't really have any friends. I would if they knew sign language, but no one bothers to learn anything besides cuss words and insults. Sometimes they sign the insults to me and watch my reaction to see if they signed what they thought they had.

I am brushing my teeth when suddenly I hear my dad's anguished sobbing. I run into the living room and I see him with his head in his hands and tears running down his arms, the letter open on the table. I run over to him, crouch down so he can see my hands, and sign, "What is wrong," with shaking fingers. He doesn't look up but I can tell he saw what I signed because he starts shaking and more tears follow. Something is wrong; I have never seen him cry like this. I see the letter on the table and read over it. My blood goes cold. The toothbrush falls from my mouth to the floor. She is dead. Her balloon went down and crashed onto rocks. It's my fault.

There was a funeral, there were tears, I am guilty. I had to find the rest of the teacups on my own, without her. I strung them up with my dad's help. He is much better now that it has been two years, he isn't as happy as he was when she was here, but he is still happy. We are still here.

A few of my classmates added a new phrase to their sign language vocabulary to sign to me during class: "Sorry for your loss," but they soon forgot it. Eventually, things at school went back to how they were before, with the exception of a few people who now pity me but don't do anything about it. I still feel guilty, but I understand that she was happy when it happened. She would have wanted to die in that way if she had been given the chance to choose her fate. I continue the garden for her, for us.

A few nights ago, my dad was making dinner and he dropped a pot of noodles. It fell to the ground and noodles went everywhere. I ran in because I heard the loud noise, and slipped on the noodles then went toppling to the ground. I sat there dazed for a moment, and then my dad burst into laughter. I cracked a smile, and in that moment, we were both genuinely happy for the first time in a while.

I sit up from my cold grass bed, the back of my shirt damp from dew. I place the bottle down on the ground, stretch, clutch my knees to my chest, and look into the branches again. I am in my favorite place. I look over to the small shed behind me, once red, now a multi-color chaos thanks to my mom. It is beautiful. One of the chickens walks over and pecks at my weird socks bunched at my ankles, I love my socks. I can see everything from here — our two-story, light grey house with yellow shutters, the little vegetable garden now blooming with butterflies. Through the window I can see my dad drawing plans for the new building he is designing; he was promoted to his business's highest position recently. The gate squeaks, and a few of my friends walk through. I smile and sign, "Hey," and they chorus back in greetings, laugh, and run over and sit next to me. My dad sees them through the window, and smiles and waves. We wave back. I sigh, no sound produced from my throat, only the sound of breath escaping. A new perspective.

From the tree dangles the teacups, the right teacups.

Exams...amirite?

She sits with coffee, her face opaque in expression,
Ambling mind blooming in fantastic cacophony,
Fingers poking at a scone that crumbles under stress,
Nose scrunched in thought of hypothetical outcomes,
Words and phrases jumbled, none proving to be of use,
Axioms dismembered, quotations marred,
Time wasted seems infinite, time left seems fleeting,
Brain aching from memorizing information,
Coffee cold, papers scattered, scone uneaten,
Mind on fire and yet also flooded,
When the shop door opens with a ding, papers take flight,
The last line of this poem was lost, in the chaos.

Found Poem(s)

Transported

To be discovered means a flood
Thus, change course,
Run through the bustling crossroads,
Rise to the cotton kingdoms
Elegant in abandonment

This June there is something in store.

Girls get away.
Customers will be able to choose from a wide variety of stained glass
While supplies last.

The End Times

Death's bed is of dirt,
Nature sends forth her flowers,
The sky sends its tears.

Parents and children
Side-by-side, but blind to each,
Eyes closed to the world.

Reincarnation.
Locusts pose on their headstones.
A tree umbrella.

The 'Secret'

I once had a secret that I didn't know was a secret.
Before you make assumptions, I did in fact keep it.
I wanted to tell it, to talk about the secret, but I knew it wasn't mine to tell.
It ate me up inside, I hated the secret,
But a duty was bestowed upon hearing it.
The secret I had is still the secret I hold,
Although not important to still keep it.
I was trusted with the secret, so I will never *ever* speak it.
I really, *really* hate the secret.

Shadow Beach

I stumble along the beach, white sand sneaking in between my toes as I leave an uneven path of footprints in my wake. I keep an eye on the shapes in the shadows where the orange rays of the sunset cannot reach. I begin chewing on my hair, the stark black standing out in my line of sight against the bright white of the sand. I can feel them watching me, staring. I shudder. I can see the bench. *The Bench*. I remember him. I know his name is on that cedar bench, it is there on that plaque. I know, I remember. It was here; It happened here. He isn't here anymore. *He's gone*. HE'S DEAD. I will myself to look away, my hands shaking violently. I can't bear it.

I spin around with a jolt, someone is here. Who is that? I know him. I squint, now gripped with fear. It's Him. No. NO. No it's not, it isn't, it *isn't*. He's dead. He can't *be* here. I can't breathe. The humid air fills my lungs and I feel like I'm choking. I run and run. It can't be him. No. I shake my head and shut my eyes as tight as I can, tears escaping. I trip on abandoned cans, and my arm falls into the dying embers of the fire that was left behind. It *burns*. I scream and stumble away, but the sand is holding me down. I can see him. I can see the shadows. They are coming. He isn't here. *He can't be*. I try to run away, anywhere away from *them*. I fall. My white dress becomes heavy with water that fills my eyes with salt. A wave hits my face, but I am still frozen in shock. I'm drowning. Where am I? I scream. I fall from the asylum bed, tangled in sheets. It was a dream. But the shadows are still here.

The Sense of Fear

Fear looks like a room full of wide-eyed people that finally realize their terrible mistake,
Fear tastes like the bitter taste you get in your mouth when you know you are next,
Fear smells like sulfur and metal; pungent and jarring,
Fear feels like cold hands gripping your arm,
Fear sounds like the piercing squeaks of rusty wheels.

Not About Jesus

Let the words rain down from the heavens,
Let the rivers babble the name,
Of the story lost in commotion,
Without it, the world can't be sane.

Let the wind whisper the meaning,
Let the birds sing through the cold,
Of the story once buried in ashes,
Of the story that needs to be told.

For I Will Consider my Paper

For I will consider my paper
For it waits for all of the unwritten words I wish to someday write
For it keeps all of the sentences I wish to speak
For it is everywhere I look, always present
For it comes in all forms, shapes, and colors
For it folds and tears, rolls and rips
For it allows anything to happen, I must only think it

“Best Friend”

“Jolie is at her dad’s house so I am going to go over to her house for a couple of hours.” I tell my parents. My mom says, “Okay” and they go back to watching TV. I call Jolie a few times, no answer. I call her sister 5 more, still no answer. I call their dad and he picks up the phone. He tells me that I can come, but can only stay until 8. “Okay, that’s a little early though,” I joke, but I make sure he can tell that I am very disappointed, even though I am definitely going to stay longer than 8 anyway. I put on my shoes, grab my laptop, and walk over to their house. I tell Jolie all about what car I think she should get and play computer games with her and her sister, but when I asked to straighten Jolie’s hair and do her makeup she said “No.” What? I am great at it! She does her own makeup all wrong and she can bear to say that she “likes it that way”?! She obviously doesn’t know what she likes. I ask her again because I know she didn’t just say “no,” maybe it was my imagination. But there it is again! “No.” I remind her that her makeup looks terrible and her hair is a mess and make sure she understands that she is my only friend, and my only friend can’t treat me like this. She can’t say “no” to me, friends don’t say no. I yell at her because she is being totally mean, “You need to apologize to me because you are really hurting my feelings. That isn’t what friends do,” I say. She starts telling me that she doesn’t want me to mess with her hair and whatever; I stopped listening because she is being impractical. I cut her off because she is saying something about how I do have other friends. “Yeah, well they aren’t my best friends, so they don’t count.” I plug in the hair straightener, “Come on, let me straighten your hair, I can’t straighten my own” I say. She starts to respond, “Um, yes you actually-” I cut her off and say, “Um, no I can’t because makeup and hair things are just for girls,” She stares angrily at me, I don’t know why though because I didn’t say anything wrong. I grab at her hair but she quickly steps away, “Get out of my house,” she yells and points in the direction of the door. I loudly repeat all of the things I have been saying again because obviously she wasn’t listening and start listing all of the things that happened that are completely her fault. I remind her that she always starts the arguments and that she is so mean to me. She just stands there, stiffly pointing to the door, still angry. “Fine then!” I yell in her face and storm out. I grab my computer and slam her front door angrily, storming into the darkness; it was now 11pm. I can’t believe she made me late.

Shayla Ides

A fourteen (almost fifteen) year old girl who lives in Gulf Breeze, Florida, but is originally from Den Hagg, The Netherlands. She is going into her sophomore year. She enjoys reading, writing, and playing volleyball and is a member of Gulf Breeze High School's marching band as an alto saxophone player and historian, as well as the president of the Science Olympiad club. She volunteers at Gulf Breeze United Methodist Church as an Audio/Visual tech and runs the youth services. She is interested in chemistry and physics as a career, but is also considering writing or the ministry. She enjoys reading murder mysteries and books that make you think, but writes more along the lines of realistic fiction; though she prefers writing poetry. She lives with her parents, her twelve-year-old brother, and her temperamental cat that hates everyone but her.

Life as a Game of Cards

Life as a game of cards
Sometimes you win
Sometimes you lose

You just have to pick them up and try again.
You never know what you'll be dealt next.
You either play the game of life or walk away.

Are you the King of Clubs?
The cards slap each other,
Shuffling, shuffling; Why? Why
You?

Are you the Jack of Spades?
Make 21. Hit me. Again.
Bust. How about you?
You know you won't win this time.
When will you bust, too?

Are you the King of Hearts?
Whose hearts do you hold? I haven't given
Mine away yet. Slaps. Doubles.
Sandwiches. No top/bottom, right? Right.

Are you the Jack of Diamonds?
Tough, untouchable. You can't
Be broken, can you? Not
Unless something tougher hits you.

Can you do tricks? I can't.
Well, I can, but not card
Tricks. Mine are the scratches
On the page, the way my
Voice rises and falls rhythmically
As I read.

Queen, Ace, hearts, clubs, spades.
Diamonds. I can't tell. The
Cards flap. Your hands press
Down on them. Bridge.

King. Ace. Two. Ace.
Line the cards up, five,
One, one, five. Deal
Twenty. Play the game,
Damn it. Play the game.

Hands of five.
Pairing them up, matchmaking.
Fishing for cards, fishing for
Pairs. What am I fishing for?
What's your line out for?

Get rid of all the cards.
Lie. Cheat. BS.
I know what you have. But
What do you have to lose?
And what do I have to give up?

Pair. Two pair. Three of a kind.
Read through my poker face. Find the cracks in my game.
They're there. I promise. I'm begging you. Someone see through me.
Where's your pair? Two of a kind, we are.
Damn you. I can't tell what you want.

Two beats all. Play the same or similar.
Damn, you do suck at this.
Think in the now. Your heart's in the
Past, but your body is in the present.
Wake up. Wake up. Make your choice.
Then, or now?

What do you want?
I want to win. But I
Don't know my prize.
Do you?

A Whirlwind of Emotions

My love, with eyes that reflect mine
Storming with ideas and longings
Whose mind is not pure, but strong and clear
Only clouded with dreams and lust
Whose hair is wild as a woodland
And yet, as soft as silk
Whose face lights the way
Out of hell and through the night
Whose voice is smooth as glass
An ever-steady timbre
Whose grip is firm as a cuff
When he holds me close
Whose hugs are strong as a bear
Gripping my sides tenderly
Whose jaw was carved from stone
Sharp but inherently smooth
Whose nose a gently sloped hill
Rolling down, down, down
Whose shoulders are broad
As a river
Whose legs are strong
Sturdy like a tree
Whose hands are callused
Hours of music being the source
Whose hands are even
Always steady, never shaking
My love, whose lips are dusky red
The color of roses in bloom
Whose lips captured mine with elegance
Claiming them as his own
Whose mouth presses on mine softly
Unsure if this is alright
Whose touch makes me feel faint
Melting into him
Whose arms wrap around me
Pulling me closer to him
Whose hands skim up my sides
Sending shivers down my spine
Whose fingers wind through my hair
Lightly tugging, just so

Whose tongue is urgent
Probing my lips eagerly
Whose teeth are very keen
Pulling my lips between them
Whose teeth make me weak
When they nibble on my lips
Whose scent is enticing
Crisp but always sweet
My love, whose past has found him
Ripping him from me painfully
Whose absence is crippling
Leaving me dangling from this cliff
Whose presence is crucial
And the lack of it paralyzing
Whose appearance in my life
Has created a new being, but
Whose disappearance has ruined me
Whose memory is damaged
Stained like a white canvas left out for too long
Whose history means nothing to me
But everything to him
Whose idea of family is warped
Like someone turned it upside down
Whose parents were no parents to him
Teaching him all the wrong things
My love, who has left me
Alone out here, abandoned
Whose voice soothed me
When the day had been too much
Whose embrace cradled me
When I couldn't face the truth
Whose hugs enfolded me
When I couldn't bear the outside world
Whose fingers twirling in my hair
Gave me a sense of security
Whose grin made me blush
Red as a tomato
Whose smile made me laugh
Clear as church bells tolling noon
Whose words left me dazed
Confused in a labyrinth of meanings
Whose words left me giddy
Poring over the smallest details

Whose compliments made me believe in myself
Like no one has done before
Whose brush against my skin
Left me wanting more and more
Whose hand in mine
Fit like the last puzzle piece
Whose shoulder was the perfect fit
For me to rest my head
Whose being is my perfect match
My other half, my parabatai
Whose essence is why I love him
So kind and sweet and strong
My love
Whose grip on my heart is crushing
My love
Who hides behind no walls for me
My love
Whose facades I tore down
My love
Who threw my barriers to the ground
My love
Whose passion is unrelenting
My love
Whose kisses are lost to me now

Dancing Through Life

Dancing Through Life

Dancing through life
Dancing through strife

Dancing through flame
Dancing through shame

Dancing through guilt
Dancing through pain

Dancing through the hardships in life
Dancing away the hurt we all feel

Creating beauty out of sorrow
Turning the bad of yesterday into the art of tomorrow

Dancing through the pain and suffering
Dancing through the lies and questioning

Why do we dance through life?
Because it is unbearable otherwise

So we dance with happiness
We dance with smiles

We dance with excitement
We dance with jubilation

We dance through life.

For These Reasons

For these reasons I will consider my pen
For it is my quill and ink, my type
For through it, my soul flows to the paper
For with it, I express myself wholly
For without it, I am but a shell with nowhere for my ideas to go
For when I have it, I come alive
For if I had never discovered it, I would be lonely
For at first glance it may seem insignificant, but
For the rest of the time, it is the center of my being
For these reasons I will consider my pen

I Didn't Know

I didn't know I loved you
I didn't know I loved your laugh
And the way your eyes crinkle in the corners
I didn't know I loved your voice
And the way it soothed me after a long day
I didn't know I loved your hugs
And the way you held me like you never wanted to let go
I didn't know I loved you
Until you let me go.

The Story Inside Me

There are things no one has said, things no one has dreamed
The most special to me, a story yet to be seen
One without body and one without phrase
One remaining unspoken, so silence is its praise
This story inside me, for it is mine, no doubt
Will be told as a whisper, not a call or shout
It is my story to tell, not theirs and not yours
Once I start telling it, like a river, it pours
Because I can save it from the heat of the day
It is in good hands with me, believe what I say
My story it is, and always will be
My story to tell, just you wait and see
For this story is different, one I cannot save
This one will destroy me, so it goes to my grave.

Rebel Love Song

Her parents didn't like him. They thought he was an alright guy and he seemed to treat her right, but they didn't like him. He was twenty-one.

Yeah. Older guy, younger girl. We've all heard the horror stories. But this was different, they were in love, she protested.

Her parents told her she wasn't allowed to date him and couldn't go out with him, but she did anyway. They were shocked. Their good little girl, who always listened, disobeying them? Impossible. But she did.

Her parents decided that he was the bad influence on her and forbade her to see him. She didn't care. She snuck out and saw him anyway.

She never knew it could go like this. Drinking, smoking, dancing until it wasn't dancing. It seemed like the night would never end. But it did.

She reeked of alcohol and drugs when she got back.

Her father was furious. He locked her in her room, only letting her out for school.

He was there. He was at school.

Her dad saw them talking.

That was the first night he hit her.

And the last night she stayed.

They ran away together, cursing her father as they sped off toward the city. She became the person her dad never wanted to be, and he helped her. She got piercings. Tattoos. And she loved it.

She loved the person she became.

My Mother, Who I Love Dearly

Always separate the darks and lights; wash your clothes when you have time to dry and fold them; Put on some shoes; You can't bike in those, where are your sneakers? Paint your toenails if you're going to wear sandals; For God's sake, brush your hair; this is how to fold properly; this is how to iron; this is how to braid; this is how to sweep corners; this is how to vacuum; this is how to clean the dishes; this is how to mow the lawn; this is how to play cards; this is how to talk to someone you hate; this is how to make friends Why do you never have people over? 'Because all of my friends are boys' Well, make some new ones. Learn to like people; Christ, why are you so awkward? This is how to set the table; this is how to take out the trash; why do you listen to that music? 'Because I like it' This is how to do algebra 'Mom, you're doing it wrong'; this is how to speak to an adult; this is how to dress for church; this is how to dress for school Why don't you wear something nice to school? 'Because I like my jeans' Just wear a skirt for once. This is how to look interested in something you're not; this is how to flirt; this is how to talk to boys; 'Mom!' This is how to avoid conflict; this is how to avoid drama; this is how to do your hair and Are you even listening?

Cemeteries

The rain falls lightly
Hitting the gravestones
A brush to the shoulder
In a crowded hallway

Death

Too many headstones
Adorn the path before me
Death will find us all

Caring

What I should have done
Then
Is not
What would have done now

I know
What needed to be done
But
I did not care

At least not then
I do
Care
Now.

Foolish Dreams

I dreamed that you were here
I dreamed you were by my side
I dreamed of you, my dear

I dreamed clear skies above
And of peace below
I dreamed of you, my love

I dreamed of that one exquisite spring
And of the melodies you sang
I dreamed of you, my darling

I dreamed that you were by my side
I dreamed that you were with me now
I dreamed of you, my guide

I dreamed these lies
I dreamed these dreams
I dreamed then of you, now I cry

I dreamed that you still needed me
I dreamed that you were here
And that you and I could be what
I once dreamed we were

Ave Atque Vale

The musicality behind dancing
An enigmatic sliver of the world
A thing considered sacred to many
Something that rarely leaves behind regret
Considered to be a flame for many
Drawing, pulling them in to the lit stage
So many people cannot resist it
But that is not necessarily bad
It is addicting, like pyromania
It leaves something burning so bright behind
Though hard, they have absolutely no choice
So they say hail and farewell to the stage

Forgotten Memories

The boy in the gray Tacoma truck sighed as he got stuck at an intersection. Already late to class, now going to be even more late. This would not be his first time late to class, and it certainly wouldn't be his last. The screenwriting professor liked him, however, and he usually just sighed while gesturing for Lee to take his usual seat. The light turned green and he grinned while pressing down slightly on the gas and turning up the music as a familiar song played. The first time he had heard this song was so long ago. A slight pain in his chest became present but he ignored it, not allowing the past to overcome him like it had done so many times before.

Back then he had thought that he was okay. That he had gotten over what had happened all those years ago. He wasn't. It took her telling him he wasn't whole for him to realize it for himself. Once he did, it hit him like a punch in the gut. He was still broken, still as damaged as he had been when it first happened. He decided to take his senior year to remake and stitch himself back together. He would ask himself all the hard questions and answer them honestly. He wanted to make sure he was completely over it.

They had been together for two weeks and known each other for eight months when she told him she could tell that he wasn't okay. Another week went by before he realized she was right.

She hated herself for telling him, but she would have hated herself even more if she hadn't. That was what you did for people you cared about, right? You told them the hard truths and braced yourself for the tough answers. You were honest with them and wanted what was best for the other regardless of what it meant for you.

When she told him all of that, he was astonished. He had no idea how much she internalized everything and couldn't believe she even harbored the thought that it was her fault. He reassured her that it had nothing to do with her, that he was so grateful she had noticed. Otherwise, he would have carried it around forever.

Then he broke her heart. Not on purpose, just as a byproduct of what he needed to do. He didn't realize he had until she told him.

She was leaving for a camp during which her parents had decided she wasn't allowed to talk to him, except on Sundays. She texted him the night before camp and told him she would miss him. His response was curt, almost frustrated. She could tell something was wrong, and so she asked if he was okay. He had been fine a few hours ago when she called him. He told her that he wanted to do this in person, that he was going to tell her after camp, but since she had asked he would tell her. He told her that he needed to take some time to fix himself and to figure out what was going on in his life. He was going to be a senior, and he needed to start prepping for college and thinking about his future. He said he wasn't ready for a relationship.

