# Voices

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## Words

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## Angie

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Thoughts itch my brain
Words tickle my tongue
A twitch in my fingers
Words are for everyone

My pencil dances across the page
Good words never age
They set the stage
Full of excitement and imagination
Some words pop up
Like precipitation
Forming beautiful sentences filled joy and fun
Words are for everyone
The Poem of Truman

Truman thinks he is lit
He has a cat in a pit
He says Chill Bill is cool
He wants to be in a pool
Truman has an iPhone 7
He’s a little older than 11
He works at 7-11

Truman has an iPad
One thing he wonders
Is why they all start with I

Does his name even rhyme?
I wish he gave me a dime

Let’s see if something rhymes with Truman
Yes I found one Human
Well I guess Truman is a Human
He likes to play Madden
He thinks he was born in a den

He wants to own a Lambo
I think he means lamb

Truman thinks he shines
Now again does shines even rhyme?
Does Truman even have a dime?
Does he even like rhyme?
Let’s ask him if he has the time
He said he’s eating a lime
Truman is not that shy
Truman used to be a mime
He used to commit crimes
He said his older brother always whines
They say he is very kind
He used to clean up grime
He always tries
He has a detector that detects lies

He always likes to describe
What he likes
He always sings while

You always cry
He doesn’t know why
He was also really surprised
He always dances in a line
His brother is only nine
He says it is all line

I’m so surprised
I know so many Rhymes

Mikolaj
# Visions

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*Griffin*

*Max*

*Paige*
Voices & Visions: 2017
A Collection of the Arts: Perspectives

Visions

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“We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic.
Different people, different beliefs,
different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams.”
—Jimmy Carter

Dear MSN,

It is not a secret that our students have different styles, different talents, and different abilities. Our unique perspectives complement one another to create something special. That brings us to the 24th edition of MSN’s Literary and Arts Magazine, Voices & Visions.

Thank you to all who have contributed with works of art, stories, and poetry.

We encourage you all to compose and create something that represents your extraordinary ideas that showcase and celebrate our different voices and visions.

Enjoy!

The Editors

___________________________

With special thanks to...

—those who share their perspectives through sharing their voices and visions
—faculty, family, and friends who encourage and support the artist in each of us
—Principal Todd Jakowitsch and Assistant Principal McKenna Serowka and all of North’s faculty and staff
—Joshua Anderson and Anna Joy

Extra special thanks to...

Mrs. Lakiotis—for being a positive, productive, pleasant partner in promoting Publications
Mrs. Bevan—for inspiring artists and capturing their perspectives in photos represented in this edition
Mrs. Lippert and Mrs. Metaxas—Literature and Language Arts Department co-chairs who lead with passion and the perspectives on one’s ability to live, learn, laugh, and love with literature, art, and one another is without limit
Mrs. Dooley Taylor and Mrs. Sieckowski—for making the Library Media Center a fun and fabulous place to be

Young Author Representatives

8th grade: Hallie, Georgina, Madeleine, Grace, *Alina, Olivia, Olivia, Michelle
7th grade: Sophia, William, Maddie, *Hannah, Paige, Zoya, Sasha, Taylor, Kelsie
6th grade: *Suzette, Isabella, Brooke, Peter, Erin, Brianna, Orna, Matty

*Young Author State Representatives

Super Spellers: All ~School Spelling Bee

8th grade: Alaya, Max, Kelly. 7th grade: Nikko, Manny, Sharanya. 6th grade: Sophie, Nicole
Winner: Sharanya  Runner Up: Max Sharanya won the Lake County Spelling Bee and is the first MSN student to earn a place in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in Washington, D.C.!

Art Award

Scholastic National Art Award: Silver Key

Kaia
Skateboard, page 38

Credits:

Exceptional Editors: Alexandra, Sasha, and Kelsie
Art and Photography Liaison: Mrs. Bevan

Proud Pair of Publications Promoters: Ms. Anderson and Mrs. Lakiotis
Cover Art: McKenna

Lake Zurich Middle School North  95 Hubbard Lane  Hawthorn Woods, Illinois 60047
The Watertower

Alina
State Young Author Representative

I've been through fire and I've been through snow
I've seen all types of people come and go
I've seen thousands of tears and a thousand more smiles
Lines of people that trail for miles and miles
I've seen tongues of flame tear families apart
I've seen the process of mending one's broken heart
I have witnessed such pain, happiness and strife
Throughout this eternal expanse of my life
I have watched, from the ashes, a new city arise
Bright lights, how they sparkle, way up in the skies
I've observed love and loss, loyalty and light
But nothing more beautiful or painful than that dreadful night
For in all of my years people will come and go
But no more standing in the streets of Chicago

I had never seen a night as beautiful as this. The bright stars sparkled in the sky and reminded me of the stars painted on my ceiling back home in London. The moon shone brightly against the teal blue sky full of fading light from the sun. It was cloudless and perfect. Well, not perfect exactly. We're going through a pretty big drought now and everyone keeps saying there might be a fire. I don't believe it though. How could such an amazing city get caught in the middle of a fire? Fires were what happened in country homes like the one I grew up in, not in big cities like Chicago where the activity was always booming and the lights never dimmed.

"Ey, Lauren! 'Ow ya doin' on this 'ere beautiful night?" a voice called from out of the fading light. I turned around. It was Riky.

"Hello, Riky!" I called back with a smile as I walked past him.

Riky was an immigrant from Germany but had come when he was only a baby. His parents had died when he was a baby and he had gone to live with a Scottish family, giving him an odd dialect. His real name was Adalrik, but everyone just called him Riky as it was much easier to remember and seemed to match his personality, which was always full of energy and laughter. He was about 18 and slept wherever he could find comfort. Everyone knew him
and greeted him as kindly as he greeted them. It's hard to explain really. He just had a sort of, well, spontaneity that made you want to be around him.

Me, well, I was quite different from Riky. I traveled here as an immigrant two years ago from my rural home in England so that I could follow my dream of being a writer. Well, now I am turning 17 and still haven't gotten out of those awful sewing shops. I had plain brown eyes and curly brown hair that I tied up out of my face. I was short, but not exactly petite. I wasn't pretty, but I wasn't exactly ugly either. Riky was bright, spontaneous and fun. I was more of your ambitious immigrant trying to live the American dream but more often than not just landing in the soup*.

The sky was almost dark now so I sped up as I walked back to the small apartment I had rented with the minuscule pay I got. I passed the water tower, the Chicago river, the bridge, and loads of other sites walked by every day. The wooden walkways creaked under my feet as I observed the view. In the aftermath, I could have sworn I'd seen a bright orange light in the distance, steadily growing and gobbling up the city I loved. However, at the time I had no idea what was going to happen to the place I called home.

I sprung up in my wood framed bed and felt a tingling in my fingers and feet. Something was off. It seemed to be around 11:00 PM and the city should be asleep. Yet, I heard shouting in the distance and took a few deep breaths, trying to calm myself down. Then I remembered: the orange light in the distance. What was it? Was it the setting sun? Or could it have just been a lamp off in the distance? No, it was too big for a lamp and the sun had already set. It couldn't be, there was no way- I jumped out of my bed and dashed to the window, confirming what I always feared. Fire. I threw on my nightgown and ran as fast as I could to the door, not bothering with grabbing any of my few possessions.

The fire was, from the looks of it, about 7 streets away and burning steadily consuming homes and even the streets because they were all made of wood. I hadn't fully observed the scene but from the glance out of my window I could at least make out the rapid rate at which the fire was advancing. I had to get out of here to someplace that wasn't flammable. Where, Where Where! I thought to myself. I got halfway down the stairs before I remembered my locket. It was one of the only valuables I had and the only item from back in London. I grabbed it and raced out of my room. The last thing I saw before my city was engulfed in smoke was the water tower standing tall against the dark sky.

I traveled down the stairs quickly, holding up my skirt and banging on the doors of neighbors, doing my best to yell 'Fire!' after me if they opened the door. Some nodded vigorously telling me they understood, others shook their heads like I was crazy and shut the door. The noise from outside was escalating now but still not as much as one would
have thought when a city is burning down. Then I realized something as I hit the ground floor, the reason there wasn't as much noise as there should be was because people were either getting out safely or getting burned inside their homes. There was no one helping to fight the fire.

From what I knew, Chicago had a small force of men trained to fight fires, and they should have been able to get to the fire by now unless someone had wrongly alerted them or not at all. It was only after the fire that I knew the firemen had been given the wrong location and by the time they arrived, practically one third of the city I loved so much was engulfed in tongues of fire. As I reached the street, I saw something more astonishing than one could ever imagine; the fire had already almost reached where we were now and it was burning through the streets, walkways, and houses. People were clustered outside in the small, narrow streets staring at the fire just a few blocks away.

_Why are they standing around?_ I wondered, _Why won't they get away from the wood?_ I ran towards a family standing in the middle of the street, huddled together. The mother was cradling her baby while a boy and a girl sat at the fathers feet playing a game with their hands.

'Excuse me ma'am,' I asked the mother, 'but is there a reason everyone seems to be waiting here? I mean,' I started to talk quicker and my breaths sped up, 'the fire will be here extremely soon and anybody near anything that is flammable will hardly stand a chance! We have to get away from this place as fast as possible and-' the woman put a hand on my shoulder to stop me.

Her voice was gentle when she replied, 'My dear, there is nowhere to go except wait for the firemen to arrive,' She said this kindly, but I still didn't understand it. 'Some of the men have already gone to try and douse the fire but it has gotten too big and grown too strong,' she explained, her voice now getting louder over the din of shouting and a roaring that seemed to be traveling this way.

I thought and after a second I had an idea. 'The water tower,' I said almost to myself, then, louder, I repeated 'the Water Tower! We have to get somewhere that isn't wooden and the water tower is strong enough! It's the best chance'.

The woman nodded and got her children off the ground and moved forward with them, their father in tow. "Thank you!" she called over her shoulder.

Others started to follow her when I heard a huge roar over the sound of shouts and screams. The fire had reached us. We ran in the direction of the water tower, the crackling fire chasing behind the crowd. The roaring monster chased us block after block, consuming homes, trees, streets. The city I loved. Finally, I reached the tower.
and found hundreds were already clustered there. Some sat in the dirt, waiting, others were being tended for burns. I looked around for any familiar faces but saw none.

The fire tore through Chicago for 2 more days until finally, on the morning of October tenth, the fire was put out by the Chicago River. Over 300 people were killed, and over 100,000 were left homeless. Few buildings survived and the city was entirely redesigned and rebuilt. However, one building remained and still stands tall to this day.

*The water tower that helped to save thousands of people when the bell came crashing down*
*The landmark that was home to citizens left homeless when roaring fire came round*
*The place that saved many, the brave and the free*
*And by the way, that water Tower? It's me*

---

*Kaia*

*Scholastic Art Award- Honorable Mention*
Were-urse
A werewolf story

“Jezebel, RUN!” Jen was lying on the cold, damp ground, clutching the side of her rib. Pulling her hand clumsily away, she saw the dark blood, the thick liquid slowly running down with broad drops falling and sucking into the dirt. The pain was vibrating through her body; the wolf’s bane was slowly climbing through her veins, into her pumping heart. “Please,” she gasped out the words, “GO!” Her head slammed to the ground, gravity pushing it down, the life seemed to be defeated from her. She became uncertain, incautious of her surroundings, unconscious.

Calan ran to Jezebel’s side, as the traumatized teenager stood, tear-filled. She tried to pull her away from the collapsed and defeated body of their friend. “Come on, she said go!”

Jezebel pulled away. “No, we can help her. I’ll distract them, you call Had.”

“Had won’t...”

“Just call him! There’s no time for he will or he won’t!” Calan ran off to a more secure place, dialing as quickly as her fingers and brain could communicate.

Alva came out of the shadows. He loaded his gun with a new round, pointed it at Jezebel. He gave her a smile, the one filled with anger and revenge. “The she-wolf belongs to me. Trade her, for your life.” Jezebel knelt down closer to the ground, eyes with the resemblance of pique, fiery stirring in her blood, rapidly searching for a stone or rock to throw.

“Forget it, kill me, but you aren’t taking her,” she snapped at him and immediately regretting the decision. His face gleamed with backfire. He tilted his head back, one step forward, raise of the arm, pin pointed straight through the heart of the girl whom had just refused his offer.

Jezebel started to fight back the tears, knowing her life was about to end. The ringing traveled throughout the area, and someone dropped dead.

Chapter 1 When It Found Me

‘Jen was just about out the door when the phone rang. “Hello?” An eerie silence was all that was heard from the other line. “Hello,” she said again in an impatient voice. No answer. Placing it down with a clang, she flung her backpack over one shoulder and headed out the dark oak door.

“So there was like no noise at all? Gotta be a prank call,” Jezebel proclaimed, shaking her head next to Jen in her white shirt, plaid jacket, and blue skinny jeans. Her hair was streaming down her shoulders with a grey beanie covering the top of her head.
“Yeah, but I think I heard like heavy breathing, it wasn’t just a silence. Maybe someone was crying, too.”

She looked down, biting her lip to end the subject. Her friend spotted her expression and quickly moved on.

“So, I’m finally going to talk to Nickolas,” Jezebel said adding a little skip to her walk.

“That’s my girl!” Jezebel has had a long filled "crush" on a senior, two grade levels above her. By crush, she basically stalked him through the halls and up until he opened the door to his house. She had his Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, she even was subscribed to his YouTube channel.

“Well, I’ll see you in French third, bye!” Jezebel wasn’t paying attention anyway. The love of her life had just opened the two brown double doors leading into the school. He must have caught her stare, because his head turned slightly towards her direction and his lips gave a small smile. Then he pushed through the doors and walked off into the hallways.

“Ring!” The echoing noise of the final bell rang. Jen watched as students started to collapse in their seats. Mr. Osmond came into the room, hustling quickly to his desk. Jen had spotted he was clutching something tightly to his chest. She didn’t let her curiosity get over her, yet. Maps, globes, textbooks, anything you can find in a historian’s office was piled on shelves in the History room. The countless wonders of the geographical world were endless!

