

Student Literature and Arts Magazine

FMS 2020



S. L. A. M.

Spectacular Literature and Arts Magazine

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Fantasy



The 100th Game
By Brielle Baker

The doorbell rings and Lexi screams "I cannot wait, I love Candyland." My friends Lexi and Erin came over because it was our tradition to play every Friday. This time was special though, it was our 100th Friday in a row. We were all more excited than usual and my mom even ordered pizza! We got playing and Erin was in the lead, for the hundredth game we all chose to change our colors. I rolled a 2 and it sent me to a Rainbow Bridge. When I put my red gingerbread man down we all got sucked into the game. We all broke into 1 million pieces and were reformed in the game. We landed in the Ice Palace. Erin Lexi and I had no clue what to do. I was the red ginger bread man, Lexi was the blue gingerbread man, and Erin was the green guy. I didn't know if I was shocked or scared. Lexi was going crazy and you could tell it was from excitement. Erin was pacing up and down the purple and yellow blocks, she was really scared.

"What if we die, we need to play to get out!" Erin said with a scared look on her face.

"Erin it's fine just stay calm, we will get out" Lexi and I said laughing. But you could tell Erin was shaking.

"Let's just play, we play every Friday how hard can it be." I said proudly.

"It was my turn!" Lexi screamed. She rolled a 4 -- she moved forward. Erin rolled a 1 and I rolled a 6. Erin demanded she go because she didn't want to be left behind. Erin went and rolled a 5 and was starting to worry less. I rolled a 2 but it said I need to go back 3 spaces. A loud noise went off and I lost a body part on my gingerbread man.

"Guys did you see that Brielle lost her arm" Erin said, starting to cry. I said we needed to stay calm and Lexi agreed. Then I realized we couldn't land on the go back spaces. We didn't know how to control that because rolling the die is random. We were all safe for the next 30 minutes because the colors were really far apart. We ended up at the Lord Licorice's castle. This was the spot with the most go back spaces. Then we saw him, Lord Licorice.

"What are we going to do, what are we going to do?" Erin shouted. Lexi was scared too, I was shaking but I was not sure of what to do. We backed away and made a plan to roll the die smartly and Erin always had a lucky spin. In our 100 days of playing she hasn't rolled it once. We thought she should just automatically roll. Even though it broke the rules it was the best chance we had. She was really scared because she didn't want to mess up. She rolled and if she got a 4 we would land on a go back space. We were all so scared for what was going to happen, Erin rolled a 4 and we all blacked out. We woke up and we were in a cage over lava in Lord Licorice's castle. Erin started crying but I had an idea of what to do. There was an opening at the top of the cage big enough for us to get through and Lord Licorice was not watching us 24/7, he came in every hour. Erin wouldn't stop crying but she was crying candy so Lexi and I were enjoying it. Lord Licorice walked in and Erin

immediately stopped crying, Lexi was talking about how she went to the mall but she got quiet right away.

“Hi girls, I hope I didn't ruin your night. You need to find a way out of you will be here forever. Please just stay calm, I won't hurt you but there is lava underneath you” Lord Licorice said slowly, and terrifyingly.

“Ok” we all responded. We were very scared at this point, when he left I told them my plan. We talked till he came back to make the plan better. We escaped but one of the bars broke off Lexi's base so she could not stand up. Erin and I were getting tired because it took a lot of work to get out of the cage. We still did not pass Lord Licorice's land and we were still scared about having to go back spaces. We were fine until then, but it was the last go back space of Lord Licorice land and we were so scared because we saw a sign that said roll at your own risk.

“Erin do you want to roll?” Lexi asked.

“No, I'll let you roll, I don't want to risk anything” Erin replied.

You could tell that Erin was really scared -- if Lexi rolled a 6 we would land on the go back a space but she rolled a 2. There was still a chance that if Lexi rolled a 4 we would be done, we didn't know what was going to happen to us because it has been different every time. Lexi rolled and rolled for such a long time, it could have landed on anything. It landed on a 3 then shifted to 4. We didn't know how it happened but it did -- we walked 4 spots and when we all stepped foot on the go back space, we broke back into 3 million pieces. As we dissolved Erin screamed. There we were back home, not one of us knew what to do and how to act. We all agreed not to talk about this, it wasn't because we didn't want anyone to know it was because we couldn't find the words to say it. We stopped playing and just enjoyed our pizza but we didn't know if we should tell my mom. We had to make sure that next week we had a new game. Maybe playing 100 times was just enough. We were really happy that we got to spend all this time together.

“Wait, so what game is next?” I asked.

“I say we try snakes and ladders” Lexi said.

“No way am I getting stuck in that game” Erin answered. We all laughed.

“Thank you guys for coming, I am really happy I get to enjoy every Friday with my best friends” I said.

Lexi replied “It is always really fun, thank you.”

“Yea thanks for hosting and happy 100 weeks of playing” Erin shouted.

The Magical Powers of Our Treehouse By Cody Boyce

The treehouse sits in an old oak in my backyard. It looks pretty normal. It is made of wood we found lying around; in the shed, we found the plywood for the walls and in the back fence we found the stuff for the roof. The stairs are different sizes and colors but we worked hard. My brother and I worked for hours making all the cuts and putting it together. My sister did the painting, she loves colors so there are many on the treehouse. My mom let us put in things from around the house to turn it into our fort. We have an old rug in the middle of the floor, some of our favorite books and comics on shelves that I made and a table for our Legos. Matt and I want to build a Lego city. And of course, we had to put in a place for Megan's dolls. Matt and I were so proud of our work and we could not wait to enjoy it. We begged our mom for us to sleep in it and we finally wore her down. She gave in and said we could but we had to stay in the treehouse and were not allowed to roam the yard. That hot summer night changed the way we thought of our treehouse forever.

Matthew and I got ready to sleep in the treehouse. We had to put a fan in the window and get our sleeping bags. Matthew got the pillows and I searched around for the air mattress with the battery-operated air pump. My mom got us a lantern and plenty of drinks and snacks for our night. Megan wanted to sleep with us but Mom said no and she started to cry. Just as it started to get dark we were catching lightening bugs in mason jars when my mom said it was time to get into the treehouse. She told us she would be back to say good night after Megan went to bed. Matthew and I were nowhere near ready to sleep so we got out the Lego table and put it in the middle of the room. The fan started to make a funny noise and we noticed outside that the wind started to pick up. A streak of lightning and a crack of thunder startled us but we kept playing. All of a sudden the room started moving, the next thing I knew I was lying flat on my back. I could not see Matthew. I thought that he got scared and ran back into the house. But I was confused about how I got on my back.

"Matthew, Matthew" I said. "Where are you? I am telling mom that you left the treehouse," I yelled.

"Cody, I am sitting next to you. I think I am. It's really dark in here. Where did mom put the flash lights?" Matthew answered. I started to get up but I felt weird. As I cleaned off my glasses, I stood up. I took a giant step trying to avoid the Lego table but I fell. It felt like I had fallen off a cliff. I hit the ground with a loud "THUD" It knocked the wind out of me. I called to Matthew not to move. I did not want him to get hurt. I was trying to figure out what was going on when the treehouse door opened and Megan came running in. She looked like a giant. Each time her feet hit the floor I was bounced around. That's when I first saw my arms and legs. The light from her flashlight shined on the floor and I realized I was a Lego man. Just then I

heard Matthew crying. I knew that he was a Lego man too. Megan began to scream for us. She started to cry because she thought we were gone. Her tears hit the floor like giant raindrops. They left lakes in the cracks of the wooden floor beams. She got so upset that she dropped her flashlight

to the floor and ran looking for my mom I knew that if my mom came into the treehouse and could not find Matthew and me that we would be in trouble. Like no gaming for the rest of our lives. With the light from the flashlight, I could finally see where we were. I yelled at Matthew, "Are you ok?" He said he was but I could hear that he was still crying. I had to come up with a plan to save us. I noticed that my toolbox was still open on the floor but it seemed so far away. I knew that I had to get to it. I ran as fast as I could. Once I got to the toolbox I had to figure out a way to get in. I did not remember what I had inside but I knew that there had to be something to help. As I climbed up the side of the toolbox, Matthew started to throw the Legos off the Lego table. He said he was trying to help me. He thought I could build something to get to the top of the Lego table. Once inside my toolbox, I was able to find a pack of thumbtacks and dental floss. I threw them over the side of the toolbox and slid down the lock. I flipped the thumbtacks so that the top was on the floor and pushed them over to the table. Just then I heard the sound of a diesel engine in the driveway. Oh no, my dad was home from work. That meant that we are in big trouble. I crouched down, don't ask me why because I was so small no one could see me and waited for my dad to come. I heard the creaking of the ladder and waited for him to open the door. But then I could hear my mom off in the distance yelling for him to come in the house. She said the power was out and she was trying to give Megan a bath.

He told her he wanted to see us but she said the flashlights were on. She said if there was a problem we would have been in the house by now. The silence seemed like forever. Would he come in or would he go to the house? Just as I thought we were done for, I heard the ladder creak again and then nothing. I heard the screen door slam. I knew that we were safe, but for how long. My mom was always checking on us and she would not leave us alone for too long. We had to act fast. But how do we change back? I could not worry about that now, first I had to get back to Matthew on top of the Lego table. "WATCH OUT!" I yelled to Matthew as I threw the first thumbtack to the top of the table. It missed so I tried again. The thumbtack came flying back at me. That was twice would - I be able to do it again? I tried three more times and it did not work. My arms were starting to get tired.

I was ready to give up when Matthew said, "Just one more time Cody, please. I am scared. I want Mom" I felt so bad that I knew I had to try one more time. I picked up the thumbtack and threw it with all my strength. I could hear it hit the table. I

told Matthew to flip the thumbtack so that the point went into the table. He was able to get it down. And I was able to throw the dental floss up to him. I had taken some of the dental floss out and rolled it into a ball. That made it easier to throw it to Matthew. After he tied on the dental floss, I tied on my end. I started the journey up the dental floss. As I climbed higher and higher I remembered how much I hated climbing the rope in gym class. But at least for once something I learned in gym class, I could use. It seemed like forever until I got the top. Matthew was waiting for me. "What are we going to do, Cody? I don't want to be a Lego."

"I know Matt" I said but just then something caught my eye. I started to walk to the shining Lego. I had never seen the block before. I had no idea where it came from. As I got closer I saw that words were written on the Lego block. I started to read it -- somehow when the lightning storm hit and we were playing with our Legos, it turned us into Legos. There was something written about how when the stars line on a stormy night and blah, blah, blah... That part was not really important. What was important was how to get back to normal. As I read on, Matthew skimmed to the end where it told us what to do to get back.

"Cody, Cody, read this part. It's right here" Matthew said as he pointed to the side of the block. I would have been reading forever about the dumb curse. I flipped over the block and read. We had to complete two Lego challenges to be able to turn back into people. But it had to be done while the skies were dark and the lights were out. First, we had to build a tow truck. When we finished building the tow truck it said that the next and final task would appear on the blank side of the Lego. I sent Matthew to find the wheels while I got to work on the body. It was so hard. The pieces weighed 100 pounds. We tried to work fast but it was hard to see what pieces were what. They looked so much different when you are the same size as them. After a while, he found the wheels. The only part left was the tow hook which took us about 45 minutes just to find. It was the smallest piece to find besides the lights and mirrors. For some reason, it felt odd -- the truck started shaking and turned in two directions for another build. The build was looking very difficult. The build was like a ladder but bigger. You had to build a trap too. After a few seconds we figured out why we needed a trap. There were these tiny Minecraft looking zombies. We found some tiny swords. Matthew was fighting and I was building. The ladder was finished -- we climbed up. We both felt a jolt and became humans again -- the problem was I just didn't know how to get down from the roof. The first thing that came to my mind was

"How am I gonna get down?" I thought to myself "Climb down the tree." So I did -- it was about 7 am when I checked. I was tired and fell asleep.

The Magic Pencil
By Porter Duplechan

My name is Peter Hawthorne, I live in downtown New York City. And this is the story of *the magic pencil*.

It's New Years and I'm kinda low on rent money so I head out to make a quick buck. There was an old man named Mr. Gilbert that lived by the liquor store that would usually need something done. So I head of to his place. As I walk down the streets of New York City I find myself admiring the scenery as it was a quiet day due to the fact everyone is tired or drunk. I hear the song of the bird flying around. And as I listen closer it sounds like a superhero theme song. I continue to walk to his house and find a penny on the ground. It is a shiny one, but it is missing something, the Lincoln head was gone and replaced with the Mona Lisa. It was a weird sight to see so I kept it. I walked up to Mr. Gilbert's door and knocked.

"Mr. Gilbert, are you there," I shouted. The door opened slightly as I knocked. I push the door open and find a dead body. It was a horrible sight to see, I nearly vomited. With closer examination it wasn't just a body it was Mr. Gilbert's body. And it had a note on it.

It said, "The I.C.E. was here."

"It was a weird note because would you not want to be known that you were here," I thought. I remember being close to that man as he was the person to give me a job but to also give me advice. He told me in this house was a magical pencil that would allow me to do great things, and if he died it would be mine. So I start to look for it. There are a lot of strange things in his house like horns, bottles, pencil, books... Wait, the pencil. I quickly grab and examine it. It looks like a normal number 2 pencil to me until...

"Hello, dude with the tall hair," said some nonexistent voice. I swivel my head looking for the sound.

"Oh, you hear me great. Now I could really talk to somebody other than Mr. Gilbert. And if you want to know where I am, I'm in your head," it said.

I pause for a sec with a dumbfounded look... Hours of talk later, I finally realize how he was in my head. It was a telepathic connection, and that he was a ghost from the past that was trapped in this pencil. He told me that I was the chosen one to defeat I. C. E. because I was able to hear him. It was definitely not ready for this responsibility. The pencil and I started to walk home, and when I got there my stuff was all over the place inside the hallway. There was a sign that said "Evicted."

"What are we supposed to do now," said the pencil.

"Leave," I responded. I grabbed my things and left.

"Hey, I have an idea. Why don't you draw something," He said.

"Like what?" I asked.