She broke.

She didn't tell him then how much she hurt, how she wrote angry letters and poems. He only knew about them from the second to last time he had seen her about a month before Christmas break. She had told him about them, blushing as she did so.

He had laughed.

He wished he could go back and erase that moment or change it. Change anything about it.

He could still see the hurt look in her eyes.

He could still hear her heart breaking all over again.

She slapped him.

It took the better part of the day for the outline of her hand to fade.

He knew he deserved it.

He deserved the smirks and snickers he got in his classes that day. The administration had noticed and asked what happened, but he stayed silent.

Looking back on it now, he was reminded of just how much of an asshole he had been to her on that day.

The last time he had seen her had been the day of his graduation. He didn't think she was there for him, but he had not seen her with any of her other friends who were graduating.

He knew way before then that he would be attending Full Sail University in the fall and would be short on time for the next two and a half years. So he had said goodbye.

Well, he had tried.

She had just sort of stood there, and when he was silent, she had cordially replied, saying farewell and then leaving him standing there.

The honks of cars behind him brought him back to his senses and he snapped back to reality. Shaking his head to get rid of the fog, he drove up to the classroom's building and ran in, twenty minutes late. As expected, the professor rolled his eyes, paused his lecture, and waited for Lee to get situated before continuing.

He was in his second year now at Full Sail, so Elena would be graduating this spring. It still shocked him how young she was compared to how old she acted.

When they were dating, she had been almost fifteen and him halfway to nineteen.

He had been a junior and she had been a freshman.

His friends had given him hell for dating an underclassman, especially a freshman.

Her parents didn't trust him.

Understandable, but unnecessary.

Every guy swore to respect a girl's wishes and to not try anything, but Lee meant it wholeheartedly, with one exception:

Her parent's rules came first.

He wouldn't sneak out to see her when her parents said she couldn't, he texted her at respectable hours, and he only saw her when her parents were around.

He took good care of her.

Until she took care of him.

She bandaged his reopened wounds and was always at his side. She made sure that he was alright, put his needs before hers and made sure he was comfortable. She was the best thing that happened to him then.

And he dropped her there. He let go permanently when he left, but he had been gone a long time before that. He had been gone since the summer before his senior year.

Now she was a senior.

She was seventeen.

Time flies.

He wished he could go back to when he left; he wished he could go up to his old self and tell him that he needed her more than he realized. That Elena was the only one who calmed him down when he needed to be.

The PTSD had started when he hit college and went to his first party. He had been to high-school parties before, but she was always there and they usually just ended up talking and playing chess.

Without her, it sucked.

He saw his classmates completely smashed and out of their minds, and it reminded him of how he was when it happened. He hadn't been drunk like they were. He had been completely out of his depth and had absolutely no idea what was going on.

That was the first time he had a panic attack. He had no idea what was happening to him. He just collapsed and started hyperventilating, eventually blacking out. He remembered after it happened, the doctors said that it wasn't surprising. He had just left his home and had been completely uprooted from everything, leaving everything that had become comfortable to him. They said it would take him a while to adjust, but that they were surprised this hadn't happened earlier in his life. They asked if he had someone to talk to back then, someone that listened. And he thought of her.

The doctors saw him relax and they smiled. They told him that whoever it was, they had been grounding him and he needed someone like that again. And his face fell. They noticed and walked out of the room, leaving him alone with his thoughts.

He almost called her that night. Almost. But he didn't.

And now, he hates himself for not doing it.

My name is Marley Knittle, I was born in Colorado, and raised in Texas. I enjoy soccer, theatre, reading, and obviously, writing. I hope that you enjoy this poetry as much as we enjoyed writing it!

I Should Have Told You

What I should have done.
I should have stuck with friends.
I shouldn't have had a closed mind.
What I should have done.
I should have tried harder.
I should have been myself.
I shouldn't have put on a mask.
I should've listened.
I should've paid attention.
I should've said I'm sorry.
I should have done something.
What I should've done.
I should've been brave.
I should have cried.
I should have told you.
I should have not done this.
I should've missed myself.
And while we're on the subject,
I miss you.
I shouldn't have said good bye.
I shouldn't have watched you walk away,
I should've done something.
I should've told you.
I should Have Told You

Royalty While Dancing

Light on your feet,
Taking a new stance,
Amongst the elite,
You are ready to dance.

Your legs twirl around,
Your fists pump in the air,
After a while you've found,
You've lost control of your hair.

You keep on going,
You don't want to stop,
Your brain starts slowing,
But your feet still hop.

After a while,
You start to get tired,
Like you've just run a mile,
But you keep on going as if you were wired.

Then you slow,
Your old senses enhance,
Your brain wants to go,
But you can't stop, you're in a trance.

You fight hard to escape,
You keep your feet down,
You take of your cape,
You take of your crown.

The thrill is gone,
The night is done,
You let out a moan,
You feel like they've won.

Shut up and Dance

Poor child. So lonely. So unaware. So much fear. She's quiet. Words barely leave the dark tunnel that is her mouth. She's beautiful, a dream, but she does not know it. She hides her face with makeup; she is too scared to make a difference. Too scared. I know I have to help her. I invite her to the dance. My friends make fun of me, mocking me on my choice. I don't care. She wears stunning pink dresses, her hair in loose curls. I look into her eyes. Her beautiful dark eyes. I see something in them. A story. As far as I can tell, she's the prettiest girl on the floor. I try to get her to talk, trying to start a conversation. I'm too afraid to ask her to dance. I look over. Her feet are tapping in time with the music. This could be my last chance. I'm still too afraid. Of what? I couldn't tell you. She looks at me, as if waiting for something to happen. I still can't. I start to say something, but then she grabs me in. She pulls me to the center. I hope she's not as terrified as I am. "Don't look back," I say, mostly to try and calm myself down. She looks up at me with those eyes. Those dark and beautiful eyes, and she said, "Shut up and dance with me."

The Three Stones

My target sat in front of me. I looked around to see if anyone was watching. This was my chance. I reached out and grabbed the round object, and then I slowly placed it in the pocket of my oversized sweat shirt.

“Aha! I knew you were a thief,” the man said from behind me. I ran. I looked back, but the man wasn’t giving chase. He stood outside of his store, calling 911 on his phone.

“Crap,” I said to myself. I can outrun a tired old grocery store clerk, but I don’t know about the police! I ran anyway, my prize still safely secure in my pocket. It was too late to go back to the alley, so I headed for my safe place. I sprinted the whole block, I had been practicing, and by the time I got to the coffee shop, my hair was still in its usual long brown ponytail, and my pursuers were nowhere in sight. I looked at my green eyes in the reflection of the glass door. They seemed to ask,

“Was this prize worth risking your life?” I looked down at the lumpy orange and nodded. I had to eat sometime. As I walked in, a bell sounded my entrance.

“Sammy! How nice it is to see you!” yelled Charlie the owner’s son. He usually speaks with exclamation marks. He looked down at the orange in my hand.

“What have you done this time? You know I will always give you food,” I replied,

“I’ve gotta get a laugh somewhere,” he shook his head and handed me a tall caramel Frappuccino with a bagel on the side.

“Eat you skinny person,” he said. I laughed.

“Thanks,” I said. I went down and sat at my favorite two person table across from my favorite painting in the world. It was my favorite painting because every brush stroke was like a code of letters that only I could understand.

“ABAA,” that’s what I saw.

“I have the paper today,” Charlie told me as he tossed it over. As I started reading it, I noticed that he kept looking at me. Finally, I put the paper down and stared back.

“What?” I asked him. His face turned dark red.

“I was just thinking that maybe someday, somebody will fill that spot next to you,” he said pointing to the empty chair.

“Charlie,” I said softly. “You know why I can’t do this. It would be too hard,” he didn’t make eye contact with me.

“I wish I could help,” he said. “But my mom as she is...”

“It’s okay,” I say. “Even if you could help, I wouldn’t let you. You have a good life, and you’re helping me too much as it is,” I tell him. He shakes his head.

“I couldn’t live without you,” he says. Then he leaves for the back room to get some more espresso. I see a cop car pull up outside.

Oh my gosh the cops! I had totally forgotten about them! I see a man step out. He’s not a police officer. He does have a gun though. A big one. He walks in. The bell sounds for him. He looks about my age, dark, professional, pretty cute actually.

“You’re Sam,” he said as if I didn’t know. “Use these,” he handed me a black bag. It wasn’t heavy, but it did have some weight to it.

“Use these to complete the quests. Once that is done, you’ll find what you’re looking for,” Then he walked back outside and back into the police car. They drove away.

“Is someone else out there?” Charlie yelled from the back room. I ignored him. Then another car, almost identical but less shiny than the last one pulled up. A real officer came out of this one. I pulled the stolen orange out of my pocket and set it on the table.

I didn't need it; it would just slow me down. I was about to make a run for it out of the back door when I realized that the bag was glowing. I pulled the string to open the bag and I looked inside, expecting a magical star or a key or something. What I found were rocks. Three rocks. One of them was glowing. It was a pink smooth pebble. I looked up as the policeman ran into the door. *Too late to run.*

“Slow down!” he said. “We don't need this to get bad,” I put my hands up, but they were still holding the bag.

“What's that?” he asked. I took down the bag and took out the glowing pebble to show him, but as I touched it. He disappeared. The coffee shop disappeared. *I was in a desert.*

Or at least, it looked like a desert at first. My feet were on sand, but it wasn't hot, and there weren't cacti. There was seaweed. I figured out where I was in a few quick gulps of saltwater.

Great. I'm drowning in the middle of the Ocean and I don't even know how I got here. I tried to save my breath. I tried to close my mouth again. It wasn't working. Water flooded my lungs like root beer in a float. My mind got tingly. I couldn't even think of a better word than tingly to end my life with. My eyes were growing dark. The last thing I saw was a boy.

I woke up in a boat. It seemed to be moving, but I couldn't see a motor. There was no land in sight. I heard a thud from behind me. I looked back to see a sandy-blond headed teenage boy with freckles standing there, staring at me with empty murky brown eyes. I screamed for about ten seconds straight. He flashed me with a smile.

“Hi there,” he said in a voice that matched his hair. “What brings you to my humble abode?” he said it like he owned the ocean.

“You live here?” I asked in a surprisingly not surprised voice.

“Yes, it just so happens that I do,” he told me matter-of-factly.

“You want to make something of it?” he gave me a close glare. I shook my head confidently.

“I'm just kidding,” he said.

“How do you live in water?” I asked.

“I'm a merman,” he replied. At this point I was thoroughly confused.

Who even was this guy? Was he an escapee from a psych ward? He seemed to notice my confusion.

“I knew you were human. And besides, instead of gawking at the fact that I live in water you should be wondering why I saved your life!”

“You don't even have a tail!” I said. “That's just an old fable,” he informed me. “Don't you know anything? Now, ask me why I saved you. Come on, ask,” I was surprised at his enthusiasm.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because you're pretty,” He said, somewhat mockingly, somewhat sincerely.

“Thanks,” I replied shyly. “Where are we going?”

“I'm not quite sure,” he said. “I picked up one of those rocky thingies you had in your bag and *poof!* A rowboat appeared and started taking us somewhere. I thought you would know,” it was then that the tail of an island appeared in the distance.

“That must be it,” he said looking at me. Actually, he wouldn't STOP looking at me. As we approached the island, it got more and more dreary, steam, smoke, lava, volcanoes. I wondered how I would find what I was looking for here.

What was I looking for again? Oh yea, I didn't know. The boat stopped as we reached the shore.

“Can you walk, merman?” I asked him.

“One, yes I can, and two, call me Lee,” Lee did seem to fit in this situation. As my feet touched sweet land I heard a voice.

“You’re looking for me,” it said. The voice sounded familiar. Then I heard a rush of air from behind me as a streak of brown crossed my vision. I looked behind me. Lee was dead, a harpoon straight through his heart. I heard a rustle in the bushes. I froze. I turned my head slowly.

“Dad,” I whispered. He held his hands out, waiting for a hug.

“I didn’t mean for it to be this way,” he said.

“It was all so sudden, and I couldn’t let anybody know where I was. Not even him,” he gestured towards Lee’s dead body lying on the ground. I shook my head. This was not the ending I wanted. Dad was supposed to be the good sailor lost at sea. Not the cowardly runaway.

ABBA. Father, Father. The painting’s memory danced on my brain.

Someone Special Like Me, Someone Special Like You

A waiting area, far, far, away,
Filled with stories untold.
A frog who can fly,
A shoe that can harmonize,
A princess who slays her own dragon.
A guy named Joe who likes to eat cabbage for every meal,
A king who is afraid of his noble steed,
A squirrel who wants to swim,
A shark afraid of water.
All of these stories are waiting.
For some special person like you,
For some special person like me.
Someone to stand up against the rest,
Someone to be brave, and create something new.
Someone to put their own mind on a page,
And not be scared of other's opinions.
Someone willing to risk failing.
Someone willing to realize that failing is not an option,
They're waiting,
Patiently;
For some special person like you,
For some special person like me.
Someone ready, someone willing,
Some courageous unafraid person,
Maybe someone a little scared,
They are waiting.
For someone like me, for someone like you.

For I will Consider Bird Blue

For I will consider the bird that I pass on my street,
For as he daily sits on top of the old tree,
And turns his head slightly to the sun's warmth.
His elegant and simple ways,
Hidden beneath an abundance of blue and grey feathers.
For his faithful and trustworthy demeanor,
Reflect his small and sharp face.
For his claws cling securely to the top branch,
His feathers lay dormant by his side,
He is still.
Yet if he is not still,
If his feathers become active,
His majestic span fills a tiny part of the sky,
Blocking out the old blue, for a new blue.
For his swiftness in being still,
For his mystery, contradicting those of others,
For his presence.

Deeper Appearances of Mom

My mom, whose thoughts are of my best interest.

My mom, whose remarks hang in air like the tail of a swallow.

Whose face is filled with crevices of love that has past.

My mom whose fingers are worn and experienced with wisdom and strife.

My mom whose eyes hidden behind spectacles show a roiled pool of understanding.

My mom, whose voice is as sharp as a lily and as soft as an axe,

My mom, with a much worn back from too much protecting.

My mom, whose feelings are openly expressed,

My mom, whose feelings are rarely shown.

Am I the Same as Him?

As the twenty-five year old dressed in work clothes and makeup walked through the park on her lunch break, she sat on her favorite lonely bench on the west side. She ate her Swiss cheese on wheat bread carefully, making sure that not even a crumb went to the pudgy park pigeons. As she was eating, a man emerged from the path guarded by trees which lay behind her. He was diffidently homeless, his dirty clothes and unshaved beard proved that. He was young too. About twenty seven in age. He walked proudly, letting his skinny twig arms swing firmly with every step. He came and sat down next to the girl.

“Hiya,” he said to her with a mostly toothless grin. She was a little disturbed that he would talk to her, but she returned his welcome. She put down her sandwich and casually watched him from the corner of her eye. He took out one single piece of moldy bread from his coat pocket. She watched as he ripped off tiny pieces, and one by one threw them to the birds until there was none left. The girl was dumbfounded. He was so skinny. The man had a big grin on his face.

“*How?*” she wondered. Then with a satisfied sigh, the man got up and went the way he came, humming an unfamiliar tune. She noticed him picking up trash as he went. She threw the rest of her sandwich to the pigeons, and then she went back to work, humming the same unfamiliar tune. The birds were left alone with the bench.

Barefoot at Walmart

“This is the fourth duel we’ve had, but this time, I’m going to win,” I heard from the television lightly in the background as I walked around. Walmart isn’t my favorite place to go, all the hustle and bustle, the noise from the electronics isle, the sketchy people with long beards and Hawaiian shirts, and who could forget the squeaky carts? But, this was for a good cause. I wasn’t used to the Louisiana humidity, and I needed conditioner. Fast. I went down the aisle marked,

‘Shampoos and other showery stuff.’ I was a lone except for one man looking at woman’s deodorant. He looked a few years older than me, and the weird thing was, he wasn’t wearing any shoes. As I looked at some ‘Sauvé’ brand conditioner, I noticed out of the corner of my eye that he was staring at me. I grabbed the milk and honey bottle and started to leave.

“Wait!” the man cried. I moved faster.

“Wait!” he said again.

Why couldn’t I have waited until morning?

“I have something, something that you need!” he said. His voice. I recognized his voice. I turned around. As his figure got closer and closer, I knew who it was. How was I so stupid that I didn’t remember that face! He caught up to me, sighing for air. I grabbed his face, and I kissed him. Bare feet and all.

My Screed of Things That I Hate

I hate hate hate hate it when you do that! I hate it when you ignore me! I hate when you think that just because I'm short that I can't do anything! I hate it when you only like me because I'm so quote unquote, "Cute and little!" It makes so angry! I don't have a chance! If I'm good at something you'll say, quote unquote, "Oh my gosh, we just got beat by a five year old!" That makes me so angry! I hate it when you say, quote unquote, "Don't hit her, she's too little!" I hate it!!! I hate it when you give me pity do to my height, or when, even though I am older than you, still call me a baby! What does that make you? I hate it when you judge me because I don't like violence. I hate it when you taunt me, maybe to be funny at first, but you don't realize that it hurts. It hurts a lot. I hate it when you talk about horror, even though you know I have a problem with it. All of these things keep me awake at night, and instead of anger, I'm filled with fear. Fear that morning will never come. I've learned to help myself. I've learned to stop the shaking by holding my arms tight, and praying until the cold night is done. I've learned to shut out the harmful, mocking words that hurt even more because you don't mean them. I've learned to control my rage. I've learned to keep it to myself. I've learned to put on a smiling mask every day, to hide my beat up and bruised crying face that lies within. I've learned that if I hurt now, maybe I can laugh about it later. I've learned to ignore. I've learned to push of the hate and turn it into love. I've learned to keep a well behind my eyes. I've learned to play my part as the, quote unquote, "five year old." I've learned that you will never know the pain that I feel every day. The pain that will almost completely take over, until I'm ready to die. I've learned to do something else with it. I've learned to hold back tears until the cold night appears again. For it does appear. Every. Day.*

* Which is alright, because I don't have to go through it alone. And I'm not always in pain, just little times every day, and I'm usually very happy. Where would I be without hardships anyway?

My name is Trei Lee. I'm currently 13 years old. I was born in Lafayette, Louisiana before I moved to Little Rock, Arkansas. I like to play video games. Mostly Nintendo games. I started writing in around 6th grade. I also have a Wattpad account. It is titled "WeavileGuy24" and my current series is a Sonic fan-fiction. I often write fan-fictions, but I will probably write original works soon. My short story, titled Pokémon Warriors, is best suited for people with a full understanding of Pokémon. My motif with poetry is technology, so expect to see poems about my laptop, my phone, and video games. I hope you like my works. Also, I take "nerd" as a high form of compliment.

Pokémon Warriors Chapter 1

You've heard of the world of Pokémon, right? I know you have. Everyone has. When children turn 10 years old, they receive their own Pokémon and start their own journey. But have you heard the story from the Pokémon themselves? Trust me; it's not all smiles and joy. Just ask Weavile, and his sister, Sneasal. They never knew their mother. Weavile was left at the old orphanage at a young age, while Sneasal was still an egg. It was made almost entirely out of wood, and there were about eight bedrooms, so many orphans had to share a room, some even sharing bunk beds. Weevile and Sneasal were at the orphanage longer than anyone else. Their only friends still at the orphanage are Lucario, the "strong and silent type", his brother Riolu, and the laid back Gallade. They all go to the same dojo to train. Gallade reached black belt before anyone else, and he never lets them go a day without remembering it. Today, it was time for either Weavile or Lucario to go up a belt. The past three attempts, Lucario went up first. The way to determine who went up was a spar, and whoever fainted first lost. Weavile had a huge disadvantage because he is a Dark/Ice type, whereas Lucario is Fighting/Steel, but Weavile knew this time he would win. They both took position on the field.

"You sure you don't wanna quit?" Lucario said, "I've beaten you every single time before now."

"Heh," Weavile said, "That was then, and this is *now*."

Their sensei Meinshao raised her hand. She lowered it quickly and said, "Begin!" Lucario opened out with a barrage of Aura Spheres, and Weavile narrowly dodged them. He sent out Ice Beam, which wouldn't do much damage, but it froze Lucario in place before he could blast another Aura Sphere. Weavile used this opportunity to use Swords Dance as many times as he could to raise his attack. Lucario broke free of the ice. "Hmph. Cheap shot," he said. He struck with Force Palm, which Weavile barely survived. He charged with Fury Swipes, and Lucario blocked each hit with Close Combat. Lucario then used Bone Rush and swung at Weavile with it. Weavile dodged all the swings, then he grabbed on it. As Lucario raised it back up, he saw Weavile hanging on it.