“Good morning, class. Take out 5b of your assignment, please!” His voice was rushed and hesitant. Some students whispered, others rustling through papers. Jen, however, was prepared, full report on her desk. Her shoulders gave a shake, shivered slightly like you would if you were in thirty degree weather and it was raining with nothing but a sweatshirt, as her teacher’s bony fingers tapped her desk. “Mrs. Sabur has clearly done her part of the work, whilst you all probably didn’t have the brain to remember you had homework.” The disappointing look in his face made all his others students look down. Jen was never one to be the comet between the stars, so her head went down as well. Osmond bent his head enough so that his mouth was ear level with Jen. “You are excused from today’s assignment, Mrs. Sabar.” She looked into his green eyes, and gave him a quick “thank you” smile. He gave a nod and went up in front of the millions of eyes miserable watching innocently. “As for you all...” he paused dramatically, “read chapters six through eight and write an essay on how this relates to our modern society.” His right hand lifted up so his elbow was parallel to the floor, waited a few seconds looking around, and brought it back down as if gravity had clutched and ripped through the floor just to bring it down with it.
There was rustling for books, papers, and pens. On the other hand, Jen just stared at her teacher, the mysterious figure. Not that he was never odd, but this particular day; The day that Jen got the eerie phone call, and Jezebel had all of a sudden wanted to talk to the person she had loved since the fourth grade, it just seemed... odd, different in a bad way. Looking back at her teacher, abruptly there flew a crow outside the window. Before it was gone, one of its pearl black feathers flew from its wing. It sat in the air, and then danced so marvelously down on the sill.

‘BRING,’ rang the second bell and everyone started to pack and rush out of the room. Jen saw myriad colors rush by in flash marks. She sat and waited. Once all the students were out of the room and no one appeared to be in earshot, Jen braved and went up to Mr. Osmond.

“How are you doing, Mr. Osmond?” Her arm immediately tucked underneath the other. He gave her a smile.

“Fine, thank you. Now, I wouldn’t want you to be late too your next class, so I’ll have to let you go now.” Another smile. Jen didn’t buy the act. After a flash of her camera, she walked off.

French came quickly. Mrs. Anderson was, as the students called her, the good witch of the east. She got this title mostly for letting her students choose their seats. Jen and Jezebel sat near the window, midpoint. Jen was a desk row in front, Jezebel behind. They wouldn’t get caught whispering that way. As the bell rang, Jen had time to send a picture to her friend. But before either could comment,

“Bonjour, classe,” Mrs. Anderson’s voice vibrated cheerfully through the room.

There were mixtures of, “Bonjour!”, and “Salut!”, and “Ca va?”’s through the room.

“Objective aujourd’hui c’est...”.

“Hey, what is this?” Jezebel had her phone is the air. The picture that Jen had sent her was on the screen.

“Mr. Osmond’s desk. He had papers in his...”

“Alright class,répétez après moi s’il vous plaît! Oui.”

“Oui,” echo the class almost as in a chorus.

“D’accord.”

“D’accord!”

Jen turned back to her friend behind. “I’ll explain at lunch. Okay?” Jezebel nodded an, “Okay” back in agreement. Even though she was really impatient and despised waiting around for answers, she decided to wait. And wait. And wait.

“This will take forever,” she whispered heavily beneath her breath.

“Filles dans le dos, écoutez s’il vous plaît,” Mrs. Anderson said while clapping her hand simultaneously.
“Désolé, Madame, Pardon.” The heart filled teacher smiled.

“C’est bon,” but she still gave them a “Don’t do it again” look.

Finally, lunch came. Jezebel slammed her books on the oak wood table and was ready for the story.

“When Osmond came in the room, he was clutching papers to himself, almost like…” she paused, “was hiding a secret and didn’t want anyone to find out about it.” Jezebel pulled her phone out in curiosity. The picture wasn’t blurry, but the writing was far from visibly clear.

“Well, that’s a w,” Jezebel pointed out. Jen looked closer. "Near the top, it says ‘Meet at 1... 2... 12pm.” In Asheville, North Carolina, there were only so many places to go, so many things to do. There was, however, a mountain ranged forest near the town border. “I think we’ll have to go to the woods tonight.”

“Sounds good, I guess,” Jezebel stated uncertainly.

Past dark, 11 pm, an hour before their departure, Jen had snuck around her house grabbing snacks, flashlight, batteries, and a separate inhaler for her friend. Jezebel had asthma since she was an infant, and Jen was always prepared to be there for her. 11:25 on the clock, and there was a solid knock on the door. Jezebel. Her bright neon yellow Citroen DS was running, the engine pounding steadily, ready to move into what was about to be a mystery uncovered.

“Ready,” Jezebel asked Jen.

Exhaling, Jen said, “Let’s get the road.”

11:45 and the girls had already hiked into the forest about 3.5 miles. Each were trying to keep her breath as steady as possible, but they were both tired. Jezebel looked down at her watch. “Jen, I don’t know if we’re going to make it, Jen let out a long gasp of air. Before saying anything, flashlights. There were shimmering lights right behind Jezebel. Jen pushed her behind a large spruce tree. She brought her finger to her lips. Jezebel stopped making any noise possible without hesitation. She got the memo.

The lights were coming closer and closer. An attempt to get closer to her friend too stay more hidden, Jezebel turned her foot out and fell right in front of the moving figures. It was in fact Mr. Osmond and someone else in a leather jacket with a belt with a package safe and large enough to hide a gun.

“What are you doing here at this hour, Mrs. Lavier? You know there’s a curfew for teenagers,” the teacher’s voice snapped out, both in anger and frustration.

Jezebel had thought quick of an excuse. “Sorry, sir. I was looking out here for my dog.”

He shook his head. “If I see it, we, I’ll be sure to inform you of its location.” Suspicion was still draping
over his face. His flashlight spun around in a circle.

“And your usual partner?”

“Who, Jen? Jen’s at home. She didn’t want to help.”

Jen stayed glued to the tree.

“Well then, off you go.” Jezebel ran off towards the town. After about five minutes, Jen moved again. Before she could recognize where the two men had gone, behind a bush were a pair of blood red glowing eyes staring right at her. Jen didn’t freeze in fear. She turned and ran. The beast leapt and started sprinting right after her. This was the run of her life. The pesky thing had caught on, tearing at her heel after every trot until she finally toppled over. She laid on her back as it leapt on her. Thirty seconds of its breath on her face and claws digging into her side, it ran off.

Jen was breathing deeply. She lifted herself cautiously off the ground. Her left hip was feeling weird. She lifted her t-shirt up and saw what looked like a bite mark. There was a stream of blood creeping down her skin. “What just happened,” she thought to herself. She put her shirt down and started to go towards the town where Jezebel had parked. On the way, she thought, “Why am I feeling no pain?”

Michelle

Sasha

Hallie
A Very Special Reunion

You are now leaving Chesterton!

“Alright! Vacation is officially starting!” I shout as we leave our town in Indiana.

“Not so fast, missy,” my mom interrupts. “We have to stop for gas, and then we will still be on the road for an entire day.”

“What? A whole day? Can’t we just stay in Chicago? It has the Bean, beaches, and huge buildings like the Willis Tower. You can go to the skydeck and look at the whole city! And it wouldn’t take an entire day to get there. Please?”

“Nope. Though that does sound fun, we’re going somewhere even more fun!”

“Yeah,” my dad chimes in, “we’re going to be way up in the Boundary Waters of Minnesota.”

Dang it. It’s bad enough I can’t bring any electronics. At least I’ve got my Polaroid camera with me.

“Where the nearest town is more than 50 miles away, your neighbors live in Canada, and your best friends are the trees and the wildlife,” my dad continues impersonating a commercial announcer’s voice. “The lodge is practically in the forest, and there are crystal clear lakes everywhere you look. There’s barely anybody there, and the only sounds you hear are bugs, birds, the wind, and fish. And the best part of all is the canoeing!”


“The splashing of the water of course. And the sizzling of the grill when the chefs cook ‘em for dinner!” he says, dropping the accent.

My best friend Sunny is joining me on my vacation. She’s usually pretty quiet around adults, but this makes her giggle.

“Okaaaayyy,” I say.

We are now in the parking lot of the gas station. “I’m just gonna go.”

“Everyone can choose one snack,” my mom instructs as she pumps gas into our red minivan.

“Sounds good,” I reply as I step out of the car, Sunny following right behind me. Her name isn’t really “Sunny,” that’s just my nickname for her. Her real name is “Solveig,” which means “sun” and “strength” in Swedish. I also call her “Sunny” because she always thinks on the positive or sunny side of things.
The gas station bell rings as Sunny, my dad, and I walk into Marty’s Market and Gas Station.

“Remember the rule,” my dad says, “you get one snack.”

“We know!” I tell my dad speaking for me and Sunny. I start walking to the chip aisle with Sunny while my dad eyes the fake-cheese nachos.

I end up getting a can of salt and vinegar Pringles, and a cherry ICEE. Sunny gets a bag of pepperoni pizza combos and a medium coke. My dad does get those nachos after all. We get back into the car, and we settle in for the long drive ahead of us.

“Wake up, Avery!” I hear Sunny whisper.

“Huh?” I reply groggily.

“We’re here! At Macintine Moose Lodge!”

“Already? Didn’t we just enter Minnesota?”

“Yeah, of course. Only an hour and a half ago! You fell asleep silly!” Sunny giggles.

“Oh,” I say turning bright red. “Was I snoring?”

“No, but you were drooling a little.”

“Oh, gosh!” I say as I hurry to grab a Kleenex to wipe off the saliva covering the top part of my chin.

It was such a long and exhausting drive, that after my dad checked us into our room (room 354, third floor, 2 bedrooms and a bathroom) we all fell asleep right away. The next day we got up, ate a delicious breakfast of blueberry pancakes in the dining room, unpacked all of our bags, went to the lodge’s pool and swam for a while, and then started our canoeing trip. Everything was going great canoeing, and everyone was having a blast! Sunny and I had never canoed before, so it was especially fun for us. And a little scary! We paddled until we got to a rocky shore, and then we got out of the canoe to start portaging. Portaging is when you carry the canoe on a trail over land, then get to a different lake and start canoeing again.

“Careful where you step,” my mom instructs, “this path we’re gonna be walking on has tree branches and rocks all over!”

“And apparently toads,” I say as I see a big green one jumping this way and that.

“Let’s go follow it!” Sunny says excitedly. We run after it into the woods, leaving the path behind us.

“Be careful,” my dad shouts, “and don’t go too far away! We’ll call for you when
we finish getting this heavy canoe out of the water.”

The toad bounces over huge rocks, small tree branches, a huge tree stump, and it even scares away a bunny eating grass.

“Hey, where'd it go?” Sunny asks out of breath. We look around. She’s right; we lost it.

“What's that?” I ask, pointing to something lying on the ground. It's not the toad, but it doesn't look like the usual rock or branch. Upon further inspection, we see that it's an old, battered up china doll. It has white china (well, it’s now brown from dirt), and brown curly hair. It’s all tattered up, and has dirt in it. It’s not very hair like, more like a brown mob of tangled up curls. Her dress is bluish-brown, is a mess, and is ripped. One of her blue shoes is missing, her left arm has a crack in it, and her right pinky finger is just a stub.

“It's actually a pretty nice doll,” Sunny says, “or at least it used to be.”

“Yeah,” I agree, “it looks like it's been out here for quite a while.”

“Avery! Sunny!” I hear my dad call.

“Coming!” I yell in response. I grab the doll and then run back to the trail.

“What’s that, Avery?” my mom asks when she sees the doll.

“It's just a cute little doll Sunny and I found when we were chasing the toad. Can we keep it?”

“I don’t know. We don’t know where that’s been. What do you think, Craig?” she asks my dad.

“Oh it's fine, Jules. Let the kids keep the darn thing.”

My mom hesitates then reluctantly says, “fine.”

“Yay!” Sunny and I shout at the same time.

The rest of the portaging and canoeing went great, and we had a lot of fun. The best part is nobody fell in and got wet!

When we get back to our room, we put the doll down by the door, get ready for dinner, and then head towards the dining room.

After we’ve been eating dinner for a little while, a man comes up to us and asks us how everything is. “I'm Mr.Middleton by the way, owner of Macintine Moose lodge,” he says.

“Pleased to meet you,” my dad replies.

“The food is great!” I say with my mouth full.

My mom gives me “the look”. Don’t talk with your mouth full, she mouths.
“The kids really like the mac ‘n cheese,” my dad tells Mr. Middleton.

“Glad to hear that. That exact macaroni and cheese had a whole article about it in the newspaper a couple years ago,” he says.

“That’s so cool!” Sunny says.

“I could show you it after the campfire and s’mores tonight if you’d like. If you’re going, of course.”

“That would be great! We are definitely going,” my mom says.

“Thank you for everything,” my dad adds.

“You’re welcome,” he says. “I’ll see you two later,” he tells Sunny and me.

Before going to our room, we walk around and explore the lodge a little. We visit the gift shop, the fitness area, the porch outside, the campfire (some staff are getting the fire ready for a little later), and the Great Room. The Great Room is my favorite place of all. It’s a cozy, open room, with a couple of large bookshelves and a fireplace with a roaring fire. But my favorite part is the animals. They are stuffed animals, but they aren’t fake with big sparkling eyes and a button nose (though I love those). These are real animals, just stuffed so they can stand and look more realistic and not so...flat.

There’s a red fox, a wolf, a black bear, and my personal favorite, a moose. Its antlers are huge, and it towers over me creating an eerie shadow.

“We’re gonna go, okay, hon?” my mom tells me.

“Don’t forget that the campfire and s’mores start at 8:00, and it’s a little chilly out so you and Sunny need to dress a little warmer,” my Dad says. “Come to the room around 7:30 please.”

“Got it,” Sunny responds.

“Sunny, look at this giant moose!” I tell my best friend.

“Wow,” she whispers, “it looks so real.”

“I’m pretty sure it is. My dad did tell me there were a lot of moose in the Boundary Waters.”

“That is definitely picture worthy,” she says.

I grab my Polaroid from my bag and get ready to take a picture.

“Ugh, that girl’s in the way. She’s right in front of the moose!” I say.

“You’re right,” Sunny agrees, “Excuse me! Little girl?”

She’s actually not that little. She looks around 10. She’s not moving.