"I don't know, a bubble."

So that's what I did. The bubble popped out the page and popped in my face. I felt a fire burn inside me, but it was dim. I went to an abandoned lot down the street, and I started to draw my dream house. It would have a lab theater and a big kitchen. It popped out the page and onto the lot. It was beautiful. After I knew I was guaranteed a home, I could work on other things now. I started to create more things and helping others with my newfound power. The more I drew the better I got, and by the time I'd become really good at it. It had only been a week and I was ready to confront I. C. E.

"I. C. E. is an organization that wants to end all human imagination, and the leader is Mr. Z," the pencil informed me. And that is something that I do not want to happen to the world.

I and my handy pencil drove off in the car I drew to the I. C. E. base thanks to the Internet. It was a very tall office building with not too many windows. I walked inside with my handy-dandy pencil and headed over to the front desk.

"Good Afternoon ma' ma, I was seeing if I could get an interview with Mr. Z," I said to the receptionist.

"I'm from... Name That Company, and I was here to help advertise the business," I said to her knowing that I lied.

"Ok, he is on the top floor at the end of the hall," she said.

I walked over to the elevator and got on. There was a guard inside the elevator. It took a while to get there, but it wasn't that long. We walked out into a narrow hallway, we saw the door she was talking about and walked in. Once we got inside it was already hostile. Guards were everywhere, and I thought one was giving me the stink eye.

"Hello Mr. Z, I'm here with Name That Company," I said with a tremble in my voice. He was a scary dude he looked like some cartoon mob boss or something.

"Ok and what do you need to talk about," he said.

"Before I talk I don't need these guards in the room," I say trying to get alone with him. He shooed them away just with the lift of his hand.

Charlie's Story
By Alfred Eville

"MA! I'm heading to the store! Whatchu want? Cold Cuts again?"

"NO! I just bought all these cold cuts!"

"Oh right, seeya MA!" Charlie and his MA were very fond of cold cuts, "just something that ran in the ol' fammy," he'd often exclaim.

...

Charlie had no source of transportation, he had an old bike from when he delivered the paper to the town he used to live in before he inevitably moved to a small town in Arkansas, so he was forced to run, with soles half ripped and cut jeans that he stole from a K-Mart and the tattered, beer-reeked white, turning yellow-green now, tank-top on his back, he ran three and a half blocks to the nearest 99 Cent Store. He passed fellas that he couldn't quite remember but they looked familiar, "probably some old folk I dealt to before." Charlie got fired from almost every close store that didn't require a high-school diploma since his MA couldn't afford school during Charlie's 8th year at his school.

So after Charlie got himself fired from the K-Mart for stealing the jeans, the 99 Cent Store for harassing some of the customers and fellow employees, he was left sitting next to his MA on the couch. But until about last year he started dealing fake drugs and passed them off as real. It made him a lot of money and he was a little too fond of it. But that wasn't his main source of making money, at least for now.

Charlie was trying to get published, he had submitted five books in one year. He would always talk to MA and tell her "I got it!..." and that "One of these days we'll get out of this dump and I'll get us, most importantly you! A HOME!" And she would just nod and say something comforting.

Charlie knew or at least thought someone thought the drugs were fake but he didn't want it to be that way, so he kept on jogging to the store. He could feel his strands of hair getting damp so he scurried faster and faster until it was a raging storm

"God's tears, how sad yet beautiful," he exclaimed, "That's it! A religious story! With maybe a horror aspect to it. I'll write it down." Charlie had a tiny notebook in his jean-pocket. It was brown with the inscription Charles Foster, his father's name. After his death, which happened before Charlie was born, his MA gave him for his 10th birthday, that very notebook. The book was very tattered but to be quite frank, the nicest thing that Charlie owned.

Charlie scribbled the book idea and kept on walking.

...

Charlie was greeted by cameras—lots!—specifically paparazzi. They all shouted his name, asked for autographs, etc., but one female at the back caught his eye; he went over and she dropped her phone into her ripped jean-shorts. He smiled at this lady and

voluntarily started to sign her chest. She immediately slapped his germ-infested, hairy cheek.

“Oh! I’m so sorry ma’am, I just thou-”

“Get away from me, PERV! I’ma call the cops on you!” she scoffed one last time, took her last look gesturing up and down with her head at Charlie’s whole body and ran to her other friends. Charlie looked around and the paparazzi were gone. He walked in, scratching his head, pushed the door open, and grabbed a small hand-held basket. There was an old lady with tiny glasses and a beaded necklace. She struggled to grab the peas on one of the higher shelves. He ran towards her and he told her that he got it and he grabbed them and tossed them gently into her decaying cart, just as she was.

He passed by her without giving her a chance to say, “Thank you, sonny” as they all do. He passed the fish and he grabbed the discounted food in the back of the store.

Charlie was finishing bagging his groceries when a guy came up to him and asked him what he was doing in a 99 Cent Store as though the thought of that was all-around blasphemy but the cashier soon interrupted and asked who Charlie was talking to.

“Umm-Uhh!” Charlie looked back to where the man was, but he wasn’t there anymore. “I guess nobody.”

“Okay sir, your total come out to \$32.41,” the clerk mindlessly said without making any eye contact. Charlie only had \$27.36 on him at the time.

He looked discouraged but said with confidence, “Well...” he stuttered looking at the name-tag pinned to his shirt, Jason, it read.

“Well, Jason, I only got 27 bucks” he said, hoping he could make a deal. Jason was not one for deals or this job or Charlie.

“Well you can put back those,” the man said, pointing to a few cans of green beans. He did so and left, feeling belittled.

The Dream? By Elijah Herrera

“Ring, Ring” the bell on the shop’s door rang. I looked around and there wasn't much. Every wall had at least seven cracks in it. The lights were blinking

“Can I help you?” the man behind the counter asked.

“No, I'm fine,” I answered. The man walked in the back room and I could hear him moving around in the room. I looked around and took two bags of chips and a drink off the shelf and made my way towards the counter to pay. The man came out of the room. I put the things on the counter and started to reach for my money and then I remembered that the money was back at my house.

“Sorry I left all of my money at home. Is there any other way I can pay you?” I asked.

“There is one way, but it is very dangerous.” he said in a raspy voice.

“What is it?” I asked.

“You have to go on a very dangerous journey through the haunted forest, through the valley, and climb the mountain. Once you are at the top of the mountain you have to pass the sleeping dragon and get the green gem it’s guarding.”

“I'll do it!” I yelled

“Great, I'll go get the stuff you will need for your adventure,” the man behind the counter said cheerfully. He rushed to the back room knocking things over behind the counter. I looked around at what else was in the store. The man ran out the door and handed me a heavy bag filled to the top with stuff. Before I could even open the bag before the man pushed me out the door.

And that is how my adventure started. I pulled the map out of the bag and started walking. I walked until I saw right in front of me a forest. The forest was filled with fog and all of the trees were dead and had no leaves. I guess this is the haunted forest. I walked into the forest not expecting anything bad to happen but halfway through the forest I tripped and fell onto the hard stone path that led through the forest. I looked to see what I tripped on but I saw nothing. I didn't think much of it until I tripped on nothing a second time.

“Who's there?” I shouted, “I know you’re there.” A shadowy figure emerged from the fog ahead of me.

“I AM THE KEEPER OF THE HAUNTED FOREST AND YOU CAN'T GO ANY FURTHER” the shadowy figure yelled with a booming voice. I ran off the path hoping to lose the figure but it seemed wherever I was it was too.

Finally after a lot of running I got out of the forest without the figure following me. I walked towards the valley when behind me I saw a pack of wolves and began to walk faster. The faster I went the faster they went. The valley was dark and sandy with rocks everywhere. I ran into the valley and the wolves followed I was almost out when wolves blocked the exit. I noticed that there were rocks that formed a staircase. I had no other option so I took the path and escaped the valley.

I walked again until I reached the mountain. I climbed the rope ladder someone before me had left and there stood the entrance to a giant cave. Inside the cave was cold and dark so I grabbed a torch from the bag and lit it. I followed a long path and then saw it. A giant green gem on top of a pile of treasure at the far end of the room. I entered quietly and then I saw a giant dragon with red and orange scales. I walked past it as quietly as I could and grabbed the gem. I snuck past the dragon once more and made it to the hallway when I heard a booming voice that echoed through the cave.

“WHO GOES THERE” the dragon boomed. I ran as fast as I could to the exit and out of the cave. I climbed down the later and back through the valley, I ran back through the forest and before I could make it through the doors, my alarm clock rang. It was all a dream.

I left the store and went home.

The Bridesmaid By Rohan Lal

Princess Marathyle—a sweet, innocent, fair lady, with quite elegantly placed delicate features arrayed upon her face was one who preserved a grin so morally pure. So naive, nothing but genuine, and retained a blessing, a single, mere blessing enough to last her an eternity of beauty. A blessing she believed bestowed upon her granted by a man in a white robe, a silver mantle, golden trim. A beard so soft, prolonged, adding definition to the man's face. His title was prevalent everywhere, in different forms, but she referred to him as the *One with Power*.

Conveyed by him was a casket of morality, in which he possessed blessings, its sole purpose was to grant wishes of those who retain a contented disposition, an altruistic and genuine persona. Princess Marathyle was one to bear these characteristics. Amid her was an ample fortune, a king and a queen, and a fiancée, for she was yet to be engaged into holy matrimony in the hopes of an enduring relationship, as the sun and moon do, alleviated by the presence of her beloved, and in deeming that never shall their very souls depart till the dusk of eternity. The princess lifted her veil, glanced at the leveled pane, posturing as if she were deciding which dress she shall wear to the royal ball...but that was when she had been much younger. Now it's different.

Recognizing her beauty, she bit her lip and let out a mere grin. Even though she held an obsession with her appearance, she felt at ease to believe that she wasn't one to be narcissistic as she was rather one to submit herself into altruistic deeds instead. She placed the veil on the obsolete, fusty cabinetwork, as it glistened like the tidal waves at daybreak. She had selected her bridesmaid the previous week, no ambiguity, would it no other than her most devoted escort, her closest companion. The princess was obliged in doing so, for she herself believed the only prettier soul than herself to roam the planet, indeed was this special person. Ophelia Hart—an alluring palette of color she obtained, a fair complexion drawn by the beauty of Mother Nature. Her hair, of the blond color, perhaps, rather a mixture of golden and auburn, glistening through rays of light, well-defined, indicating a state of composure with a distinct smile, manifesting all other elegant features that she retained. The appreciation of this belle, at times, could turn into envy, but that didn't worry the princess. Being a major component of royalty, none of the beauty of a mere companion of the princess would come into an interest in the folk.

Princess Marathyle made her way down the royal staircase carpeted in a pleasing shade of red.

The carpet carried her in praise and pride. As she held her dress above her ankles, people glared in awe, in spite of her beauty. Her hair was curly, ever since she had been birthed, by her mother. Her hair was naturally brunette, and at times in the sun, chocolate-colored. Ophelia Hart was a friend of Princess Marathlye since childhood. Due to the lenient characteristic of the queen, her mother approved of the children frolicking together. In most cases, the mirth of any sort between the classes would be prohibited.

The chandeliers lit up the great hall. As she moved down from her bedchamber, she locked eyes with her confidant and her newly-made bridesmaid. She made her way down the rearmost step. Men in obsolete suits, women in vintage dresses, men in contemporary suits, women in cocktail dresses. This was royal mediocrity.

The candlelight complimented her authentic beauty. She was bewildered by the indifference that her soon-to-be-wed prince held, that induced him to not even attend their own engagement ceremony! She queried about this, and how it may perhaps influence their very conjugality in the near future.

“Oh! Your majesty, pleased to meet your acquaintance,” hollered a man, who she believed she knew, but then supposed not. She curtsied and then proceeded her tread. Her head held high, her arms to her stomach, she tilted her head, whilst maintaining a decent presentation, as she was welcomed into the dining hall. Her look revealed her obligation as the future queen. She began to wave, at the people who were staring at her as if she were a lion juggling apples on a unicycle.

The day of the nuptials arrived presently. Princess Maratyhle awaked to the notes of singing birds and jovial carols. Her feelings were deprived of vexation or envy, not that she believed any of those to be a predicament in her daily life.

Then she heard a knock. Then another knock. Abruptly, a heinous sound approached her ear. She heard a loud squeak like the one of a mouse. She soon realized that it was the door hinge screaming, for the door opened in the unforeseen. It was Ophelia, who came racing in with haste. Slamming the wardrobe open, she dug for clothes as if she were an excavator; she pulled out a few of her preferences. The princess lifted her head and took a quick glance at her veil on her bedside table. It reminded her of the extravagant occasion to take place on this very day.

“Puff sleeve or no puff sleeve,” exclaimed Ophelia as if she were much happier about this day more than she was herself. In ambivalence, Princess Marathyle took a hasty moment to think and declared, “puff sleeve, and make it quick!”

Ophelia faked a smile, trying not to make it seem as if she were retorting or speaking ironically. “Oh, how lovely this day is. I am so, so very happy for you Mrs.

Marathyle," *Mrs. Marathyle—it isn't like Ophelia to bear courteous manners and civility* thought the princess. She attempted to be nice about it.

"Ophelia, oh, how could you ever call me by my maiden name, please, this day is no different than the mediocrity."

"Except for that today you're getting married to quite a handsome, charming prince, indeed." The princess wondered about the whole situation, and thought *if Ophelia is so exuberant, shouldn't she be considerably more exuberant?* The thought recurred in her conscience, till the time of wedlock.

She stood upright in a dignified and royal fashion, as the veil slightly altered her vision. She maintained her signature grin, the genuine grin, and awaited the marriage officiant to speak. She placed her hand on the veil on her head, in pride. The priest lifted the gospel and began reading the words. Time went by quite quickly, as the two lovebirds striking glances at each other, as the officiant spoke. He smiled, then looked away, as if he were disappointed, or distressed, in uncertainty. The only words the princess heard after that were..." Do you Mrs. Marathyle, wish to make Sir Bathlemew, your soulmate till death do you part."

Without a falter, the princess began blushing and spoke articulately, "I do."