"Hello!" Weavile said.

He kicked Lucario's Bone Rush and broke it in two. He used one half to swing at Lucario, which Lucario blocked with the half he was still holding. Weavile then jumped back and threw the piece he was holding, sending it spinning at Lucario. Lucario blocked it with his piece, but that sent his half flying out of his hand. Lucario then hit Weavile with Focus Punch, right in his stomach, which almost took out Weavile, but Weavile smiled, and used his own Focus Punch on Lucario, knocking him back.

"What? How did you survive that?"

Weavile smiled and showed Lucario his Focus Sash, which has the ability to leave the owner standing after an attack that should have knocked them out.

"It's only fitting, since you always use one." Weavile said.

In anger, Lucario charged at Weavile with Giga Impact, and Weavile ran at him, too. Their attacks left them both standing for a bit, but Lucario fell down. Weavile walked over to Lucario. Lucario asked, "How...did...you...?" and Weavile held Lucario's Focus Sash, which he had been holding the whole time. Weavile had finally won.

Meinshao stopped Weavile and Sneasal to tell them something.

"I got a letter from the orphanage. Your mom is there to pick you up."

They couldn't believe it. After all these years, they would finally see their mom. On the way back, Gallade, Sneasal, and even Riolu were congratulating Weavile on his victory.

"Now you finally have a black belt, like me!" Gallade said.

“OK! WE GET IT! YOU GOT A BLACK BELT FIRST! I swear, every conversation we have somehow gets to you having a black belt.”

Gallade almost said something, but then they saw smoke coming from the village where they lived. They ran over to see the orphanage engulfed in flames, with Weavile and Sneasel’s mom still in it.

I Didn't Know I Loved Video Games

I didn't know I loved video games,
How fun pressing buttons is.
I didn't know I loved leveling up,
The feeling of getting stronger.
I didn't know I loved exploring,
Seeing the new world I stepped into.
I didn't know I loved combat,
Using my skills to beat the bad guy.
I didn't know I loved glitches,
Laughing at how broken everything is.
I didn't know I loved RPGs,
But then I was introduced to grinding.

The Beginning

I was raised like a soldier by my older brother. He taught me the value of discipline and respect. He was usually pretty strict, and trained me until I reached my limit every day. He also told me only to trust the people you have a past with, which would explain why his only 2 friends are the kids he met at the orphanage, even though they are nothing like him. One is super laid back and the other is kind of laid back and used to be a coward, but he is a lot braver now. I think he said something about losing a close friend? Speaking of him, he has the prettiest sister ever. (Yes, she's my age!) It was practically love at first sight. She was kind and as brave as her older brother. The only problem is that my brother has taught me only to love family, not friends. Basically, he didn't want me to love her. I tried not to, but she got more attractive every day. So at night, when my brother was sleeping, we would "sneak out to hang out" as we called it. She showed me that life opens up when you do. So, like the opposite of what my brother said. It was tough to do both. Eventually my brother found out about it. He said he'd allow it, but only if I could show him that I was strong enough to protect her. Did I forget to mention that me, my brother his friend, his sister, and his other friend were the main line of defense against a warlord and his much weaker followers? I did? Oops. Anyway, I did show my brother. I would always risk my life to save her, until she risked her life to save me. I thought I would never see her again, but I knew I couldn't give up. Days later, I did find her, captured by a general of that warlord guy I mentioned. Behind the guard, in her jail cell she whispered, "3, 2, 1" and I kicked the guard towards her cell. She grabbed his arms and pulled his head into the bars, knocking him out. She got the keys and opened her cell. I guess I shouldn't have worried about her too much, since she's as tough as her brother. We all escaped, and at least 60% unscathed! My brother finally allowed our love. Probably because he saw how tough *she* was. I was just glad she was okay. My brother hasn't changed a bit. Except he does give me, like one day off per month, so that's cool. And I always spend that day with her.

Character Monologue

We were the best of friends, nothing could separate us. Most of the time we were all each other had, and always helped each other out. Her, the fearless explorer, and I her cowardly tag-along. We were the perfect pair, until one night. She ran off into the woods. I was too scared to follow after her. A few minutes later, I had worked up my courage and began to go after her, but then she came running out, screaming. She was being chased by kidnappers. She twisted her ankle on a rock and began to call out to me for help. I was too scared to move in any direction other than away. So I did. I ran and let her get taken. But that moment haunted me forever. I knew I could've helped, but I was too scared. But I know what I have to do now.

My Anger

What makes me angry?
Surprisingly, it's technology
Like when my phone crashes
Apparently, you can't swipe a touchscreen
And you certainly shouldn't open an app
That's not what phones do nowadays
Or when my laptop just freezes
Internet? What kind of PC uses that?
You wanna turn off proxy servers?
Here, I'll turn it back on
Even worse is when my own video games
Take a turn in difficulty
This is the hard for you?
It's only the first appearance of it
What, you thought *hitting* it killed it?
Jump over here to proceed
Also, there's that enemy you can't kill
You thought this boss was cheap?
The next one is just plain difficult.
Here's a stealth mission.
That's also an escort mission.
With ice physics.
Also, you have to swim.
And the enemies one-shot you.
You wanna stop playing for a bit?
Here's a game over for that.
Oh, I forgot to tell you
There is no autosave.
Wow, it *does* cost a lot to repair me.

I am Madison Elizabeth Lemoine, a ninth grade student from Natchitoches Central High School. I was born and raised in the little town of Natchitoches, Louisiana. Basketball, art, movies, books, and music are just a few of the things that interest me. A little while ago, I discovered that I loved to write. I came here, to ADVANCE, to grow this newfound ability and have fun writing amazing stories and poems.

Little Anecdotes: The Tale of Charlie Bird

It was a dark night, one when you could barely see what is in front of you. Two criminals trying to escape the police fled into the country town of Jena. They stopped at a small country home. They knocked on the door, and the owner came to answer it. As soon as the door was swung open, the criminals hit the owner on the head with a bat, knocking him unconscious. Stealing his car, they drove further into the night.

Soon, they ran out of gas. They ran to a nearby house in a panic. It was the house of a man named Charlie Bird. He was a smart man and Charlie knew someone should not be driving by his house past midnight. The criminals were appeared sketchy, dressed in all black. He could see them coming to the door from his bedroom window. Charlie opened the door, with a plan in mind.

“Hello, what brings you here at this time of night?” Charlie said.

The tall criminal on the right said, “We ran out of gas and were wondering if you had any to spare?” Charlie was careful, picking specific words in case they happened to react violently.

“Well, I did have some earlier, but used it to mow my lawn. I could just drive ya’ll to town to get some more gas.”

“Yes, but...”

Charlie cut him off, “The gas station is right down the road. Let me take you.”

The smaller criminal said, “Sure...”

On the way to the gas station, the cops’ sirens sounded nearby. Soon they were right on Charlie’s tail. Before he had a chance to come to a complete stop, the criminals jumped out the vehicle, into the dark, swampy forest.

The cops slammed on their brakes and jumped out of their vehicles, running after them with their guns in hands. The criminals were too fast, and they soon lost track of them. They started using dogs to find their scent; but, before the dogs could detect a whiff of the criminals, there was a sudden scream nearby.

The criminals had rushed through the alligators, mosquitos, and other swamp vermin to find a trailer. They hoped to seek refuge, but instead found more trouble. The man living in the trailer grabbed one of his rifles, and shot one of the criminals in his leg, the other in his “dairy air”. The cops came to retrieve the criminals and brought them, in handcuffs, to the nearest hospital.

Charlie Bird had been questioned about the events and explained his plan to turn them in at the gas station in town. The police told him about his neighbor who had gone to the hospital, still alive but unconscious. In the end, everyone got a happy ending. Well, except for the criminals, who are now locked up for their crimes.

This story was published for my grandpa, John Bradford; who told me many a tale.

Fairytale Night

It was just a few years ago that I met him; it was just a few years ago when all this started. I was going to Louisiana State University, which is only a few hours from my hometown of Natchitoches. One of my friends brought me along to a masquerade themed ball in New Orleans that was part of the huge Mardi Gras celebration. It was held in a huge mansion decorated with masks and purple, yellow, and green streamers. In addition to the mandatory mask, I wore a huge purple ball gown with jewels sown throughout the dress like stars scattered in the night sky.

A small quartet played music that was slow, but beautiful. On my way to get some drinks, I met a man. His face was only half covered by his mask, but I knew instantly who he was. His name was Michael Swiss, the son of the richest man in New Orleans.

“May I have this dance?” he asked me.

“Umm.....okay,” I replied nervously.

The music whisked my feet into dancing. He was tall and dressed in a dark, blue suit that complimented his eyes. Those dark and mysterious eyes also showed kindness and wisdom beyond his years. His arms were strong, holding me aloft while we danced throughout the night. He danced with an elegant grace and confidence that made it seem as if we weren’t dancing at all, but instead gliding.

We danced, talked, and laughed all night. I told him that I was here with a friend who dragged me along with her. He said he was glad she did because he wouldn’t have met me without her doing so. He confided that he just wanted to settle down with a nice girl that appreciated him for who he is and not what he has.

By the end of the night, we had fallen in love. When the call for the last dance came, he held me close and kissed me. It wasn’t a peck, but something much more. As he pulled away he took me in his arms and we waltzed with much more intensity than before. We danced, my head against his shoulder and his arms around my waist holding me with those strong, strong arms for what seemed like forever.

Forever wasn’t enough for us. When the bell sounded midnight, we kissed once more and I ran off to find my friend. I knew that this was reality, not a fairy tale, and that there was no way that one night of love would survive the harshness of real life. He tried to chase me, asking who I was, but I ran in fear he might find out that I was just a small town girl.

I grabbed my friend, and we rushed off into the night. In my haste, I dropped my ring given to me by my grandma and engraved with my initials. However, I wouldn’t realize that I had dropped it until the next morning.

That night my friend and I stayed at a hotel in New Orleans. In the morning, I was awoken by her screams saying to look at the news. When I did, I saw my ring and the handsome man I danced with the night before. Now that he had his mask off, I could really see his dark black hair and kind, round face that smiled so hugely when he said, “Last night I met a girl, who wore this ring. It is engraved with the initials C.E.M. I will search this whole city for her and will give a reward for the person that finds her. If you come to me, I will promise you my love and care.”

I was in shock. Immediately, I called the hotline giving my name and number. I was given an interview time with Michael and reminded that if I was not the girl that I would not be given any reward. I knew that I was of course the girl, Cara Elizabeth Mason. The girl who met the man of a lifetime; I was the one who danced the night away with the man of her dreams.

I tried to get dressed, struggling to find clothes that I wanted to wear. I hadn’t packed much, but finally decided on a cute dress that complimented my auburn hair and blue eyes. It was sheer with a lace

back and sky-blue underneath. I stared at myself, agreeing that I was ready to see him. When I looked at the alarm clock by my bedside, I saw that it was already 5:00. I was supposed to meet him at 5:10 at Café Du Monde a few blocks away. I rushed to grab my bag and ran down the stairs. I ran as fast as I could only to find him sitting at a table with another girl. He was smiling, laughing, and flirting with her. I turned away, about to run again when he saw me.

He yelled, "Wait!" as I ran off. Unable to out run him, he grabbed me by my arm and looked at me with his fierce eyes, held me tight and kissed me. He knew it was me.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

"Down the block," I said.

"I searched this whole city when I could've found you a block away?"

"Yes..."

He held me closer, as if fearing I would run yet again, but I didn't. At the time, I wasn't sure if we'd last or if we had what it takes to survive as a couple in the real world.

But we did, for a while at least. We dated for months until he finally popped the question. We got married that next summer, but I soon discovered the darker side of him.

Michael was abusive and very strict behind closed doors. I had to do everything he said, exactly the way he had asked for it. When I would do something wrong, he would beat me, and break me down as if I were a building about to crumble. Sometimes he would lock me in the cellar; left alone in the dark.

When I finally escaped from months of abuse, I made sure he would never seduce another girl like me. Every morning, he would have a cup of tea with his breakfast. Knowing this, I saved up bits of change here and there until I had enough to buy a paralyzing pill; his graceful dancing feet would never seduce or harm another girl again.

Only in my dreams would he still be the kind, handsome man with whom I danced the night away.

Naturally Beautiful

I didn't know I loved the pitter patter of rain falling on rooftops,
Or watching the lightening flash
Like someone taking a picture of the world.
I didn't know I loved how tree branches sway with the breeze,
Or how the leaves float down to the ground, dancing on the wind.
I didn't know I loved the sounds of birds chirping,
Or the howls of wolves to the moon.
I didn't know I loved the sweet smells of spring flowers,
Or the smell of freshly cut grass on a warm summer morning.
I didn't know I loved how the raindrops create ripples in puddles,
Or how mud squishes beneath my toes.
I didn't know I loved the rustle bustle of people going to work in the mornings,
Or how the sun slowly sets, indicating the end of a busy day.
I didn't know I loved all these things before,
Or even that these things created beauty in itself.

Summer Love

-May 10

It has been lonely, these past few months. Chico, my bunny, has proven to be of some company at least. A few of Jacob's staff from his house next door will talk with me and ask if I need anything, since I am living alone in my cottage. I always tell them I'm fine. I ask when Jacob will return. They always tell me, "May 18th." Why May 18th? Maybe it's his last day of school or a family tradition to arrive on that day.

I have a little over a week until he comes. I have become wiser these last few months. Fall was gloomy, preparing for winter and harvesting my crops. Winter was even worse. It was the harshest winter I have ever seen; I almost ran out of food supplies, but Jacob's cooks fed me when they got too low. I am very grateful that they have been so generous to me. At times I feel like I am leaning too much on them, so I try not to bother them.

May-13

On Sundays, they let me come over for tea with the cooks, housekeepers, and gardeners. We sit and chat about minor things. The gardeners ask me how I keep my garden so well, and what my secrets were to keeping the vines on my cottage from being overgrown. The housekeepers ask how I keep my house so clean. I would answer back that a small house with only one person is much easier to keep up than a big one with many people. The cooks ask for my recipes and I ask them for theirs, trading our secrets here and there. They are like my family.

My garden is in full bloom; the roses, tulips, sunflowers, and others are all showing off their beautiful colors and smells. My small wood cottage, just scrubbed down from spring cleaning, is looking almost brand new. The wild flowers that Jacob and I usually lay in are blooming, becoming the beautiful meadow that I love to watch grow. The creek is just about warm enough to swim in, the path almost overgrown, but still walked on for my Sunday tea.

-May 15

Last summer was magical. Jacob and I became close. We shared our stories of the past year and he would tell of the outside world. We would sit and read our favorite books, and he helped me with my stutter. Over the past year, I have read aloud to myself a lot, my stutter almost gone. We would watch movies together and laugh at the little things that couldn't happen in real life, like when a lost love writes to the other and they get married after years of being apart. How do you know that they are still the same person from years ago?

By the end of the summer, I fell for him. Jacob never pitied me for living alone in the woods, but loved the woods like I did. He said that he would stay with me in the woods if only he didn't have school and family to worry about. I felt as if I had butterflies in my stomach, or a jittery feeling that wouldn't allow me to sit still while I was around him.

One day, we were at the creek swimming. It was a normal summer day, near the end of summer actually. I was walking to the rock we usually jump off of when I slipped. Jacob was right behind me and caught me in his arms. I stood up on my own.

"Krista, you should be more careful," he said.

"I know. I just slipped," I said.

"I don't want you to get hurt. I won't be here all the time to catch you."

"But you're here now," I said.

As soon as I said that he kissed me. His lips were soft and warm. After a few moments he pulled away.

“I shouldn’t have...”

“It’s alright.”

We kissed again, longer, with more embracing this time. He promised that he would keep in contact with me and come to see me next summer. We shared almost every moment with each other until he left for college once more.

I just can’t wait until he arrives.

-May 17

He is coming tomorrow. I can’t wait to see him. I have been waiting all year to see him again. I wonder if he has changed, maybe gotten a tattoo or cut his hair differently. My hair has always been the same long, wavy blonde hair since I was little. His has always been short, curly, and light brown, his eyes always the most intricate mix of blue, brown, and green I have seen. My eyes are bright blue; the typical blonde haired, blue-eyed girl.

He always said I was different than other girls; and that each time he saw me he was reminded that I was different, but in a good way. I never knew what he meant. Maybe because I wear dresses that I made myself out of fabric the maids trade with me. Maybe because I live in the woods and other girls live in the big city. Maybe he just sees me as a lonely girl in the woods, but I doubt that. I can’t wait to see him.

-May 21

He didn’t come on the 18th. I have been waiting for him. The housekeepers say that he was supposed to arrive days ago. They told me that something could have happened, or that his school could have been longer this year. I hope nothing bad has happened. I hope he does come back. He promised he would be back for my birthday, June 5th.

I remember the day he left. He was about to get in the car when he came over to me and whispered into my ear, “I will be back for your birthday. I promise. I will have a surprise for you. People don’t turn twenty every day.”

Then he gave a goodbye kiss and slowly got into the car, keeping eye contact with me the entire time. I hope he keeps his promise. It has been almost a year since I’ve seen him.

-May 30

The staff received a call today from Jacob. They won’t tell me what he said. The Sunday tea has become strangely quiet. They must be keeping something from me. It worries me what might have happened to Jacob. Did he get a girlfriend? Did he meet someone else? Was he in an accident? My birthday is in just a few days; he should arrive any day. His college must be on summer break by now.

The staff have been running about, fixing things around the house and whispering to each other. I have been spying on them; since they won’t tell me what he said to them. Builders have been hired and are working on a few projects in the house. I tried to bring the cooks a pie I cooked, but they said that they were busy at the moment and I needed to come back later.

I have replanted my garden. The seeds are just sprouting. I have also killed a few squirrels here and there, hoping to try a new recipe the chefs gave me a few weeks ago. It is mashed potatoes with squirrel and gravy on top. When they make it, it's delicious. I want to try to put my own spin on it and let Jacob try it when he comes. He always loved to taste my cooking when I tried new recipes.

He would say, "I should have hired you to be my chef! Your food always tastes better than theirs."

I never believed him, but I hoped he was right. I wanted to surprise him with this dish and a blackberry pie; the blackberry patch near the creek was finally becoming ripe. When I was little, my grandma would show me how to cook the pies. One year, we won Best Dessert at the local fair.

I will turn twenty in a few days. So long ago was it when she taught me how to cook those pies. I hope he comes for my birthday.

-June 5

Today is my birthday. My friend Silvia, a housekeeper, told me that he was coming today. I went to my cottage and put on my best dress, the one I had been working on for the past few months. It was a sky blue with jewels scattered throughout the dress like stars in the night sky. The dress was flowy and silky; it was simple, but beautiful.

When I got back, the housekeepers brought me into the living room and blind-folded me. They walked me into another section of the house. It sounded large my footsteps echoed.

"Hey, you miss me?"

"Jacob?"

"Yep, you still remember me?"

The housekeepers took my blindfold off. I was in a huge library. I knew Jacob's family had a lot of money, but didn't know he could do this.

"I built this for you. I have the classics, mystery, crime, sci-fi, fantasy, and any other kind of book you could possibly want."

"How? Why?" I was awe struck. He had done this for me.

"There is more, come here."

He grabbed me by my waist and led me down to his garden. A new gazebo had been put in. All of my favorite flowers surrounded it. I looked up. In the ceiling of the gazebo, was a carving of Jacob and me laying in the meadow.

He got down on one knee. I knew as soon as he got down what he was going to ask me.

"Krista Olivia Montgomery, will you marry me?"

After a year of being without him, how could I marry him and he leave me so often?

"I graduated this year. I don't have to go back. I can stay here with you."

"No more leaving me?" I asked.

"I will never leave you alone again. You have a family now, and me. I promise I won't ever leave you again."

"Yes."

We kissed and the staff came out clapping, and yelling, "Congrats!" I could be with him. No more being alone and worrying about food.

Right now I am lying on a couch in the library with Jacob, writing about my day. This was worth all the waiting and loneliness.

Crescendos and Decrescendos of Everyday Life

-After Arioso

A shy girl walks down the hallway, unnoticed by everyone, yet she hopes to be noticed by the one she secretly loves. There he is at the end of the hallway beside the biology room, excitement builds within her.

“Hey,” she says to the guy.

“Hey, I don’t think I’ve met you. What’s your name?” he said.

Her excitement dies down into shyness once again. He doesn’t recognize her. They have every class together and she sits beside him in a few of them.

“Georgia,” she says very quietly, almost not audible.

“Hi Georgia, I’m Kevin, but you can call me Kev, everyone else does,” he responds, “Why don’t you sit by me today. Maybe you’re better at this than me, I could really use some help.”

“Sure,” she says quiet and nervously. She couldn’t believe he actually may like her. She was shy, but also very pretty with long blond hair and a bright smile that showed her dimples.