“Hello?” I try. She doesn’t move out of the way or respond. I decide to wait. After a minute or so Sunny tells me we have to be
in the room in a couple of minutes so we should go. “Okay,” I say, “I’ll just have to take the picture with her in it.” I snap the picture and then start walking. The picture has printed out, so I start shaking it so the picture will appear. When the picture is finally clear, Sunny and I are in the elevator. We look at it. My heart stops and Sunny’s face goes pale. We look at each other. The picture quality is fine, but something’s missing. The girl that was in our way isn’t in the picture at all, but a doll she was holding is. It’s floating in midair, with no hand holding it. I look closer to make sure I’m not seeing things. The girl’s definitely not there, but I realize something that makes my face turn even whiter, if that’s possible.

“Isn’t that the doll we found?” Sunny asks taking my words.

“That...that’s just what I was thinking,” I say quietly, too afraid to speak in a louder voice.

The elevator door opens, but we don’t get out. Instead I look closer at the doll in the picture. I can’t tell for sure, but it definitely looks like the same doll. Sunny walks out of the elevator, so I follow.

We reach our room, so I take out the key from my bag and open the door. When we walk inside, the doll’s not there.

“Sunny, didn’t we leave the doll right next to the door?” I ask.

“Yeah,” she whispers.

“Did that girl take our doll?”

“But...but how?”

“Did my mom give it to her? She didn’t really like it anyways, I don’t think.”

“When would she have done that though?”

“Girls are you here? We’re leaving soon!” my mom shouts from her and my dad’s room.

“Yeah!” I reply without much sound coming out. I try to think of the fun we’re going to have roasting s’mores and talking around the campfire, but part of my brain is still thinking about the girl not being in the picture, holding our doll that has seemed to disappear from our room.

We all went to the campfire and everyone had a great time, even though I got stuffed from all those toasted marshmallows! We sang silly songs, played small games (like charades), watched a funny skit by some of the staff, and told scary stories (just what I need). Sunny had 2 whole chocolate bars, and I had 9 marshmallows!
After it was over, Mr. Middleton took Sunny and me to his office so we could see the article about the delicious mac 'n cheese. We walk inside, and Mr. Middleton goes to his desk and starts rummaging around different papers, and looking through drawers. “You guys can sit down if you’d like, this might take a minute,” he says. As I’m walking to a black squishy chair I see something out of the corner of my eye. A heading on a newspaper says, “Girl Drowns in Lake While Canoeing, turn to page 4 for the whole story”. I look at Mr. Middleton. He’s mumbling things like, “it’s got to be here somewhere”, and “it’ll just be a second”, and “where did it go?” I quickly turn to page 4. It talks about how a 10 year old girl was canoeing with her mom and dad and brother, and the canoe tipped over. Everyone came up out of the water, except the poor girl. She had been staying at Macintine Moose Lodge.

Mr. Middleton has now moved on to looking in file cabinets.

“Psst! Sunny!” I whisper, “Come here and look at this!” Sunny walks over to where I am standing.

“A girl died in a lake while canoeing 15 years ago!”

“That’s so sad! What lake was it?” Sunny asks.

I look back at the article. My heart starts beating really fast. “Lake-uh...la-lake-” “Spit it out!” Sunny giggles. But I’m not laughing.

“Lake Trintom,” I manage to say.

A mix of confusion, concern, and just plain fear comes across Sunny’s face.

“That’s the lake we were canoeing on,” she states.

I nod slowly.

“It also says she portaged to Lake Friedman.” Also what we did.

“Do...do you think that might’ve been her doll that we found?” Sunny asks worriedly.

“Well, maybe.”

“What was her name?”

I look at the article. I feel like I’m going to pass out.

“Maggie, Maggie Middleton,” I say.

“That’s the owner’s name isn’t it?” Sunny looks at the nameplate. Yep, Mr. Middleton.

“That can’t be a coincidence,” she says.

“Ahh-hah!” Mr. Middleton shouts.

“Found it!” he says holding up a newspaper article.

Sunny and I quickly look away from the article about the drowning girl, and pretend we didn't see anything. “Are you girls okay?”
he asks with a concerned look on his face. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

That’s because I’m pretty sure we have.

That night I can’t sleep. I look at the clock. It’s already 1:32. I decide to close my eyes again, even though I’m not very sleepy. After about 10 minutes I open my eyes again, and am startled by someone standing a few feet away from my bed. I look over and see Sunny lying next to me, fast asleep. The person standing there looks too small to be my mom or dad.

“Sunny!” I whisper. I nudge her a little, and she slowly opens her eyes.

“Yeah?” she asks, still half asleep, “Avery it’s the middle of the night.”

“Yeah, I know. But um...there’s someone in here.”

“You mean like your parents? They probably just have to go to the bathroom.”

“No,” I look closer at the figure, “it’s a younger girl.”

“Avery, you’re imagining it. Just go back to sleep okay?” Sunny closes her eyes.

“No Sunny, look.” Sunny opens her eyes again, and they widen when she sees the girl.

“Avery,” she says while starting to get out of bed, “that looks like the same girl that was in your picture.”

Now I get out of bed. My heart’s racing.

“You mean the one that wasn’t in the picture?” I ask. I muster up all of my courage, then walk towards the girl. Sunny follows, first closing the door so my parents don’t hear us and wake up.

Now that I’m closer I see that the girl is wearing the same dress that she was when we were taking the picture by the moose, and she’s holding a doll. The doll has a crack in the left arm, a stub for a right pinky finger, a missing shoe, and a rip in the dress. This is definitely the same doll Sunny and I found.

“He-hello?” I ask the girl. She turns around to face me. She doesn’t look...right. Something about her is...spooky.

“Hi,” she says quietly.

“Who are you and what are you doing in our room?” I ask.

“You’re that girl we saw by the moose, aren’t you?” Sunny asks kindly, nothing like my rushed tone.

“I believe so,” she says. “I just want to thank you.”

I look at Sunny. She looks just as confused as I am. “Thank us?” Sunny asks.

The girl nods. “When you brought my doll back, you brought me back into the world.”
I remember the article about a 10 year old girl drowning in the same lake we were canoeing in, and portaging on the same trail. The one where we found the doll.

“Are you the...the girl who...di...died?” I ask.

The girl puts her head down. “Yeah,” she says, her voice shaking, “I’m Maggie Middleton, the girl who drowned 15 years ago. In Lake Trintom. I was staying here, in this exact room.” Sunny and I exchange glances.

“So are you a um...ghost?” Sunny asks softly.

Maggie nods. It all makes so much sense; why she didn't appear in the picture; why the doll we found was gone and she was holding it; how she got through our locked door. But one thing didn't make sense.

“Why do you need to come back into the world?” I ask.

“It's my brother,” Maggie says.

“Mr.Middleton,” I say connecting the dots.

“Yes,” Maggie says, “ever since I died...my brother Micah hasn’t been himself. He’s not as happy. He’s lonely without me. We were in a fight before I died, and I...I feel really bad. I want to make things right, and tell him I love him. I also want to give him this.” She holds out the doll.

“This is my doll, Jenny.” She continues, “My brother gave it to me for my 10th birthday. He saved all of his money up for this. It’s so special to me, and I think it would be better if he kept it. To remind him of me, and that I’m always there for him, with him. If you hadn't brought me back, I would never feel complete. Thank you.”

I look at Sunny. I can tell she’s almost crying. I'm the same way.

“You’re welcome,” Sunny and I whisper.

Maggie starts fiddling with her dress. “Would you...” she starts, “I mean...can you...do you want to come with me?” she asks.

Sunny and I look at each other. We look at poor little Maggie. “We would love to,” I tell her.

“Okay, we have to be really quiet,” I tell Sunny and Maggie as I slip on my sneakers and grab the room key.

“I don't think your parents would be okay with us doing this,” Sunny whispers to me.

“Which is why we can't make a sound,” I whisper back.

We open the door and close it gently. So far, we’re good. As long as my parents don't wake up and see us missing, we should be okay.
We all walk together towards Mr. Middleton’s suite, which is next to his office.

“What if someone sees you?” Sunny asks Maggie.

Maggie shakes her head. “Only you two can see me. You two found my doll and brought me back into the world. My family can also see me.”

We are now at Mr. Middleton’s door.

“How are we going to get in?” Sunny asks.

“The door’s locked.”

Maggie smiles. “One thing about being a ghost is that you can go through doors.”

Maggie goes through the door, just like she said. The handle turns, and the door opens with Maggie waiting on the other side. We walk through the door.

“Over here,” Maggie whispers as she points to a dark room with a bed.

Mr. Middleton is sleeping. “Micah?” Maggie asks. He doesn’t move. She looks at Sunny and me. Speak louder, I mouth. Maggie takes a deep breath. “Micah? Micah Middleton?” she asks a little louder.

Mr. Middleton stirs.

“Hello?” he mumbles with his eyes still closed.

“Hi,” Maggie whispers.

“Who...who is it?”

“It’s me, your sister Maggie.”

Mr. Middleton opens his eyes. His face goes white, and he starts moving away to the other side of his bed.

“Tha...that’s impossible. You died,” he says. “It’s just a dream, it’s just a dream,” he starts saying to himself.

“No, don’t worry! I’m not trying to scare you,” Maggie says.

“Well, you are. I don’t know you are, or how you got in here, but I’d like you to leave now.”

I step out of the shadows. Sunny does too. “Mr. Middleton?” I say quietly.

He looks at me and Sunny. “What are you girls doing here?”

“We’re helping,” I say. “I know it seems crazy, but Maggie is here. We picked up her doll in the woods when we were canoeing, which let Maggie come back into the world.”

“Why would she?” he asks.

“I think she should tell you herself,” Sunny says. Mr. Middleton looks back at Maggie.

“Micah, I’m sorry about leaving, and I’m sorry about being so mean to you before I died. I really didn’t mean it. I love you more than anything, and I miss you so much. And I...I want you to have this.” She holds out the doll.
Mr. Middleton’s mouth drops. “The doll I got you! Jenny, right? Where’d you find her?” he asks.

Maggie nods, “These nice girls found it. I think you should have it. It’s so special to you and me, and it’ll help you remember me and know I’m always with you and that I love you.”

Mr. Middleton’s crying.

“Thank you so much, Maggie! I love you more than anything!” he says.

He turns to us. “And thank you two, too! This never would have happened without you. Three years ago people wanted to tear this lodge down, but I wouldn’t let them. I had too many memories here. This is where I stayed with Maggie! This is where I lost her.” His voice goes quiet. “So I bought the lodge and became the owner,” he continues. “But even after I did, until now, I’ve been really sad. It hasn’t been the same without my little sister.”

He turns back to Maggie, and puts his hands next to hers in front of him, almost touching, but not quite. “I love you Maggie, and I always will, no matter how far away you are,” he whispers.

Their hands touch.

“I love you too Micah,” she whispers back.

The rest of our time at Macintine Moose Lodge went great. We never saw Maggie again. Sunny and I thought about her often though.

A week later my mom, dad, Sunny and I are leaving to go back home to Indiana, and Mr. Middleton is smiling and waving. Just as he has been ever since he reunited with his sister Maggie. He mouths the words thank you, and then we’re off.

Brooke

Eliza
My Poetry Work

Olivia

Salty Sweet Sailing

The sound of the splashing waves
Rocking my boat
Like a baby's cradle

Encased by various vibrant colors
Surrounded by miles of sparkling, sapphire surf
The flashy fabric of the sail
Rippling in the salty, sweet breeze

The breeze as always
Soft, soothing
Slightly chilled and crisp
Blowing gently on my face

The intense golden light from the sun was dazzling
It's illuminating glow,
The sea glistens with delight

The seemingly endless Ocean
Miles of salted seas ahead and all around
The sound of the ocean waves calling my name
In a way that only they can..
The Waltz of Fall

The crisp, cool air,
Kisses my skin in the sweetest way
Sharpens each of my senses

I can just taste
The pumpkin pie,
That is still yet to come,

The smell of damp leaves,
And the dew on the grass surrounding me,
Embracing my every step,

My golden mane dances
Wildly, Gracefully,
In the breeze,

I can feel the chilled air blowing
Through my long locks
Calms my every muscle

The trees, and the breeze
Begin to waltz together
Fallen leaves swirl around

Thousands of colors
Thousands of leaves
Too many to count

Crimson, Gold, Bronze,
Brass, Maroon, Chestnut,
Burgundy, Sienna, Champagne

All the leaves
Are breath taking
Are beautifully unique

They leave me stunned
At the beauty of our world
I am inspired.
Kindness is a Light in the Night

Kindness, Compassion
That's what we need
Our world is more bitter
Than I've ever seen,

Cold and Cruel
Every day, a duel
Shoving, Shouting,
Swearing, Stabbing,

It's exactly what it seems
Evil schemes
Is that what we want to be
Maybe you, but definitely not me

I have a dream
People as sweet as ice cream
It'll take more than a day
But don't walk away

Mean isn't a fetter
There could be better
We can do it together
A great big adventure

With Whoever, Wherever you are, Whenever,
Whatever you're doing, Whichever you'd like...
Please don't show blindness
You can show kindness

Fight
The battle is within your sight
Although kindness isn't easily taught
It can be fought

But the cruelty must stop
It isn't cool
Cold and cruel
Just as it's always been

Use the weapons in your heart,
Appreciation, Thoughtfulness, Graciousness,
Humility, Forgiveness, Kindness,
Compassion, Happiness, and Peacefulness,

Being thoughtful doesn't cost much
You can do it, touch
Someone's day with a little compassion,
Graciousness is high in fashion

It's a start
Open up your heart
Be the light
In our world stuck in never ending night

Scholastic Art Award-Silver Key

Voice and Visions of Olivia
**An Immortal of a Mortal Life**

Hi, my name's Eros. You know, the god of desire, erotic love, attraction and affection just to name a few aspects. You've probably seen me countless of times on the walls of churches next to Apollo and the rest of the gang. If you knew I was behind you right now you’d freak. Nah, I'm messin' with you. It's kind of my job, being a human interaction love examiner, or actually more like spying now that I think about it.

Today, my assignment is to spy on human interaction by going to a human high school again! Ugh, this is the worst thing that I could possibly be spending my immortal time on. What a waste of gold! For gods’ sake, someone else can do this while I act like a sixteen year old getting into trouble and all that jazz. I could just go there invisible for all I care! Nope, Mama decided she knew what's best without asking me. Ugh, sometimes my mother (Aphrodite) is just so ANNOYING! VERY ANNOYING APH, IF YOU'RE LISTENING IN TO MY THOUGHTS!