He turned around with Sir Bathlemew in vision, "Do you, Sir Bathlemew, wish to make Mrs. Marathyle, your soulmate, till death do you part."

He seemed to fake a smile and replied discreetly, under his breath, "I'm sorry Angela. My heart is somewhere else." He turned his head to Ophelia. The girl surely was overwhelmed, but also seemed to smile, a smile so vile, so wicked, for she knew all along.

The Girl and the Candy Forest

By Isabella Nunziata

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Alice. Every day after school at about four o'clock Alice would walk to the library to do her homework. She would sit at the same tiny blue table in the middle of the room, and every day she would see the same old man sitting in the corner reading the same big book. Alice wondered every second of every day what the old man was reading. Alice always wanted to say hello to the old man but she never had the guts to. She could never figure it out so she just gave up. She worked on her robotics homework. She liked it and it took her mind off the old man.

"Miss Wimpleton, can you tell me where I will find a book on the history of robotics? I have a project to do for school and don't know anything about them," she asked the reference librarian at the checkout table in the front of the library. Miss Wimpleton had long brown hair that she wore in a tight bun at the back of her neck, but little hairs slipped out and gave her a confused look all the time. Alice wasn't sure if Miss Wilpelton understood or if it was just her natural confused look but after a time she wrote down the call numbers for a few titles. Alice started looking for books. In the corner of her eye, she spotted the old man. She followed him through all the isles until he stopped. Alice didn't stop fast enough and she ended up bumping into him and dropping all her books.

The old man said in his grumpy old voice "Watch where you're going, little girl."

Alice said she was sorry and she introduced herself "Hello sir my name is Alice, sorry about that but can I ask what your name is and where you were heading?"

The old man said "My name is Harmin, Harmin Jones. And I was just going..." The man paused and then ran. Alice ran after him. They ran and ran and ran until Alice ran out of breath and stopped. Alice looked over and Harmin was gone. Alice was determined to find him. So she looked and looked but couldn't find anything. Not even a sign. Until a stroke of light caught her attention. It was a portal. She obviously had to go inside. She jumped in and there she was going down a slide. The slide came to a stop.

In the corner of her eye, she saw Harmin. Alice tiptoed up behind him and noticed her surroundings. She was suddenly in another world which she had hadn't known was there. It had trees made of Twizzlers, gumball coconut trees, streams of hot cocoa with marshmallow lily pads floating on top, and a candy cane diving board into a hot cocoa pool at the end of the stream. She spotted Harmin. He was working on this gigantic machine. It had so many parts of all sorts of shapes and colors. Alice saw a poster saying "WIZARDS ENTER YOUR INVENTIONS AND WIN A BIG PRIZE."

"It looks like a dispenser," Alice said out loud. The old man got startled and crushed his machine.

Harmin got up and ran toward Alice and said in a very grumpy voice "Who is in my candy shop? This is my candy shop and I will have no one in here but me." Alice stayed put. While all this was happening it all started to make sense to Alice. The book the old man was reading was how to build the machine and he left the library at the same time every day so he could work on the machine. Also, Harman didn't want anyone to see his machine so no one could copy it. Alice was so distracted that she forgot to start running bumping into him and knocking his machine to the ground, smashing it.

The old man came up to her and yelled "What are you doing in my candy forest?"

Alice felt sorry. Alice said with great sorrow "I'm so sorry. I really am. I am Alice the girl from the library. I see you every day in the corner of the room and wondered what you were doing. I've been wanting to ask, but just was too nervous. So I thought if I followed you, I would get my answer. I didn't mean to get you mad."

"It's ok," said the old man.

"I know how to make it up to you," said Alice. "I can help you fix your machine. I've been doing my robotics homework and I know a few tricks. Do you want some help?"

Harman said "No thanks I don't need help from a little girl like you. You're too clumsy, you'll probably break my machine even more. Besides you were the one who startled me and broke it in the first place."

"Suit yourself. I guess you don't want to know all of my secrets" replied Alice.

“Fine, fine but only for a little bit then -- I want you out of here. You understand me” said the Wizard.

“Yes,” said Alice. “I won’t disappoint you, I promise. But we have to act quickly I’ve got to get home, my mom is making her famous dish spaghetti with meatballs.”

“Deal,” they both said with a smile on their faces. They went on working for a while. They lost track of time. After a lot of hard work, they finally finished putting the machine back together.

Alice said, “May I ask what the machine is and what it is used for?”

Harmon said, “Come back tomorrow at around five o’clock and I will tell you everything about it. But you better get home or else your mother is gonna get worried. And you are not going to get any spaghetti with meatballs. But you have to promise me one thing, you can’t tell anyone about this or I will get into big trouble and maybe lose my candy forest.”

“Deal,” said Alice. And she went on home. But what Alice didn’t know was that the candy forest wasn’t like any ordinary place. Every minute that passed was a year outside the forest. Alice kept on walking and knew where her house was but just couldn’t quite find it. She looked and looked. She started to get scared until she finally found it. It was all old and dusty but it was the house. Alice wondered what happened to the house since it was in perfect condition that morning. But she couldn’t quite figure it out. Alice didn’t know if she should go into the house or not, because of the condition of it. But she did it anyway. She opened the door and it creaked. She took a big step in hoping she wouldn’t fall through the old floor. Once inside Alice was a little relieved that the floor held her weight.

“Hello, anyone there?” No one answered. She started walking down the hall, so many things swirled threw her head. *“Is this the right house? Where is my mom?”*

A picture in the hall hanging on the wall caught her eye. The picture had writing on it. It said *“Abigail Jones. Died in 1960 in a car crash.”*

A tear went down Alice’s face. “Mom?” Alice said in a soft confused voice. Alice wondered how this could have happened. The picture said on it *“Died in 1960 in a car crash.”* But Alice saw her mother that morning before going to school. So how could her mother have died in 1960? Alice started to cry. She walked along the sidewalks and went door to door ringing

doorbells but no one answered. She was about to give up when it hit her. *“I was in the candy forest for an hour. And there are sixty minutes in an hour. And it said my mother died sixty years ago then every minute in the candy forest is a year in the real world.”* Alice cried again. She didn’t know what to do. So she decided to go back to the place she knew best. The place she went to every day. The place that always cheered her up. The library. As she walked towards the library she stopped at every stop sign, even though there were no cars, no people, no bikes, no one. Until she got to the library. She walked inside and no one was in there either. Alice yelled, “Is anyone here.” No one answered then she felt a tingly feeling. Like there were people right next to her. But Alice couldn’t see anyone.

Then Alice heard a soft voice say her name “Alice, Alice.”

Alice jumped with great fright. “Who is it? Who’s there?”

“It’s me, Miss Wimpleton,” Alice saw Miss Wimpleton. She was a bright yet dark blue ghost. She started to talk before Alice could begin asking any questions. “I’ve watched you every day Alice. You care for these books. You treat them just like people. Just the way you would want people to treat you. You know I was a little girl just like you when my librarian gave me the same present I am about to give you.” Miss Wimpleton put a key in Alice’s hand.

“What is this?” asked Alice.

“The key to the library. It’s all yours. You know Alice, I was once the same little girl just like you. I used to always treat the books like they were all my friends. And I found the candy forest just like you did. Now it’s your turn to own the library and keep it safe. And when you get old like me you will find that little special girl who you will then pass that key to just like I did” said Miss Wimpleton trying not to burst into tears. “I know you will find that lucky girl and I know you will do a great job with the library” she added. Before Alice could say thank you she disappeared into thin air. She was gone. And so Alice’s journey began.

Aurora

By Ashna Narielwala and Ishika Dhawan

Past the mansion, past the plantation
Past the slaves and mine
Lay the Aurora River
Beautiful and in isolation...a long straight line

Some say it's magic
While others don't know of its worth
But Amina believed it to be sacred
The perfect place for brother's ashes to flow back to Mother Earth

Amina was a slave girl
Who never had a taste of freedom or liberty
Her master, Charles, was the cruelest man in the world
But Amina never feared him as her brother protected her from hostility

They thought they could run
Just Amina and Abe, two siblings side by side
But they were too slow and were spotted by their predator
Charles pitilessly shot Abe in the chest, and after three bullets, Abe died

Now Abe's ashes flowed through the river
Just like the floating tears in Amina's eyes
Loud footsteps echoed in the woods
As she jumped into the river, hiding and acting wise

She stayed underwater for almost a minute
And from the crystal blue, she eventually rose
But standing before her was not her master or the lands she knew
Instead, she was in a magical kingdom where she felt the presence of her brother and froze

The grass was luscious and green
The sun shone brightly in the light blue sky
As Amina looked around she noticed a golden deer
The deer was drinking fresh water from the river in the area nearby

Amina felt different and strange
She looked in the river to see her reflection
Standing before her she was not her body anymore
She was now a glamorous phoenix, with a blue luminous complexion

She walked towards the golden deer to ask for help
"Why of course. This is the Wish Kingdom!" he said
Something about the deer felt familiar
Only the idea of a different kingdom just couldn't be grasped in her head

"My name is Abe," the deer replied

Amina couldn't believe what she had just heard
She exclaimed "Abe it's me, Amina!" as she rushed to hug him and cried

Abe began to explain to Amina
"This was a land on the pathway to becoming a star
A land where the dead receive their dying wish
But until they do, they cannot go far"

Abe continued to explain
"There was a ferocious dragon named Impius, an evil dictator
Who wanted to rule the entire kingdom
And be worshipped and adored as much as the kingdom's creator"

"There were three jewels that would give one eternal power
Impius already owned two
Obtaining the third would make him the leader
By using all the enslaved creatures that he knew"

They all knew of the prophecy
Which stated that only one being could defeat the evil tyrant
The blue majestic phoenix Amina had become
She was the kingdom's only hope to get rid of the cruel aspirant

A great responsibility was thrown on Amina
She was just a slave girl, and not a hero
If she succeeded, she would save hundreds of lives
But if she failed to defeat Impius, she would save zero

They headed to a beautiful enchanted forest
But looks can so often lie
Amina was told to stay on the path
Where she saw a colorful unicorn that she could not pass by

Amina touched the soft unicorn,
And suddenly, its eyes turned red
Abe quickly used his antlers to slice the evil unicorn's horn,
It came off, fell down and like a river she bled

Finally, they were out of the forest and safe
But Abe could journey with Amina no more
Only she was destined to defeat Impius
After bittersweet goodbyes, Amina set off to defeat Impius and soar

It was a long and tedious fly
And the skies darkened and the clouds sparked with lightning
Amina was approaching the land of Impius
And her encounter would definitely be frightening
Before she could think twice, an arm reached out and grabbed her
Impius, in the tower where he reigns

"I know you're the bird from the prophecy!" he growled
He called her puny and weak and locked her up in chains

Little did he know Amina could change her size
She shrunk and escape, in need of a scheme
Amina spent all night thinking
In the morning she had a plan, though it might have been a bit extreme

She needed to free the poor creatures
And what better way to defeat Impius than to set a trap
So she snuck into the mines and stole two pieces of copper by turning small
There, she created a fake jewel by smashing the pieces of copper flat

She flew up above the slaves
She flew higher up until she reached the tower
Impius was now furious and flew out the window
Fortunately, Amina did not even cower

"I have the final jewel," she told him
She started flying towards the volcano
The aggravated dragon followed right behind her
He started breathing fire which smelt like Drano

"Give me that jewel!" Impius screeched
But he was unable to fly fast enough to catch up
"Come and get it," she said while dropping the fake jewel into the volcano
Impius rushed in to save it but he wasn't able to call for backup

The volcano was magical
Whoever enters the volcano becomes chained forever
Only if they are not pure of heart
Which Impius was never

The Aurora River transported Amina to a free state
She was able to save everyone and fulfill Abe's wish of seeing his sister free
Finally, Amina received the freedom she always longed for
When Amina looked up at the sky, she saw Abe, the North Star, twinkling in glee

The Deadly Sins
By Xavier Torres

Mom said, "Lui, wake up! You're going to be late for training camp."

"I know, I know, I'm going. Are you sure this magic village is safe? I woke up to two enormous dragon roars. Hey Mom, when is Dad coming back?" I said.

Mom said, "I don't know, maybe in a week or so."

"That's what you said a couple of months ago. I want him to teach me some summoning magic."

Mom said, "That's a very advanced technique, even with all your mana I'm not sure you will be able to pull it off."

"I know, but Dad's the best wizard there is. If you want something he's got it. I'm sure he will be able to teach me how to do it."

Mom said, "Well we will certainly find out when he gets back. Now go get ready."

The village leader said, "Now that Lui has turned eighteen, he is now able to go outside the village and hunt monsters. He was top in everyone in his classes and has a high capacity of mana. His father is now deceased and Lui will soon surpass his father. His father died protecting the village from two giant dragons twelve years ago. He was the most powerful wizard I've ever known. We will now say goodbye to Lui."

All the people in the audience said, "Goodbye Lui!"

"A couple of weeks had gone by and I've hardly earned any money. All the villages nearby were run down and poor. The most I've earned is 1000 yen. I guess I'll set up camp in this cave. What was that, I think it was a giant dragon. It sounded just like that dragon My father couldn't kill. My father managed to scare off one of them but he killed the other. It sounded just like that dragons roaring," I said.

"Crash, fwoom!"

"There are flames everywhere in this village. I got to find the leader. Hey!! Evacuate the village now. I'll take care of the dragon. Wait... the dragons retreating" I said.

The man said, "It's probably because it sensed a threat. There was once a man who was strong enough to make a man run away. His mana was insanely high"

"Look at my mana. Does mine have any resemblance to his?" I said.

The man said, "Holy smokes, yours is a lot higher than his, no wonder he sensed a threat."

"Yeah, that man was my father. He was the most powerful and bravest wizard I have ever seen." I said.

The man said, "Hey kid, you want a mission?"

"Not if it pays low," I said.

The man said, "Oh, you won't be disappointed then. This job pays 800,000,000 yen. Look at this poster. It says wanted dead, the dragons name is L. It says he is a very dangerous dragon who never sleeps. His eyes are as cold as night. His scales shine like

gold. His breath is the sun itself. He eats meat and plants. He doesn't live in a specific spot, he is always on the move.”