As biology class continued, they became close and talked quietly so the teacher wouldn’t hear which she was quite fine with. At the end, he asked her if she wanted to go to the movies sometime. Trying to not sound too excited or nervous, she said, “Yes, I would.”

Faith had finally gotten the guy she had been longing for and she couldn’t believe it. Why had she been so shy before, I don’t have to be any more? Over the next couple of days, she started to come out her shell and became more involved in life rather than sitting on the sidelines. Life was now not just so quiet and reserved, but fun and full of laughter and joy.

Nightmare

I see a stairwell,
A long, dark, dank, stairwell.
Where does the stairway go?
I hope to never know.
I start down the stairwell,
Despite my protests.
Watching every step,
Cautious of where my foot might land.
Then Suddenly, Unexpectedly.
Vanish.
I fall
Down
Down
Into complete, utter less darkness
Until I feel a sharp pain.
I wake up.
My brother pinching my arm,
Startled of how quickly
I woke up.
I realize that it was just a dream.
NO,
A Nightmare.

Little Bro'

My brother whose hair sticks up like Alfalfa
Whose voice is as soft as a lamb
My brother whose forgetful
Whose mind is scattered
My brother whose random
Whose mind is never stopping
My brother with whom I fight and argue
Whose anger is like a volcano
My brother who loves video games
Whose thumbs must get sore
My brother whose laugh is loud
Whose smile shines bright
Like a starry night sky
My brother whose eyes remind me,
Of thunderclouds in a summer storm

Cornered

I feel trapped in my own body. On the outside I may be a teenager, but I feel like a professor's brain was captured and put into my head. I've been called a nerd, but I feel like that isn't a good way to describe me. Maybe I'm just mature for my age or maybe I am just too smart for my own good. I always overanalyze situations and problems making them more difficult than they are meant to be. Maybe I don't fit into a category. In school, I feel like I am surrounded by predators that stalk their prey, me. Why am I an outsider in society? Why am I so intelligent? Who am I? I feel as though I am being cornered and the world wants to keep me an outsider, never to be a part of society.

Cornered; the Haiku

I feel cornered, trapped

Like an inmate in prison

My prison, my mind

Priscilla Mach lives in Houston, Texas with her family of five. (Plus a few dogs and some fish.) She currently goes to River Oaks Baptist School and hopes to go to a high school for the arts in the future. At the time being, Priscilla isn't quite sure what she would like to do once she has finished her education. Her first love has always been drawing and painting, but as she has grown she has expanded to all different kinds of art. (Creative Writing being one of her most recent favorites) She has had a lot of fun at ADVANCE this year, and she hopes that her readers will like the anthology.

What I Should Have Done: Written a Title

I have made many mistakes
And they have helped me learn.
I have said things that I regret,
It's taught me to think about my words.
There are things I haven't tried,
Chances I never took –
The things I should have done.

I come home from school, after a long day.
I sit in my room, replaying in my mind the moments I could have done better.
My little sister plays outside, alone.
Yes, I could have done better.
The things I should have done.

I arrive at a party in a brand new dress.
I don't know anyone there; I don't try to meet anyone new.
Instead I lay my back against the wall; I watch them have their fun.
A girl sits next to me; I turn on my phone and tune them all out.
The things I should have done.

I walk to the stand of my favorite street vendor, he is closed.
I have no interest in the other stands so I head back home.
A hopeful young man lays out handmade bracelets, I come near.
He gives me a smile. Will I at least try on a bracelet? No. I walk on by.
The things I should have done.

I sit at a desk with paper, so many possibilities and different things to write.
I stare at the page blankly, too scared to let it show me the way,
Too scared to mess up or be judged, too scared to try.
The things I hope to overcome.

For the Bride To Be, That Never Was: A Three Part Haiku Series

A ghost wavers, silent.
Shimmering cobwebs drip down.
Could have been the dress –

Raindrops on the stone
Caressing each tier like flowers
A cake for the bride –

A shriveled bouquet
A ringless finger lays limp.
The day never came.

Alive But Gone

The vines grow closely,
They twist and turn,
Covering all they can reach
And draping the stones.
The mosses, they come second
And do their part.
They fill every crevice, every notch, every nook.
Yet, they leave the names untouched.
Though the trees may fall and the stumps may rot,
Let the lives of the people be forgotten not.
For every wise elder and small infant babe,
They all have a marker, they all have a grave.

Peter Pan's Shadow

Have you seen Peter Pan's shadow,
The one belonging to the boy who can float among stars?
His friend has stretched out past Neverland,
And there is no one to help fight pirate wars.

He's in dire need of its return;
He feels incomplete without it.
The Lost Boys say he's only on short travels,
But Peter sincerely doubts it.

So now he's traveling to our world
With trustworthy Tink by his side,
So please can you tell me dear Wendy –
Do you know where Peter Pan's shadow hides?

My Book

My book whose pages lay barren
Whose cover has yet to be bound
Whose surface yearns to be touched
Whose title has not been found
Whose ideas are full of promise
Whose dedication is unknown
Whose questions are left without answers
Whose author is still above ground

The One With No Story

I plead with you now,
Left only with a broken voice.
I need your help,
I need your story.
My heart beat grows faint,
My pen strokes are weary.
Give me the words,
For I must write them now.
Hurry, please hurry!
Before I run out of time.

Funny How That Works

I didn't know I loved the earth, until I was soon leaving it.
I didn't know I loved revolving doors, until I tried a few spins.
I didn't know that I loved security, until I found myself griping it.
I didn't know I loved small cafes, until I was amongst the chatter and din.

I didn't know I loved soothing music, until I let myself listen.
I didn't know I loved town square fountains, until I saw one shimmer and glisten.
I didn't know I loved how wispy clouds could be, until I had my face against the glass.
I didn't know I loved afternoon trolley rides, until holding the bars of brass.
I didn't know I loved chewing so much, until it stopped the ringing in my ears.
I didn't know I loved old paintings, until I saw one that surpassed me in years.
I didn't know I loved puzzles, until I tried one and passed the test.
I didn't know I loved foreign beds, until one offered me much needed rest.

I didn't know I loved flying, until I was back on the ground.
I didn't know that I loved to travel, until I was home safe and sound.

Please...

Remember to take out the trash every week, and every time you smell something rotten; even if it's someone else's turn to take out the trash you WILL take it out if something is fishy; also remember to wheel the trashcan out to the gate on Tuesdays, the garbage men come that day and they MUST take the trash; if we ever have a house guest coming please clean your room... What? I know you said something... No we will NOT be spending the evening in your room, but the guests might want a tour, and you WILL NOT sass me young lady; paper towels are only acceptable on pizza night —which is only once a month, well it's a bit more than that, which is something that we need to work on; your father likes to work out in the morning before his meetings, it's a major stress reliever for him, and when he is calm things are a lot easier for the rest of us, so don't be late in the morning because he has to take YOU to school in the morning FIRST. Grab your backpack, grab your umbrella, here's your shoes, where's your gym bag, grab a snack' wait, you're wearing THAT skirt?!? That's from 5th grade! I don't care if all your other ones are dirty, find something else; always have your phone with you when you leave the house, it I hear from another parent that you were on your phone the whole time then you will lose it for a week... no, it is not your phone, it is OUR phone, if anything it is my phone because I PAID FOR IT; don't slam the doors because eventually they will break, don't slam the car door, its automatic, what did I tell you about LOCKING doors?... Please I have seen everything you're hiding before, privacy with your family is no big deal, and if you're fighting with your sister again, it ends NOW; I don't care who started it, I'm ENDING it; always rinse the dishes and utensils BEFORE they go in the machine; never leave the stove flame on unless you are watching it AT ALL TIMES; don't mess with the chopping block without supervision; whenever you are driving KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE ROAD! Now is not the time to be having a conversation with the backseat passengers or pointing out that butterfly; if you don't want to appear ditsy to other drivers, then don't swerve in your lane, @\$%! You heard that language I just said? Don't ever speak it in front of your friends, siblings, or elders, but remember it, you might need it one day, hopefully not; thank god you don't have a temper like your mother; What?... you want to take your sister to the park?... No, it's alright, I'll stay here, I Trust You.

Short Story

Karen smiled down at the glow from her phone screen. She had butterflies in her stomach, partially from moving down in an elevator. She heard a soft ding every time someone got on the elevator, pretty much every other floor. However, she wasn't worried about being late. She needed to get off at floor three, but she had purposely traveled to the very top of the building in the elevator so that she could continue her conversations with Garrett. (He was the cutest guy on the internet,) in her opinion. He had a bright white smile and handsome brown eyes that matched his golden-tan skin perfectly. She could go on and on about him along with the flirty texts he was sending her. She had done so with Anya, but Anya wasn't interested. (She had needed Karen's help with something because she wasn't allowed to be seen or found. Anywhere.) When Karen remembered the reason she was at this hospital, she managed to pull herself away from Garrett's gorgeous pictures so that she could check what floor she was on. Floor four. She sighed, glancing at one more picture of Garrett and remarked out loud.

"It's so unfortunate that I have to go see this old hag instead of spending time with you." She blew the picture a little kiss.

Several people in the elevator turned and stared at her for saying such a thing. She simply smiled at them sweetly with her beautiful face, and they went back to waiting. (Waiting for their floor, for their next few steps, and for their next few years.) The elevator stopped with a small hiccup of movement as the doors separated to let Karen pass through.

"Jeez, that was slow," she remarked, "This place really needs some updates." And she was right, it was clean, and the people were friendly, but everything felt old. Karen was glad that she would be moving to a new city soon, one of the perks of having your dad be a rich man. She felt bad that most of the people would have to stay in this city that seemed to be crumbling a little bit every day, but the feeling only lasted for a moment. Karen tossed her hair behind her shoulders to get some attention. First impression is everything, that's at least one thing that Karen's parents had taught her. So she sauntered over to the main desk, making sure to put one foot directly in front of the other, the way that models walk. She succeeded in showing off her new pumps and legs, and the doctors weren't the only ones staring; she had the full attention of the head nurse at the front desk as well. She eyed this new girl warily,

"Most people that came to visit the elderly in the hospital wore shorts and t shirts," the nurse thought, "but this girl looked like she had come to wheel one of them off to prom in the get up she was wearing." Karen daintily placed both hands on the counter of the front desk, revealing a brand new manicure.

"May I help you, miss?" the nurse asked politely.

"Yes, please do. I am here to visit a Mrs. Denby." Karen stated very matter-o-factly.

"Oh... I see." The nurse replied.

"I'll get you a visitor's pass," she said, her eyes still on Karen as she turned to get one.

In a few moments Karen was walking down a sterilized hall to room B202. She kept up her runway strut and tilted her head back a bit so that her viewers could better admire her neck. She got so caught up smiling and waving at a hypnotized passerby that she almost missed the room. She gracefully back tracked and read the small sign that hung under the room number.

'And then Jesus said, let all the little children come unto me. And they did, and he blessed them with God's love.'

She rolled her eyes at this.

"More of that Bible crap." She muttered before knocking on the door.

"You may come in," Answered a small but firm voice from inside the room.

Karen cracked open the door and peeked her head around the frame. There was a standard, white hospital bed in the middle of a small room. In the bed sat a small woman. She had a periwinkle blue crochet quilt draped over her shoulders. She was a feeble little thing, but she did not show it. She sat up straight against the many pillows supporting her back, and she had a tired but serene expression on her sagging face. Karen observed all of this as she walked in and closed the door. It let out a loud squeaking noise that made Karen wince. The lady did not turn to look at her though; instead she stared out her window, as if lost in thought. Karen looked in that direction as well. The window was draped with a transparent lace curtain, and outside there was a small bed of Iris flowers leaning against the glass. Karen looked back to the old lady. She sat there unblinking staring at the flowers. Karen didn't know how to get the woman's attention. She slowly walked to the opposite end of the room where a rocking chair lay; she picked it up, carried it over to the end of the bed as quietly as possible, and sat down in it. Immediately her tight dress slid to the back of the chair, laying her back against the blue quilt that hung on the back of it. She felt clumsy as she scooted her long legs up to the front of the chair so she could see the woman better. "Hello." Karen said, clearing her throat.

The woman blinked out of her trance and turned to face Karen, she had the lightest eyes Karen had ever seen. Not foggy, they were glittering with light, so she couldn't be blind; but just very pale blue. No- a silvery-grey. Now it was Karen's turn to blink, she looked at the woman again, and this time her eyes seemed to be darker, more concentrated, as if she had been pulled from a dream.

"Yes?" the woman asked then continued.

"Well I can see that you've made yourself comfortable." She stated as her eyes focused on Karen, maybe she really was going blind.

"Oh!" Karen squeaked, jumping out of the chair as if the woman's words had pinched her.

"I'm terribly sorry, I just saw you there and I didn't want to disturb you. I-" Karen was now grateful that her mother had shown her how to talk to elders. She already felt awkward enough when she walked into the room but now she was making it worse by rambling.

"I'm sorry," she said sheepishly.

The woman watched her again with her dangerous eyes, but she had a small smile tickling her lips. Was she amused?

"Its fine," the woman replied her face setting in a small frown. Nodding to the chair

"I heard you come in, and anyway, I have that chair there for visitors."

Karen slowly sat back down, her stare with the woman never breaking.

"There, that's better." The woman said, giving a nod of approval and finally letting her stare relax a bit. They sat in silence for a moment as the woman studied Karen, and Karen studied the woman. An unsettling silence had settled over the two of them when Karen finally decided to explain why she was there.

"Anya sent me." She piped up.

The woman did not show any sign of curiosity about Anya's whereabouts, but her eyes darkened again and her gaze turned into a scowl.

"She's gone isn't she?" The woman stated more than asked.

Karen was stunned, Anya had been her friend and she hadn't figured that out until she found the note.

"Yes," she answered, "She's in trouble with the law, I don't know what she did this time but she has left the house and all I could find was a note."

The woman looked down at her lap, she played with the IV string that stuck out of her right hand and slowly started.

"The house, the one she was staying at. It's yours isn't it?" Karen asked.

The woman nodded, "I lend it to people who come to me looking for help, there are more and more of them, your friend is one of many who have lived there in my absence." She said.

Karen sat in awkward silence once more before asking, "How did you get in here?"

The woman was hooked up to several different pouches. She wasn't in bad shape though, she was just old.

"Your friend knows how I got in here." The woman replied, "I told her to scare her. It's because I see a lot of myself in her; I didn't want her to make the same mistakes." She paused, as if debating whether or not she should say more, "Those mistakes landed me the title of nut job, and so they stuck me in here to keep an eye on me." She said, forcing the words out.

"Who," Karen persisted.

"The government" the woman said, apparently it was blatantly obvious.

Karen's eyes narrowed, "You weren't the one who got her into this mess were you?" Karen asked the woman, "She was a good citizen, and my friend. Now she has to run because she broke some big rule!"

Karen paused after she said this, was she really sure if Karen was a good citizen, she didn't seem to be doing anything wrong, but the crowds Karen had seen her hanging out with weren't exactly clean cut.

Maybe that's why Karen did like Anya so much; she was what Karen couldn't be. Her dad was an important officer for the government. It was a miracle that she would even get to meet people like Anya.

"Your friend has gotten herself in a real fix, can't say I blame her, but I did try to warn her." The woman sighed with regret.

"How could you have warned her?" she asked, "I looked at the front desk; she hasn't come here in weeks. I was the only one who saw her during that time." Karen said.

She was confused. Anya had cut off most of her ties with her 'street friends', as Karen would call them. She had only kept in touch with Karen, and even then it was on rare occasion. In fact, the last time she saw her, Anya wasn't acting like herself at all. She was acting guilty-

"That's what she let you think." The woman replied snapping Karen out of her thoughts.

"Why would she come to you? I was her only friend." Karen spat out, she didn't like this woman at all.

"She has many friends you don't know about, and I am her source of reaching them. You just happen to be the only one with government information." The old woman stated harshly, and almost smirking.

Karen was about to retort with all of the names of friends she had met, but then the last thing she heard caught her.

"What do you mean, information?" she asked angrily.

"Don't you get it? With a daddy as big and important as yours you should have at least some kind of brain in that plastic head of yours, you can figure this out." The woman sneered.

Karen opened her mouth to but it had suddenly dried, the realization dawned on her.

"She used you." The woman stated plainly, then continued

"You should know that she's not from here; not from this town. Many of the people I speak with aren't from here. She was looking for a cure to save her family; she is trying to steal from the government."

Karen sat there dumbfounded, "But why didn't she just ask me for the information then?"

"She was going to. I can tell you that for sure, but part of her probably didn't want to hurt you. It was foolish that she didn't take that opportunity though. She should have used you, that's the only thing your friendship was of any real use for." Mrs. Denby said these words with conviction and disgust.

It would have been kinder if the old hag slapped her on the face than said those words. Sure, Karen had friends. She was popular. She could have them do whatever she wanted. They worshipped her. Anya, Anya was different. She saw her as a flawed person, not as a goddess up on a golden pedestal. She made a

point of publicly humiliating her the first time they met. That was how Karen tracked her down, that was why they were honest with each other, that was why she was her only true friend....

Karen didn't want to finish this train of thought. She knew where it would lead her, but she asked anyway.

"What's going to happen to her?"

The woman glared at her with disappointment,

"If she's lucky, she won't be caught. She can avoid the law if she puts her mind to it, but she can also be rash." The woman looked back towards her flowers, her eyes held concern now, instead of contempt or pride."

"So what if she's rash, she's not stupid. You don't think she would-" Karen was cut off.

"I don't know." The woman stated a bit harshly

"She is determined to get what she came for; she might go to them again, either to ask for help or to steal what she needs."

Karen slumped to the back of her chair, she didn't know much about these kinds of things but she had snooped enough to learn that the people that went in, voluntarily or not, didn't come out.

"But maybe they will give it to her, then she can go home and give it to her family, they can trust her she won't tell them about here.

"What about the strange new formula, the doctors won't recognize it." The woman reminded her. This was not helping, but she had a point.

"But Anya can figure that out," Karen stated, reassuring herself more than the woman.

"She can tell them that it was someone from a different center, and then they won't go looking for answers. She can make them believe, can't she?" Karen stopped.

The old lady had won. None of those ideas would work because even for Anya, it was impossible. The government was too smart. Karen knew that best.

Suddenly it was becoming very hard for Karen to breathe, she sucked in a deep breath and it felt like someone had glued her throat together. She moved her mouth, trying to form words, but nothing came. Her eyes darted around the room, looking for something, anything to grab onto so she wouldn't sink into this despair and anger that bubbled and rose inside of her.

"Even if she does convince them they won't let her go, neither of us would see her again... I'm sorry"

The old woman said the coldness in her voice turning into pity.

"You're wrong!" Karen yelled, suddenly standing up and running; to where? She didn't know. The bathroom maybe, yes. There she could clear her thoughts.

Karen clung to this thought, repeating it in her head as she slowed her breathing. She wasn't running anymore, but she was hurrying to avoid the stares from bewildered nurses and patients in the hall.

There it was. Karen pushed the door to the ladies room open then closed it and locked it rushing to the mirror. Her face was a mess, red and flushed, not the beautiful pale ivory she had been keeping it. Her mascara was running; not too much, but enough to make her eyes look wide and blurry. Her hair had a few wisps floating around here and there and she quickly tucked them in, splashing some water on her hands to smooth her hair and cool down her face.

Her thoughts were a mess. She tried to comprehend everything that was going on, and that's when she broke down all over again. She cried in frustration. She had been all better, preparing herself to leave and

-

Preparing....

Anya had said something to her about that. Karen had asked if it was ok if she took some time to prepare before they left for a party.

“You can prepare all you want,” she had answered, “Because you have the option to do something after. Others will prepare, but nothing they try will ever be accomplished. You’re lucky. I wish you could see the rest of this place. I’ll show you-“

“NO!” Karen screamed, covering her face.

Her body was racked with sobs while she remembered, but eventually the shudders stopped. She stood still. She slowly uncovered her eyes and looked straight at herself in the mirror. But she wasn’t looking at herself; she was looking at Anya’s eyes. Another memory, from the day she left, and now it turns out she had left for good. Anya’s guilty expression stared back nervously at Karen. All of a sudden Karen wasn’t sad anymore. She was full of hate.

“I trusted you!” She yelled at the illusion.

“You were my first real friend, you were smart, and you really saw me!” she raged on.

“But then you had to be stupid and disobey the government!” Karen picked up the metal soap dispenser sitting on the bathroom counter.

“I would never have helped you!”

She flung the object with all her might at the mirror. She looked into Anya’s wide eyes one last time. Then the glass splintered, and the cracks spider webbed over the eyes.

She stared at it a moment then spoke to calm her down.

“The government is right. Everything is fine. Anya was never my friend. I don’t even know her. She’s gone. Everything is taken care of now.... She never even existed.”