Anyway, I better hide my wings somehow... if only I knew how. No one teaches me anything important. Like come on, maybe I needed to hide my wings so I can go around doing everyone's bidding for them!

***

As I entered the grand building, a gold brimming aligned on the door, windows evenly placed throughout the border; an unappealing noise arose in the long stretched hallway filled with a continuous rapid river of students.

"AH FIRE, IT'S A FIRE!" I proclaimed in a panicked tone while running to the nearest fire extinguisher. Then someone put their arm out in my path blocking me. As my chest hit it, I fell backwards, hard; air knocked out of me, and felt a feather yank out.

"Ha, obviously you’re a noob at school. That's the ‘don't act like an idiot bell’, also known as the ‘time for class’ bell,” a very ill-mannered student had said. Well, excuse me for making a mistake mister know it all! Clearly, he was one of those jocks that Ma’ had warned me to stay away from.

While pulling myself up on my feet, I realized that I didn't have any particular love connection to watch over. Did that mean that they were
sending me to high school just as a little check to see if it all was going good?

***

“Students meet your new classmate,” the teacher had told the class and turned to me.

“Why don’t you introduce yourself, young sir?”

Um… how was I going to do this... “Hi? My name’s Errro-ic, Eric L-Love. I u-um… I like Archery, and I-...” Oh my gods. Too bad I didn’t have a backup name. I almost said my actual name. Next time I have to go to a high school, I’ll need to get myself prepared. Good thing I’m a slick guy with a slick mind, yeah. Well I guess I’m now Eric Love?

“Thank you Eric, that was wonderful. I see you’re shy. Everyone’s special in their own way! Now, can you take a seat in the back next to that girl right over there?” She waved to me and smiled. Good! I think she’ll be nice.

“Alright can someone name-” A student immediately cut off the teacher.

“Zeus is King of the Gods, and Hera is his Queen. Aphrodite is the Goddess of Love, while Ares is-,” a fellow pupil of mine had started.

“That's great Rodney, just how about... Eric.” It was like one of those movies where the teacher is the killer and looks at the good guy as if she knew that he was going to arrest her. I hesitated, and then started saying the names of my family members and their roles in my world. As I finished, the teacher was glancing curiously over me, as were the other students.

“If you don't mind me asking, how do you know all of this, especially about the Goddess, Psyche?” What will I say? Uh oh, here goes my mouth again.

“I did a project not too long ago about Greek mythology.” Not too bad Eric; not bad at all for a newbie.

***

After all classes were over, it was the end of the day. Finally I can relax my wings! I meandered through the hall looking for the back doors.

Once I found what my journey had brought me to I strolled out the school. I looked around to make sure no one was looking. I took off my sweatshirt and tied it around my waist, looping the sleeves together.

My wings unfolded stiffly, but relaxed over time. I stretched and leaped high into the air. Then I heard something, a voice.
“Wait! Eros...” the same girl from class was calling my name. I had been in such a daydream I hadn't noticed her beautiful crystal eyes staring at me. I decided if I didn't come down she would tell the principal or something more, and people can't know who I am or else I would be banished from the immortal world I come from. I softly glided downwards.

“So, your real name is Eros, huh. I figured, it’s quite fitting,” she stated with a smile. “Eric...wow... E-ros, E-ric—clever.” She gave me a bright smile that made me have butterflies flapping happily in the pit of my stomach. At that point, I didn't know what to do. My head was racing with worry, thinking that Zeus was watching my every move. I just waited for a while to see what she had in mind next. Then I had an idea that was most likely not going to work.

“What? You think I'm Eros, the dude of love who flies around shooting people with arrows all day long and taking orders from his mother Aphrodite who tells him what to do all the time, and can never get life to be his own way...” She crossed her arms with an “I know you're lying” look. Yeah, I blew my cover. I might have to bow on my knees and plead for her not to tell another soul.

“Sure, it's not like you have wings sticking from your back and we're just 100 feet in the air,” she playful claimed.

“Uh...” I looked behind me and indeed my wings were pretty noticeable, gently swaying in the wind, their silver white color glow sparkling in the afternoon sunlight. I wanted to smack my head knowing that my “clever” plan wouldn't work. I'm such an imbecile. “I... uh...”

“It’s okay, I won’t tell. More important question, how old are you? Some people say you are a baby and some say you're like 1000 years or older.” I was shocked. Why would someone think I am old? I mean, have they seen these cheekbones?

“I’m not exactly sure how old I am, but I can tell you I’m no baby. At least in age.” I laughed. This was true. Immortals usually keep track of their age, but sometimes they might not know. Those gods might celebrate special occasions are more like weddings and family members returning from battles and stuff like that. I though, was a different story. I never knew when I was born, or my biological birth parents.
“Huh, I never realized that I don’t know my age... I’ll have to ask Aph. Oh shoot did I say that out loud?” I started to panic. I might end up on the ground with a panic attack any second. I suddenly felt a ton of pressure on my wing from fire, or heat, and I screamed out the pain from the pressure.

The next thing I knew was that I was lying on the ground with a beautiful, blonde haired, blue eyed girl right above me.

“AHH!” I launched forward thinking it was Hades or some other evil being, which now I think is stupid because clearly it was a girl. Unless Hades got a new female disguise. She flew at least 10 feet and then came down with force onto the grassy lawn.

“Ow, that hurt. WHAT WAS THAT FOR?” The mortal screamed and moaned in complaint.

“Well, why were you right above me!? Oh, my gosh! I’m so sorry, that's not what I meant to say!” I rushed over to her and helped her up.

“You got attacked by something... fiery?” she said while steadying herself, hand over her scalp.

“I tried to help but I couldn’t see much and then it was gone. Are you alright?” The mortal surprised me. I thought they were usually over their heads with mortal flesh and blood roaming inside them. Ma’ always told me that mortals could get hurt easily. The human race was the most fragile than any other creature on the planet.

“Actually... I can hardly move a feather in my wing.” I said in full honesty. I mean, this girl was nice, and she wasn’t going to tell anyone I was Eros. The thing I wanted to find out now was, why?

“Hey, I know your name so I should tell you mine. My name is Lucy. So I was wondering, should I walk you home? You’re kind of limping.” I was surprised.

“I AM LIMPING? OH NO, MY KIND OF DAD ARES, WILL SEE ME AND FREAK OUT! Oops... I said that out loud didn’t I? Heh, um, joke?” I said with a slick smirk. “In all seriousness I’m fine. It’s not like I can’t walk. I’m like a werewolf, I’ll heal speedily overtime.”

Lucy pulled out a whip from her maroon bag, which deeply startled me, and thrashed at my legs almost as if they were raging bulls. I tumbled to the ground as if gravity increased a ton. The pain was stinging me so much, my head started
throbbing. I never expected that from a mortal, nonetheless a girl!

“See? If you would’ve just let me walk you home you would’ve been fine. Come on, put your sweatshirt on and let’s go.” Okay, she was fine before, but now she's a mad woman!

***

“Oh, hello, Lucy! It’s a pleasure to meet you! You know, I bet my husband a million gold pieces if my son, Eros, would bring back a beautiful girl as yourself. If I had lost, I'd probably be looking for another wealthy man! Thanks for not letting me down,” Aphrodite had said to Lucy as I finally got to her Temple.

“Actually-” I panted, “I… she… we are FRIENDS Mother. F-R-I-E-N-D-S!” I hated to let my step-ish-like-dad win a bet, but it was the truth. Plus, there are already too many girls falling for me that don't need a mentally sick people or, a cell in the closed unit where they keep the lunatics, at least not as much as Lucy.

***

The annoying screech of the school bell rang and I bolted up. I was gracefully sleeping in the clouds above the building so I wouldn’t lose my way. I was then free-falling. I flapped my wings down and half-landed. Pain starting the day, why not? That really hurt. Maybe just my terrible landing. I put my sweatshirt back on and tucked my wings in, making my way to class.

“Eric, late again? I can’t be too mad since you're new. As your punishment of being late please describe to me who the god of desire, erotic love, attraction and affection is.” The teacher looking me up and down, a curious look upon her face.

“Umm, is it sunlight?” I said with an imbecilic tone while almost falling into dead sleep. The teacher walked over to my desk and slammed it with her hand.

“Who is the god of desire, erotic love, attraction and affection?” Uh oh, this was not good. I was making the teacher angry. Arrows are things you launch into the sky... I dozed off into sleep again. This time she didn’t slam my desk. She flicked me in the head and said it again.

“Who is the god of desire, erotic love, attraction and affection?!”

“Eros, I’m sorry Sir-MA’AM! I didn’t get much sleep last night.” Truth was I couldn’t stop thinking why someone would attack me. I mean,
clearly she knew I was a god, but why? I had to find her.

“Excuses, excuses. Eric, please get some sleep for now. You did impress me with your knowledge yesterday.” I figured do as she says.

“Yes ma’am.” I rested my head on my desk.

“AT HOME! Not school. Eric, don’t make me send you to the Principal. You’re a smart kid. We learn now.”

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Chance,” I said to her sincerely. The only thing I could think about was to rest my head, clear it from everything going on.

“Today we have a very important field trip to go on! We are going to Aphrodite’s Temple!” I bolted up. This couldn’t be true, it’s not real! I looked at Lucy in concern and confusion. She just looked back and shrugged.

“Excuse me, Mrs. Chance? I have a… doctor’s appointment to go to so I won’t be able to go on the field trip.” At least I could have some luck with this plan than the one before which ended into painful strikes across my legs.

“Aw, well that’s too bad. Where’s your note, the office didn’t get one. You have to get a note from your parent or guardian in order to leave school.” Uh oh…

“Uh, my mother is at an important meeting at work, so she cannot be interrupted.” Please work, please work, please wo-

“Well I’m sure Mr. Love is available, right?”

UUUUUMMM… Ares, Hermes, help me out here! Dads...

The teacher's phone rang. The vibration made the floor shake a bit. “Hello? Who’s this?” The teacher had said.

“My name is Are-…Aaron. I’m Eric’s father. I will be coming to get him now for his appointment. Would you be so kind as to send him down to the office?” Thankfully, my frantic praying was answered.

“Alright! Thanks! Have a great day!” The phone hung up. “Eric, have a good day! I hope to see you ON TIME tomorrow, right?” I gave her a halfhearted smile and left the room with no steady pace.

***

“Welcome back, honey! You forgot your note this morning… do you remember the lines you are supposed to say?”

“Yes, Mother. ‘Hello mortals, what can I help you with on this lovely day?’” I said with an annoyed catch.
She patted my back. “Good boy, now go put some powder on, you don't want your classmates to recognize you. Also speak a bit deeper.” She smiled and walked off.

***

“We greatly appeal to the god of desire, erotic love, attraction and affection. Let us see your great power and grant our wishes,” all the students said in unison. Did no one see me in the back corner? I was wearing white. Either way, I flew in front of them.

“Good morning young mortals, what can I do for you?” I tried my best to be serious, but honestly I almost laughed because… they are my classmates, high schoolers, and they bowed down to me like I’m Zeus or someone with higher importance. “It’s alright I’m cool.” Stupid, stupid, stupid. I’m supposed to be formal, not a pathetic slang boy. The god, not some stuck up 16 year old who can't seem to find what to do with himself.

“Hello, you must be Eros. Well, it’s very nice to see you. My class and I have a few personal questions, so is it okay if you met up with some of them today?” The teacher honestly looked scared like I am Hades! Shocking, but I am a god after all. I’m the cool, slick, awesome god named Eros! “Of course! Who would I be if I didn’t?”

***

“Um, hi...” a shy girl said to me. “Hello, is there something wrong? You seem a bit sad.” “No I’m, I’m...” then she burst into tears. I wish I had a mind reader with me so I could know what she was depressed about.

“It’s okay, if you don’t want to tell me I’m not going to make you, but I would love to help.” I said calmly to her, trying to sound as soothing as possible. I really don’t like it when people are devastated. Hopefully she talks to me about it.

“Thanks. It’s just, you remind me of someone I like in my school named Eric.” My heart raced. What? Keep it calm Eros, keep calm. OH MY! She likes me? Really?

“Well, if you like him why don’t you talk to him?” What am I saying? That’s me!

“Umm, because I’m scared. I don't want him to think I'm obsessed about him.”

Please don’t be pathetic mortal. I’m nice in school. Why would anyone be scared of me, for real.
“Well, be yourself. You’ve got to talk to him one day, right?” She suddenly smiled largely and her eyes grew big.

“OH MY... THANKS!” She just rushed out... wow... a lot of energy in that one.

***

“So how have your little interviews been goin’ Er-Er?” Lucy finally said when we were alone.

“Er-Er? Is that a nickname? Is it like the mojo of friendship?” I was so confused. I have plenty nicknames and that's a new one for sure. “Yes... and can I ask you something a bit about you?”

“Sure, I love to talk about myself. At least when I can tell the truth.” “I am doing a project on Eros, and I was hoping you could help me out on it!”

Uhh me? “Uh, sure? I am 6 foot 4, natural hair color is pink.” “WAIT REALLY??? I WANT TO SEE THAT!” “Ouch, that echoes you know! Anywho, fine. Maybe later if I can get all this brown out.” Ouch! Why did she scream that!!!

I’m sure all of Greece just heard her! “So, how about Psyche?” “Uh... I thought I was supposed help you with love life?” Why would she enter my love life? I can handle it!

“Heh, heh... anyway, so?” She sounded like a dork what she tried to act professional. “Psyche was my girlfriend and I am planning on staying single for a long time.” I said, “I was planning on marrying Psyche but then... she got attacked and... I wasn’t there to protect her and she...” I dwelled tears in my eyes. “I’m sorry... I didn’t know.” She tried to cheer me up and I’m thankful for that. “Need a hug?” She just hugs me anyway, “Feeling better?” “Yes, I sincerely thank you.” I got the tears out of my eyes and I tried to look happy. Lucy and I went back to my fellow pupil.

“Thank you, Eros, for allowing us to come and visit you. It was an honor.” Wow the teacher was being nice to me... I guess the love tips for her were definitely needed... well,... maybe I need to not be as smooth of a guy. “Anytime. I’m sure my mother Aphrodite would appreciate visitors. She is out with my father... If you would like, I can let her know you wanted to visit?” Am I crazy? I DO NOT WANT THIS MEAN TEACHER AT APH’S TEMPLE AND MINE! “Alright, goodbye, Eros!” The group said in unison. There was something different... almost as if they knew I was Eric. Then...