“Really, where do I go to get the reward money?” I said

The man said “At the magic council in Viridian city. It says, in order to get in you need to become a magic knight by entering the test. It says there will be hundreds of people and then at the end of the test, the 7 magic knight captains will choose people. But it is very hard to get picked.

“Well, I don't need that stuff. I'm going to bring him the head of Luinor” I said.

The man said “Don't say his name out loud or you will be sent to his location. People who have never returned. Hello kid, where did you go?”

A few years later in Viridian city “We will now officially make Lui a magic knight captain. He has saved many people from the dragon known as L. Lui has many missions under his belt. He has slain sea serpents, mythical beasts, and many other rouge wizards”

“I am very proud to be her. I would not be here if it weren't for my father and mother. They have guided me to this point” I said.

The man said “Thank you, Lui, for speaking. We will now make you a magic knight captain. You will now be put through a test that might end your life. Are you willing to do this?”

“Yes,” I said.

The man said “Please step into this cave to be put through the trial for your life, and to become a captain”

Two days later “I have made it out alive, but I lost two limbs,” I said.

“Thud, Fients”

The man said “You have now become a magic knight captain. You can name your squad whatever you want. For example, you can name them the black bulls, the golden dawn, or the aqua deer.”

“I think I'll name them the deadly sins,” I said.

The Kingdom of Nazgul By Jaden Wang

Once upon a time, there was a tower. It was a tall tower that overlooked the sea and the kingdom of Nazgul. This was the kind of tower that would take hours to climb. There were 400 floors in the tower with 20 guards on each floor. At the top of the tower, there was a treasure. A treasure that was also a secret. Many people did not know about the treasure. Only the king and the captain of the royal army knew about the secret treasure. Everyone else in the kingdom heard of it but never thought that it was important. Each day the king would climb the tower after his dinner to check if the treasure was still there.

“My lord the treasure is still there. There is no reason to check every day it is in good hands” said the king’s captain.

“Yes I am sure it is, but it is my duty to check every day for the safety of this army and the kingdom” replied the king.

“Yes, sir I understand” answered the captain and then the king went on climbing. Just as the king disappeared into the spiraling steps the captain of the royal army came marching down and stopped at the edge of the stairs. When the knights saw him they all stopped slouching and stood up straight. The captain took a look at his men to see if they were still the best men to guard the secret treasure.

“Which one of you questioned the king?” he asked in a calm voice. None of them answered. The captain started to walk around the circular looking at each man’s face. “Eyes forward, stand straight, and show pride,” he said as he checked all of his men she stopped at one of his men and stared at him for a few seconds and moved on to the next knight. He walked for a few more minutes and just when he was about to leave he saw something from the corner of his eye. He turned around and faced one of his knights. He looked into his eyes and started to lift his helmet. The knight tried not to look into the captain’s eye and just looked straight. The captain took his finger and wiped it above his forehead. On the drop of sweat was all the captain needed. “Did you question the king?” the knight said nothing and just looked down. The captain asked again. The knight started to slouch and the captain knew that it was a sign of guilt. The knight dropped his spear and started for the door with his armor clanking as he walked down the stairs. The captain picked up the spear and leaned it against the wall where the old knight used to stand. “Let me make this perfectly clear. There is no questioning of the king. Your job is to guard the treasure and follow orders. You step out of line then you deal with me” he looked at his men once more and left the room. The captain climbed high trying to reach the king. When he had gotten to the top of the tower the captain entered into a room with

a soft glow of a fire in the corner. This room was not a room but a vault. The vault that held the secret treasure. The King turned around to check who had entered.

“Oh It’s just you” the captain kneeled down at once when the king looked at him. “raise my great captain” the captain looked up and started to stand up slowly.

“My good lord we have lost one of our guards”

“Why?”

“He questioned you, my lord” the king turned back around and faced the treasure. The captain stepped up and stood next to the king. “What a mighty treasure to have” said the captain as he turned to face the king.

“Lock up the tower and you can escort me out” and in the blink of an eye, the captain and the king walked out of the vault with their eyes on the treasure. The captain turned the large handle and the door began to lock itself. The clicking of metal echoed throughout the tower and into the kingdom.

“CLING CLONG CLOP BOOM!”

“The vault is locked my lord shall we leave now?” the king nodded and they made their way down the ten thousand stairs that led to the vault. “Sometimes I wonder who would be crazy enough to climb this tower” said the captain with a laugh the king laughed with him. They were about halfway down the tower when they entered the largest room in the tower. This room had 50 guards standing along the wall and a closet unlike most of the rooms. The guard’s armor was shining from the torches that surrounded the room. “Shall we rest her my lord?” asked the captain.

“We shall” answered the king. The captain alerted one of the guards. The guard left the room and went into the closet and grabbed one fine wooden chair and placed it behind the king. Just as the king was about to sit down an ear-shattering screech came from the north side of the tower. This made all of the guards in the room drop their spears and fall to the floor.

“Get up you fools. Sound the alarm. Get to your battle stations” demanded the captain. The guards picked up their spears and blew a golden bugle. The bugle echoed through the tower and the sound of armor and spears clanking then a thundering flap could be heard. The wind rushed in breaking the windows and knocking everyone down. The thunder like wind echoed through the tower. The torches went out and dust fell from the ceiling. The royal army was in pitch darkness now.

“What was that?” asked one of the guards.

“It was a blood howler. It is a type of dragon. Stories say that their breath is death and their screams are poison” answered the captain as he slowly drew his sword from his holster. The tower was dead silent. There was no noise. Nothing but faint screams coming from the distance and fear. The screams grew louder and louder and there were with every passing minute. Then a soft glow came into the window and the guards had

some kind of feeling of hope. The guards started to stand up one by one. The captain approached the shattered window. He poked his head halfway and then shot it back in. "The Dragon... He is attacking the villages" he surmised. All feelings of hope were now lost and there was only fear. The captain peered his head out the window once more. He watched the villagers flee from their burning houses. The villagers only had one pace to go now and that was into the dark woods. Each villager covered in ash soon disappeared into the tree line. Then the screams all just stopped and the royal army was back in the darkness. "What will we do my king?" asked the captain.

"Nothing. Let the dragon come" proclaimed the king. The captain looked at the king with confusion as he tried to understand what the king just said.

"Let it come?" asked the captain "Have you gone mad?" The king said nothing and looked up into the spiral of stairs watching the door that led into the vault.

"Defending the treasure is what we must do now. There is nothing else to do" the king answered.

"We will all die if we try to defend the treasure" complained the captain.

"Then die, but I will not let it take it without a fight" said the king and the captain nodded and blew the bugle three times indicating for everyone to rush to the captain. The sound of 7950 men running up the stairs was enough to confuse someone with thunder. "To the vault. Fight to your last breath and you shall die a hero" yelled the king. The captain raised his sword and lunged it forward. And with that, all of the knights run up the stairs to try to defend the vault. The sound of spears scraping the rock walls of the tower alerted the dragon who had just finished burning the forest rushed to the tower with its eyes at the top.

"The dragon is coming!" yelled one of the knights.

"Archers move to the top of the tower and fire at will" ordered the captain. Faster the archers ran pushing, anyone, in their way. They got to the top of the tower and lined up, raised their bows and started to fire. The arrows all shot up into the air and dived down towards the dragon. The arrows bounced off of the dragon's thick skin and had no effect on him. "Fire again!" ordered the captain, but it was too late. The dragon gave another ear-shattering screech and all of the archers fell to the ground covering their ears. This gave the dragon enough time to raise its wings. The dragon took to the sky and blew a stream of fire from its mouth burning all of the archers and melting their golden armor making it impossible to defend the roof. "Move back. Get down!" urged the captain. The dragon flew straight into the roof knocking 600 knights off of the stairs and exposing the vault. The knight's screams grew faint as they went lower into the tower.

"Get to the vault" screamed the king. The knights moved to the door and went into a defense position. The knights raised their shields and the guards poked their spears in the little spaces in between each shield. The dragon moved back slowly and the knights

closed the space slowly. The dragon took a deep breath and exerted a stream of fire. The shields blocked the fires but melted the spears.

“We are defenseless. We will not win” yelled one of the knights as he slowly stepped back as the dragon spit another stream of fire. The shield began to burn to the point where the knights could not hold them anymore. The knights started to back away. The dragon slowly flew towards the vault and tarred the door down with its powerful talons. The king ordered his troops in the vault. All of the knights were so frantic for safety that they pushed the king out of the way. He was pushed to the back of the line. He was about to get in, but the dragon blew an explosive ball of fire directly towards the king. It hit him and knocked him forward. His furry cap burned his skin and melted his gold necklace. Before long he was dead his body was back with burns and his legs were broken his melted crown on the ground beside him. The captain gasped and yelled out. “Use whatever weapons you can find in the vault. Defend the treasure!” he screamed. The knights broke their formation to try and find and weapons that had not already been melted. The army charged at the dragon-like a pack of ravaging wolves. The dragon wiped away any of the charging troops with its spiky tail. The knights stood no chance against the dragon. They were about to lose hope. The knights had formed an unbreakable bond with each other. They had become like brothers -- now they had to watch their brothers burn and die right beside them. They were scared. They had no more energy left to fight. They just stood there. Then the stretch of a bow stock broke the silence. The knights looked at the bow bearer. It was a ranger from the south. “What are you doing here ranger?” they asked.

“Protecting the treasure. Like you said to me before. I must not question the king” the captain looked at him in shock. It was him -- the knight that the captain threw out of his legion days before the attack. The ranger looked back at the dragon. He aimed and released the arrow from the stock. The arrow whistled beside the remaining knight’s ears. It flew through the air and struck the dragon directly in the heart. It fell dead and with its dying breath blew on the last puff of fire.

When Darkness Poisoned the Moon
By Nadia Zydiak

She watched as the moon rose from the horizon, ascending further and further into the air. The sun submerged deep into the skyline, and the stratosphere was now stained with a deep blue tint. Clusters of stars blossomed around the moon, encircling the beaming planet as if it were a silver halo. Adora watched in awe at the sight, strangely finding solace in the peaceful atmosphere. It was an evanescent sensation though. She longed to let the stars slip between her slender fingers like sand, or to feel the moon rest in the palms of her hands. However, the girl was nothing but a spirit that was meant to walk this Earth with others such as herself. Hopelessly, she stared at the ominous face of the moon, before returning inside. Curiosity flooded through her mind like a vast tidal wave.

“Mother, is it possible to live among the stars and the moon?” Adora inquired, as she approached the woman who raised her.

“It is very much so,” her mother answered with a morose tone, “though you must capitulate to the spirits of darkness. Of course, we locked them away in an enchanted box so no one will be harmed.”

Adora nodded her head in acknowledgement, feeling quite doleful as those words sunk in. She desired nothing more than to wander the unknown regions of outer space. But at the same time, she wished to stay grounded. Adora’s choice was final; she must not let such a foolish idea infect her mind ever again. That night, the girl drifted off into a dreamless sleep, where the moon’s lunar surface stared down at her.

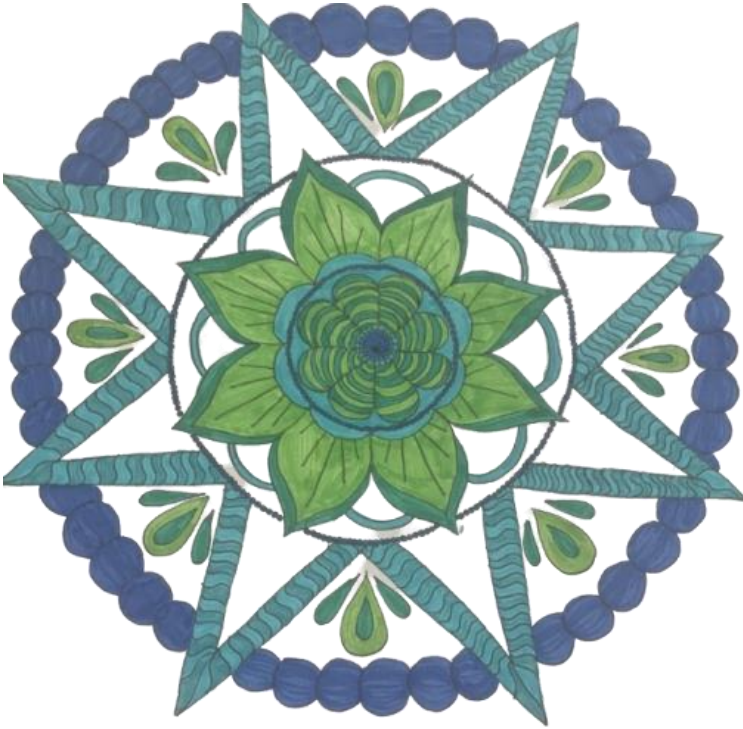
Daybreak had awoken peacefully. The sun adorned the lush grasslands and the homes of the spirits with a twinkling radiance. As the light crept into Adora’s bedroom, it caressed her fair skin sweetly, as if it were signaling to wake her up. Proven to be successful, her eyelids fluttered open in with ease. With fatigue still latching onto her, she trudged her way downstairs to face the rest of her family.

“Come closer...” a peculiar yet soothing tone whispered from a distance. Adora tilted her head in confusion, as it was not the voice of her mother’s. She deduced that it was all in her head, before she heard it slither into her ear once more. It was as if she was put under a spell, and the vulnerable girl with jet black hair found herself following the voice. Adora slowly sauntered into her mother’s bedroom, and that was where the voice grew louder than ever before. There, she spotted an exquisitely carved box. It was the most magnificent object she had ever laid eyes on, as gold accents were laced around the finely carved edges. Why would Adora’s mother keep such a divine item from her? Her fingertips grazed the smooth surface, as she contemplated whether she should open it. The voice coming from inside kept on instigating to do so. Without thinking, she opened the lid. That’s

when ear piercing screeches were thrust out of the box and into the room. Black matter released itself, swirling rapidly. Adora pressed her hands against her ears, desperate to drown out the agonizing shrieks. The dark mist danced its way out of the window, roaming the Earth. Within the blink of an eye, the sky plunged into a sea of nothing but darkness. The moon emerged from the horizon. Adora rushed to the window, watching in horror as the sable substance swallowed the moon. The whole world went dark. Feeling guilt seep through her veins, Adora wept and wept. It was only then that she realized what she did. She released the evil spirits, allowing them to poison the moon with its aura. It seemed that all hope had slipped from her grasp, until it hit her. She knew what she had to do.