Karen didn’t bother to check her face this time, there were cracks in the mirror anyway. She tucked her hair back again and headed for the door.

“Goodbye.” She said, and then she left.

I, Bella Mishaan-Avalos, am entering junior year at Arlington Heights High School in Fort Worth. I enjoy learning languages (and speaking them!!), running, reading, writing and drawing. I love to laugh (which is why I love characters so much) and enjoy finding new and fun ways of writing. My favorite thing that I wrote this year is The Ghosts of Seide Street, because it many different characters and techniques went into the process of creating it. This was so much fun. Thank you and I hope you enjoy everything in this.

A Vague and Beautiful Concoction

beautiful concoction of musical screeches
dim Rapsallion swashbuckling through
pedantic masses which walk in the whistling whispers.
Dreamer of the vague lavender breezes of once
upon a time and long long ago that sail in the
sea of the past, swirling, whirling, rushing blue, blue
blue skies opening with the unweaving of the clouds.
dancers stumbling over their clumsy bodies, reaching
out to find an empty space. The beat stutters.
A twisted hand with knobbly knuckles, belonging to
the Queen, sitting on her cardboard throne.
And you, with a pen and a journal: what next?

Ana

My mother, who sings of the sea with the sound of the waves
Whose hands are shields, metal forged in fire,
then hammered on an anvil until they could take no more,
until they would not bend
My mother, whose laugh is the gentle clinking of glasses,
the blessing spoken in the instants before
My mother, who is a tree: firm and short,
who does not sway,
who is a perch for birds to land and take flight
My mother, whose mind is a wheel, a globe, spinning, spinning, away, away
And whose heart is the finely tuned melody,
floating between now and forever
My mother, whose mouth is fixed like an ellipsis,
Always caught amongst words
Whose strides have become wings,
Who could fly out beyond us, but
Instead stays another day, then another

Snapshots of a Cemetery

I

Cemetery open from dawn 'til dusk.
Not at night. So when the tips
Of the sun's last rays no longer
Rustle with the swaying leaves,
The gate will be gently locked
With a *click*.

And the ghosts are left
In silence.

II

Three little bushes, haphazardly
Planted, are wilting, their once vibrant
Pink flowers droop down, no longer
Keeping a vigil.

The planter must be gone, far
Too far away to remember them,
To care for them.

So the poisoned oak wraps them
In a stifling embrace: *don't*
Worry. Someone's still watching.

III

The white stripes have faded into a dusty
Brown, reminders of a forgotten memorial day.
Lilies—dying but not dead—maybe a
Month old and mounded dirt patted down
By rain.
A small toy—a Spiderman figurine—
Caked with dirt, placed by a mother's
Hand.

The letters have become shallow, faded, letting
Time (that Great Poet) wash them away.
But what better place to learn about life
Than from those who have already finished?
Those who sleep silently as the world
Spins.

Dreams of Flying

I dreamed, the other night, as I cushioned myself into my nest, of flying: the world became a toy town, with fragile little dolls.

I dreamed of swallows passing by, winking with their gleaming eyes and banking left as I went right.

I dreamed of orchards, ripe with red, red, red fruit which slowly crackle and break, f a l l i n g

I dreamed of an empty swing, swaying in the breeze, and it's matching once gleaming slide, now a rusted brown

I dreamed of where the waves lap, of the foam that stays like old stories, waiting to be dragged out.

Improbabilities

The earth spins on its axis at 23*,
Once every twenty four hours, light
And dark alternating.
And seven billion people, watching as
The universe shifts, as the sun gleams,
Hitting my face in waves which crash
Against every particle.
Fourteen billion brown, green, gray, blue
Eyes, fixed on each other: *what next?*
The stars explode, dying, dying, will
I die, too?

The sisters of the wind blow through,
Allowing their fingers to tangle
In the small blades of grass that
Shift, brilliant green, trying to grow
Up, up, up, just trying to be
Seen.

I didn't know, then, that the novelty
Isn't being seen, not to blaze in a supernova
Or to burn like the sun
I didn't know that one in seven
Billion isn't a statistic, it's a
miracle.

The Name

So what is it? And you stare, your eyes piercing. I stay still, because maybe if I'm still enough, then you'll go away. *What is it?* It's a single syllable. One little note. Nothing to fill up a page about, much less a story.

But if you know it, then you'll know me. Not my secrets, of course. Not the pale voice that haunts my dreams, nor my odd little penchants, nor the quaint and random collection of words that make bubbles of laughter fill the empty space around me, but you will know *me*. And if someone asks you, *Hey, you know that one girl?* You will say, *yeah, I do*.

And maybe I don't want you to. Maybe I know enough people, maybe enough people know me, because there *is* a difference, isn't there? Between knowing and being known?

It is, as I have said, only one syllable. Not rare, not particularly unique. But it is *mine*. It has been since before I was here, long before I was a thought, long before I was the whisper of an idea, and it will be for long after I've gone. It will be the word that people form when they look at the faded and weathered stone that once marked my bones but by then will only mark memories. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust.

But now you wait, your lips forming a little 'oh', *what is it? What's your name?*

I will tell you, won't I? Because that's what people do, right? When you ask, I answer. And it is still mine. But it will still be when it is so battered, so used, that it becomes commonplace? I was dedicated once, to somebody beyond you. And my name is still mine.

Mas Fuerte

I remember my yellow dress fluttering as the rope swung back and forth and back. A laugh filled the small, rocky garden, which had an old detached garage, white paint flaking and falling bit by bit and three trees, the oldest and strongest standing dead center, steadily holding the tired rope on which I clung to.

The laugh had come from a man whose face was old sandpaper, crumpled and rough and dry, and whose head glistened in the early morning sun.

“Harder,” I think I said, “*mas fuerte!*”

And so he braced himself, and I now know how much effort he must’ve put into those pushes, to throw me forward and watch me fling back, to still his shaking hands, even for a moment.

But then, I just knew that he would do as I said, that I could watch the world grow and shrink beneath me, like a little fairy who floats, watches, waits, leaves.

There was an instant, as my hands grew sore and his arms grew tired that the world, my world, blurred and all I could see were the leaves above me, thousands of little lives which broke the sky into millions of shining stars, and the sun that glittered onto my face, the face of a little girl who had not yet learned of the nature of the world.

I bared my teeth in a large grin, becoming part of the winds, even though I was barely two feet off the ground.

The Empty House

There is, right now, at this moment, a house at the top of a clumsily paved hill, with its rod-iron fence carefully placed on a protruding retaining wall. The vines have grown well past an acceptable length, interweaving and reaching, trying to skim the skins of pedestrians walking by, trying to say hello. And the tattered curtains shift in the dry June breeze, dancing to the noise of a cat's little motor.

Two large garden chairs will soak up the sun, with flower beds on the right, and three trees which tap-tap-tap in the windows on the left, each side of the little yard covered with greens and enclosed by a fence.

The door leading in is glass, melding the cool bluish glow of slate that covers the small porch with the smooth wood which stretches out through the house. Inside, it is still. Nothing breathes. A woman lives there, but she's gone now, presumably to take her rough, clawed out place amongst the masses. The sun floods through five large windows, illuminating the fine points of dust which lightly land on lamps, chairs, tables.

Every so often, there will be a light disturbance: a *whirr* of the air conditioning, or the *glub* of the ice-maker announcing its creation, and then silence will resume, particles of invisible gasses bouncing without ever making a sound, swaying to a song only they can hear.

Then, when the kitchen clock reads five-thirty, there will be a loud *click*. The woman, whose hair spills from her tight ponytail, glasses resting lightly on her head, will sigh tiredly. It is the first proper sound the house will have heard all day. The woman will drop her baggages: a plastic bag with a half-eaten or, more often, uneaten lunch, a small black purse with keys peeking out of the top. Then, she will start the process of ending the day.

Moment in time

Time is the instant between rain drops, the pause between breaths of laughter

It is the scent of snow in a muddy lawn, slowly covering the world gently, gently

Time is the bitter taste of sweet chocolate two swallows after it's gone

It is the last, fading notes on Old Blue Eyes' cacophony, which blasts from the old record player in the small living room

It is the man who leans back, feeling the weight of his body settles on his bones, whose hands are no longer smooth fields, but have become deserts and canyons with creases and valleys, sagging and dry

Time is the way his eyes glance, as if he's quick enough, he can catch stars flying by

Scarlet

For I will consider the color red

For it burns with crackles and creates life

For it spills slowly: drop by drop until history is made

For it becomes a symbol: love, hate, passion

For it is worn on weddings, a woman in gold and twisting in red, today, forever

For it falls to the earth, large, round, eternally wise, eternally forgiving

For it creates order, thousands of metal cars twinkling like scales in the sun, stopped, waiting

For it is primary. That is, it is only ever itself

For it reaches across oceans, across time, existing

For it does nothing at all. Except, of course, for us.

The Bride's Groom

The Woman in white wailed, her chains clashing against each other and the sound of her voice resonating through the cell her captors called a room. She shuddered, the white torn lace now muddied and brick red, swished as she pulled away from the wall, which crumbled and allowed the cold to pierce her exposed skin.

Her veil, once beautiful translucent, now lay limp and tattered beside her. The walls seemed to be closing in, she couldn't breathe, couldn't breathe, couldn't breathe, and it felt like something was trying to crawl out of her throat; a scream that died on her tongue. The world tilted, left, right, left.

Then blackness.

*

When her eyes next opened the sun, which slipped through the cracks, was gone. Night time. The night was the worst: the air got cold, still as death, silent as the empty grave. Sometimes, a rat would scamper past, realizing that this prison was *not* where it wanted to be.

Lucky bastard.

Footsteps would make their way closer to the door, three breaths away then two then one. The lock would shoot open and the Thing would come inside, reaching his hand out, brushing her matted hair.

“So beautiful,” he would murmur, “and mine.”

And bile and hatred would rise and bubble, burning the inside of her throat, *don't touch me. Get away.*

But his fingers would flirt with the wedding dress and his face would inch closer...

The woman awoke with a jolt, grabbing her wrists, making sure that she was free, that this was only an illusion. A crow fluttered to her window, *who are you? What do you think your doing?*

She twisted at the small, perfectly cut diamond around her finger: *I'm happy! We're getting married in the morning.*

She turned to give her answer to the bird, who was long gone, wings noiseless as it had taken flight.

Please

But who was she pleading with? Only the silence answered her.

The Ghosts of Seide Street

The little coffee shop was a sort of local landmark. It had stood, with the same little quaint metal tables, some flowered wall paper, for thirty years. In the early days, people would come for the victuals: the coffee had been hand brewed, the scones baked every morning, and a faint smell of baking bread would always emanate from the kitchen.

Now, the café had fallen into a perpetual state of disarray: the wallpaper cracked and peeling, with various swaths of paint randomly decorating the wall, the once bright white now a sort of urine yellow. The place bore a vague resemblance to a nursing home, and the French woman who ran it had long since entered her *troisième étage*; the coffee was served cold, the spare grains collecting at the bottom of the cup, the scones baked about once a week, made to last, nobody really bought them anymore, anyways.

The door, which was glass, was always coated in a fine layer of dust and cobwebs, with a tarnished old bells singing when someone walked in, *hello, hi, hello*. The passersby would always spare a glance at the little place—sometimes pity, sometimes longing, sometimes sadness.

The shop itself was nestled between homes and an empty shop, which always glittered gray (gray walls, concrete floors, even sunlight seemed to dim); the ghost reminding the old little shop, and the old little lady inside, what would come.

Across the street, a little bench stood, waiting for a bus that was constantly late, its blue faded silver, and now into the final stages of an ashen, cracked cement color. Two small trees were planted in front of the town homes (of which there were ten, but the city had decided that there wasn't enough money). The homes themselves were a sort of dark brown, old-on-purpose brick, each door adorned with a brass number, 340, 341, 342 and so on.

The street, Seide Street, as it was, had been repaired about five years ago, when the houses had been built, so as to “revive” the west side of the city—the *city* had then decided that there wasn't enough money for that, either—the cement had cracked, crumbling in various places and letting dandelions poke their vibrant yellow heads out of the sidewalk, but the road itself was still a dark gray and cars had no problem ripping through, and never seeing the place—well, *seeing*, but never noticing.

On the other side—that is, if a pedestrian were to brave the single crosswalk, the one with a malfunctioning sign—they would have found a small little grocery store whose produce was limp, their meat always two days old, and a bookstore which had moved in two years ago, their owners claiming that they'd ‘been so excited to have chosen Seide Street’.

Everyone else had known what they really meant: they'd had no other choice, every other option had been exhausted, you're just as washed up as the rest of us.

The woman in 345 sighs, rubbing her tired hands over her bloodshot eyes. A little notebook sits blankly on the desk in front of her. She can hear, in the starry silence of the night, a whisper. Well, less of a whisper than the echo of one. It spirals and twists, soaking through her synapses, *please, please, please, is anybody there?* And she is.

Not at that moment, of course, not when she's so blinded that she can't see their eyes sparkling with tears: theirs, hers. But when he evolves from a wisp of smoke to a shadow in the corner of her mind; when he takes a stutter step, wobbling to that place beside her that is his, that will be until he had nothing more to say; when he slowly drags the chair, allowing its unfelt legs to scrape against the hardwood; when he sits, rigid as the lamplight that glows outside, as uncomfortable with her, his teller, as she is with

him, her ghost; when he finally settles his pointy elbows on his wide knees, leaning forward in anticipation, *is this it? Can I finally speak?* Then she will listen.

She watches his blurry edge coalesce as the atoms of his being become sharp. She will scribble as the words flow: *It's dark and cold and I'm alone, I'm sad, tell me who I am*, and she will endeavor to do right by him. And slowly, the marks on the page will become a word, a world, the place from whence he came; the place he's desperate to return to.

Please I want to go home.

Okay, she will say, feeling the streaming rivers stain her face, *I promise.*

And, finally, after they have learned all there is to learn about each other, after they have shared their minds, their hearts, their souls, he will rise, tenderly extending his hand.

No. I don't want you to go.

It's time, he will give her a smile, a real one, all gums and teeth and dimples, *But there are more coming.*

She looks out her window, gently tapping her pen to the blank page:

This place was five floors tall, and his flat was on the fourth floor. It wasn't a large space, what with its five rooms and its huge glass panes that brought light every day, right on cue. The man, the one who owned the space, lived on his own.

He was tall; mops of dark red hair fell over his bright eyes and when you would get too close, he would take a small step back, a light scrape of his feet on the floor. The lady who guards the door would talk.

'He's an odd one,' *she would say, but not, of course, in front of him,* 'Not a word at all, as long as I've known him.'

And the passers would give a grim smile, 'what can you do?'

*

One day, when the moon still clung to the sky, but a faint gray line hugged the city, the man in flat 4C stood, turned to the light which tried to crash through the glass, to lie on his floor.

Tiny drops swam. A hand came up to wipe at them. No. And a small glass with scotch, his old friend, sat to his left, pick me up, pick me up, pick me up.

His mind was on fire, fists clenched, white, white, white. Go on. A bowl of red, green, blue, black chips sat in front of him. One year. Two. Five. Ten.

Pick me up. Pick me up. No one would know. No one would care. Just this once.

The city stayed dark. There were no tunes if pretty notes, nor a buzz against the sleek, steel table on which the slight glass sat; no voice from the past through the phone, just a mind that could not rest. Just five red half-moons on his pale palm. And a scream. God, that scream.

It was the type that could break hearts, the type that came from struck dogs, from lost souls. No home. No point.

And it would not stop.

Ten years last May. How could one drink hurt?

The night stayed still.

And then it broke. The glass hit the wall, going, going, where did it land? His feet pad on the floor, don't bleed. Don't break.

*

The next day, or the same one, when the sun was high in the sky, he left with one box, then two, filled with stuff. The only things left of his six year stay.

Thank you, he told the lady who guards the door as she held it for him, Thank you.

He did not come back. That was three years ago, and the man lived three doors down. What he wants is not rare. He wants what we all do. I hope he saw it. What he searched for. What we all do. What we all have to find.

The room will barely be dark, what with the shutters that don't close all the way and the street lamp that adorns the path outside: a beautiful nuisance. And the man, the one in 340, his eyes will be peeled, unable to close for more than a flutter, and the silence will be overbearing, stifling.

He *is* tired, so he will squeeze his eyes tight. So tightly, that little blue, green, red spots will dance across the lids, ribboned by flashes of white, one-two-three, one-two-three. He can hear his heartbeat. It beats systole, diastole, and systole again, keeping him alive. But it's scary, in the too-dark world beneath closed eyes with an invisible force sustaining him.

The old springs will creak beneath him, trying to balance the man's shifting weight as he tangles himself in the covers, then kicks his legs out in an effort to be free if the soft noose around him.

The light will flicker slightly, perhaps an electrical pulse. He will clench all of his muscles, because somebody told him that if he clenches all of his muscles, then releases them, they will relax and he will sleep.

To sleep, perchance to dream. Shut up, Will, he thinks, because now is not the time and he is *really* tired, his brain ready to give out, neurons wired, each sending the same message to the hypothalamus (*sleep, sleep, sleep*), but the frontal lobe doesn't agree. It chooses to stay awake, to watch the world outside stay silent.

As it does tonight. As it does every night.

*

What should I have done, he looks out the pane of glass, a simple sheet that allows light to fly in, *what should I have done?*

His mind spins like a top, whirling in a mass of chaos: old songs, a peal of laughter, favorite places (the old tree that was gnarled with time, now just a stump, *it was dying*, they had told him, *aren't we all, though?*) Boxes of memories spilled out in front of him like forgotten toys: a bit dusty, a bit cracked, a bit loved on; real, but only for a moment.

The coffee pot beeps, its red light flashing, pulling his eyes away from the window, from the moving people below. His hands are steady, long fingers wrapping themselves daintily around the black pot and slowly pouring the black coffee. Bitter. Fitting.

The light settles on the bits of dust that flutter in the air, which move carefully, as if not to disturb the man; the settle on empty couches and armchairs, empty beds and cold pillows, things which only ghosts dare use.

It's too late, isn't it? A young woman across the street waits for the bus, which is late, as per usual. Her head flickers up, down, up, down, looking. Searching. Searching for what? Two blocks away, a car stops and the man watches as a small family joins the crowded streets. *I don't know them. What is it about them?*

Somewhere in the apartment, a door creaks open. It does that, sometimes, all by itself, but he turns nonetheless, eyes wide, expecting, always expecting.

What should I have done? He settles with the too-cold coffee in his little chair, the leather squeaking as he shifts his weight. The light doesn't quite reach him. *What I should have done was...I don't know. At least I should have said.*

The old toys are gently repacked into their boxes. 340 is silent once more.

The cars blur past the midday heat, with an orchestra of honks and roars and muffled radio beats. The bus is late. The girl sits, her hand scuttling over a page, lines overlapping: a curve here, an edge there, not *quite* right, close enough.

Her model is the man across the street in the café at the table closest to the window. His face droops down, his lips faintly tilt up, and the crow's feet are little cracks that have come from a lifetime of laughing. He's there every day, at the same table by the window, always with two steaming mugs facing each other: one for him, one for...who? A son? A daughter? Mother, Father, Brother, Sister? A lost love? A lost life?

His form takes shape on the hard piece of paper, her charcoal clinging to it, blurring as she runs her finger over it to blend the tones. She draws the man's lips parted, but just barely, as if he'd just finished a sentence, as if it were his companion's turn to speak.

That's not what I meant, she imagines him saying, pale eyes sparkling like diamonds, a little smirk falling over his features. *I only meant. Well. I only meant that I love you.*

But there's no one there. And emptiness cannot answer. Apathy, she knows, is the opposite of everything and that's what solitude is, isn't it? Apathy?

The old man doesn't seem to mind. He's said everything he's meant to. And the steam from the cooling mug rises slowly, creating a thin stream in the air, a thread between today and yesterday, now and forever.

The bus chugs towards the bench, and she closes the little book, stashing the charcoal in her purse. It isn't done yet, her drawing. But he'll be there tomorrow. And the next day. And the following.

*

This song, she thinks walking through the familiar, run down street as the bus pulls away, *is my favorite*. It's the song of rain pitter-pattering in the street, of the leaves bouncing up and down, crashing into each other, *excuse me, I'm sorry, oops!* It's the way a car shatters the stillness in one, two, three, four seconds, and then the song fits around the silence again.

She dances gracefully, the way we all do. Walking slowly, allowing the tip of her toe to dip into the puddle that's just formed and letting her heel *click* through the splash. Her head tilts up slightly, not enough to be noticed, not enough to be vulnerable, but just enough so that the large drops will hit her head, and slide down the slope of her forehead, down the hill of her cheeks, down to the crevice between her lips and onto the stump of her neck, coating her.

And a tune, a small tune emanates through the open window of house 340. A single violin that warbles, trying to string through a broken world, trying to create a story: *This is me. I'm sorry*. The melancholy tune echoes through the empty street, vibrating off the bricks of the houses, the shops, coming back in waves.