“I hate to be rude, Eros, but do you think we can stay here until the storm clears up?” One of
the students asked... why are these perfect little mortals scared of rain? IT IS RAIN! It’s not like it is going to be a tragic storm all day and night long. “Sure.”

***

Sigh. Today’s been rough. Wait... “Is someone in here?” I turned around and no one was there. Sigh, guess not. Did someone enter the room? I felt a terrible slash and... “AHHHHH!” I screamed so deafening because I was in probably the most pain in my life. The man grabbed my neck hard, and I could just feel the air slipping out of me. I couldn’t scream for help. I wanted to kill him, but I needed to breathe first. The room got darker as blood rushed out from where my wings were, and it continued to get darker and darker and... Bam! I was out.

***

“Why did you bring an immortal god to a human, mortal doctor?” The doctor asked in concern, “Well, we are human, and we don’t know how to bring him to an immortal doctor!” Mrs. Chance had said with panic on her mind.

“Ngugh... Where, am I?” My head was spinning really fast, or was that the world? “Eros!” I suddenly saw bodies appear near me. I tried to get up but it didn’t work... “Uh, what happened to me?” My vision was really blurry, but it looked like my class maybe? “Well, we found you lying in your own blood with your wings cut off, with a dagger in your chest. Does this *usually* happen?” A fellow student of mine had said. “Of course not...” Okay now I wonder, couldn’t I be turned mortal and die that way? “Well, I believe your parents want to see you. We will visit again soon! Goodbye! We hope you feel better soon!”

I just saw light and figured it was them because I could sense god-like power. “Eros, my baby, don’t let this happen to you again, okay, hon?” I laughed subtly, “Course ma.” “How could you let this happen Eros, I know you're my strong little boy. Fight! Stay strong! You know my motto, always know what you're fighting before you start fighting.” Ares proclaimed with a proud tone.

“I'm sorry I just-” “Nah, it’s fine. It’s not like I expect YOU to be ready to fight any second.” “I am just trying to make sense of all of this, Ares.” “Just rest up, you should be fine in no time, and look on the bright side, your wings might grow back!” I just dozed off from there.

***
Why can’t I sleep? Why can’t I forget about my wings? Will they ever grow back? Will I ever be able to fly again?

***

I woke up finally. I miss my wings still… If they don’t grow back I don’t know how I’ll move on.

Those wings were like my life, but my spirit is now broken. I can’t even last a day with some sort of pain. Am I becoming mortal? Uh oh...

“BEEP, BEEP, BEEP, BEEP, BEEP, BEEP!!!” “Eros, please calm down.”

Did THEY know WHAT to SAY to a GOD???

Apparently not.. Sigh… I’m still super worried.

“His heart rate is over the scale! IT’S OVER 9,000! BPM…”

The other doctor just rushed to me and panicked, was there any calm, in him? “Umm... no, now it is... Flat line...” I think I should speak... “I hate to barge in but, I’m alive. I’m not dead. I think I broke that thing by accident. Treating immortals are pretty hard I think... I don’t really know because I’m immortal and I usually go to the doctor for immortals.”

“Mmm... Well Eros, you will need to rest up because if you don’t you will need surgery on your heart.”

I panicked, “HEART SURGERY!!!?” The heartbeat monitor’s number went high again.

“Easy now Eros,” “Is that REALLY needed?!”

I was now in panic, HEART SURGERY?? That may affect my powers. Let’s see if I can still turn into a baby and bribe them not to give me heart surgery. “Grah? Gar giy meh Gar Surg! (What? Don’t give me heart surgery!?” Oh my gosh... was that even a language other than baby-talk? I am still rockin’ it! “Um... Dr. Frank E. Stein, Eros turned into a baby and I have no idea what he is saying. He’s giving me the puppy dog, baby-like eyes! Help!”

That doctor turned away. Huh my vision was fine like this, and I didn't feel as weak.

I stood up walked over to the doctor, magically grabbed a piece of paper and a pen and I wrote in cursive, “You said to stay calm, so this is the easiest way for me to do so. Also I said that I don’t want heart surgery and if you can do anything to avoid it that would make me glad.”

“Never mind, Dr. Frank E. Stein. Hey, I thought you were once an immortal doctor?” The doctor who was treating me had said.

Frank E. Stein, why does that sound so familiar? “I was, until I got fired with having to
deal with Eros." "I can see why. He's not the easiest to work with." I rolled my eyes, uh huh I am. "Heh, heh..." I laughed subtly because I felt bad for the guy. I jumped off the exam table and went over to Frank.

I still had my magical paper and erased it. I wrote, "I'm sorry I got you fired, Dr. Frank E. Stein... Truly! I didn't try to." "No, no, it's okay Eros, I never liked that job much anyways. I always seemed to get stressed a lot. You immortal's health is crazy." Frank complained.

I turned back to my adult form. "I made my paper and pen disappear. "Give me the sleeping shot or whatever. I'm really hyper and I would rather avoid the pain and money of heart surgery." I thought out loud.

***

"Ngurah," I yawned, "What happened?" I just heard a ton of voices, "Eros! How are you doing? What's it like living in the real world? Are the mortals treating you well? Oh wait... who do I have to kill? Are they giving you enough wine? Did you bring your sword, bow and arrows? WHO HAS DONE THIS TO YOU! Is my little-baby, okay?" I couldn't tell what they were saying; it was like an unbalanced choir of voices.

"Oh my goodness, too many questions for me to handle right this second! Thanks guys but I am fine, almost... It's just my wings, I don't have them anymore, and what will Valentine's Day be like without someone to..." I sighed. What am I meant to do now? I am the cool god of desire, erotic love, attraction and affection, and I am awesome! "I'm sure those wings of yours will grow back... maybe Zeus can magic you some new wings, maybe Artemis?" Ares suggested.

"Mmm, yeah." I kind of dozed off from there probably from sadness and when I woke up...

***

"Wake up sunshine, hearts and love!" Hades proclaimed. "Huh, AHH!" My voice echoed in the underworld chambers in its dungeon.

"LET ME OUT HADES!!" I was furious! Shouldn't he treat me better, not like this? "Relax little babe, it's all going to be fine, your momma's coming soon." "DON'T YOU DARE TOUCH MY MOTHER, DON'T LAY ONE CLAW ON HER HADES OR ELSE!!!" I screamed.

"Oh Eros, babe, it's okay. She has just volunteered to stay with me forever. I take care of you, she relaxes, no hard feelings, right?" Hades practically sounded sarcastic the way it sounded.
when he made deals. “WHAT DID YOU DO TO HER? LET ME AND HER GO YOU PRICK!” “Ah, Ah, Ah. Be a good baby boy and don’t name call. By the way your friends from the over world are also here too. Look behind you.” Hades said with honest truth. “You leave all of them alone! Got it, you big cloud of nothingness!” I let a tear slip off my face. “Oh don’t worry one bit. They are perfectly happy here. Right?” Hades magically made their heads nod. “Hades I have no idea what this plan is, but let my family and friends go. Don’t do this to them, just do it to me only.” “Please don’t hurt him!” Lucy finally had the courage to say. “I don’t hurt anyone. I just, make deals. Now Eros, or should I say, Eric Love…I could imagine you’re hungry. I could, you know, unchain you and you could go to the dining hall. So how about it?” Hades says, “Your mother is going to love it here!” If I say I’m going and just escape this cage, get the key and let my friends out, AWAY TO FREEDOM!

“That would be lovely Hades, turns out you’re not a big idiot who makes deals all the time who is also dumb, stupid, as I said earlier an imbecile, and a jerk. Good thing you are not.” I said with truth of meaning he was one. “Oh yeah by the way Eros, if you could just get me some bits of a cloud I can restore your wings...” Hades enchanted.

I just heard an army of voices, “Don’t fall for it!” “I mean maybe... first you would have to free my friends, family and ALL of the gods and goddesses that are locked up.” I sealed my deal. “Well look who just turned into a bit of a negotiator... And what is it for me? Nothing, No Deal!” Hades said. “Just get out of your cage and get to the dining hall. Goodbye little termite!”

Hades wakes off almost growling. The chamber’s door opened. I exited the cage and looked around. Suddenly it closed again. “Hmmmm nothing” I thought aloud. I grabbed one of my arrows out and stuck it through the hole of the lock and smacked with all my strength the iron bars down so they could escape once they were all unchained. I walked over to them and undid all their locks with the end of my arrow.

“Thank you so much Eros! We thought we were dead meat a minute ago.” “No prob. Also, I would never eat the food here... Now come on, I see the portal to the overworld!
“Eros, I don’t know how much to thank you, and question you... So this whole time you were Eric Love? Wow how come I didn’t see that.” Mrs. Chance stated. “I was only on a spy mission, don’t take the act for my personality!” I kind of joked... Truth is I kind of was starting to become mortal. And to think, what would I be without this mission.

“You Eros are now newly crowned known to be as the King of Mojo, cool god of desire, erotic love, attraction, affection.” Zeus proclaimed, “Now to obtain your wings back!” I was glorified with happiness! My wings! The crowd cheered.

I still hang out with my oddly strong mortal friend Lucy. In fact me and her might start to be best friends!

The mission was a success to see how high school love was doing! Now to see what my possible next mission is! Oh wait, that’s later but for now... “LET’S GET THIS PARTY STARTED, IMMORTALS!”

End of story #1.

Kelsie

Katie

Kelly
Kate

Alyssa

Rhea

Sarah

Amelia
Kaia
Regional Scholastic Art Award-Gold Key
National Scholastic Art Award-Silver Key

Jaida
Scholastic Art Award-Silver Key

Megan
Scholastic Art Award-Gold Key

Holly
Scholastic Art Award-Silver Key

Hallie
Scholastic Art Award-Silver Key
Behind A Moody Teenager

A mask is on your face. Helping to cover a sadness.

A sadness fueled by loss. The loss does not only fuel, it engulfs.

The loss may come from many things. Love, friendship, or life. Or lack thereof.

Before you judge a moody teen walking by. Look inside and feel their inner fire. When the fire is burning, it flares out at others.

Wanting merely to be left alone, pondering life, and longing for a better one.

They are frustrated that you do not understand! You might think that you do. But it is really deeper.

A bigger responsibility falls upon them and they feel as though they are simply pushed into this out of the blue!

They feel that their work goes unnoticed. While a common saying for parents is “I do everything for you! You will show me respect!”

So before you judge a moody teen walking by and grunting a hello. Look deeper.

They want something back that was taken from them.
Read between the lines and you will see.

Vice Versa

You don't see me, i know you don't
Don't underestimate me
Me who has served loyalty and stood by
Bye my freedom and soul and i'm yours
Your judgement is clouded and has been for 200 years will be for 200 years
Years of anguish and pain
Pain of a 4 year war. War.
No more war
Still anguish
A movement of equality
A time of segregation
A time of the greedy
A great leader
A great speaker
A murder caused by our desire
A desire to finally be seen as a human
A hatred of law enforcement
And vice versa
They are
Second class,
Ingrates,
Colored ungrateful second class
We are
Important
Smarter
Normal smarter people
They are weak
We are strong
They are unimportant
We are supreme
They are not entitled to this earth

Now, 50 years later
What is wrong?
Are you ungrateful?
Are you unsatisfied?
Are you hungry?
Are you daft?
YES!!!!!
And vice versa
Accept us
Know us
Be us
Help
Love us
What is wrong with us in your eyes?
Are you ungrateful?
YES!!!!

This may be extreme
A great majority of us live in complete harmony
Some don't.
Multiverse

Chances are you've heard of the multiverse theory. What it is, is the theory that there is a dimension for every possible reality.
It is not as simple as, “The asteroid never hit earth and wiped out the dinosaurs.”
... Which would have changed the course of history.

Most of them would be more like, “I started watching TV 1.2 seconds earlier.”
... Which changes absolutely nothing.

Some might meet halfway in between, and would only change you alone.
... Like, “I went to Princeton instead of Harvard.

Either way, when you travel you will always be confused.
... Because they are so similar and different at the same time.

A universe where coin flips are opposite. And when you arrive, you look around and all that is different, and that your best friend is married!
... Your friend flipped a coin to see if he would go on a date. In your universe, tails. In this universe, heads.

So simple.
...But so interesting.

A universe where the 2nd amendment was never written.
... And though the world is a little more peaceful, not on the inside.

A universe where the Simpsons was cancelled.
... No one is upset, except Matt Groening.

A universe where the Nazis never existed.
... We avoided one of the bloodiest wars in history, there are 9 times as many Jews. Not to mention that Nagasaki and Hiroshima are still sound, and we never developed the Atom Bomb.

A universe where on my plastic water bottle, the barcode is different.
... The entire world is exactly the same and you would mistake it for home.

A universe where Saturday Night Live never survived its dark days, and not even Eddie Murphy could save it.
... As a result, we have so many great movies that we love today. And all of our days are a little darker.

A universe where the Great Depression never happened.
... And there wasn't as much of a reason to elect FDR over and over.

Vesuvius never exploded.
... And we never found that precious insight into Roman life.
So, though you might think that traveling through dimensions is a “good idea.”
... IT’S NOT!!!

There are an **endless** amount
... And you will *never, ever, get home.*

Look before you leap.

*Mattcy*

---

*Michelle*
The Truth of the Wolves

Frigid air blows at my shoulder as I step out of my father's car. It's twenty-seven degrees out and snowing, but I can barely feel the cold. Everyone's instinct is to look for heat when they are cold. Since everybody is always basking in the heat, nobody takes the time to appreciate the cold. The cold is so lonely because nobody wants to be him, and that's why I like the cold. I can relate to the cold because we are both quite lonely.

My eyes wander upon my small townhouse, a place where no people of any sort ever come to visit me. Stepping in the snow covered driveway to walk to my door, I smile a faint smile. I used to love the snow, and even though I may be a seventeen year old in my senior year of high school, I would love to build a snowman again. They remind me of my childhood when mom was still around. Before she died... We would roll tiny balls of snow down the hill in the front of our house until they became big and strong, just like her, besides the big part. After that we would add a piece of broccoli for a nose since we never had carrots, and blueberries for his mouth and eyes because I loved blueberries, and-

"Don't use the sink today, it's broken. Some repair guys are coming in today to fix it," my dad interrupts my thoughts from behind as I continue to walk to the house. I don't answer, only because what do I have to say? If I answer with an ok, will that really do anything good to the conversation? I heard what he said, and that's all I needed to do...But ya, my mom was a cool person.