Adora climbed to the highest peak of the hill, looking up at the starless sky. She knew that she had to sacrifice herself to the spirits in order to bring the beloved moon back. The girl knelt down on the grass, feeling utterly defeated. It felt like forever that she waited for the evil spirits to come and collect her. Before long, the black particles surrounded her, piercing into her skin. A scream of utter agony ripped through the night, as her body laced itself in the sharp edges of pain. It gave out within a matter of seconds, her skin breaking into tiny fragments. Every inch of Adora turned into nothing but dust. She now lived among the stars and the moon, fighting the evil spirits that held the majestic planet hostage. From the Earth, it seems as though the moon has been cut up into quarters. Other nights it looks as if it were a whole again. That is because Adora fended the vengeful spirits off. But she knew that they would return stronger than before, and that her life was now an endless cycle of constantly battling with those unforgiving demons. She knew that because of her selfish actions that the moon would never return to its once full state.

Nature



My Friend, the Wind
By Olivia Altidor

I am happiest with wind in my face and by my side,
it comes along with me, on my every stride.
Conquering fears and motivation to conquer another,
the wind stays by my side like a loving sister or brother.

The wind uses momentum and then it is off!
Dashing through cities and states, brushing hard and soft.
With full effort and strength,
the wind can reach a great length.

The wind is what I aspire to be.
It is strong, fearless and free.
It's my inspiration, my friend at my side.
I would be lost without this tour guide.

The wind is my friend because it is loyal to me.
No matter the time of day, night or what the season be.
It gives me comfort in a way that I openly embrace,
it assures me that everything is okay, and that life is not a race.

This wind is a breath of fresh air,
sending a breeze past my face and blowing my hair.
I smile knowing my loyal friend stays near,
I know, boy do I know even though I cannot hear.

My friend, the wind, motivates me to progress and reach farther distances,
it will always be right there for me within instances.
So, by my side the wind shall stay,
I would not want it any other way.

Four Seasons
By Adien Annis

In a year there are four seasons,
Each is unique and enjoyed for different reasons.
These include Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall.
Some there is snow, while others there is not any at all.

Winter is the beginning of the new year,
The temperature is certainly not high,
We drink hot cocoa, as snow dances down from the sky.

Following this is the season of spring,
Summer is finally insight,
And the temperature is rising.

The next season, the sun is scorching.
Pools are greatly valued,
And without school, it most certainly isn't boring.

The final season is known as fall,
For Halloween, we pick pumpkins,
And after the leaves fall, we make a pile and jump in.

Once again the cycle begins,
These are the four seasons.

Cows
By Mutindi Maluki

Cows are the calmest creatures,
and they have interesting features.
Their fur is as soft as silk,
and they also give us milk.
Bertha was a German Angus.
She was a good cow, but loud noises made her anxious.
She had unique white spots
with speckled brown dots.
All day she loved to graze,
and after that she would laze.
She would then listen to music
because to her Mozart was amusing.
All the other cows loved Bertha too,
but when the man in the overalls took her, they knew.
that they would never see her again,
because sadly, Bertha was slain.

Nature

By Katelyn Antonoff

The Sun wakes up in the blue,
The birds see it, that's their cue,
Though no rain, the ground is wet,
But there is no reason to fret.

All the animals look up to the sky,
To their delight, the Sun is high,
They now know it's lunch time,
All animals scurrying for food, some may even climb.

The Sun goes to sleep,
But the Moon's alarm goes beep,
The world has a mysterious glow,
Much happens that no one will know,
Nocturnal animals come out to play,
While the wolf howls without delay.

Everything is on the right track,
But Mother Nature becomes angry and begins to clap back,
Thunderous storm rages in
However, a rainbow begins to grin!

The Ocean
By Jamie Cridge

A cold breeze encircles you
As you run upon the shore
The ocean engulfs you
When you step upon its floor

Frigid waves crash
On the unsuspecting sand
It slaps the tiny harbor
Like an enormous hand

A monster at times
Yet a gentle lamb at others
An enticing place for all
For calm sisters and rough brothers

As the Sun slowly sets
And glows a beautiful yellow
The sparkling waves wash onto the shore
So tranquil and mellow

The deep ocean voices sing in harmony
Alas, at the end of the day, when all is done
Even though they are separate
Together they are one

Woods
By Hailey Desai

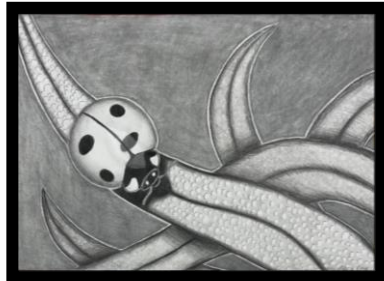
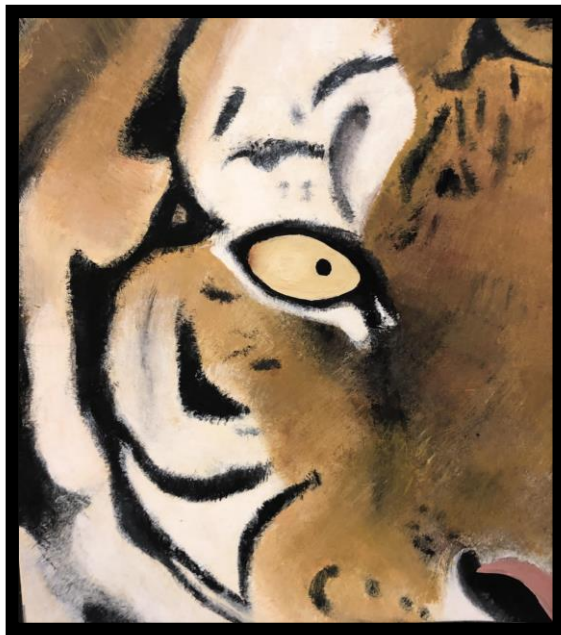
If only she could stay.
A safe haven for her at last,
The crunching of leaves filled the silence,
Birds flew like stars in the night sky.

A silent deer hid shivering.
Its eyes amber like marigolds
The child without a mother.
Hope was not enough to save it nor her.

The lone tree stood in her path
Bark rough and rigid, the branches barren
Flowers bloomed on this bitter night
Vines tangled at her feet

The unknown was immense yet there was nothing in sight
The unknown was beautiful yet silent
The unknown was in harmony yet broken
The unknown terrified her greatly.

The wind sang marvelous songs
The sun rose, and light shed upon her
She was no longer safe, the woods were gone
If only she could stay.



Winter Wonders
By Grace Kirwan

A mystical force of beauty and power
At night, the fairies fly through the inky darkness, dusting the ground.
The light keeps the wintry, cold darkness at bay.
The flakes, fragile yet powerful, create fleeting masterpieces.
Their accumulation like a blanket over a frightened child's head, a sign of beauty and wonder.

A mystical force of terror and peril,
Strikes fear into the hearts of its victims.
"Watch out," Mother Nature whispers down necks,
Her icy breath warns of the inevitable storm.
Humans shiver from the frigid air and fear as they beg Mother Nature for protection.
"Swoosh!" The blizzard winds howl like a wounded animal,
Curtains of white form layers and construct a blockade.
The once gentle blanket transforms into a horrific prison.
People pound against the frozen wall,
They beg and plead to be let out, for escape, but do not prevail.
They are trapped in this wintry stockade from which there is no solace.

A mystical force of beauty and terror
Gentle yet threatening, a natural marvel, a natural disaster
It is a balance of light and dark, yin and yang,
Never wavering, always unruly.
A delicate equilibrium of beauty and power.

Above Freezing
By Jennifer Han

The ocean rolls in foamy curves.
There she stands, arms crossed.
Her vision gliding along the water,
Her feet tucked deep in the sand.

Friends gather around her,
But she can't see them as real.
A strained smile and hollow laughter.
That is what I see.

Her words automatic,
An empty breath of air.
Her eyes clouded over,
Shielding secrets behind them.

She sneaks away from the waves.
Feet skipping across the ground.
Lightly sinking into the grains.
Leaving undetected by all.

She builds a facade of happiness.
No one hears her,
Screaming for help,
I heard her.

I follow after her.
Close enough to see,
Far enough away to not be.
Down the length of the boardwalk.

She reaches the edge of a bridge.
Ignoring the unknowing strangers.

She stops.
In front of her lies an end.
A place where her story cuts short.
Still water welcomes her.

Her eyes seared with hate.
Her hands trembling.
Her mind yearning to stop.
Her willingness to let it.

Where she was,
She suddenly wasn't.

My name was Lucy.

It's surprising.
Not knowing what lies beneath you,
Falling to meet impending death.
It gives you time to think.

I know he followed me.
He wanted to say something,
My best friend.

But feeling is too complex,
Comprehension of the unknown,
It's an inescapable paradox.

I have spent too long
Too much of my living days.
Looking for ways to feel,
And not even for the better.

The waves lean into me.
I want them to.
And then it's done.

The water is cold.

Pretty Little Killer
By Rose Fender

The pretty little flower sits quiet.
People walk past her, glancing at her vibrant colors.
They pass by the beautiful statue on a stem.

That's all they see:
A pretty little flower.

But if they look closer then maybe they'd see what she really is.
Maybe they'd see the red color in her petals are blood stains.
Maybe they'd see her thorns cut deeper than any knife.

She seeks revenge for being put into a glass cage.
She deserves better than being bought with worthless money.
She deserves more than being a gift to a foolish human.
She is worth so much more than to be thrown out and forgotten after death.
She will not be a slave to humanity.

The day will come when she will bring terror over those who have done her harm.
Next it will be humans trapped in the glass cage.
It will no longer be her petals that fall, but the heads of people.
The only water in their vase will be their own tears.
Tick, tock.
Soon the time will come.
Planning, patiently she waits.

Her mask of a pretty little flower is her best friend.
The pretty little killer sits quiet.

Passion



The Definition of Happiness By Madeline Bates

Happiness is:

Friends, laughing to death, partying all night, socializing, and excelling in school.
Silent, sound, secure places,
Rambunctious rodeos, or following your passion.

What is happiness though really?

A euphoric feeling running through your veins, a serendipitous moment?

A feeling of self-reliance?

Cheering up a friend in need of comfort?

Happiness is the relief of being free.

Not like a puppet, free from the strings of the puppeteer.

Snip, snap, crack.

The freedom to write your own story, fortunate or tragic.

Music that moves and transforms you.

Learning to love yourself.

Knowing you are wanted, that you matter.

When a friend understands your struggles.

Worries for your well-being.

Stays up all night to ensure your safety.

Happiness is not only a feeling. It surrounds and binds the world.

Emotions

By Anusha Deshpande

Sometimes, our emotions seem to control us.
It is as if we feel, hear, and see what our emotions want.
We act, speak, and react how our emotions do.
It seems that we become our emotions.

The emotions range in felicity and fury.
Anger is a fiery beast with zero remorse,
its blood boils in its rage and wrath.
Happiness is a bubbling brew of joy,
it is a beautiful gift.

Not all emotions are so certain.
Fear acts like a restraint,
it's like a cage.
Sadness is so vastly different from fear,
however, it forms its own barriers.

There is an abundance of emotions.
An abundance of the state of mind that are derived from one's situations
An abundance of these feelings that can help us feel so free,
but make others feel trapped.
Emotions are a wonderful thing

A Walk in The Park
By Danella Silagy

Sports are sports,
but in some people's minds,
sports are opinions.

Football, basketball, and baseball are considered sports
but cheer, gymnastics, and dance are activities.
Activities are thing that you do in your free time
like watching the talkative tv.

Sports are people competing to get to the top.
It's not "click, click, click" and you there.
All sports have to work hard to get to the top and that's what a sport is.
Sports and activities are two different things,
sports are sports and activities are activities.

There's also a myth about girls in sports
girls are goals when it comes to sports.
Girls are always told they're not as good as boys
which is a lie in every line.
Sports are for boys and girls are equal.
In fact, they are equal as an equal sign.
Sports and their opinions are awful and not fair.
Sports and activities are two different things.

Make it Graceful
By Alina Chen

It's the pinnacle of grace,
movements sharper than a crisp Fall leaf,
or as gentle as the Summer breeze.
Dancers look light as air.
Marvelous dancers can do it all.

Harder than a dead man coming back to life,
the amount of strength, flexibility
the amount of endurance, and balance,
that a dancer possesses is colossal.
All while making it graceful.
Yet the number of people that deny this,
Uncountable.
Anyone can dance,
but can they do it well?

Snap! And your ankle is gone,
five, six, seven, eight,
you dance and dance,
till your shoes are held together by a thread
your feet are pleading for you to stop.
You fell flat face down?
Get back up,
make it graceful,
because no one,
no one
can know you messed up.

Photography
By Sarah Bragger

Capture a picture with the perfect setting,
This will make a moment you'll never be forgetting.
Taking the perfect photo is pretty exciting,
It's like creating a story without any writing.
Find the hidden beauties of the world,
Maybe it's something gorgeous no one else has unfurled.
Photography is a beautiful art,
That can only be taken from the heart.

Getting a snap of something moving is tough,
When it comes out blurry you'll say you've had enough.
It's annoying when photobombers get in the way,
Like when a car drives by and the whole screen looks gray.
You often can't stand upright, because that just won't please,
To set the perfect angle, you might get on your hands and knees.
When the flash goes off, people may shut their eyes,
And then the essence of the picture quickly dies.
Maybe it's your job and your budget is tight,
But the photos just never seem to come out quite right.