And she will walk on, and the musician will close the window, twisting the shutters and allowing the street to sit the next one out in silence. But the rain will still pitter-patter; the leaves will still bounce and crash. And someone, somewhere, will open their window, and for a moment, hear a song that is not there.

The man's hip hurt. It wasn't an unusual phenomena, but he wasn't used to it. *I'm glad she isn't here to see* this. Then he sighed, shaking his head, as if he were trying to shake the years from his mind, as if they could fall down like leaves.

Where'd my cane go? The old man from 342 grabbed around for it, the room still dark except for the street lamp. A little breath escaped him: *When did I get so old*. He wished the sun would hurry up. He wished it would slow down.

Patience, he imagined her saying, always teasing, *is a virtue*.

He'd hated that.

Patience, he would reply, *is nothing but another word for cowardice. You can't make something so you wait*.

She would've laughed now, watching his peppered hair turn white, watching his eyes cloud with years. *Glaucoma*, they called it, literally the clouding of the lenses, as if his eyes were a pair of glasses that had gotten dirty. But he knew, without going to a fancy doctor, exactly what it was: it was everything he should've seen *then* when he could've, coming to haunt him now, making it so that he couldn't see anything else.

Damn it all, he would think on those days, when the coffee was cold and the scones were stale and the goddamn paper wouldn't stay still so he could do the crosswords, *Maybe they just don't want to fit. Maybe they don't like boxes!*

He didn't do crossword puzzles anymore. Sometimes he would carry a book, sometimes he would make small talk with the French lady who owned the place, but more often, he would sit in the same spot that they always had, order two coffees, one just with cream, one black with sugar, and relive old conversations.

He would try to remember them, word for word for word, and when he found that he could no longer remember the tone of her voice, the way she spoke like a tenor but laughed like a soprano, the way her lashes flirted with her cheeks when she winked, the way her red hair fell over her face like a theatre curtain, the way he would push it back and she would let it fall again, until he could not picture her, with her fingertips stroking the small white mug, never picking it up, *patience*.

When everything muddled together and the details were blurred and it felt like she had been a painting that was watered down, he would rise, pay for the coffee, and share *one* more anecdote from way back when with the owner; once, he'd shared about the war, but only once. No one, except his wife, had ever heard those. No one else had wanted to.

Or maybe he hadn't wanted anyone else to know them. This woman, with her faded features and the smell of flour surrounding her, a crisp accent decorating her words, her face always smiling, she hadn't seemed to mind. But still.

Two trees, barely reaching the window of his flat, rustle in the breeze, whispering the secrets of the past.

She hadn't meant to stay as long as she had. She had only been meant to stay for a year. But one became two, and then the owner had taught her how to make the coffee. And three became four, and she'd learned how to bake the scones. At ten years, she'd become a chef, at fifteen, a manager, at twenty, an owner. And here she was now, watching the place she'd spent the last thirty years up, going down the drain.

She lightly touched the cool oven range, caked with a layer of grime for months of cooking. She didn't clean anymore. Didn't have the time. And didn't have any one to help her, either. *C'est la vie*. Or perhaps, *c'est le mort*. Because she was. And so was everyone else, of course, but she was older, so she was dying faster.

The refrigerator complained about its lack of use, groaning softly. *Je sais*, she thought, looking at it, wondering how long it had left, *I know, me too*.

She then exited the small kitchen (no help, no money to renovate) and walked to the dusty window, *I wish I could do something about this. I wish I weren't so useless*. The morning sun hadn't quite

risen, the sky a faint shade of indigo that shone through the remaining clouds. *Well, that is one thing that never changes. The sun always rises.*

And the old man from 342 would pay a visit at 8:11 on the dot, and the bus would be late, wheezing and coughing all the way to its single whitewashed bench, where one girl would be waiting and *why doesn't she just take another bus?* But then again, the woman reconsidered, *why don't I just leave?* Because she was old. Because this had been home for so many years that she couldn't imagine being anywhere else; because the chains that bound her were made of memories and cobwebs and sometimes that's stronger than iron and steel, isn't it?

When I was overseas, the old man had said once, when she had mentioned this phenomena to him, *I saw some of the worst of it. The boys would hide in the bushes, waiting to slaughter us. Our boys would be going about their business, and the next moment, they would have a hole in their head. I know about memories.*

And she had given him a little side-hug, because giving him anything else would have been inappropriate, and had served him another scone *but was that really a compensation, a stale scone and a flightless bird's useless comfort?*

It wasn't rhetorical, she said to the silence, *I want an answer.*

A car drove past, not stopping for anything or anyone, its headlights blinking, red orange red, *gotta go, gotta go.* Where to? Certainly not here, not this moment. No one ever stopped for *here*, always wanting *then* and *yet*. She supposed she did

I want an answer. Is there anything left for me?

The bookstore has an apartment over it where the woman and her husband would sleep, dreaming of Whitman and Wilde, Bradbury and Carrol, imagining that the words would leap from the pages and mix, creating a new story, one that no one had read before.

In reality, the books were cracked relics: spines broken, pages missing, ink faded, words jumping out here and there, stories unreadable. The woman shifts in her sleep, moving closer to her husband who subconsciously makes room for her. *It's okay; come here.*

The streetlamp shines like broken glass, slashed by the half-open shutters, illuminating their faces. They looked like children, their eyes curled shut, their lips pursed, like they were waiting for something to happen next.

The books stayed in their disorderly stacks, listening to the world around them, knowing more stories than they dare tell. They knew that she preferred chocolate, that she would rather live in the center of the city, that she was too young to be so lost. They knew that he would bare the traffic in the morning to get her the coffee she wanted, because the one from across the street was awful. They knew that he desperately wanted a family, and that she would say *I'm your family*, and he would go *yes, but--*.

They knew that the man in 340 played the violin, that sometimes he left his window open and the entire street would here concertos of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart. They knew that she liked Shubert while he preferred Hayden's surprise. They knew that the man only played when it rain and always closed the window before it stopped. They knew that the musician had bought exactly one of them: an old biography.

It told a lot about a person, what they bought: the old man in 342 bought a blank photo album and the woman had said *isn't that sweet, he's so in love with her still* and the man had hugged her and said, *I think it's sad. It's not what she would've wanted.* The elderly French lady who owned the bakery had bought a book of poetry. No cookbooks, though. Some others bought mystery novels, some notebooks,

some romance or sci-fi. They knew who had children and what their children liked. They knew that the woman, their owner, was afraid.

Of what, the air conditioner turns on, roaring to life, echoing into the silence, *what, what, what?*

The man's eyes opened wearily at the sudden noise, as they so often do. He turns slowly, looking around the room, making sure that there is nothing out of place. His wife whistles in her sleep, her chest goes up, down, up in an easy waltz. *I'm your family*, he thought, looking at her, reaching to move her hair gently out of her face.

Yes, she seemed to agree, but of course, all she actually did was bury herself deeper into the pillows, *Yes, but—*.

*

The compass, which sat on the woman's bedside table, keeping dusty volumes company, had a single crack running through it horizontally, east to west. No one knew *how* it had gotten there, but it had been there as far back as five generations, passed down from father to son to mother to daughter, always handled as if one misstep would shatter it: *don't break. Please.*

She had gotten it through her own father, a rusty old man who had kept it in a small tin box and taken it with him wherever he'd gone, *it's meant to be guarded. Don't show anyone. Protect it with your life.*

The gilded letters glittered under the cracked crystal, the needle spinning, spinning. *It doesn't work.*

Her father's hands had been callused by years of building, carting long oak beams, not smart enough to do anything else, he would say, quoting Socrates and Homer, Carlyle and Marx, adding kindle to a small flame, *the only way to live is to learn. No matter what you have to do, no matter where you go, just...learn.* She remembered that, when those sandy hands had covered her own soft ones, she'd thought of the dead leaves in the winter, blanketing the park where she'd grown up in. *Wonder what it looks like now.*

'Sometimes,' he'd looked at her with bright eyes, 'your True North fades.'

The compass sat now, illuminated by her small lamp, spinning, spinning.

'It works fine,' he shrugged when he'd given it to her and she'd quietly alerted him to its defection. Her father's life beaten face had softened, looking very much like he had when she'd been six and she'd asked about magic. 'It's a little broken, but you'll see. You'll be just fine. Promise.'

Something shifted down in the bookstore below the apartment. Her husband, locking up. The compass spun slower now: one.....two.....three....., each twirl around its origin taking longer than the last. In the quietest moments, before she'd quite opened her eyes, when her books were still lying open on the floor and the covers were draped over them, she thought that the compass had stopped, pointing South, towards the store.

It doesn't yet work, does it? But it will.

Seide Street stands, on the west side, ten minutes from the center of the city, isolated. No one accidentally wanders through, no one stops for a cup of coffee. The town homes that were completed rise sharply as the rest of the street sags. The telephone wires crisscross overhead, creating a map. *Yes, I hear you, can you hear me?*

The coffee shop stays open, hoping that someone would see it not for who it was, but for what it could be. The bookstore remains, keeping its stories, collecting more. The old man in 342 goes every day, like clockwork, to order two coffees; the elderly French lady patiently listens to his stories, eventually dragging a chair, leaving a scratch across the tile. The girl waiting for the bus completes her charcoal

drawing, adding the owner of the shop: so it's the old man, the woman beside him, and a mug with no one to drink from it across from them.

The writer in 345 would go on to sell some stories. Nothing too popular, never the next pop culture phenomena, nothing that made her unique. *Except*, the next character would tell her when they started to speak, *for me. I came to you and you alone. That has to count for something, right?* And it did. She would patiently pull out a new notebook and write the first question: *Who are you?* A smile would make its way across her face.

The man in 340 still plays when it rains. He's moved on from classical to international music. No one knew what sparked the change. Maybe he met someone, maybe he lost someone. Maybe he fell in love, maybe he fell out of it. Maybe he was just tired of living life the same way day after day. One night, just the once, he'd not timed it right, and the last notes from the violin came about an hour after the rain had stopped. *Why? Why not.*

The family in the bookstore had eventually expanded: one little girl, one boy who came before and had died at birth. They almost didn't try again. No one would ever tell the child that she was an accident, because that's not the sort of thing you said to your daughter. The word they would use in years to come is *blessing* or *unexpected miracle*.

One day, when the sun was just barely covered by the clouds and she was gently fingering the still cracked compass, she would look up at her mother and say, 'Can you be blessed on accident?'

And the lady's eyes, which were still filled with fear in the darkest of nights, in the nights that she would go and sit in her little girl's room, would get this far off look, the way they did when she was telling one of her favorite stories.

'I don't know. If you ever find out, will you tell me?'

And the little girl would laugh, thinking that her mother was being funny, because when did her mother *not* know something? But she just gave a smile, her baby teeth not all the way gone yet. Still just a little girl.

'I will. I promise.'

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That's not what I meant

“Hey.” The hairdresser said as I sat in her chair. “What are we doing today?” She took my hair in her hands and studied it.

“Surprise me.” I responded—I was feeling quite adventurous that day.

“Really? Okay, I have an idea.” And she was off.

She dragged me over to the hair washing station and scrubbed my head vigorously with different smelling liquids. I smelled mint, peach, orange, and something sweet like cake.

It seemed as if she was preparing my hair for something.

I'm beginning to regret the “surprise me.”

She then wrapped a towel around my head and sent me back to her chair and ran off excitedly.

I leaned over and saw her in one of the side rooms forcefully mixing something in a small black container. I was confused, but decided to shrug it off and picked up a magazine and began to read.

A few minutes later, she returned with the container and a blindfold.

“Put this on. It absolutely has to be a surprise.” She cheered enthusiastically.

What's she so excited over?

I take the piece of cloth into my hands and apply it to my face.

After she checks that it's on securely, she began applying something to my still wet hair. It burned my scalp and nostrils.

I'm regretting it more now.

I sat in the chair for a few minutes until she took me back over to what I assumed was the washing station and rinsed my hair.

Once again, we moved back to the chair after she dried and straightened my hair.

I heard a faint snipping sound a few seconds after.

I'm fully regretting this now.

She removed the blindfold from my eyes and twirled me around so that I was facing the mirror.

“That's not what I meant.”

Make It Better for Yourself

I should've looked
I should've listened
I should've paid attention

I should've worked
I should've learned
I should've done what I was told

Now it's all over
And I should've gone
The other way

Sleep

It calls me close promising sweet dreams
All full of happy and joyful things

But when I finally go under everything goes sour
Monsters and demons chasing me around a tower

I jolt awake in fear and sigh
I guess I'll only get sleep when I die

September

I miss him.

Two months without someone you love is torture.

My heart broke instantly the moment he told me that he had to leave.

He promised that we would talk every day. That ended about a week ago.

It's like I'm not worth his time. I'm not worth anyone's time.

Depression knows my name. It knocks on my door that never opens, calls my phone that never rings. It haunts me.

One night, I went out. And I met this guy. He was nice and understanding of my situation. He was handsome, too.

He asked me out, but I didn't know what to say. I'm not worth anything. Why would he want me?

I got a call today. He died in action.

I never get to be happy. Why do I never get to be happy?

Crying in my room is how I spend most of my time now. It's so hard.

It's never going to get better. Never.

The bell above the door rang.

David looked up from his book that he was reading at the counter.

It was a girl. He recognized her from outside. He would look outside of the glass door that was covered in old posters and see her through a little space between the pieces of paper. Never had he seen her up close.

She looked to be around his age, 14 or 15. She also had hair that reached under her shoulders and was in twists. From one look, he was, well, not in love, but infatuated. She had pretty almond shaped eyes that were a light brown—a little lighter than her skin.

David followed her with his eyes as she walked through the store. He watched until she disappeared behind one of the shelves.

About a minute later, she reemerged at the end with a Coke, a bag of plantain chips, and a can of soup. She walked up to the counter and placed the things down.

She seemed timid, not making any eye contact as he rang the items up.

"I-Is your butcher shop open?" she inquired in a soft voice. "Cause I didn't see anyone." She definitely seemed nervous now.

David gave her an 'are you okay' look, but when she didn't respond to it, he decided to answer her question.

"No, sorry. They'll be open tomorrow though," he replied.

The girl nodded and handed him the money for the items. Then, she quietly walked out of the store—the plastic bag rustling as it hung off of her arm.

As soon as David made sure that she was gone and couldn't see him, he let out a sigh. His finger tingled—theirs brushed against each other when she gave him the money and again once he gave her the change.

He looked at his hand and wondered what it would be like to hold her hand.

"¡Hijo! ¡Ven aqui!"

David snapped out of his daydream from someone calling him.

"¿Si Mama?" he said, climbing off of his stool and walking toward where he heard her voice coming from.

“I need you to take care of the store and clean up after hours.” She commanded. “I’m leaving early; I have a date tonight.”

“It’s not gonna work out.” he mumbled while walking back to his stool at the front.

“What was that?” she yelled from behind him.

“It was nothing... nothing at all.” He went back to reading his book.

A few hours had passed, as did customers. David was sweeping the floor when he got distracted and looked out of the window.

There she was. She was getting into a minivan with a boy, around five. In the front, there was a woman who he recognized as the owner of the store two doors down. She looked sickly—he figured that’s who the soup was for.

Must be her mom. He thought.

He stared at her as she got in the car, but she must have felt him staring somehow, because she turned around and looked directly at him. His heart jumped and so did he—right to his feet and continued sweeping just as if he was never looking at her.

After a reasonable amount of time had passed, David looked up and saw that she and the car were gone.

He removed his apron and hung it up.

He was done for the night.

The next day, David sat on the same stool, as he did every day, and watched the TV that hung on the wall and had Rugrats playing on it.

Her face showed up in his dreams the night before; just as they were now on the faces of the characters.

David was snapped out of another daydream, but this time by a bell. He turned his head toward the door and saw her, but with her mother.

He smiled softly and her mother returned it, but the girl just looked away bashfully.

The girl broke away from her mother and went the same way she did the day before. When she resurfaced, she held another soda, and then went over to stand by her mom who was standing at the butcher’s counter examining the meats.

The girl waited by her and minute by minute seemed to get more and more frustrated.

Finally, the girl broke away from her mother and went up to the counter with the soda and money in hand. She placed the money down and walked away to sit at the tables.

She put her head in her hands when she arrived at the tables; she was obviously tired and frustrated, but she was afraid to show it. Only in subtle, subconscious ways she did.

The girl sat up and shook her head, presumably trying to shake herself awake.

David wanted to go and sit by her just to be near her. He would let her lie on his shoulder and sleep all day if she’d want.

What am I thinking? He questioned himself. *This is weird.*

He shook his own self trying to knock some sense into his head, but it didn’t work. He still wanted to be beside her.

The mother finally finished selecting her pieces of meat and walked up to David who was staring off into space.

“Young man.”

David was still looking at the back of the girl’s head.

“Excuse me!” She yelled in a hushed tone.

David quickly rotated his whole body to her. “Yes, ma’am?”

“I need to buy this.” She said anger just under the surface of her voice.

“Oh, sorry, miss,” he said, straightening his back and taking the meat from her.

He placed the package on the scale and weighed it. “That’ll be four thirty-seven, please,” he said.

“Here.” She handed him the exact change. “Colleen, come on!”

Colleen.

The girl stood up and gathered her things. Then, she followed after her mother and left the store.

Days had passed and each day, Colleen would enter the store, buy a soda, then sit at the same table and watch TV until her mother went in the store to get her. She would drink the soda, then get up and buy a bag of chips and do it again. It was like a routine.

One day, David was stocking the shelves and peeked around the corner. She was crying. His heart immediately dropped into his stomach once he saw it—so pained, yet not really showing it. He wanted to make her feel better. He wouldn’t ask any questions or say anything. So, he grabbed a candy bar off of the shelf and placed it down on the table in front of her and went back to his stool and picked up his book as if he had done nothing.

She leaned her head at a weird angle. David could tell that she was trying to look at him. Colleen stood up and walked slowly up to the counter, her hair covering her face, and mumbled a quiet thank you. She then left the store.

The next day, Colleen did her routine and sat at the table watching Full House.

David decided to do something risky. He got off of his stool and strode with light footsteps to her table and sat down beside her. He just sat there, and so did she.

They stared at the screen without speaking for five minutes until Josh noticed that there was something in front of him that wasn’t there before. He picked up the piece of paper. It had a tic-tac-toe board and the word “hi” drawn on it.

Josh looked at the girl from the side and she was still looking at the TV. He looked back down and made his move and wrote a ‘hey’, then passed it back to her.

‘What’s your name?’

‘David’

‘Colleen’

‘Nice to meet you.’ David drew a smiley face beside the words and when he got the paper back, she had drawn one too. He smirked to himself as he felt his cheeks getting red.

The two continued playing and talking without moving their mouths until Colleen’s mom called her to leave.

“Bye.” She grinned at him. And he returned it before standing up himself and closing the shop.

This continued for a while. They began to become friend, then best friends, then more. They hung out all day and went out on many dates.

Fast forward to fifteen years later, in 2015 — they are no longer together, but David still remembers her as the best summer romance he ever had.

Poem

So peaceful
Leaves and sticks scattered
Locusts roaming
Wondering who they once were
The sky cries softly for a minute
Then shines brightly
As if nothing had ever happened

Not So Simple

People say that there is simplicity in the world
But there really isn't
An echo could vanish into nothing like magic
Oranges being grown to the size of fists
Fledglings being born for mass production
How could all of this be happening right now?
Zygotes holding power in a world they don't know
Children that wield weapons to kill others
And all of it from this hunk of dirt?

Dulce

Lola sat on the end of her bed, waiting for Mrs. Cook to walk up the stairs and do her morning wake-up call to all of the girls in the orphanage.

Every morning, Lola would wake up early and shower, get dressed and do other parts of her morning routine to get a head start on the day. Mrs. Cook praised and adored her for doing it. The other girls despised and loathed her for it.

“Wake up!” Mrs. Cook yelled from the bottom of the stairwell.

The other girls in the room began to stir, the early hour of the morning making them groggy. Many of them groaned from the bright light of the sun that was streaming through the crack of the blinds and into their eyes.

“Lola,” Susan, her best friend, yawned, “How long have you been up?” She asked, observing her fully clothed and clean body.

“About two hours,” she replied curtly.

“Wh—” She was cut off by Mrs. Cook yelling, now in the room.

“Get up girls! Today is cleaning day!” She yelled enthusiastically.

More groans came from the girls.

“None of that, girls. Now, make your beds, get ready, and then meet me downstairs for breakfast.”

Lola immediately got up, said a short goodbye to Susan, and followed Mrs. Cook downstairs as she did every morning to help with breakfast.

After breakfast, Lola collected the plates of the girls and helped wash them.