When I make it to my room inside, making sure not to use the sink, I hop onto my bed and scroll through Instagram on my phone. Pictures of friends upon friends hanging out, making hot chocolate, or wreaking havoc throughout the toy sections of grocery stores flood my eyes. Of course, I don't like any of them. After all, most of the pictures are of stupid girls at my school. But why can't I just be like them and try and be normal. Try to be social. And I know my grammar sucks, but those weren't questions. They were statements because I know why I can't be like them. It's because God cursed me with the gift of not being normal in the bad way and not the good one. Maybe I should just stay that way. Even if I changed, who would be there to see me?

This time that was a question because I truly don't know.
I toss my phone to the end of my bed and make sure not to use the sink, I hop onto my bed and scroll through Instagram on my phone. Pictures of friends upon friends hanging out, making hot chocolate, or wreaking havoc throughout the toy sections of grocery stores flood my eyes. Of course, I don't like any of them. After all, most of the pictures are of stupid girls at my school. But why can't I just be like them and try and be normal. Try to be social. And I know my grammar sucks, but those weren't questions. They were statements because I know why I can't be like them. It's because God cursed me with the gift of not being normal in the bad way and not the good one. Maybe I should just stay that way. Even if I changed, who would be there to see me?

This time that was a question because I truly don't know.
I toss my phone to the end of my bed where I probably won't be able to find it in a few hours, as long as I try to forget that I did. Rushing out my bedroom door I see a glimpse of the sparkling snow through the window next to it from the corner of my eye. Between me and my one floor apartment, I would rather be outside exploring the shadows than be inside weeping on my pillow. As I start to pull my winter coat onto my body, I see my dad washing pasta sauce encrusted dishes in the sink. My feet drag towards him with tiredness.

"Hey, Dad," I whisper as I sit down on the chair pushed into the kitchen island.
"Where ya' going? Down to your friend's house or are ya' taking one of those walks of yours again?" he asks with a certain tone as if he knows where I'm going. Shy, even in front of my dad, I answer, "You know." I'm not much of a talker, so I usually just use expressions to communicate, if I ever communicate with anyone. I make my way back to where I was pulling my coat on and look to my left to find my gloves. They are a wooly material; the upper half black and the bottom rim of the gloves white. My dad never bought me a hat because he thinks they are unnecessary if your
coat already has one built in. So all I have for a hat is a fabric dome with faux fur glued on the edge, attached to my coat. Soft, the gloves fit around my hands like two tiny blankets for mice. My cheap knock-off Uggs are the only boots I have, so I slip them on my feet.

"Hey, Maggie," my father adds with a questioning sound in his voice, "what's wrong?" Ugh. The terrible name is out in the open, floating through the dust particles that I have to breathe in. My name itself isn't bad, it's the person who I don't like. I, Maggie, don't deserve a name because of the nothingness I do for this planet. When I'm gone, all the people at my school will remember me for the person I truly am; the girl who sat in the back reading the same love story over and over. And that's the sad truth. "Hello?" he asks squinting his eyebrows, waiting for an answer. I totally forgot about his question, what's wrong. I could tell him what every teen or person ever would say. That would be "nothing." But then I would be lying because I do have a problem. I'm lonely and I am desperately in need of a friend. Since I'm Maggie and I don't have the confidence to tell him what I'm feeling, I answer with a "Nothing. I'm fine," and open up the door. I walk out with a tingly feeling in my chest. What it may be from, I have no idea, but I guess I'll find out.

When my boots hit the sticky, powdered snow, I think of my mom, but I just can't. If I do...I...I might just cry. She was so good to me. Whenever I felt down, she would take me to the store to get my favorite snack, Oreos. But when that ended, my dad never carried on any of those things. He became dejected and alone and...Then I started to feel alone...

I continue to stride along the vast blankets of snow before I notice the woods behind my house. Stopping to see, the trees are bare with snow piled upon their winding branches. Again, chills disperse up and down my back as if something wants me to go into them. Slowly walking towards the trees, snow continues to fall upon me. Out of the corner of my eye, I see a figure peering out from the branches of a few smaller trees. Anxious, I start to walk a little faster towards the figure. As I make it closer, I notice the figure is not a human, but some sort of animal.

Its head peeks out with a sad smile, the animal's white fur blending in with the snow. And then the tingly feeling comes back and spreads into something different.

The animal darts off back into the woods, but the feeling inside me won't let myself lose the animal. My legs move faster, as the feeling of panic creeps into my brain. I'm chasing a wild animal that who knows how dangerous it could be. Even though I feel alarmed, my feet keep moving, almost as if I'm not controlling them anymore. Almost as if my body is. I catch a glimpse of the animal's behind as my legs move faster. At this moment I realize the animal is a wolf from its bushy tail and distinct body shape. A milk colored wolf, speckled with brown spots like a white chocolate chip cookie.

"Stop!" I yell, thinking the wolf can hear me. "Please! I can help you, I cry, reaching my hands out." I don't know what came over me to say this, but he looks in need of help. The wolf stops as his leg scrape across the snow. Due to my terrible hand eye coordination skills, my eyes move faster than my body. My feet give in as my body hurtles to the ground, my face flattening into the snow. The snow speckles touch my face, not making me shiver. The cold never makes me shiver. I force my hands to push me up, even though I may not feel the strength to do so. As soon as my pale face is uncovered from the snow, the hood of my coat falling off my head, the wolf's eye
stare right into mine. His bright yellow eyes at first look angry, as if he can smell my fear, but then his eyes turn happy, and I start to feel calm.

"Maggie!" the wolf shouts with relief. "It's really you! Boy, I didn't think you were real after all the good things people were saying about you! But it's really you," the wolf cheers as he pounces across the snow. His feet drag up and down, carrying snow up with him. He then stops and walks towards me. In awe, I stand up to look down at the wolf. He sits down while his tail wags across the ground. His tail makes its own snow angel as it buries into the snow.

"How...H...How did you know my name...Mi...Mister?" I question while my eyebrows squint down.

"You're the only person who can speak to us wolves, of course! We've heard much about you from the head wolf, Phinx. He said you're the only person who can help us save our kind, as long as you're willing to." The wolf smiles as he nars towards me. I step back in disbelief.

"Oh gosh, did a little man give me a bag of some white stuff that I thought was snow? Who are you and why do you need my help? And how are you even talking?" I quickly scream into the trees, the end of my sentence echoing. My hands reach up to my exposed head to pull at my hair. I don't bother to pull up my hood, it nearly crosses my mind.

"I don't know what you mean by that first sentence, but I can answer your other questions. I'm Bear, by the way, which is sort of ironic because I'm a wolf and not a bear, which-

"Please hurry, I need answers," I urge him. My foot starts to tap on the snow as my mind fills with questions like Santa filling up on cookies on Christmas night.

"Right! Well, it's a long story actually-" I grunt and twirl my hand, gesturing him to speed up. I'm not sure of how much time I have before my dad starts to become worried. Plus, nobody's ever talked to me this long before. Heck, I've never talked to anyone this long before. "The easier question is how I can talk. You see, the only animals that can talk are wolves. They have more complex brains than other animals. Other animals like squirrels have brains that can sense the basic things of feeling pain and sensing food. Wolves on the other hand have intellectual brains. We can have feelings of love and despair. We can have friendships and enemies. We can think like humans. Us wolves can only communicate to each other, which means nobody else can understand us. But then came you. We know you think you aren't important, and we know you are lonely, but you won't be lonely anymore" My mouth opens with interest as I say,

"Wow. How does a wolf know so much? How old are you anyways?" After I say this, I sit down in front of Bear so I can take a better look at his face. His features are unlike anything I've ever seen. His eyes gleam under the sparkling sun that continues to dim. His mouth grins with the satisfying grin of a human. His ears point up, excited to be with me.

"Oh me?" he asks knowingly, "I'm twenty-four. I'm one of the younger wolves, but I'm one of the most talkative." That I can see. "Oh right! Back to the helping thing. There have been many attacks on us wolves by your kind. Since we can't talk to the humans to tell them to stop or warn them, we need you to tell them. Our kind is dyeing off one by one, and if this continues, we'll go extinct." Exhausted, my mind is full of thoughts that I cannot fathom. Why would I be chosen to be the only one who can talk to these stupid wolves? "Um, rude! I am quite intelligent, but I guess I have to tell you-"
"Sorry, I guess I said that out loud," I interrupt while rubbing my eyes. Now I'm so tired that I don't know what I'm saying out loud or not anymore. I stand again to try and wake myself up. Yesterday night I didn't have nearly enough sleep. Between YouTube and the TV in my room, there was no way I was going to bed before two a.m.

"No, you didn't say that out loud. I forgot to tell you, us wolves can sort of read your mind, and you can sort of can read ours. That's probably why you could feel what I was feeling earlier. You see, your mom knew us very well. She was actually the one person who could talk to us in the first place. She met up with us all the time, and when you came along, I guess she passed the gene onto you. Of course, she noticed you had a connection with them when she brought you along once, but she never took you back because she wanted to keep you safe. Just like your mother, you can feel and hear us. We didn't need her help back then only because the killings weren't as big of a problem. She was really just here to keep us company. But she told us that if we ever needed you for anything, we would let you know that we needed you. And so here we are.

"My legs give in and I collapse to the ground as I let out a deep breath. Bear comes towards me and sits down. "I understand that you might need a moment," he says noticing the surprised expression on my face. I can't believe Bear is reading my mind right now, and most importantly I can't believe my mom knew them. Judging by my skills, I don't think I can read his mind as well as he can mine because all I seem to be hearing when I look at him is food like pizza and chicken wings. My mind must be broken right now.

Bear nudges my hand with his wet nose until it reaches up to his back, feeling his fur coat. The tiny bristles of hair that make up his fur coat are soft and soothing to touch.

"Bear," I ask, "What am I supposed to do now?" I say rubbing my eyes again. I'm truly shaken from all the information I've been given that I don't think I can handle anymore.

"Ok. I'll take you home so you can get some rest then," he whispers as he stands back up on his four legs. That's right, I keep forgetting he can read my mind. "Get used to it," he nags jokingly, gesturing me with his head to stand up.

"Ha. I think I'm going to like you Bear, just like little orphan Annie with Daddy Warbucks," I laugh, standing up at his command. We start walking back to my house until we make it to the end of the woods where I entered from. Bear tells me he can't go any farther in case a human sees him with me. We say our goodbyes as he promises he'll be waiting for me at that same spot at noon tomorrow, ready to tell me some need to know information. Before I walk back to my house the rest of the way, I take a good look at his yellow eyes. They assure me I'll be alright.

And I know Bear would never lie.

My eyes open to a bright but late Saturday morning. I'm glad I don't have school today where I would have to see all the people that won't notice me. All I can't think about is seeing Bear again. My feet kick around at the end of my bed, feeling for my phone. I knew I wouldn't have been able to find it easily. Once I feel the phone with my bare feet, I sit up to bend over and grab it. With a click of the home button, the screen turns on so that the time reads; 11:45 A.M.

Yes! I don't have to wait long until I'm able to see Bear. Pulling off the bed covers sprawled upon me, I stand up at the side of my bed, looking for my coat, boots, and gloves that I left in my room.
last night. There is no time for brushing my hair or changing my clothes, so I skip that part of my
day. As soon as I spot my jacket, I slip it on to look for my gloves and boots. I only manage to find
one glove, but I do find my boots.

The lonely feeling I have felt ever since mom left is slowly drifting away. It's not that I don't
miss her anymore because don't get me wrong, I miss her a whole lot, but I finally have a friend.
He may be an animal, but I know he loves me. Wherever my mom may be now, I know she'll be
proud of me for stepping out of my comfort zone.

When I have my boots and glove on, I walk out of my door, trying to close it slowly so that
my dad won't hear me and become suspicious. But right when I turn around, the person I come
to face with is indeed my dad.

'Hey dad! I've got to go. I have a...A friend to meet up with. I'll see you in probably two
hours. Maybe three!' I blurt as I start to head towards the door which leads outside.
"Wait! Why the heck are you so happy today? And who is this new friend of yours?" he
questions with definite uncertainty as he turns around to look at me. I stop in my tracks, thinking
of something that would be very like me to say.

"Ok. You caught me. I'm just going to the library. All I wanted to feel was some
accomplishment," I moan with sadness while I open and close the door without hearing his
response. Hmm. Maybe I could be a good actress with my great acting skills. I close my eyes to
picture myself running on stage and skirting out lines in a British voice that is as fake as my
Uggs. The picture in my mind starts happy but becomes a train wreck as I fall over and over
again on stage. My eyes open. Yeesh...I guess acting isn't for me.

Filled with excitement and the need to learn more about this wolf stuff, I dart towards the
woods behind my house. Not seeing Bear, I frown with disappointment, bowing my head to the
ground with sadness. It's not snowing today, but snow still covers the ground, the coldness just
starting to nip at my one naked hand. Maybe I was dreaming just like I was thinking about me on
that stage. I continue to stay still until I hear a faint, 'Yoo-hoo' from the branches of the woods.

Looking up, I see none other than the great Bear. "You came!" I scream loudly but not too loud so
the whole neighborhood won't notice. As I look closer at him, I notice a black and white object
hanging from his mouth. Soon I realize it's my glove that I had been missing. My tiny feet drag in
the snow, making my way towards Bear. I hug him with a tight embrace when I see him.
"Hey, I promised, did I not?" he smartly remarks, swaying his tail in the air. Letting go of my
grip, I look upon him to tell him my answer. I say with a smile, "I guess...You know, this is the first
time I've smiled in a while." Pulling on my glove, Bear opens his mouth a tiny bit so his teeth don't
hold the glove in his mouth. I slip the glove on saying, "Anyways, what's going to happen today?"
Bear turns his head towards the trees behind him then turns back while saying,
"We're going out there today to meet up with the pack, along with Phinx. Then we'll talk
about how you can help us. It's quite simple, actually. Come, hop on my back." He bends his
head back to point towards his back, calling me to hop on. I kick my leg once, twice, then launch
off the ground. My hands grab his neck, pulling myself up securely. My foot makes it over his
back, and I plant it into his side to make sure my grip won't slip and I won't fall as we ride. "Here
we go!" He shouts as he starts to hop along the snow. Expecting him to warn me, I shriek out of
fear, but also excitement. Together we ride into the winding trees for about five minutes.