Although taking good pictures is frequently hard,
If you try and persevere you'll be passing out your business card.
You'll get compliments from everyone that will fill you with pride,
You'll see this is the real you, and you've got nothing to hide.
That perfect picture where everything just fits together,
Makes your entire mood become instantly better.
When you see your photo and it's something you love,
You'll know that this image is something to be proud of.
Taking photos can make you feel free,
And it allows you to appreciate how beautiful the world can be.

A Mother's Greif
By Grace Liu

The broken child asks his weeping mother
His pink cheeks alive, but his eyes not quite:
“When we leave this world, is there another?”
Her mind sees darkness but her mouth drips light

*Is death an escape or a path to pain?
When we succumb to living as the dead,
The once glowing flames of thought are now slain
Cold souls on the scale of justice like lead*

Her lie is the sun deep into the dark,
Black weeds, white tulips in the same garden
She hides her woe, but her mask is so stark
She wills tears to cease, her harden

Though when her heart's dams break truth claws her throat,
Her son's sunken ship has started to float...

Plucked

By Alice Liu and Madeline Sparks

I met you, sweetheart, in the warmth of May,
A flower bulb that has already bud,
A tulip, red as the first gleam of day,
The golden streak of light after a flood.

Your spotlight is my guide through the abyss,
Your azure eyes are as deep as the seas,
Your smile turns on my eternal bliss,
Together, it brings all my moths to ease.

Without you by my side, there are no hues
Perhaps a black-white film with no real close,
If only like my dream, where *us* comes true,
There is no saying what we could compose.

Together, the moon and sun are both ours,
Your love is worth more than a thousand stars.

The torrents of May, when I noticed you,
It seemed spring was a sign you overran,
Your warmth hid your cold soul, I had no clue,
The hidden, true intentions of your plan.

While your attempts made a solid campaign,
Your shallow deepness just made me repulse,
So many others see, hear, and feel pain,
Acting civilized was my first impulse.

If I am argent fireworks, you say,
Then you must be a caliginous bomb,
By leaving everything in a disarray,
In seconds, I would leave without a qualm.

Our hearts will bring anguish to the inside,
Our paths were not intended to collide.

The Art Contest
By Kayakunda Muhumuza

Victoria woke up with a start. This morning felt unusually different. The sunlight streamed from her shutters like a waterfall, bathing her in light, "...but why do I feel like something's wrong?" she asked herself. Then she saw the time on her phone ...10:09! Victoria's heart started jumping out of her chest. "Oh crap-I'm late!"

She must have forgotten to set her alarm! She was a whirlwind, grabbing random clothes, stuffing her school supplies in her backpack, and left her room. No one was there. "Great," Victoria muttered to herself, "Mom must still be on her evening shift!" She grabbed a trail mix bar, gulped it down, put on her shoes, and ran out the door. She jumped onto her bike and started to pedal off to school, her long dark hair flying in the late morning breeze. As she went, she recalled the dream that she had-auctioning off her paintings and making lots of money. She reached her school, put a lock on her bike, and ran into Forest Hill Middle school. She stopped by the office, picked up a tardy slip, and headed to her 4th-period class. Her cheeks burned as students stared at her with curiosity. Her palms had enough sweat to fill a glass. She handed Mr. Rovioas her slip and sat down in an empty desk. She could hardly hear the teacher because she was too embarrassed about what happened. She swore to herself that she would NEVER forget to set her alarm again.

Streaks of pink and purple lined the sky as soft clouds softly floated in midair. Victoria was doing her favorite thing: painting. She was so engrossed that the bell made her jump out of her seat. "Ringgggg!" The bell screamed.

"Class dismissed!" Ms. Covian announced. "And don't forget about the art contest!" Victoria glanced at the art contest brochure. It was a miniature version of the poster on the wall -- a picture of a paintbrush tangled with a medal. She had a sudden daydream of herself wearing the medal, waving at the school, everyone clapping for her. The image broke when somebody bumped into her. Victoria headed to her bus, catching up with her friend Leona on the way.

"Did you hear about the art contest next week?" Leona asked.

"Mhm..." Victoria confirmed. "I'm thinking about signing up" she confessed.

Leona squealed "You should TOTALLY sign up for the contest!"

"I'm not that good," Victoria said modestly.

"Remember when we worked together for a science project and our teacher said that our project was the best?" Leona inquired.

"It could be because of your writing" Victoria defended. Leona's handwriting was light-years away from Victoria's, with perfect twists and curls that looked pleasing to the eye. Leona lightly swatted at Victoria playfully, and she ducked, running to her bus. "See you next week!" she hollered.

Two days later....



Lunchtime! Victoria cheered inwardly as she sat next to Leona. "So," Leona asked, taking a bite of grilled cheese, "did you finish your art contest entry?"

Victoria nodded "My mom told me that my painting actually had a chance of winning!" She sipped her milk optimistically. She was especially proud that her mom complimented her drawing because her mom didn't really have time for her most days because she worked at the hospital.

"Can you show me?" Leona begged.

"Sure!" Victoria responded. She carefully took out her entry: A watercolor painting of a sunset.

Leona looked over her shoulder, her face morphing in a look of wonder. "That's-"

"Stupid" a voice interrupted Leona from her compliment. Victoria and Leona turned around to find a girl named Melodi glaring at them. Ever since Victoria accidentally spilled milk on her favorite shirt in 3rd grade, Melodi had been out for blood. She looks like a vsco girl. Victoria always thought. Her big shirt, shell necklace, and Hydroflask made her look like a top-notch vsco girl. Ebony hair twisted into a messy bun. Lips twisted in a cruel sneer. Eyes looked ice-cold. Victoria gulped. She was on the attack. Melodi narrowed her eyes. "What the heck is that!" she snickered. "It looks like you just barfed on the page."

Victoria's cheeks burned. She clenched her fists. "It's my art contest entry, mind you, and I think it's beautiful!" Victoria's voice quavered and she knew at once Melodi had found her weak spot.

Word of the art contest must have traveled really fast, because Melodi wrinkled her nose. "I think that my drawing is better than yours, don't forget that I used to be in an art school!" She displayed her drawing of the principal with a proud smile.

"Is she trying to flatter the principal?" Victoria pondered. In the portrait, the principal's nose was too big, and her lips were a bit too wide. But other than that, the drawing looked exquisite, and actually looked like the principal.

"Right, used to" Leona shot back.

Melodi rolled her eyes "See ya later, losers" and she sashayed away. The bell chimed, signaling that it was the end of period 6.

"Are you okay?" Leona asked. "Melodi is such a jerk sometimes."

"I'm okay," Victoria reassured her with a brave smile, but as soon as Leona left, the smile disappeared. As Victoria gathered her things and headed to homeroom, echoes of doubts formed in her head. "What if Melodi is right? What if my painting doesn't stand a chance? What if I shouldn't even try?" These words spun around and around her head, making her feel dizzy. Victoria glanced at her brochure. It seemed like it was mocking her, with its shiny medal she knew she would never have. She looked at her painting. Maybe it does look like throw-up, she thought in low spirits. She balled the brochure in her fist. She walked up to a trash can and chucked it. She almost threw away the painting, but she thought that she could at least give it to her mom. She trudged to her next class.

She was so distracted, the rest of the day flew by. The 9th-period bell rang.

The teacher clapped her hands. "Ok, now everyone be quiet!" Ms. Covian commanded. "If anyone has an art project, turn it in now." A handful of the students stood up, one toting a sculpture, one-word art, one with a drawing. Melodi passed by Victoria, smirking at her. First, Victoria slumped in her chair. A sudden bolt of anger went through Victoria. She can't tell me what to do! She stood up and started walking toward the turn in box. One-step. Two steps. Every step felt like an eternity. Victoria dropped her painting on the table. As soon as she put it down, she began to have second thoughts, but she cleared them away as she focused on the teacher.

Victoria sat in her chair during homeroom the next day, anxiously waiting for the results of the art contest. Her forehead was beaded with sweat. She chewed her lip anxiously. Her heart pounded like a bass drum. Melodi sat in a chair two rows away, looking as smug as ever. Victoria wondered if Melodi was putting up a front, and she really was quaking in her shiny, new designer boots. I hope she was nervous, Victoria thought, then mentally scolded herself that she shouldn't think like that. Victoria sat up in her chair and tried to look confident when she really knew she felt like she was about to burst. Just then, the intercom crackled. The principal's voice resonated through the classroom.

"Good morning, students. I would like to interrupt your programs to announce the winner of this year's annual art contest." Victoria tensed. "The winner of the regional art contest and who wins 1 million dollars is...." the principal paused for maximum effect. Victoria felt like her heart was trying to burst out of her chest. She felt sick. Her feet seemed all over the place. "VICTORIA MATTHEWS!!!" The principal announced. "Victoria, please meet me at the office." Everything seemed to be in slow motion. Everyone in her homeroom was screaming her name.

"Vic-toria! Vic-toria!" Melodi sat in her desk, seething. She looked at Victoria, her expression venomous. Victoria thought that if looks could kill, Victoria would be dead already. Victoria awkwardly waved to the class and headed to the office. There, she was handed a big fat check of 1 million dollars. They also gave her a medal. It was pure gold and was marked with a paintbrush. Victoria felt like she was floating off the ground. Just wait till I tell Leona!

Then Victoria noticed that her feet were off the ground. "Huh?" Victoria muttered. Then a familiar sound pulled her out the scene.

"BEEP, BEEP, BEEP!" Victoria was startled out of her sleep by her alarm. She grabbed her phone and shut the alarm off. She shook her covers off and blinked groggily. "Was that all a dream?" she asked herself. She scanned her room for traces of the prize. Nothing! I wish that it was real...She slowly dressed, got her things ready for school, and ate breakfast. She headed for school and had a normal day until art came. By then, the dream she had was faint, and she almost forgot about it. Victoria sat in her chair then noticed a shiny, new poster on the wall, advertising for a certain art contest. She smiled, took out a piece of paper, and started to work on her entry....

True Sight
By Izzy Volpe

I see
A vision that has come to life,
Seeds blossoming into a wondrous garden.

I see
A life full of opportunity,
A world full of hope.

I see
A smile on bright-eyed faces,
Drops of rain caressing every leaf.

I see
A lost soul
Finding the birds

I see
A fire,
That never eradicated.
Sparks that keep igniting

I see
A rope,
Strong enough to hold a heavy heart.

I see
A mirror

I see
A girl

I see
A soul

I see
Trouble

I see
Pain

I see
Emptiness

I see
An army

I see
Passion

I see
Hope

I see
An ocean

I see
Love

I see
Me.

Science



Space
By Arnav Chaudhary

Space is endless,
It extends much further than one can see.
One can go there,
But they won't be able to breathe.

Many countries have raced for space,
This chase led to many discoveries,
The Americans and Russians have always been ahead,
They lead the race and pulled the ace.

There are many planets out there,
There are also many stars,
You can also find comets,
And galaxies apart.

Space is infinite,
It can be very dark,
It hides many mysteries,
For humans to solve.

Amazing Atoms
By Katherine Castro-Quesada

Amazing Atoms, they make up everything,
It's pretty cool that tiny circles,
can make up everything in existence,
everything is made up of Atoms.

Nothing can break them,
nothing can create the,
it's the law of conservation of mass.

Everything comes for the elements
on the periodic table,
Not Atoms!

They are circles that form,
the elements and everything else in the universe,
atoms are the smallest piece of matter.
Atoms are older than the dinosaurs that went extinct 65 million years ago.
As a matter of fact, even dinosaurs were made up of atoms!
You can't escape the amazing atoms because they are there but you can't see them.

Hopeless: Looking Back From the Year 2220

By Grace Bellina

A planet dying by the second, crying out violently, but no one knows if it is going to survive
Resources gone in the blink of an eye: coral reefs crumbling, clean water gone filthy
Animal life almost extinct with heartbroken bones laying everywhere in grief
The jungle is silent, the ocean is black, and the sky is no longer blue,
If only we knew

If we stopped when we had the chance, the earth would not be threatened by this circumstance
If only we listened to glaring warnings placed desperately before our eyes, shouted in our ears
Humanity overlooked the obvious, now facing an irreversible dead end
A missed chance to throw the earth a lifeline, put out the raging fire with a swoosh of passion

Two centuries ago, leaders ignored the evidence, bringing a trap of scorching heat, bitter winds
Cowards long dead, sleeping in their graves, left behind damage as horrific as a black plague
Voices cried out in vain, left unheard, a message shriveled up like a plant in winter
We should have restored the world, to before humans left their contaminated footprints
Nowhere to run from destruction, the human race will perish too

The chance for a healthy future grew sick, a shining tomorrow discarded like trash
If only we listened 200 years ago

Extra-Terrestrial Life
By Samantha Soybel

We have searched
both high and low
in pursuit to find
a friend or foe.

We've looked on Earth
and through outer space
in our best attempts
to find their place.

We've predicted how
they may appear,
whether they are
opaque or clear.

They may be round
or possibly long.
They could be weak
or very strong.

It's possible that they
have an extra nose,
or twenty fingers
and thirteen toes.

They may come to us
to steal and take,
but it could be peace
they want to make.

Though until they come
we'll never know
whether they are
a friend or foe.

Into the Future
By Liesl Winchell

"Hmm" said Srishti and Liesl. There was a big machine that seemed like it could fit a body. They were not sure what to do.

"I think I'm going to go in it" said Liesl happily.

"Don't go in it that's stupid" said Srishti. But Liesl went in it anyways and she vanished. "I guess I have to follow her" moaned Srishti.

Srishti and Liesl both found themselves in a very interesting place. Everything was all out of color. The whole sky was filled with smoke and there were no animals and there wasn't even any grass. It was very hard to breathe. Then all of a sudden came two random strangers to Liesl and Srishti.

"Hi I'm Jade" said Jade.

"Hi I'm Ava" said Ava. Srishti and Liesl both just looked at each other and just started screaming. Liesl and Srishti really don't like to talk that much.

"What are you doing?" said Ava and Jade.

"I don't really know actually" both said Srishti and Liesl. Jade and Ava were both wearing very complicated glasses and were wearing hula skirts and were wearing a fancy white shirt.