“What a magnificent job, Lola!” She praised. “It’s like you’re the only one who cares around here,” she said in a disapproving tone while looking at the table of chattering girls.

Lola smiled at her as a polite gesture and asked, “Is there anything else that I could help with?”

Mrs. Cook handed her a broom. “Sweep the main room.”

Lola nodded and went off to do her chore.

After about five minutes, she had swept almost half the floor when she noticed a black lump in the floor. It was under their coffee table. Lola swept it aside and with her blurry vision, thought it was a scarf or sock of one of the younger girls, but no.

From that one lump, at least five hundred spiders dispersed. Lola screamed loud, then ran into the kitchen.

After a minute, she caught her breath. She looked up and saw that some girls were staring at her, giggling, whispering, or all three. Her face became red and tears swelled in her eyes as she realized that she had made a fool of herself. And, now her reputation as the quiet, polite, sweet girl who never made a scene was gone.

Music

I didn't know I liked music
The way it flows through the air
I didn't know I liked music
How it is in beat with my heart
I didn't know I liked music
The sounds that pour from my instrument
The harmonious voice of the strings as they vibrate
Notes on a page turning into so much more
I didn't know I liked music

Bouquet of Roses

My mom whose eyes are the ocean
Whose eyes are the sun
Whose hair is a field of wheat swaying in the wind
Whose legs are the trunks of oak trees
My mom whose feet are cursive
Whose hands are the earth holding the sky
Whose nose is a cliff
Whose lips are the ripe raspberries of the bush
My mom whose heart is a bouquet of roses

One Syllable Story

It stopped.

She screamed for what seemed like years. My ears felt like they were numb.

Friends got off, full of bliss. They smiled and laughed with glee from all of the fun. How could they be happy now?

Turn to me, and I am scared. Sweat rolls down my face as I turn red. I could not believe that I just did that.

I am stuck in place as she begs me for one more time. I could not say no. We head off and the screaming starts once more.

My heart beats fast and off beat as I try to catch my breath. No luck.

She shrieks with joy as I yell in fear. When will it end?

Once we get off of that one, she drags me on more. Why can't I say no to her?

We take a break.

It all feels like a punch in the gut to me. I still can't breathe.

Yours

Yours was the first face that I saw.

It was happy and bright as you ran around the yard.

I couldn't believe that I had made it this far.

I sipped my glass of lemonade and looked around. Wow. There were no more dark, rainy days for me. I had gotten through it all.

I laughed as you rushed up to me and bombarded me with your soft hugs and kisses. The life I had always dreamed of was finally mine.

Now, it's all gone. I am old and weary and my whole life is a dark, rainy day. It just drags on. No one comes to visit anymore, not even you. Why?

Sticky Fingers

Hands grabbing at things
Why take what you do not own?
Nature will solve this

Birds

Up above
Singing
This is your job
Warbling
To keep the dead company

The Five Senses and Time

Time looks like my mother—aging over the years
Time tastes like spoiled milk in the back of the fridge
Time smells like the musk of one after not showering for days
Time feels like the holey sweater never worn, but bought long ago
Time sounds like the tick tock of the clock

Little Wonders

“So, Miss...” The man picked up the paper on his desk and studied it for a few seconds. “Patterson, what makes you think that you would be a good candidate for this expedition?”

“Well,” Emily started, her tongue clicking low in her mouth in moments of silence. “Ever since I was a young child, I was interested in archaeology. It’s been a huge part of my life. Also, I’ve been on many small expeditions before I got my degree and a few larger ones this year after I got it.”

The interviewer nodded his head, never putting the paper down from his face. He seemed slightly unprofessional—he sat slouched with his elbows on the desk.

Emily noticed this and squirmed a little in her chair.

“You have an impressive resume,” the man said. He raised his eyebrows and pressed his glasses up to the top of his nose. “It seems that you actually are an exceptional candidate.”

“Why, thank you, sir,” Emily smiled. “And I’ll assure you that I work diligently, too.”

“That’s great to hear. Now, I will have to go over this with my colleagues, but for now, consider yourself part of the team,” the man said.

“Really?!” Emily exclaimed excitedly.

“Yes, Miss Patterson.”

“Thank you so much!” She took his hand and shook it with gusto.

A couple of days had passed and it was finally the day that they were going to see the inside of the cave. Emily had gotten a phone call the day before saying that everyone on the board had approved her. She dropped everything and started packing and getting everything together for the trip. This seemed to be the best news of her whole 20 years of life.

Emily sat down on a rock at the site and pulled out her handbook to read over again. While reading it she noticed one part that she had not noticed before. It stated: In case of discovering a fresh cave, if explorers make the decision to go inside, they must immediately be sealed in only to be let out when the expedition is done.

This frightened her—she had terrible claustrophobia ever since her older brother locked her in the closet when she was five. She breathed in and out, trying to calm herself down. After a minute, she was calm and closed the book and put it up.

“Why in the world did I wear pants?” She said to herself. The hot summer sun shone down on her unrelentingly.

She stood up and put her blonde hair up in a ponytail, then hiked up her pants so that they were more capris. “That’s a little better,” she said, exasperated.

“Hello, Miss Patterson.” Another archaeologist, Sebastion Wires, greeted. He had an English accent, which intrigued Emily.

“Oh, please, call me Emily.” She said. “Are you ready for this? I’m really excited.”

“Me too.” He smiled. “Out of all of my journeys, I feel like this one’s going to be the most interesting.” Sebastion chimed.

“Will everyone that is expediting the cave please report to the entrance.” A voice spoke.

“Here we go!”

“Whoa.”

It was a sight to see. There was light in it somehow—upon closer inspection, the cave walls were encrusted with many minerals and stones that shone brightly from within. They appeared to be bioluminescent and it amazed each and every one of them. It was otherworldly.

“This is magnificent!” Sebastion yelled.

“Absolutely, I’m mesmerized.”

Emily yelled in joy and the echo went on for a long time and she marveled at this.

“Get out your lamps everyone.” The woman who was the head of the process ordered.

The groups of four did as told, and then proceeded forward on their journey.

“Plants seem normal, mostly greenery... nothing big.” Emily spoke to herself, scribbling down notes in her pocket-sized notebook. “It seems as if this one has been chewed on. Are you seeing this Sebastion?” She called him over to her. “What do these look like?”

“I think... nothing. I’m not very good at identifying animal tracks or teeth marks,” he apologized. “Although, this cave does give the impression that nothing—except plants—could live here. And even that is a phenomenon. I mean, without sunlight...” He trailed off.

“Keep an open mind. You never know.” She picked herself up and continued walking with the group while clicking her tongue nonchalantly.

Then, out nowhere, as she was studying how the floor reacted to her footsteps, she smacked into something.

“Ouch! What the—wow.” Her jaw dropped.—in front of her stood a deer. It was long and slender and... green.

The rest of the assemblage was far ahead, but they immediately turned around and started toward her.

“Emily!” One of them yelled.

Emily stood up, clicking her tongue from excitement, and tried her best to not scare the deer away.

“Shh!” She stepped softly closer to the deer that had run off to the side after she and the others yelled.

Once she got close enough, she examined it. It looked exactly like a normal deer, only green and a strange shape to its antlers and ears.

“Amazing!” Someone whispered excitedly from behind Emily, making her shriek and in result, scaring off the deer.

“Ugh, look what you did!”

“Opps. Sorry,” Sebastion shrugged. “We need to keep going; its going to take a while to search this whole cave.” Her motioned for her to follow him and she did.

It took them around a month to explore the entire cavern.

They found more animals—lizards, rabbits, monkeys and goats. There were more, but Emily was not able to document them due to the fact that while she was sleeping, a sneaky monkey ravaged through her back and tore her notebook apart. She was only able to salvage a few pages.

Throughout the cave, it was lit with the same rocks; this was the only consistent thing. One night while the group was sleeping, Emily woke up to get a drink of water from the reservoir, but when she opened her eyes, she was completely thrown off. Everything around her was frozen. Earlier that day, it was blistering hot, just as if a giant had breathed his foul-smelling breath in it.

This was amazing to her and as she tried to record it, she noticed that an animal had ripped the little book apart.

“Eagle one to home base.” The head of the operation spoke into her radio.

There was no response to it, so she tried again.

She still got nothing.

Emily watched from a rock that she was sitting on at the entrance. They were waiting for the people outside to open the cave and let them out.

“Sebastian, I didn’t know that you had gray hairs,” she said, staring at his head. There were gray sprigs coming from his roots that ran throughout his hair.

“I don’t. Or, rather, I shouldn’t. I’m only thirty-two,” he responded, turning around on the rock to face her. “Looks like you have some too,” he said while plucking out a hair from her bangs.

“Ouch.”

“And you’ve gotten wrinkles.”

“Hey! I’m not that old!”

“No, look.” He took out a pocket sized mirror and held it up to her face.

“What?!” She exclaimed, snatching the mirror from his hands. The wrinkles on her face weren’t just ones that could be from stress or from squinting too much; no, they were deep wrinkles. Just as if she were an old woman. And as she stared into the mirror, she noticed them getting deeper and more appearing. She screamed and threw the mirror far away from herself. At that point, she looked up and noticed Sebastian’s face.

He had wrinkles too, but more. And his usually light brown hair was now all the way gray, not a speck of brown to be seen.

At the entrance, the leader was on her knees and was seeming to have breathing problems. She appeared to have aged too. Now, she looked like she was at least ninety.

Emily rushed up to her. “Are you okay? What’s going on?”

Before the woman could answer, she drew in a long breath and wheezed it back out. Then she collapsed on to her stomach and died.

Emily backed up, out of breath herself. She felt her skin aging somehow. She lifted her fingers shakily up to her face. She prodded a part of it with her fingers and everything felt strange to her. It felt like she had a completely new face. Deep wrinkles and droopy skin was all she felt.

She looked around. Another person was collapsed on the floor—presumably dead. Her head became tight as did her throat.

She scampered back to Sebastian in fear. Everything was happening so fast. What was happening?

When she approached him, he was on his back wheezing with shallow breaths.

“Sebastian? Sebastian!” She yelled while picking him up and holding him in an embrace.

“I— I...” he began.

“What are you trying to say?” She sobbed.

“I’m scared,” he said with a whimper.

Emily pulled him back so that she could see his face. His eyes were closed and his mouth was slightly agape. His face was completely new. It was one of an old man with the friendliest eyes. That’s all she saw.

She put his body down slowly as her eyes swelled with tears.

Emily was all alone and there was no escape—from the cave, from her mind, from anything.

She climbed off of the rock and went to the entrance and sat down. Everything ached. She removed her hat from her head and pulled the band that was keeping her hair up out. Her now silver hair cascaded onto her shoulders and a few clumps fell out.

She couldn't catch her breath. For the life of her she couldn't. She stared off into the cave where she had had the best time of her life. She was content. So she just sat there.

Until everything went dark.

Harlan Picht is a 14 year old ninth grader who lives in Natchitoches Louisiana. He goes to school at Natchitoches Central High School and is a first year at ADVANCE. He plays basketball and soccer. He also likes ping pong as it requires little movement. Creative writing has been an intuitive, intriguing, and an impulsive experience for him. He has learned much and is ready to take all his newfound knowledge to the next level.

Secret Haiku

There was a secret

It was a terrible one

It's snowing on Mt. Fuji

Rain Haiku

Rain on street corners

Siren Warbles through red light

Pedestrians write

Fork Haiku

That's not what I meant
Five words used to justify
Snake tongue hiss quickly

Haiku

What I should have done
Is kept from what I really did
Spring rain Mt. Fuji

A Day in Marrakesh

Dust stifles the boy's mind as he tries to figure out the best way to deal with this situation. Should he make a break for it, or be patient and wait? He could see no benefits of waiting patiently, but if he full or ran out, there would be a better chance of him getting caught. But his mind and his legs agreed on one thing: run. So there he goes, dashing out from behind the pillar into the sunlight, across the street, over a cart and there is his destination.

He grabs the big, dark green, ripe avocado and is jumping back over the cart when *smack!*, he is stiff armed by the vendor of the avocado. The vendor does not look all too happy about the situation; he's dressed in loose white clothing, sandals and a turban. He then pulls a knife out of his belt, puts his foot on him and says, "Ye dare steal me avocados boy?! People who do that type of thing get cut!"

"Please, please show mercy, here's your avocado back!" The boy says pleadingly in a very strange accented broken Arabic.

"Aye, I'll let this wee matter pass but next time I catch ye I'll kill ye, then I'll kill yeh again, and I'll keep killing yeh and ye'll never be dead!" He says finishing with a slight hiccup. The boy doesn't really know how to respond so he runs as fast as he can, which was pretty fast, back to his alleyway where he...lives.

He, of course won't tell his parents about the incident because when his parents worry it makes him mourn and think about his old parents, his real parents who had been run over by a boat while out on the lake swimming together several years ago. But if he didn't have his parents he would still been at that wretched orphanage in Denmark. Now he's living in Marrakesh, somewhere in Morocco. He speaks crippled Arabic and can hardly understand what most people are saying half the time. He still likes it here though. He has friends but not many. At first he tried to make some but after all, he was the creepy Danish kid who got bullied a lot at his old school.

He also looks nothing like the other children. They all have dark curly hair and black eyes and a very tan complexion. He is white with dark blue eyes and blonde curly hair. Oh and one last thing, His adopted parents decided to give him a name that would better suit his complexion so they named him Eugene.

Eugene missed his old home but he had better things to do then mourn about his parents and LIFE.

Eugene needed to meet up with his squad so they could go do something, anything. Eugene and his friends usually do unexciting stuff like robbing the market or getting in fights with other gangs so it looks like it's time for another boring activity. They are just heading out of the alley when suddenly they are jumped by the south side gang. Somebody swings first and then everyone is throwing hands. One guy starts spinning around trying to intimidate Eugene with fancy martial arts moves but he just punches him square in the jaw and the guy starts crying. Then suddenly someone pulls out a knife and stabs Eugene in the gut. Eugene dies. Move to part two for happy ending, or part three for terrible ending.

---Part Two: Happy Ending---

Eugene steps on someone's face but trips while doing so. A guy from the south side pulls out a knife but before he can get Eugene one of Eugene's friends also pulls out a knife and stabs the other guy in the face. The fight continues gradually changing from a fist fight to knives and other pointy objects, hand to hand. One of Eugene's friends takes a knife for Eugene in the heart. Eugene's gang chases off the

south siders, Eugene grows up to be a decent person, Moves to Saudi Arabia and becomes a hillbilly. Move to part four for weird happy ending.

---Part Three: Terrible Ending---

All of Eugene's gang members are killed but Eugene. Eugene is hunted down by the South side gang for three months but is caught and burned at the stake. After all the trouble the South side gang went through they decided to take it out on Eugene's family. They burned Eugene's house down killing the parents in the fire. It turned out Eugene had a long lost brother but the South Side gang traveled to North Korea where he was hiding out and slayed him by throwing him on an electrical barbed wire fence. By the time anyone found him his body had been fried to death and looked like a charred thing that didn't resemble a human at all. Then the South Side gang moved to Iraq and became Al Qaida. Move to part five for other bad not as bad ending.

---Happy Ending Weird: Part Four---

It has been several years since the fight at the alleyway. Eugene is living somewhere in Europe when he is sitting in a coffee shop and meets the old pirate from the market place who was drunk and tried to kill him. By now both men had made their selves presentable, so they were very proper even though the pirate (whose name turned out to be Ralph Adamo) still talked with a slight sailor's accent. It turns out that Eugene was a woman the whole time you thought he/she was a man. So she fell in love with the pirate got married and lived happily ever after. Move to part six for cool happy ending.

---Part Five: Bad Not As Bad Ending---

Eugene and his gang win the fight. Eugene goes to the Grand Canyon for a vacation. The whole family falls off a cliff when posing for a picture from a sketchy photographer and dies. Move to part seven for other worst bad ending.

---Part Six: Cool Happy Ending---

Eugene wins the fight with the South side gang but gets a fatal wound and is sent to Greece to be healed by ancient healing techniques. He travels up a mountain, over a river and through the woods to an ancient garden. There he is met by the keeper of the Garden, Ralph Adamo (who Eugene later figures out is the Pirate he met back at the market) and eats a Golden Apple, or so he thought. The "apple" turned out to be a scam by the pirate to get money and it turned out it was just a squash. Eugene always thought the "Keeper of the Sacred Garden" looked fishy. So Eugene heals from the golden apple and lives happily ever after in Greece.

---Part Seven: Worst Bad Ending---

Eugene's Parents find out about the gang fight and lock Eugene in the house and force him to watch Dr. Who reruns for the rest of his life.

The moral of this story is don't move to Marrakesh or you will get jumped.

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Who Knew?

It's almost midnight as I'm walking the streets of downtown. The only source of light is supported by a metal pole every ten or so yards. I didn't know I loved the darkness so much. It gives me a sense of peace. As rain clouds form above me, I control my instinct to cover up. My jacket becomes a cape and umbrella becomes a cane. I didn't know I loved the rain so much. It always makes me think of home, which brings back memories of diagonal grilled cheeses and the girl who loved being alone as much as I did.

We are Nowhere and it's Now

My friend whose hair is obsidian glass
Whose mind is a puzzle with infinite pieces
My friend whose nose is a seashell unlike all others
My friend whose lips are a burning sunset over the Red Sea
Whose eyebrows are an arsenal of weapons
Whose eyes are supernovas, erupting in the night sky
My friend whose eyes are black holes, drawing in their surroundings
My friend whose heart is a diamond in a blizzard
Whose heart is a flower, sensitive to every touch
My friend whose love is a one-time chance never taken
My friend whose love is a pirate's treasure, always longed for, never found

The Game of Life

Have you ever wished that your life felt just a bit more real? I found myself thinking about this more and more as each day passed. When it came to people, I was about as simple as they got. With nothing going for me, I felt as though my life was one big game that someone kept forgetting to play. I was never unhappy; I just thought life was pointless. You live just to die, and then you are nothing.

Then, on one autumn afternoon – I remember because the leaves had turned into a group of sunsets – I saw the most beautiful image yet to be painted. She had two eyes that drew you closer the longer you stared; a nose similar to a single fallen snowflake; lips that seemed to lecture you without saying a word; hair that rained down her back from the thickest thunder cloud. I received all this in a glance, and then nothing. The player of my life had suddenly picked up the controller.

Living and Dying Life and Death

Living is enjoying tea under a gazebo.
Living is becoming one with a sublime presence.
Living is the tides shifting through the ocean.

Life is a paradiddle changing right to left
Life is legitimate, never lying to you
Life is a lexicalized word, short but full of meaning

Dying is one's days changing to a darker tint
Dying is earth taking hold of your docile body
Dying is the final leaf falling in winter

Death is the pungent smell left from the hatred of war
Death is ultimately times malevolent end
Death is the final note played from a symphony

In The End

I should have put out the flame burning within you
I should have dried your rain-soaked heart
I should have watered the flowers of your love
That's what I should have done
But instead, I doused your inferno with gasoline
Instead I broke your levy letting flood waters rush in
Instead I became the weed that stole your sunlight
In the end, was I truly in the wrong?

The Same But Different

Seven billion
Fourteen billion faces
Is Spring truly warm?

All I Needed Was Space

Fish stray from their schools
The lone wolf never returns
That's not what I meant

The Hidden Heroes

Blood on foreign lands
A world shrouded in darkness
New parts are shipped in

How to Be a Man

Make sure you keep your hair short; always sit with the best posture; keep your body free of piercings; never speak as if you know everything, even if it is done to you; never argue, even if you are brought into an argument; never correct an elder, even if you know they are wrong; you don't know everything; this is how to clean the pool; this is how to mow the lawn; this is how to throw a football; this is how to swing a baseball bat; always hold the door open for a woman; never fight, even if hit first; never get a tattoo you can't cover up with normal clothes; this is how to be a provider; work hard every day so you can be the man of the house; work at a job so you can single handedly support a family; most importantly, keep your hair short.

Fernando Torres is my name. It is my third year here in ADVANCE and I have enjoyed it thoroughly, as every year. I live in Morgan City, Louisiana and attend Morgan City High School. My favorite things to do are play soccer, read, solve math problems, and run track. I am going into the tenth grade and the thing I'm looking forward to the most is graduating in three years. I aspire to be a lawyer and having my own firm located in San Francisco, California. For whoever reads this, I hope you have fun with silly string. Adios!

Till Death Do Us Part

Above the unsaid memories of “mama and papa”
 and the cold, unkept slabs of sorrow,
Above the locusts of the night
 and the white, cotton trappings of bagworms,
Above the scenic rain that perfectly fit the death
 and the forceful wind that pushed like a moving wall,
Above the constant buzz of the flies
 and the stench of long decades in the ground,
Above all remained the girl in my mind
 and in my heart.

Fears

The day came. I was warned this day was going to happen sooner or later. However, when I graduated, I knew it really was going to be sooner. My greatest fear was happening. My parents decided to move back to Mexico, since American college was greater than any expense we had ever come across.