All I see are trees and snow, and the occasional bird, until I see tiny figures in the distance dancing to the beat of their own drums. Obviously spotting them, bear abruptly stops, his paws sliding in the snow trying to catch a good grip on the ground. Then suddenly, I hear him howl. Multiple howls fill the air like rain filling the air in a dangerous storm. That's when I realize those are Bear's friends. The wolves gather around me and Bear as they all chant things to me and each other like, "Maggie!" or, "I told you she was real." The first wolf who properly greets me is Faith, who claims to be Bear's sister.

"I've been waiting for you to come! Bear told me all about you last night. You're as pretty as he says," she exclaims with a wide smile smacked to her face. Bear gives her the evil eye, embarrassed to admit I was beautiful. I hop off of Bear and scratch Faith's head. Her eyes close into a relaxed state before I stop.

"Thanks faith! You're beautiful yourself. Who are all of these cuties," I ask pointing to the crowd of wolves circling around us. They circle us as if they're performing a routine that's part of a cult; not that I would know anything about cults.

"This is Jenny," Faith answers, pointing her ear towards Jenny. She continues on, reading through the list of all fourteen wolves. That would be sixteen total including her and Bear. The only name I never heard her say was-

"I smell human!" a loud wolf roars from a rock a few feet away from me. We all turn to see what the noise is coming from. Phinx. That was the last wolf. Phinx steps down from the large rock, sniffing the air with each step he takes. He walks over with large emphasis in his steps. As he nears closer, I notice a large tear in his ear which connects to a larger scar that drags to his stomach. It must've been from the humans who have been attacking. "Yes," he answers my thoughts as he stops to stare at me. After saying this he continues to pace back and forth near the pack. The wolves around me start to sit down, almost as if bowing down to him. "About a year ago a human spotted me while I was walking out of the woods looking for prey. The dumb hunter thought I would harm him and the town, so he took the rifle out from his house, loaded it, and pulled the trigger. He was obviously aiming for my head, wanting to kill me right then and there, but I guess he had bad aim because the bullet shot right through my ear. I had to scamper back into the woods to find help. Then about two months ago, another hunter came into the woods and attacked our hideout. He stabbed me from my ear to my stomach deeply, but not deep enough to kill me. We had to move locations in the woods, and that's also why we can't step out of the woods. You never know when those hunters are waiting for us," he says in soft but mysterious voice. I look back to Bear and Faith as their faces shine in the sunlight, showing their sad expressions. I feel pity for Phinx. All because of stupid hunters, his fur is damaged, and so are his thoughts. Fearful for what could happen to Bear and the other wolves, I step up to Phinx quickly spurting out, "How can I help you be safe again?" All the wolves stare at me in utter surprise. Oops...I guess I said that sort of loud.

"You think," Bear says sassily and quiet so only I can hear.
"Maggie, we need you to get a hold of these hunters and tell them to stop. They probably won't listen, so you might have to make them," Phinx says with his monotone voice.
"So what do you mean? Do I have to kill them?" I ask with an unsure tone in my voice, showing I could never kill anyone. No matter how lonely I could be, I would never kill somebody, let alone multiple people!

"No, no, no!" Phinx grumbles. "I meant that you might have to warn them in some kind of way that won't make you look crazy. If you walk up to them and say, 'Hi, I'm Maggie, and I'm the chosen one who was told by talking wolves to come warn you,' they'll think you're crazy!" Phinx says what he thinks I would say in the most highest voice he can, trying to impersonate me. I don't sound the slightest like he makes it sound, though.

"Ha, ha, ha," I laugh at Phinx's impression while putting my hand over my stomach so I don't laugh too hard. After Phinx's discussion, me and the wolf pack gather around a pile of bunched up logs. Making a fire using the amazing survivor skills I have, (watching animal planet twenty-four-seven really pays off) I light the wood so the wolves don't shiver in the negative degrees, and maybe so I don't shiver. Around the fire, the pack tells me stories about them. Some funny, and some not.

After telling stories and having some laughs, Phinx tells me a plan for persuading the hunters to stop killing off the wolves. Later in the conversation, he tells me there are only four hunters, but I think there are four too many. As he talks, I look around at all the different wolves. Escar, a younger wolf who was named by the rest of the pack, attained his name because he was the tiniest wolf. He was as small as a snail when he was born, so the pack thought of the French snail dish, Escargot, and thought it was the perfect name. Escar's eyes are more narrow than Bear's eyes, and Escar's ears flop down instead of pointing straight up to the sky. Everyone howls and chants when they hear an idea they like. Warmth spreads from the fire, and all is going well. But then cold rushes in, and the world seems like it has dropped into slow motion as I hear rapid shots that sound like bang, bang, bang.

Shrieking howls travel through the air as I jump to the ground. My eyes look up to see four men holding large guns in the distance, shooting towards me, but not quite seeing me. I duck my head low, looking back to see the bullets hit nothing but the skinny branches of trees. It's the hunters.

"Wait! There's a girl. I'm surprised her face hasn't been ripped off yet," one of them yells, holding their fire. Another man straightens his gun, ready with his eye on his target. I follow the gun's view over to Bear.

"No!" I shout as loud as I can, running to cover Bear. I spread out my arms so even if the men wanted to shoot him, they would be shooting me. The rest of the wolves like Faith and Escar hide behind trees, ducking with fear in their eyes. They duck with kind of fear in which you fear for your life. "Please don't kill them. They aren't even harming you," I cry, pointing towards the wolves who back up, trying to be unseen. Phinx creeps over, snarling at the men. What is he doing? This isn't what we planned. We weren't supposed to kill the hunters, I was only supposed to talk to them!
All of the sudden Phinx starts to roll around on the ground with an adorable look on his face, as if he changed his mind in what he wanted to do. What is he doing? The men all stop and stare in disbelief while Phinx continues to roll, almost purring like a cat. I start to walk over to him, thinking of a plan.

"Step back girl! I'm going to shoot if he comes near you!" the middle hunter exhales as he lifts his gun ready to shoot. Sitting next to Phinx, I rub his tummy sweetly saying, "Who's a good boy? You are! You're such a good boy Phinx." I scratch his head with my right hand as I rub his belly with my left. Acting like Phinx is some sort of dog, I look up to the hunters who have shock in their eyes. All of their weapons are pointing down now, but I'm scared of what they might say. "See," I say looking up to the hunters, "They would never think of doing any harm to anybody. Isn't that right buddy!" I say in a baby voice as I rub his stomach again.

Again, the middle hunter speaks, "What about the woman who died about a year ago. I saw her walking around with those wolves and the next day she was dead. The town says she was ripped to pieces by those savages! She had a young daughter, too. Pretty sad stuff." A large question mark floats into my head. My mother died last year, and I'm an only child.

"What was her name," I ask, trying to sort things out in my brain.

"I think it was Stephanie," he answers. My mother's name was Stephanie...Hes talking about my mom. That means he's lying because she died of brain cancer on her hospital bed. I saw her die. "That's my mom your talking about. The wolves were her friends, not her enemies. She died of brain cancer, I saw her die," I squeak with sadness while trying to speak fast so the hunters don't start to shoot rapidly. The middle hunter raises his eyebrows.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, I just thought that since I saw her with the wolves, she was killed by them. I used to hunt deer, but once I thought that the wolves killed you mother, I made it my duty to kill them all. But I guess I was wrong," the same hunter says. All of the other hunters glance at each other then look at the main hunter who spoke and angrily stare at him.

"Really Carl!" The farthest hunter away says to the main hunter.

"Yah. Check your facts," Another one tells him. "I'm going home, you dumb old man," the hunter says while he starts to walk back. The other hunters follow, leaving all but one behind. Carl. He looks at my face with regret and sorrow. He moves his lips so they make the words sorry, then he catches up with his friends. I watch them until they're completely gone. He's not sorry. Sorry is only a word that someone cries out to the void that is our Earth. Weight lifts off my chest as I let out a long, heavy breath. I look behind me to see that all the wolves are gathered back out from the trees. Phinx stands up, shakes his body to let the snow fall off, and scratches his itchy back with his paw.

"I," Phinx starts but pauses, "Am never letting anyone do that to me again!" he jokingly snarls. We all laugh as he finishes, "Seriously Maggie, am I two years old? My legs cave in to the point where I have to sit down. I feel sad that my mother is gone, but I'm glad to know the hunters won't be bothering the wolves again.

"You know what this means?" I ask the pack. They all answer with what’s that aren't in sync
at all. "You don't have to hide in the woods anymore!" I see Bear and Faith start cheers which makes the rest of the pack cheer too. Giggling, I wave my hand for Bear to come by me. "Bear," I whisper when he nears me. "It's near lunchtime, and my father is at work. I bet I can sneak you upstairs and you can lay on a bed that isn't made of dirt and grass.

"Hooray!" he shouts making the whole pack look over to him. "I mean, hooray," he whispers this time. I giggle again and start to walk back with him as the sounds of the wolves behind me become softer and softer until they disappear.

As me and Bear near my house, I can feel the cold nipping at my nose. Today I can feel the Cold air because I don't have to be lonely anymore. My mother leaving used to suck out the joy in me every day like a vacuum that was constantly turned on high. Rubbing my shoulders for warmth, I notice Bear looking up to me. He smirks with a hopeful look on his face. For what the future may hold, I don't know. For what lies remain in the past, my mind can only wonder. The only thing I'm sure of is that today and from now on, the chains of sadness pinning me down are forever gone, and I'll never stay in the cold.

_Hallie_

Sophia
Life Poems

Defining Better
Was life better then.
Or is it better now?
When kids sprint and jump on the playground,
or when they are apathetic and don't move around?
When it's Christmas time, you go shopping,
and fidget and wait in line.
But nowadays you groan on the couch,
and order it on Prime.
When we could go out and collect what we need.
Without the temptations of looking at our phone, or computer.
When we could go 1 hour without tweeting a tweet.
Or posting a pic on Instagram.
Tell me this.
Now look.
Was life better then?
Or was it better then?

Life
It's what we wake up to.
It's what we see when we look up, down, and all around.
We can't look through the rear view mirror
to look back at the past.
In life we can't have binoculars
to look into the future.
But we must stay in the present,
and wait for life to come to us.
The Gift
Writing is for expressing your feelings.
It's the friend that you can lean on when no one is around
There are poems, books, even songs...
Whatever you want!
So don't forget to use your gift of writing.
Because in writing...
You Are Free!

Somebodies
People who try to act like somebodies,
are truly the biggest nobodies.
The truth is,
that being is somebody is a good thing.
Because everyone is a somebody on their own way.
Whether you're a broken winged-bird.
Or a barren field covered in snow.
You are still a somebody!
Being a somebody is not something
that you try to be.
It's just comes naturally, no matter what road you take.

Taylor
“La Vie” (Life)
A Four Part Story of Hope

Rules

People.
People are powerful.
People are hopeful.
But people glare, and mostly tear;
People tear on what we wear,
And who we hang out with,
And what we do;
And make this true:
That we don't matter
To them we are a bunch of clatter,
All served up on a rusty platter,
We could basically just be tatter,
That they'd scatter
All over the ground like attar,
Bespatter,
Like glass, we shatter,
All around the pitter patter,
Because no matter how much we yatter
We don't matter.
They make us mentally aware
That they do not even care
On what we say or what we choose
As long as we follow their rules.
The things we do they turn into fantasy,
Take our lives and wipe all humanity,
Search our minds for all of hope,
Suck it out and leave us to mope.
And when they think we cannot cope,
We show our little sign of hope,
Let our hearts kaleidoscope;
Open up Pandora's box
And rise above the waves.
Rise

They take our emotions and shove them away,
Mold us into sculpted clay.
Follow what we know, and hide from the fear.
The fear of new direction, and the fear of jeer.
We let all the sickness towards the world,
Bear our arms through the unfurled,
Take all the things that inspire us,
And find the ones who care.
They make the world of black and white,
And sick and fear,
And harm and smite;
They find the ones who vanquish dark,
And feed them to the lies of spark;
There was no one who cared.

Care

And if no one cared, and no one saw,
The world was just a big hoopla,
The towns became a definition,
Of all the broken demolition;
They'd make us see the truth and the admission
That people are people, no need for tuition.
But then again, we are people.
We've always been dictating
When we could have been creating
A world where there's no possible telling
Of what tomorrow could be.

People are always hesitating
Of what we could do, and what we could find,
If we could only find it in our minds, then
Instead of always moderating
We could be motivating,
Instead of being penetrating
We could be populating,
And everything we've been alternating,
We could've be dominating.
Change

But then again,
We take what we believe in, and make our dreams a reality,
Using our perplectional mentality,
We take the dreams as our appointee,
Even though we know it's quite weighty;
The beliefs of what we know are unfree,
We turn them into an actuality,
For we know that if we're tied in a mess,
It will lead us to a better success,
Not the world of our distress.

We let the fire and the flame turn dire,
Because we know someone will be there to put out that fire,
And lift us up to safety,
It doesn't matter if they're hasty,
Because we'll make it out alive.
We let those sicknesses control us,
Tear us down, and then restore us,
Have the calm before the storm,
For we know that we still have hope.
Hope.

Hope will always be there, no matter what dangers life may face.

Simi
Scholastic Art Award-Honorable Mention

Isabella
Eternal Stranger

The first day is the worst day. The hallways are the red carpet, big pairs of eyes snapping photos as you close your locker. Hollywood commentators monitor your every move- the way your hair looks, what questions you answer, who you smile at. You're the hot topic of every lunch table and the circled one in every snapchat. Your outfit determines your legacy- your friends, your enemies, and ultimately your future.

Most people would crack under the pressure of being a one hit wonder celebrity, but not me. This will be my 7th first day. I've moved 7 times, and I can pretty much guarantee that this won't be my last. Mom says this is the last time she'll make us move, but I know better. Parents tell you the things you want to hear, not the truth. They never grow Pinocchio noses, even if they've told 7 very big lies for 8 years.

"Bridget!" My little sister Erin screams bloody murder from down the hallway. "You didn't put your bowl away!"