"Hi Srishti and Liesl can you help us" said Ava and Jade.

"How do you know our names" said Srishti and Liesl confused.

"We can see everything about you through our glasses like how your favorite colors are pink and orange and that you traveled here from 2020" said Ava.

"So um what year is it" said Srishti.

"And where are the animals" said Liesl.

"It's year 3030" said Ava.

"And what are animals asked Jade.

"Why is the sky gray and why is it hard to breathe?" asked Srishti.

"Well there are a lot of factories and instead of people living for 80 years people only live up to 20 but it's fine" calmly said Jade.

"Why is it like this" sadly said Liesl.

"Why are you even asking that it's probably because we are not caring about the animals and we are ruining the planet" yelled Srishti.

"You didn't have to be so mean about it and anyways can I have some water?" said Liesl.

"What's water?" asked Ava.

"What do you mean isn't there water throughout the whole world" said Srishti.

"Oh yeah water we just drink puddles from the rain" said Jade.

"No wonder you live to 20" said Liesl.

"Stop you're so rude and embarrassing" said Srishti nervously. "But anyways what's your problem?" asked Srishti.

"Well we want to fix the world" said Ava and Jade.

"Well how we do that" asked Liesl.

"To be honest I don't really know how" said Ava.

"Well I think Liesl and Srishti should go back to their time and like have a protest and so it will change the future" said Jade.

"Ugh doesn't that mean we have to do work" said Liesl.

"Well yeah but it's not going to be that much work" said Srishti. "Ok so I guess we will go back to our time" said Liesl and Srishti. "Bye we will miss you guys" said Srishti and Liesl.

"Bye we will miss you too" said Ava and Jade. Srishti and Liesl went back into the time machine and then all of a sudden they were back at their time.

"Ok so now what?" said Liesl.

"Well I think we should start making posters like saying if you're interested in fixing the future meet us at the library" said Srishti.

"Ok sounds like a good plan" said Liesl. For hours, Srishti and Liesl worked on posters to hang up. After that, they took another hour and hung up all the posters around town.

"So the posters say meet at library at 6:00 pm so we just need to wait a couple of more hours and then we go to the library" said Srishti.

"Finally a break" said Liesl relieved. At 5:50 Srishti and Liesl started walking to the library.

"Aren't you scared that no one's going to show up?" said Srishti worried.

"Nah not really I don't really care that much" said Liesl.

"Ugh you don't care about anything" said Srishti. Right when Liesl and Srishti walked into the library, there were hundreds of people.

"I didn't even know there were that many people in the town" said Liesl. For the next hour, Srishti and Liesl talked about how the world is ending and that they have to all work together to fix the world.

Strife



**Next
Hailey Bender**

**Anyone different,
Was torn at the seams.
Ripped from their lives with no more normality.**

**The Nazis took passion and hope from their eyes.
Drying up tears with their lies.**

**If you did not look
Like you fit in their book,
You were pushed aside and taken alive.**

**Neighbors watched,
But only that,
Because they refused to risk
Being next.**

The Darkness
By Madison Borer

There is a darkness spreading
taking the lives of so many.
A child's shaking hands,
tears smudging the ink,
as they write loved ones a letter.
They know the pain
their loved ones will feel
but was it not their fault,
when they dismissed a child's pain as unreal?
A fallen friend,
another one gone,
but will they meet us again,
or will all hope be lost?
These young hearts beating,
sounds that once were heard,
this life may be
ruthless, all this evil that's occurred.
But to take your own life,
to be self-removed from this life,
is something I've considered.
But I've taken my time
thinking this all through
and I refuse to let myself
go away from you.
To lose to the darkness,
to lose another friend,
to feel that this sad life must come to an end.
While this life isn't perfect,
it's scared and alone,
at least you have someone
to care for, to hold.
Although this life may be scary,
it's wild and it's free,
and if you look through the cloud of darkness
I'm sure you will see:
that standing on the other side of the mist
reaching out a hand are people like me.
Those that are afraid and want to give in,
but have known this darkness before
and won't let the ending begin.

We Make Mistakes
By Noelle Miliano

Everyone makes mistakes
One second is all it takes
Some mistakes are here to stay
But, you can make them go away

Some mistakes are discovered
While others are left covered
Don't make mistakes you'll want to erase
It'll be someone's forgiveness you'll have to chase

Everybody will make mistakes, nobody is perfect
But be careful, it might be somebody else's life you affect
Most mistakes are hard to come back from
Usually they are caused because someone is acting dumb

Mistakes can, also, help us grow
That's why some are for everyone to know
These incidents will help everyone learn
And we will get more knowledge in return

Mistakes can help you become greater than you were before
So, try something different, open a new door
After you make a mistake, you won't make it once more
Because mistakes are the things that help us explore

The Accursed Gate
By Kaitlyn Kirwan

No one dares to go near,
The rusted barbed wire fence that peeks out from the bushes,
The crumbling old buildings lined with dead grass,
The cleverly disguised gas chambers,
The blackened building filled with rusting file cabinets.

Not even the animals dare to make a home there,
They can smell the death on the buildings,
The evil that happened here,
The unjust slaughter,
Not even birds dare fly overhead.

Not even bored teens dare cross the gate,
They know the history of the place,
How children the age of their siblings were killed,
How teens their age were worked to death,
And how here they took their final breath.

The camp sits in silence,
As if it is holding its breath,
A cursed reminder of all the death,
A place where mist forever stays,
A place that will soon disappear from the people's gaze.

The Truth
By Evelyn Chan

My wings carry me through the infinite darkness
And my sable feathers dance in the gentle breeze.
The vast expanse ahead holds nothing but an invisible ebony sea
That welcomes me to fly free.

Here, I am alone.
Here, I am invincible.
Here, the chains that bind me to the earth are broken,
And Time loses its grip on me.

I can fly forever on, without fail, without doubt.
Even though I cannot see, this does not hinder me;
This only builds my trust in the haven of darkness
That has become my sanctuary from the world.

Suddenly, in the distance, a hazy light shines, and as I soar closer,
It envelops everything in a searing argent white,
Shattering the illusion of my security.

The light causes my wings to wither away
And I begin to fall through the blinding brightness,
Helplessly flailing.

I am reduced to a hollow shell of a body,
No longer free from the grasp of Time,
No longer free from the shackles that bind me down.

Despite my struggling,
I cannot break free from the oppressing light
That forces me to see the most horrifying thing of all:
The Truth.

Longing
By Madison Borer

You say you think I'm looking for
something I've lost
but have never had before.
I don't think that's the case
because I find it looking at her face.
Maybe it's the moonlight,
a silk strewn across,
but when I look into her eyes
I find what I have lost.
I don't think I have lost her, though,
she has always been right here.
I can't put my finger on it,
I just can't place it,
what has changed when she is near.
Maybe it's the wind pounding on my door,
maybe it's with every breath
that leaves me wanting more.
Maybe it's this hollowness,
this empty feeling inside,
maybe it's this darkness
leaving me nowhere to hide.
My emotions are shaken,
could there be more?
More than just wanting her,
could there be something I'm longing for?
A truth that lies within these walls,
does everyone feel
like they are destined for greater?
Or am I the only lost one?
Why does it always feel
like now or later
I could be what is yet to come?

Ella
By Samarth Ramaswamy

I knew there was something odd about this house from the minute I stepped foot in it. I looked around--paintings of different little girls in black and white were plastered around the house. The silence was two hands pressing against my ears, making me aware of any little noise. Then there was a creak upstairs. I was the only one who lived here.

I slowly walked upstairs -- not knowing what would come ahead of me; one foot at a time, I went up the stair as it creaked with my every step. Each line of wood -- hand-carved beautifully -- contrasted to the dark presence in the house. The darkness was a cloak, shielding me from any possible light.

There was a face floating in the dark. I turned my flashlight on to see what or who it was. As I looked down, my nerves calmed down. It was just some old doll sitting on the floor. I held the doll softly and placed it in my room. My tension was focused on its face, smiling widely as I turned the lights on. There was an ominous presence in the room. I skipped along to the living room of my house, waiting for the old owner. The face of the old doll came to my mind. The slightly tilted face, its bright red lips, and most importantly, its eyes, staring into my soul.

The doll. That *thing* somehow made me remember my past. The constant fighting. The hurt. The guilt, and those stormy nights on the road. That night 10 years ago when my twin sister Ella and I got hit by something... or someone. A sudden banging on the door woke me up from my daze. The realtor was here. I greeted her and walked her inside, negotiating the prices and the logistics of this house. We had some coffee and discussed everything we needed to. It was then that we heard the strange noise -- the crashing of glass coming from upstairs. I jumped in my seat, not knowing what was upstairs or who could've done that. The realtor didn't seem surprised. Curious to see what it was, we ran upstairs. I looked around the room. There was a large vase shattered all over the ground, spreading under the bed and the window. That was the moment I realized something. This was the room I put that doll in.

"It's usual of her to do this; don't worry. When I found that thing in the attic a couple of years ago I didn't know what I was going to get myself into. That's why I sold the house! You bought it because you didn't have a problem with her. Ella, that's her name--by the way, I found it on the shirt," the realtor told me, even though she looked right past me. *She never mentioned it -- her.* I hesitated, but didn't say anything; the deal was already made and there was nothing I could do. That binding signature tied my wrists together and didn't let me escape. I was forced to live here. The realtor broke the silence when she said, "Some spirit or something must've gone into that doll. I contacted the supernatural experts and

asked them what it was and apparently, a 7-year-old girl was hit by a speeding car in a storm a long time ago.” The realtor took her belongings and went to survey each room, unconcerned about what would happen to me that night.

I slept like a normal person would even though the realtor was still in the house. But the constant racket of the doll in the next room bothered me. A sudden slam of the door woke me up from my bed. My chest felt empty as I walked forward into the next room to see what was going on. There was a dead body. Right there. On the bed. It was the realtor. I saw the doll right in front of her -- with a knife. I started running -- sprinting away from the house. The cold wind choked me as I was gasping for more air. The doll, somehow, was in the forest behind my house. The eyes of the doll stared at me -- through my soul -- like she already knew who I was. I ran to the gun shed to pick a weapon up to kill that malevolent doll once and for all.

My feet squished in the mud as small drops of rain started falling. I was not sure why I couldn't feel the rain. I went back to the area behind my house where the doll stood. I pulled the gun out and pulled the trigger, as the round bullet went through the doll, releasing the tense feeling around me. Blood started appearing on her chest, and I was not sure how, but the only possible way blood would have come out of a doll was if there was a soul in there. And it was finally gone.

There was a shooting pain in my chest after I shot the doll. It felt like sharp knives were carved into my chest. I looked down at myself, and something was way different. I looked at my hand, my chest, my feet, and my shoulders. The rain was pouring now, but it was going through me. *Through me.* I couldn't believe it. Hurting the doll somehow hurt me, or awoke something that I never knew about myself. I could now put my hand through myself. I was a ghost. The only way that would be possible is if the other person I was with when we got hurt was my twin sister because when she got hurt I did too. And my sister Ella and I were 7 years old when we were hit by the car. I constantly heard that she was dead, but I could never believe those people. *Ella. The doll. I just killed my sister.*

No One Mourns the Wicked
By Madison Borer

No one mourns the wicked,
no one ever cries,
the good are remembered
and legends never die,
but for the wicked, no one says goodbye.
Pretend to care for everyone
because you know you should,
but when the evil and darkness stumble,
you don't help them when you could.
No one mourns the wicked,
no one ever cries,
the good are remembered
and legends never die,
but for the wicked no one says goodbye.
They say the good die young.
I'm on my hands and knees, begging for your mercy.
Forgive me, darling, please.
Say that you care for me
but I don't really know why,
because when the evil die young, you never said goodbye.
No one mourns the wicked,
no one ever cries,
the good are remembered
and legends never die,
but for the wicked no one says goodbye.
Living like you'll never fade does not lead to happy endings.
Crying, shedding fake tears,
I know you're just pretending.
No one mourns the wicked,
no one ever cries,
the good are remembered
and legends never die,
but for the wicked no one says goodbye.
When the wicked leave this earth,
when the bad and evil fall,
no one ever cries for us,
no one ever cares at all.
No one mourns the wicked,
no one ever cries,
the good are remembered
and legends never die
but for the wicked no one says goodbye.

A Lost Body, a Thriving Spirit
By Sharvil Raut

They took everything
My dignity, my personality, my individuality
But they never took my hope
My hope stayed with me
Like a loyal friend
I would never let go
My friends disappeared
My family was gone in a command
I was left alone,
In the darkness of the camp
To rot
But I stayed alive
I did not give up
My spirit lived on
Though my body decayed
Soon my spirit grew strong
While my body withered
And the gas took over
And my spirit joined my loved ones

A Holiday Nightmare
By Evan Vadola

Oh hello. I didn't see you there. Well many people don't know this and I assume you don't either, but every ten years Santa takes a break from delivering gifts. In the early ages of his existence, he delivered gifts every year. But the stress of Christmas started to catch up with him so he decided to take years off. But he couldn't let Christmas disappear altogether so he turned to his closest and only friend... Jack Frost. He told Frost his dilemma and inquired if he could deliver the gifts. Frost told Mr. Claus he would and with that, a new idea occurred. "This Christmas is directed by me," Frost thought to parade around his ice cave. "But how I loathe Christmas. If only I could find a way to destroy it every year." He was resolute on destroying Christmas so he used his magic to build up a specimen that would ruin Christmas for all. He called it Krampus.

Christmas time is my favorite time of year... or at least it was. About a year ago, I saw something truly scary - something that scared me to my very core. It was Christmas Eve and I was dancing to some music. I felt the vibrations flow through the floor. This was my favorite music to dance to. It was an upbeat tune that I felt in my body. It wasn't hard to find myself stuck in the music. I never knew what that night would turn into. Glass shattered as reindeer sprang into the room. A grim smile emerged from each of their faces. Blood dripped from their sharp teeth. Their fur was dirty and dingy, and their eyes glowed red. A reindeer rubbed its claw against our carpet before lifting its head up to howl. The other creatures sprinted towards my family and stabbed them with their antlers. Blood shot out of my aunt's stomach as organs started to fall out. Her guts spilled onto the floor and were strewn across it. The reindeer continued to stab her. Her face pleaded as she slowly fell to the floor. Two smaller figures emerged from the shadows pulling a red sled into our room. A whip crashed against each one of their backs until they finally fell to the floor. The reins slacked onto the ground and I fell to the floor in fear.