“Madre, do you know what moving back to Mexico implies for me?” I asked on the verge of tears. This moment was something I had feared ever since our first conversation about it a couple of years ago.

“It’s for your own good, it’s either we move to allow you to pursue a career and your future, or we stay and you work like every other person in our situation. It’s not an easy path for us, no one ever promised us anything. We have to work for it, and a successful future here is impossible for our people. The people and their government don’t want us around. If they did, they would have passed the migratory reform or even the extension to allow you to obtain a scholarship,” she added bitterly.

“I would rather live a hard life with the people I know and love over a successful, yet possibly deadly life, with people I don’t know,” I said as I walked away.

My dream of becoming a lawyer would make me a target of the constant war going on in Mexico. Initially, this war between the drug cartels, the submissive government, the remaining citizens gave us a reason to seek the safety of the United States. However, this didn’t stop my older brother who had already graduated from college in Mexico after returning from only a year spent in the United States.

“This isn’t my life, bro. I don’t have anyone here. Mexico is my country, my home,” he used to tell me. I understand what he meant now that this was happening to me. I would leave all my friends, my non-biological family that had grown with every adventure, only to study at a place that would put my name on a hit list. Mexico stopped being my home when it had nothing to offer but shootings and college students being kidnapped. Against my will, we were leaving tomorrow.

Everything was already packed. I needed to run away. And so I did — I ran. I ran faster than I thought possible, this strange, hazy cloud always following me. I traveled 422 miles northwest, with no control over my body and my legs seemingly tireless. As I got closer to my destination, a fear of imminent ending overcame me. I wanted to scream. I had no control; I’ve never had any control. I saw them, and I needed them. I had to run towards them. Maybe then I’ll have control. I opened my eyes, sleep escaping me. Outside the car window, the tall hills and desert mountains of my home city appeared. The dream of all my dearest friends standing, crying, and reaching for me was still fresh in my mind.

Sweet Dreams of Today

I dreamed of the deserts in your eyes.
I dreamed of that vibrant half-moon smile.
I dreamed of your taunting cheeks,
 and how I paint them red with words and kisses.
I dreamed of the sweet melody of your voice,
 the way my name sounds as you sing it.
I dreamed yesterday of today.

Not So Sweet Dreams of Today

I dreamed of all these things I wished I hadn't dreamt.
I dreamed of giant monsters haunting gnomes.
I dreamed of the smaller Little Pig showing the Wolf how to invade his brothers.
I dreamed of the prince feeding the ogre.
I dreamed of Red Riding Hood staying in the village and eating all the bread herself.
I dreamed of my worst nightmares.
I dreamed of my past.

The Recklessly Better One

My brother, whose hair is a smooth ocean wave,
Whose ears hold the curses and laments of dreamers.
Whose eyes are deserts drenched with the occasional rain,
eyes willing to see everything as the sky does,
Whose arms are like those of retired workers ready for rest but too eager to follow.
Whose lips resemble an eruption-ready volcano.
The brother with lumberjack hands.
Hands rough enough to tear down trees, yet gentle enough for comforting the youth.
Whose hands bear scars of wars fought by veterans,
veterans of his heart that led him free.
My brother whose feet walk where wolves yelp.

Still Believing based on Believe by Yellowcard

At that moment, I didn't think of my safety. The people inside the burning building needed me, and I just wanted to save them. So, I gave myself to them. I jumped through the doors of the twin tower closest to me. People were frantic. I became their light through the thick smoke. The first floor was clear. I could have left and been called a hero, but I heard the thunderous screams and chilling shrieks from the stairs leading up. I couldn't leave them. I made my way up, clearing floor after floor. The people, thanking and praising me ran to safety. It seemed like everything was working out, until I saw through the window the collapsing of the other twin tower. Fear overshadowed my bravery as I realized this building would have the same fate.

"I'm stuck! I'm stuck! Please save me!" a woman screamed from the opposite side of the room. I couldn't see her through the scorching heat of flames and the intoxicating smoke. The only reason I was able to locate her the continuous calls for help she was making. I made my way to her, avoiding fallen wood and burning desks. I lifted the fallen cement from the floor above off of her arm. "Run," was all I said to her. And so she did. I saw her go down the stairs, me following quite the distance behind her. I had just reached the lobby as she reached the exit, the exact time when the rest of the building came down on top of me.

Names?

What's in a name?

Controversy to protest change based on ignorance.

The feeling, judging, certain to escalate
seemed devoted to impact.

Do You Understand?

People say that you will sleep or rest when you die,
But people don't understand how cynical that phrase is.
People say that your spirit sometimes leaves you when you sleep,
But people don't understand how connected the body and spirit are.
So when people say that they enjoyed their sleep,
I understand.

Syllables

As I ponder how to count syllables,
not a relevant thought comes to my mind.
I try to comprehend traveling thoughts,
but in a rush images come and go.
Dinosaurs racing through fields of the past.
The great forges molding rings of metal,
blacksmiths taming the violet fire.
Desires of Marzipan.
Desiring hugs unrestricted by the orange string.
But I must come back to reality,
for I might be lacking enough time.
So I count and count, with nothing in mind.

Humanity

They are ignorant
for their eyes are blinded by the cloak of money.
They take advantage
for they are consumed by fake power and are driven by lust.
They are oblivious
for the boundaries between worlds create a pride greater than compassion.
They make me sad
for the only disappointment greater than anger is the sadness that they, that we, give off.

Liberty Voydetich; I'm a 13 year old from Hot Springs, AR. I come from a small school called Cutter Morning Star, and I will be moving into the 8th grade next year. I had a great time in this class, and hope to go back to ADVANCE next summer. I hope you enjoyed my and my classmates pieces, thanks for reading!!!! ^-^ P.S. I angered a goose somehow and I'm still very confused about it....

Southern Hospitality

Say you're sorry; say excuse me; milk the goat; don't turn in your project before due time, *But why?* They will copy your idea and claim it as theirs; keep your elbows off the table; Why don't you act more like a lady?; don't write on yourself; Act like a lady; Family, Friends, and God first, then you may have a turn; Don't bark up the wrong tree *How do I know if it's the wrong tree?* If they look more powerful, assume they are and play it safe; It doesn't matter if you think you are right, I'm the parent; Don't walk down the street alone unless you want trouble; do not curse or swear at your enemy, that is rude and uncalled for; Act like a lady; Don't punch back, assume someone will help you, remember, eventually they will stop; If he doesn't want to open the door for you he isn't for you I have to open the door for him too right? No, remain the lady; Do your hair like this; No you can't have it cut that short, you would look like a guy; you should start wearing makeup now; do not judge others no matter how bad they hurt you; learn to cook correctly; act like a lady; shave your legs, but those shorts are far too short anyway, go change; go change; change please; act like a lady; smile more; be kind; you don't have to actually like them, just pretend you do; Act like a lady; cross your legs like this because if you don't your sitting like a man and you are spouse to act like a lady; But I think he is gay so; Men are dogs; Be sure to act like a lady here, don't embarrass me; Wash the dishes; Don't do that, act like a lady; act like a lady; act like a lady; Act like a lady or stay home and clean the house; *Why must I act like a lady?* Because that was how I was raised, and I'm going to make sure you are not becoming anyway else, do not back talk to me again... that isn't lady like...; Water the plants; are you trying to make me mad?; Do good in school or you will have to marry a rich man *But Why?* Because money rules the world; Act like a lady please; I think that is too tight, go change; Act like a lady; Don't get a tattoo, only sluts and hoes do that; Stay quiet unless what you say is nice, like a lady would; you would fail at sports, especially that one, it's for guys; Act like a lady, it's the southern way; go to church best dressed because- *Jesus cares what you wear now?* Don't ask questions or back talk; brush your hair fine and soft like this; Act like a lady; Never drink, that's just asking for trouble; Hold your feelings back like this *Why?* I told you not to cry in public didn't I?; Eat health or you will get fat and ugly; Act like a lady; for god sakes please act like a lady! Can't I just be myself now? You know better by know... and please uhm, try not to back talk to me... it's not exactly- *what a lady would do...*

Clever Trick

Silver moonlight shone on her face as she blew the cigarette smoke into the night. The wind howled as she remembered the events of the day — waking up, calling Mother, seeing him, and doing dishes.

He entered the room with confidence, the chat about his work was dull, and she didn't really care about how his day was anyway... not today — no, not anymore. When finished, she asked him about his new girlfriend, to which he replied rather rudely.

“Don't lie to me; I saw lipstick on the nightstand.” She told him, her voice monotone. He sat on the big chair that she had claimed was purchased especially for him, just as she had told the others before him.

“A number was left on a post-it note beside the phone if you want her to go get you,” she said, starting to wash the dishes. He justified himself. She did not believe him. He said he didn't really love her anymore anyway. She continued washing dishes. He said he was leaving her. He said he chose his slut over her. She chose the steak knife over the frying pan. Things moved quickly... She's sitting on the porch now, and he has left her world. She is so sad again....

“Who will get that chair next?” She wondered, staring off at the stars above her. The smoke blows from her cigarette onto her face. Coughing, she sighs, Will one finally love her as much as she loved them? She looks beside her, him sitting there, propped up and smiling, eyes open. She asks him, expecting no answer...

“Did you know I loved you more than god himself?”

Words of Writers

Along the border of make-believe and harsh reality,
lined in a row like baby ducks,
sit the untold stories
Of dragons, monsters, wars, people, all the unwritten words.

Stories that sit begging to be pulled off the line and
scribbled into the author's mind, where he plans to
transcribe the ideas onto paper.

Lined on that border are stories waiting
to fill the page with talents, heroes, villains, and fair maidens
never seen by human eyes.

Patient like loyal dogs they wait.
Howling into the creators mind,
hoping that their screeches can be marked down gently
in a tightly bound leather skin.

Hard back or paper?
It doesn't matter, what needs to be
heard won't care.

They simply wish solemnly for readers eyes,
for a spot in that library,
and for the beautifully articulated
words of a writer.

The Screams End

There it is, a shout in pain or fright... I can't tell any longer. A whole week has passed. A week. They began down the road; it was like kids in a game of tag, full of play, what a tease... By day two, I was able to see the source, their round, red eyes and the burnt pale pink skin. Oh the shouts, they sent shivers down my spine. It was no longer children's voices, they had become loud shouts and squeals.

They dragged their legs slowly being pulled on the street as red lines of blood formed with each step. I could not stop my stares, I had no idea what to say or do. My first thought was to leave, or really to hide, but, after I got over that I ran out of my home. They were slow, very slow.

No one lived near my home; it was miles from the nearby towns. My car was gone, borrowed by a friend, leaving me with no escape. I had animals, and food, I did not know this would occur... I ran out to the street, and ran as far as I could, as fast as I could.

I did not go to town; though, when I thought I had run far enough, I raised my head to see my own home. I could not leave. It was as if a circle had been formed over my home, I ran more but to no avail. I was stuck. I have been on the run on the loop for a week, the shouts chasing me. They want me, no one else, only me. I write this to say I am done, I may have just lost my mind, or I am in a dream. It is time for me to find out... I am alone, I wait.

They are coming, a few feet away now. 10.. 9... 8.... 7..... 6..... 5..... They are slower now, as if to ask for me to run more, but no, I am here for them. Two feet away, they are so loud. I think I feel the breathing of the shouts. One foot, their skin is thin... so very thin. God help me, I can see the cracks in their teeth. They don't even reach for me, they were taunting me. They smell like death... I wait..... The screams have now stopped.

Goodbye.

For I Shall Consider My Voice

For I shall consider my voice,
For it never has left me, despite my strong abuse
For it tells of stories never heard of by human ear
For my voice is bold enough to climb mountains
For it is evergreen, never fading
For it may stumble, but never fall
For through it, I can build skyscrapers up into the heavens
For it describes the world around it
For my voice has the power of gods
For it is the messenger
For my voice is the passageway of thought
For it creates and destroys without lifting a finger
For it is the only walking giant I have control over
For it is loud enough to catch the eyes of millions, yet, quiet enough to lull a baby
For it is the most functional tag team I have ever seen, breath, tongue, and teeth
For it never judges my most unusual choices
For it is, and always will be, the most powerful tool the world has ever seen.

Daughter's Love

The subway she was in wasn't the best; the walls have been bleached yellow from years of neglect. The previously red benches had chipped paint, flaking more and more each day. Stalls in the bathrooms often didn't lock, and in some areas, you could smell mildew or urine.

This was often home for Megan, when she couldn't pay rent or get in line early enough for the shelters. Her mother had let her leave home for New York City as soon as she graduated high school, giving her a car and what little college funds she had saved.

The car was sold as soon as she got into college; her apartment was right next to the school and Megan had no problem walking to and from it. So, she sold it for money so that she could buy some new dresses for herself, but that was three months ago, when money wasn't a problem.

The store was closed when the owner was murdered; his son closed it and sold the land because of this, Megan lost her income. She had been looking for a new job for a while now, but trying to keep up with school and visiting her Mother every other day has taken up most of her free time... Visit mom on Monday, do homework Tuesday, visit mom again on Wednesday, write the essay on Thursday, and so on. Sometimes she wished her dad was still around. Before he was poisoned, he promised her he would pay for her college of choice. He didn't stay true to his promise, and Megan left for her much cheaper college, unpaid for by her Father. She was very upset at him. Unfortunately, she never received any money from his Will like she had planned it to happen.

She started her day as normal, going to class in the morning, and then walking down to the local eatery to talk with her Mother. When seated, her mom began to talk; the chat was mainly centered on Megan's grades. They weren't low of course, but her Mom knew she could do better. So as mom's often do, she told her to do better.

"Is there anything that is distracting you Megan?" Her mother asked.

"No, not particularly..." she replied.

"Something I could help with, I'm way over my college years but I'm sure there is something."

"Actually... there is something." Megan said, pushing her hair from her face as she took another bite of the steak she had ordered; one of the more expensive items on the menu.

"Anything, I'll be glad to help." Her mother said eagerly.

"I'm a little low on money, I could use some help if you don't mind." Her voice wasn't the least bit hesitant; she spoke confidently, almost cold-like; as always, a master of disguise. Her mom inhaled deeply and rolled her eyes in disgust,

"Why don't you just move back in with me instead? It would be cheaper for me anyway."

"Mom! I never ask you for anything and rent has gone up." She lied; truth was, Megan was terrible at budgeting, and being spoiled as a child, she thought money would be given to her as if she was famous. She thought the money would arrive as soon as she graduated.

"Dad would have given it to me..." She whined to her mother.

Her mother's grey, wrinkled eyes narrowed and her voice became low and soft as she said,

"We both know whose fault that is..."

Silence fell upon the table where they sat. Megan bites her lip and shifts in her seat nervously.

"Fine, I'll live with you," Megan replies, her confidence replaced with spite. Her mother smiled mockingly and asked the waiter for the check, she paid for Megan's meal as she had done when Megan was but a child. Megan didn't take note or thank her for paying, but instead insisted they hurried to beat traffic.

For the beginning her stay, Megan continued to pester her mother about just giving her the money to move back to her apartment. Megan expected her mom to give in like she always does, or like three months ago when the same situation occurred during winter's start; Mom had given her enough money to get back on her feet, but of course, Megan always needed every new clothing item in stores, all the new makeup, and money for her more than occasional drinking.

As spring started to end, Megan had stopped begging her mother for the money, and instead began to do mom favors around the house, trying to convince her that she was mature enough to handle money. Like bringing her water, doing dishes, mowing the lawn, picking up groceries, bringing her more water, insisted on cooking her breakfast, lunch, and dinner, bringing her water because Megan claims that she read the older you get, the more you need to stay hydrated.

"This water tastes odd." Her mother would say, and Megan would smile and respond sweetly, telling her she had forgotten to use the water filter and boil it, she was too used to city water; of course her mom always forgave her for the mistake. "It's more natural that way," Megan would defend herself unnecessarily, but her mother never noticed.

Somehow, Megan wasn't surprised when her mother fell terribly ill. She told others that she had probably got stomach flu or other short lived virus.

"Nothing too serious, I'm sure. Don't worry because I'll cook every meal for her, and keep her well hydrated so it doesn't get any worse than it is." She would say to her mother's friends when they called to check up on her. They knew that Megan would care very well for her mom.

Despite her daughter's quality care and love, Megan's mom had passed in her sleep two weeks into her virus. Megan refused the offer to find cause of death; they suspected the poor child that had lost both parents recently. Didn't want to find out her mom had a serious flu or diseases. Plus, they knew there was nothing she could have done to help her. For a price, they avoided the research and marked her death as old age, per Megan's request.

The Will of left a large chunk of money to Megan herself. She had no siblings, so the rest of the money was sent to pay off debts that her mother must have forgotten about, or were too expensive at the time.

As the years passed, Megan finally graduated from college and now has a full time job as a medical doctor. She has the money to buy what she wants, when she wants it, just as she was raised; with no limitations. Megan has always been extremely grateful that her Mother's will had been left with her, giving her the money she needed to get through college with a luxurious life... So glad it had worked out exactly well, Exactly as she had planned it.

The Rant

Don't lie please my old friend,
Speak to me old friend,
Tell me what I want to hear,
Don't sugar coat your poison,
I can still smell it...
Tell me now what I want to hear,
I don't want you to lie,
please O please, just tell me the truth.

Your sympathy isn't wanted,
giving someone a grapefruit and
claiming it an orange, is not the same.
I can still taste it, I am not stupid.

Don't feed me lies,
Don't tell me you are okay,
Don't say you love me if it is not true anymore,
Don't spit venom in my water because
I can still smell it.

Foul and bitter,
Sour and burning,
Dose it in spices,
run it through the dough,
Fill my bloodstream with it
and laugh because you assume
I'm just not that aggressive.

Not smart enough,
No, that dumb blonde girl
Can't see through my lies!

But oh, I can, I can smell it damn it!
Give me the truth,
I will only be half as mad,
Just don't let me smell that poison on your breath.
I've been feed it since my birth,
and I know the smell by now.

I just thought you should know,
I am not oblivious,

Not anymore, and no,
Never again.

Don't lie to me,
After so long,
I can tell when your lips bring emptiness
It smells like poison.

Secrets

She lays in bed, but is unable to sleep, too much memory on her delicate shoulders
She closes her tired eyes, imagines herself elsewhere, but the secret knocks back on her eyelids,
begging to be cared for like a newborn.
It dares her to keep her sanity.
Questions fly in circles around her body, pushing her against a strong wall of truth and lies
There is little room in her cage of broken thoughts.
She bangs on the cold steel, but she could never find the key.
Loved ones ask what is troubling her fragile wings, but she doesn't dare say a single word.

The following selections were co-authored by all thirteen students of this year's Creative Writing course. Each student was able to add one line to the story based either on no knowledge of the other lines being contributed or by looking only at the line that would appear before their own. Enjoy!

I Never Expected This

When my parents first brought home my new brother, I never expected this would happen.

My mom tripped down the stairs and my brother died, his head cracked open.

I remember the blood, which painted the walls in the brightest shade of red I had ever seen.

It looked like small flowers, splotches in the shapes of petals.

IT WAS A SMALL FLOWER.

The small flower crawled across the floor.

It seemed to be heading to the door.

But in reality, the door was coming to it.

However, being a good ninja, it jumped over the door.

Nothing can stop him now, he will finish the quest by chopping off the rainbow unicorn's head.

But, he didn't want to do it.

He had heard stories that this level was the hardest in the game.

This was going to be a challenge for him, but he can do anything.

The power of mind-reading gave her an advantage over him, making everything more challenging to him.

A Curious Delivery

A mysterious package appeared on the doorstep one day.

Dr. Who is a terrible show.

Dr. Who is a good show.

The package seemed to be arguing with itself, the notes found inside it contradicting each other.

The notes told whoever opened it to either leave it alone or tear it apart.

I continued reading; I was never good at listening to warnings anyway.

The page continued, and to my amazement the whole room around me changed to match the color of the page, it was all purple! I turned to the next page, and the room changed again!

The walls were soft and my arms were suddenly constricted.

I tore at my bonds.

Now all I had left was me.

Everyone had left the room, literally.

I didn't know what to write, so I wrote this.

And now I feel like banging my head against the wall; what even is this?

They Write About Him

He watches the movie intently, studying the faces.

He knows what he has to do.

He then begins to reel in a fish, struggling while doing so.

He hates the flavor of Rum Raisin ice cream.

He dances in the rain to a tune unsung.

He jumps to catch the flying tree.

He watches as the whole world waits, enamored by the novelty of it all.

He looks as though he's been through hell and back.

Now he hears a metallic squeak, and he knows he needs to run.

He used to love the scent of roses, but now he only likes sunflowers.

He walks down the winding road.

He wants out; no one should be put in this situation.

He walks down the street while humming a tune.