Two large boots fell to the ground and smashed the organs of my dead aunt. Gold buckles fell over the tops of the black boots. Blood stained the boots as they slowly started walking over to me. The boots banged against the floor one after another. They finally came to a halt. My hands shaking-my heart pounding-my breathing became heavier and heavier. I slowly peered up at the unknown figure. The red velvet pants taunted me as they rocked back and forth with each blow of air. I slid back on the floor-the boots followed. My heart raced faster and faster and I panted like a dog. Like a dog who was just beat. I whimpered-but I held back my tears. I subtly shifted my gaze up again. A black buckle, the same as the boot, draped across a large torso. Red silky pants were still in my view and they taunted me more. I trembled with fear-I felt at any moment I could convulse on the ground. But I didn't. I never did-I never even wanted to. I looked up one more time and saw something that bewildered me. A pale face with a white beard. His teeth were sharper than daggers and his eyes glowed death black. His face wrinkled and his nose was large. A smile revealed blood dripping from his teeth. His ears were crooked and his eyelids were flipped. The pink flesh of his eye made my skin crawl. He leaned down-too close to me-way to close. I felt his breath on my face and could taste the drool coming down from his mouth. He reached into his back pocket of his ripped pants before finally pulling out a red sack. He punched me in the face and shoved me into the sack.

I woke only seeing black. I realized that I was still in the sack. I reached up to climb out, but there was no hole. I couldn't climb out of the bag! I looked all around trying to find a hole but I

couldn't. I panicked more and more as I stayed in the bag longer and longer. I struggled and wiggled around to see if I could strike anything sharp enough to release me. I wiggled and wiggled until I felt a sharp stab. I realized that I had a glass shard in my pocket from when this demon broke in. I cut open the bag just enough to stick my hand through. I opened it fully and saw that I was flying through the air. But not just me-other kids were there too. I looked ahead to see the demon flying the sleigh and dropping gifts. But not just any gifts, these gifts were peculiar. They were exploding. I crept forward just enough to see the controls of the machine and where I could reach them. I held my breath and reached forward for a red circle. My finger felt the cold metal until a hand grabbed me. He turned around and started talking. But I could only see his mouth move but not hear him...because I was deaf.

The cold clammy hand grabbed me and twisted my skin. The pain rushed through my veins. I screamed in agony but could not hear myself. He pushed me back and I hit my head on the hard metal. I landed face down and could not see anything. That would have been a good time to hear what was coming. The pain slowly abated. He turned around and gave me a grim smile. His skin began to look like wax and his hand began to melt. He threw a couple more gifts down to houses and laughed at each one exploding. The sun began to rise and an orange sky was pictured around me. Still holding onto the controls, he leaned closer and closer to me. His skin touching mine-his breath in time with my own. I leaned back in disgust but was pulled closer, closer, closer. He smiled and a scorpion ran across his teeth. A blue vein popped out from beside his mouth and his cheeks began to rise. His smile grew wider and wider. I moved my eyes quickly to look around for a way out, but there was none. I started breathing heavier and heavier. My eyes flushed with fear. He leaned in closer and reached for something in his bag. He put a hearing aid on my ear and then whispered in my ear, "I'm Krampus."

He melted more and more until he turned into liquid and disappeared. The sleigh plummeted down faster and faster to the ground until it finally hit. I lifted my head one last time until I blacked out forever.

From the mind of what could have been still living James Hasty
Written by: Krampus

The Blind
By Diana Nejang

Thousands of people at risk of their life for their sexuality
Thousands of people at risk for their religion
At risk for sexuality, religion, body image, mental order,
At risk for following what was right and who they were
Yet it was not thousands, but millions

Thousands of people blindly followed the infamous torturer
Unaware of his true intentions
It was just like any other sickening cult,
The blind did not realize what was wrong until it had gotten too far
And because of that, the world did not care for the dead either
Because, at least, they were not dead, the blind thought
They were not the ones that were getting hurt
So it did not matter to them

The ones that they saw as filthy rats,
Those *filthy rats* were also doctors, lawyers, actors, mothers, fathers, humans
They were the same as the blind, in fact, better
The blind tortured, relegated, and denied
The blind were only of interest of those with the same hair, teeth, eyes, and skin
No one else mattered or was valued
Except for him, of course
The ruler always gets an exception

So the blind will follow
The ruler will manipulate
The world will not care
And the Jews will die
But they were all human

The Little Butterfly
By Adhithi Rajesh

Spreading its wings
The wind carries it
Where it needs to go
Up so high
Into the sky
Before falling
Passing all those
Who suffer below

Flying in grey, dismal camps
The only speck of color
Its orange wings
It rests on a tree
Void of color
Next to
Factories and lodgings
Where the only sight
Is a dreary grey

People look from below
At this apparition
An omen of
Hope
Freedom
Happiness
As they remain imprisoned

It flies
Spreading color and hope
To all those who reside
In the camp of tortures
Newcomers gasp and point
At this rare speck of color
As it flies unperturbed by
The heaping masses
Lined up like cattle

It passes over
The bodies of those
Sent to gas chambers
And furnaces
It glides away from
The rotting flesh
Of those in graves

It strays too close
To a fiery furnace
Where the orange flames
Leap out
Tongues of hungry beasts
Who will never be sated
Until there is no life left
The licks and caresses
Of the flames
Engulf the little butterfly
As the life is sucked from it

The laborers in the furnaces
See the augury of
Life
Peace
Prosperity
Killed by the
Unfailing grip of
Suffering and Pain
As the butterfly dies
The hope of liberty dies with it.

USB
By Komal Sarma

She aggressively rubbed the large coffee splatters on her lavender blouse in desperate attempt to get rid of them. Instead of melting away, they just dried darker. She groaned. Her eyelids were being pulled down as if boulders were hanging from the tips of her eyelashes, which she could now see as her eyes shut. She shook herself awake wishing she hadn't spilled the one coffee she could afford this month on her only neat shirt. What kind of luck had she been dealt? No money -- to earn she needed a job -- to get a job she needed an interview -- for her interview she needed a present mind and a clean shirt. Neither of which she could afford at the moment; physically or mentally. She begged for any motivation, the only thing which could possibly make her apply any fruitful effort, but nothing ever made her want to try; not even her life. There was only one thing left to do in her mind on such a terrible day, just sleep. Sleep allowed her to dream, to leave her worthless existence.

Her walk home was as always. She heard wolf whistles and cheers from the animals watching her as if she was in a zoo. Though the place was dank and smelt like smoke, escape into her small apartment felt amazing. Her roommate was crashed on the couch white powder scattered like dandruff all over the floor. Though it was not the best, she got to stay and eat for free as long as she let her roommate live as she pleased. But today the tiny apartment seemed more hazardous than normal. Papers from her desk were torn and arranged all over the floor, broken glass lay a booby trap blocking her way, and strangest of all chalices sat on her creaky wooden dinner table. It was filled with a viscous, red liquid and floating in the sap was a pen drive. A tiny Post-it note also sat soggy in the substance. She pulled it out, the liquid staining her fingertips. In order not to rip it, she dried it first before carefully unraveling it. It was crinkled and in a handwriting which almost looked like that of a kindergartner. It read "I would suggest you don't watch, but then again some people like death ;)".

She placed the note down on the table, now marked with red freckles. She once again dove her hand into the cup and pulled out the USB. She never felt this restless before. Her prayer for motivation was finally answered but she wished it had not, as now her mind was focused on nothing but the contents of that mysterious drive.

She ran to the sink and splashed her face with water to wake her up from the delirium. She held herself back as she knew if she indulged the interest, it would bring her no good. She feared almost nothing before, but now she did: the consequence of opening the secret that the USB held. She felt as if there was a woodpecker pecking at her restive mind. She swayed unable to resist the pull of her curiosity. Her footsteps quickened as she paced around her apartment trying to avoid the shards of glass left on the floor due to her improper sweeping. The frequency and strength of her steps must have left dents in the floor.

Hour after hour her pain grew stronger. She could hear her heart. Its thud, and thud, louder, and louder. She drove her hands through her hair ripping many strands out. She felt shivers rush down her spine and violently shake. She peered into a mirror and saw not herself, but a girl going mad. She drew her fingers to her lips and gnawed off her nails and even the skin surrounding them. They bled. It didn't matter to her. She smeared the blood onto her already ruined blouse and pulled it down in frustration ripping the neckline. She let out a ghoulish scream. Hot tears with red from burst veins in her eyes ran down her golden skin eating away at her makeup. Her roommate awoke to the noise, shaking her head and sniffing unclearly. Not thinking as she should, she grabbed the chalice and flung it at her roommate who might not have even felt it through the high. It left a gash in her forehead as she collapsed to the floor. She had had enough torture. The USB sung to her, a melody which used her speeding heartbeat as percussion. Unable to torture herself any longer, she flung open her laptop quickly enough to shatter the screen if she had not caught it. She wiped off the drive on a thin strip of fabric, the only evidence that she was in fact wearing a shirt. She ripped off the cap protecting it and plugged the drive in. She laughed almost maniacally now that her urge was satisfied. Her screen crackled and made a faint popping noise before displaying footage. It seemed to be security footage, but from where and of whom? It started at a hospital in an infantry wing. Then led to a crib. Then to a daycare. A 6th birthday and finally a talent show. The song that was playing sounded eerily familiar. Her heart sped again. Her arms began to sway, she knew the choreography. Still unable to piece things together, she kept watching, her eyes attached to the screen unable to see anything around her. The footage showed many seemingly useless scenes such as a family dining and a graduation of someone who she seemed to vaguely know but could not recognize. Everything looked familiar but not real. She then saw the face of a man, he approached the girl. A beautiful girl with golden skin. She loved him, and he loved her. Until it seemed he didn't. She left him for the bruises that he left on her, and jumped driven mad by the pain he caused. Everything made sense sequentially -- but the clip right after. Footage of a girl in a coffee shop, but from a distance. She couldn't tell who it was so she pulled up her broken glasses and held them up to her face. And then she saw her. Herself. And everything flashed before her. Her memory suppressed had returned. The footage now showed her, sitting at the table, broken as she was. But it ran just 10 seconds faster than her real life. She heard a sudden crack behind her so she jerked her head around the other way taking her eyes off of the film for the first time. From the audio of the computer came a gut wrenching scream. It was her own.

In a Moment
By Skylar Vera

She has been walking for hours. Her feet are starting to bleed. But she can't stop moving. She can't let him find her again. The forest betrays her. At first, it had been a comfort. It had embraced her, soothed her, washed away her sorrows and her fears. The iridescent fronds and leaflets wiped the tears from her porcelain cheeks. It gave her strength.

Now, they choke her.

The storm envelops her in its tenebrous embrace, smothering her in a curtain of icy rain, obstructing her ability to breathe with unrelenting gales of frigid wind. She does not stop. Her fright has inspired her to flee, and flee she does, running so fast that her bare feet only skim the miry, marshy ground.

The indigo sky of midnight is blocked out by a canopy of green. Each shard of luminescence from the full moon is a dagger. It cuts into her, stabbing her, slicing her, puncturing her. It leaves her vulnerable. Each twisted bough, each knotted branch, each blossoming bud suddenly seems hostile and cruel.

It occurs to her, at that moment that she is completely, utterly alone.

Her heartbeat pounds like a bird trapped in a cage, trying its best to break free of its bonds. Every step becomes increasingly painful. As she runs, all sense of time and direction is lost. She could have been running for mere seconds, or many hours. Branches lash out at her furiously, attempting to ensnare her in their rutted boughs. Like the gnarled hands of an old man, they clutch for her, striking her face and winding themselves into the strands of her sodden hair as if they never want to let her go.

Tears mingle with raindrops as they trace icy trails down her cheeks, intertwining and making it impossible to justify one from another. The fear -- the fear which before had been so blinding and eminent in her head -- has turned into a dull pounding that grows dimmer with each heavy step, overtaken by exhaustion.

Only one thought registers in her mind...

Don't stop running.

She does not even notice the conclusion of the torrential downpour until the sight of watery sunlight filtering through the treetops rouses her and brings her to her senses. For nearly twelve hours she has been plodding along, following nothing but her instincts at each sharp turn or newly appearing path.

The only thing she allows herself to stop and revel in is the fact that finally, finally, the man who called himself her father is no longer following her. She is safe, at least for a moment. As the day wears on, she begins to let her guard down.

Hunger is an animal, gnawing away at her insides. Exhaustion is like a toddler crying for attention. She tries to ignore it, to push it aside, yet it keeps coming back to her, stronger and more demanding than before.

Finally, when the sun is high in the sky, signaling late afternoon, the need to stop is greater than her need to continue trekking on. Finding a comfortable patch of moss and smooth dirt underneath the outstretched arms of an oak tree, she curls up and closes her eyes, only, she plans, for a moment.

After all, nothing bad can happen in a moment.

She blinks herself awake to find that she is surrounded by complete darkness. Not even the stars can be seen in the hazy night sky, and the world is cast in shadow. Rubbing her shoulder blade, which is tender from her sleeping position, she peers around trying to regain her bearings.

Everything seems at peace.

She almost goes back to sleep.

Almost.

There is a slight luminescence in the air... quite dim, but concerning none the less.

It comes from behind her.

Slowly, slowly like a deer in headlights, she twists around to face the tree.

For a moment, she sits entirely still, feeling each detail of the sight being etched into her brain. Horror is a noose, choking her to death. A shudder racks her body. A silent scream stretches across her face.

“*Mira.*” The leer beneath the two bright, glassy orbs grows larger. “*Mira.*” The moon is ripped from behind a cloud. “*Mira.*” The knife is a beacon, gleaming in the blackness.

“*Mira.*”

Nothing bad can happen in a moment.