I tuck the last strand of my auburn hair into my braid and run downstairs. Mornings in the Cooper home may as well be World War One. Between Erin screaming, Mom running around the house and Dad grumpy without his morning coffee, I'm surprised I haven't dug myself a trench yet.

"Shut up, Erin," I snap back as I run down the stairs. In my old 7th grade house, we didn't have stairs. When we protested moving into it, Mom would always say, "Less climbing and more doing!" Guess that phrase kinda lost its touch by May, because here we are in yet another new home.

"I'm not ready, Bridget!" Dad hollers over Erin's whining and the pretty newscaster on TV.

“You'll have to take the bus!”
I stop dead in my tracks. The bus?
“Dad I can't do that!” The bus is an absolute no no for first day success. One step onto that hideous yellow machine and you're automatically demoted 15 rungs on the social ladder.

Mom comes down, smiling sympathetically. “Honey, Dad slept late, and I've got a meeting at eight. Sorry.”

Erin grins evilly at me from behind her bowl of Lucky Charms. People flock over Erin and her cute smile but I know better. Beneath those blonde pigtails and pink overalls is a devilish little girl who always comes up smelling like a rose no matter what the circumstance.

“Whatever.” Rolling my eyes in a dramatic way, I head over to the cereal cabinet. I reach for the familiar red box of Lucky Charms, but all I see is that disgusting cardboard gluten free stuff.

Erin bangs her spoon on the table laughing. “All gwone!”

First the bus, now this. Lucky Charms are literally my good luck charm! I haven't skipped a first day breakfast of them since Kindergarten!

Doing my best to avoid Erin's smirks, I shove a sandwich into my Nordstrom backpack and sling it over my shoulder. If Lucky Charms and a hitch to school won't work, maybe the 1000 other tips in my first-day bag might do the trick.

Of course, the bus ride is as terrible as I predicted. The seats are practically empty, and the only girl who approaches me is a brunette plastered in rainbow leggings and a cheesy smile. She's clearly still stuck in fifth grade, and I keep my distance. However, I can't do anything about the stares I get as she tries to chat. Breaking rule #3 (only acknowledge popular kids) in the first 5 minutes isn't a good way to stake your claim.
in the thriving middle school aristocracy. It's a relief when I see a huge wooden sign that screams “Sanders Middle School” in all caps. The building’s relatively small compared to my last one, but it's long and winds around the courtyard like a snake. The entrance is overflowing with kids, pushing and shoving while huddling in little gossip circles. Great, I think. Now I have a full house watching my grand descent of the bus.

Every year the move is a bit different, but I'm an alumni at this part. You have to act shy but confident, smile but sass, and most importantly, look perfect. Being the new kid is an art that I've completely mastered. It's like being that lazy kid on the soccer team; only there because their mom made them, but incredibly talented once they step on the field.

I always knew when it was coming. It was always that time of year when the snow turned to mushy dirt and ran rivers across the sidewalks. We'd sit on the weathered green couch, my least favorite thing in the world, anticipating the worst. Somehow that stupid green couch had survived every single move, whether 2 hours away or 20, without a single bruise. Every year it would lurk in the corner of the living room, whispering worries. Come March, Mom would break the news- but never in the car or at the kitchen table. The stupid green couch was always waiting for the perfect moment to jump out and ruin my life- over and over again. Every July I'd watch the sweaty movers hull it into a truck, until the whole thing disappeared and showed up two weeks later in a disarray of boxes. The whole thing seemed so pointless. If it weren't for mom deciding to pack up our lives 24/7, there would be so much gas to go around the Persian Gulf would be worth a penny.

1st grade. 2nd grade. 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th. I know more people than the president of the United States. I've made more friends than Kim K and I've been on more teams than Michael Jordan. It doesn't matter how many scribbles I scratch across the page. I always start with a blank one come fall.

Hesitating at my locker, I look around. By now my eyes are a programmed security robot. They narrow in on a girl with straight black hair and glasses. One glance at her Pokémon shirt and I know she's someone to avoid. I scan the row of lockers to my right. The shaggy haired short kid automatically blurs and so does the hippie looking skinny girl who's wearing so many colors she may as well jump into the sky after it rains. I'm about to turn around when my brain monitor beeps and flashes. One girl comes into focus, clear as daylight. She's got curly brown hair and a perfect face accented by mascara and snow white teeth. She barely carries any books but 10000 eyes bulge as they follow her AE skinny jeans down the hallway. Her perfect hands pull out a phone as two boys come up to flirt with her. If you googled the word “popular,” her photo would be the number one hit. From pretty to best clothes to best makeup and connections, this girl’s got it all.

My heart is trained for this kind of lunchroom warfare.

This is the girl I'm going to become friends with.

My early morning classes are first day typical. Everyone stares at me, the teacher takes attendance. Everyone stares at me, the teacher gives their lecture. Everyone stares at me, the bell rings. Then the whole thing starts all over again. Forget commercials, advertisements would make a fortune by putting a sign on my back.

By now I'm on first day autopilot. Sit in the middle of the classroom, pretend to whisper during the lecture, smile softly at a starer, don't act shy or overconfident. I get a few odd looks, ones I don't remember ever
getting, but I'm sure it's just because I'm rusty. A whole year without a new school can leave one out of practice.

In fact, my panic alert button doesn't go off until the lunch bell screams. In horror, I look around and realize something that's terrible — and isn't a chapter in Bridget's Guide to First Day Success.

No one has asked me to sit with them.

This is unheard of! How could, out of the 2000 million I've seen today, not one of them even ask? It doesn't matter who — building your way up the social ladder isn't hard if you have a starting place. By the looks of this, I'm gonna have a long climb ahead.

Awkward faces dart their eyes in my direction, but not one says a word. Even the curly haired popular chick lingers her hazel eyes on mine for a second. I feel a clock ticking down in my swarmed head. I need a table. Now.

Tick tock, tick tock. I look down in panic. My clothes look okay, my face isn't flushed, and my hair seems to lay perfectly in the right spots. What is Sanders Middle School's problem?

Some fat kid bumps into my shoulder. "Why'd you hit me!" he spits.

"Umm, sorry," I'm not prepared for this. Wanting to crawl back into my little shell, I wish to be anywhere, even the green couch. Anywhere but here.

"Nice shoes," snaps a blonde girl. A chorus of laughter rings out behind her.

I frown. She's wearing converse too. What's the issue? A trio of three jocks struts up by my locker. Tick tock tick tock. "You can sit with us," says the tall kid with a smirk.

"After weightwatchers!" adds the one wearing a size XXL Bears jersey. "Cause you need it!"

No no no no no. The clock raging its seizure inside my head goes off. Alarms sound as a sitcom laugh tape explodes in the background. I blink back salty tears.

Not trained in this area of expertise, I run to the bathroom. So much for the hours I spent in American Eagle's changing room, squeezing into size 0 skinny jeans. So much for the research I'd done on the perfect mascara, contour, and concealer. No product can cover up the confusion I feel as I slam the stall door shut.

I'm so busy letting tears spill out that I don't realize when the clock stops ticking. Silence echoes off the bathroom walls. I guess it's too late to do anything about the greatest first day mishap of my life.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------

Lunch goes by surprisingly quick. I slump in a bathroom stall and binge eat, trying to regroup myself. Little gnats buzz around in my head but none of them hold the answer. What did I do wrong?

I remember a time when I was playing flag football. The coach had drawn a play designed just for me to score. It was cold day, and little puffs of frost blurred the air.

Feeling confident would be an understatement. I was so ready, like a little toddler dreaming of becoming a "big girl". A smile was spread across my face, covering every square inch of it. The whistle blew. I ran the play — straight and hard down the middle, then a jab step and 90 degree turn right. It was a perfect demonstration of a flag pass pattern. I was wide open. Of course, I had seen the ball coming. The prize was spiraling at an easy angle to catch, a receiver's dream. Somewhere from the crowd a "Go, Bridget!" rose. My chubby fingers reached out to grab the ball and I watched the oval soar straight into them, smiling ear to ear like the Golden Globe winners that give 10 minute acceptance speeches.

Then the unthinkable happened. The ball dropped.

Thud, thud, thud. My heart sank like an anchor, wincing at every "Booo!"
and “Why’d you mess up!” I hadn’t understood at the time why it happened. Thinking I had everything under control, I had played easy until the whole thing slipped right out of my fingers—literally.

Collapsed here on the toilet seat, I notice something. Mistakes don’t get taken lightly.

Whatever I messed up today won’t be forgotten.

Coach never played me again after that silly game. If I don’t do something about this first day fumble quick, I’ll be the permanent 8th grade benchwarmer.

My lungs fill with air and I take a deep breath. Time to get back on the field.

I step out of the stall, only to be greeted by a familiar pair of AE skinny jeans and curly locks.

It’s Heather Hughes, (I learned her name in science) the queen of 8th grade herself.

“Hey,” I say with a casual half smile. “Ummm…” Her eyes dart back to a pair of giggling girls wearing a pound of makeup each. They stare at me like I wear nothing, and that’s pretty impressive.

“Oh, you’re the new girl.” The one wearing a crop top pulls out her phone and snaps a picture.

I see Heather’s brought ABC news with her into the bathroom.

“Yeah.” I go into first day answer machine mode again.

Heather snorts. “Where’d you sit at lunch? We couldn’t find you.”

My stupid pale face grows hot and dyes itself the color of cherry Kool-aid. Heather raises her perfect brows as I scramble to think up a response.

“Sanders Rookie Club,” I say with a sarcastic laugh. “The messed up guidance counselor made me go to it. We had to play Apples to Apples and discuss strategies on how to make friends. It was only 22 minutes but I practically died.” That wasn’t true, but at my 6th grade school I had to attend the LMS Rookies Club, and I could barely survive a week. It was my claim to fame. Bridget Cooper, the cool new kid who dropped out of Rookies Club.

“We don’t have a guidance counselor,” Heather snickers in a mock tone. “But for the strategies on making friends, I suggest listening to that part.” Mrs. Crop Top bursts out laughing. “No one wears Converse with jeans here. Get a clue.”

The past struts out and I’m left staring at my apparently inferior Converse, wondering what else could possibly go haywire. That’s when keys jangle, high heels click, and suddenly I’m face to face with a teacher.

Shoot.

“So, how was your day Bridget?” Mom smiles sweetly, ignoring my grumpy mood.

It’s Friday night, and the entire week has been a disaster. Besides the typical shoves and tripping legs, I’ve already gotten two detentions for things I didn’t do. In classes, the group avoids my presence as if I’ve got the plague. In hallways, it’s a war zone. The mass stream of civilians provides the perfect cover for the soldiers to fire their guns and missiles. No one leaves Bridget without finishing her off.

“I told you,” I accuse, glaring. “It sucked, school sucks, this house sucks, and this whole move sucks.”

Mom sets her fork down. “Aw, honey, it can’t be too bad. Remember 5th grade?”

In 5th grade my teacher hated me. The more he yelled, the more I talked, loving the attention I got for defying him. By March, I was thrown out of the class and into the gifted program, even though I got C’s and
D’s. At the time, it was tragic. Now, it seems like nothing.

“Trust me, Mom, this is WAY worse.”

I thought parents were always supposed to have their cheesy, supportive lines ready to go for emergencies, but not my mom. She goes silent anytime anything gets awkward.

“But you wouldn’t care. It’s always the same.” I can’t stop myself. The anger that’s been boiling up inside my throat begs for release. “Sorry family, I accepted a job transfer. Don’t worry about your friends or your boyfriends or your teams or anything. It’s ok! We’ll just start over. It’s the only thing you guys do best!

“Bridget...”

“Don’t bother unpacking, we’ll just pack it all up again in July. Oh, and don’t worry about making friends or basketball teams, that won’t matter. Grades? What are grades? Who needs school work, you’ll just get thrown into a new curriculum next year. Better not try too hard!” It feels good to get the truth out. 8 different lives are too much for one girl to keep inside herself.

“Are the kids being mean?” I stare in disbelief. After all my ranting, all she says is a simple sentence. No sorry Bridget for ruining your childhood, I promise it won’t continue, or oh my goodness! I didn’t realize how much stress these moves have caused! Mom just asks a simple stupid question with a simple stupid answer.

“People being mean? That’s just the tip of the iceberg,” I laugh at my own joke. How can she say that! I didn’t realize how much stress these moves have caused! Mom just asks a simple stupid question with a simple stupid answer.

“Sometimes what we’re looking for is right in front of us Bridget.”

I don’t understand philosophy, so my peas all of sudden become super interesting.

“Bridget,” Mom continues, “can you just try? For a while?”

“Ha-ha. You’re funny.”

“I’m not joking.” Mom gets a stern look on her face, the kind that shows up when I fail science tests. “Please.”

“Ok.” I roll my eyes, but the advice sticks like gum on the bleachers. As I toss and turn in bed that night, it keeps coming back.

Sometimes what you’re looking for..... Suddenly I know exactly what to do.

---------------------------------------------

She’s on the bus in seat 20, smiling absentmindedly at the world just like usual. The brown haired girl waves, smiling as bright and bold as her neon shirt. Typically I ignore the optimistic weirdo, but today is different. She’s right in front of me, so I may as well give it a shot.

“Hey,” I mumble, sitting down. “Hi!” She smiles even bigger, which I didn’t know was possible. “You look sad.”

I want to play smart alec and “no way Sherlock” her, but something in the back of my head says not to.

“You could say that,” I remark. “Don’t be! They do it to everyone.”

She looks down sympathetically. “They do it to me too.”

“Huh?”

“They’re scared of strangers. Not just Sanders, but the whole village. I came here two years ago and I finally looked it up. Some new kid back in 1998 tore up the town. He killed 3 kids in a car accident and got arrested at age 14. The whole place has been spooked since then.”

“Well that’s something.” It’s comforting to know that I didn’t bring this all upon myself, but at the same time it’s a bit worrisome that I’m labeled as dangerous. “What’s your name?”

“Ally. You?”

“Bridget Cooper.” I had a friend named Ally once, in third grade I think. She was funny but highly annoying, and she texted emojis way too much.
Her eyes light up. “I can show you the secret passage ways.”

Ally’s nice, but super confusing. “The ways to get around the bullies. I make it a game, kinda.”

“Sounds good.” Anything is better than what I’ve got going right now.

We spend the rest of the bus ride exchanging strategies and jokes, drawing out plans to keep targets off our backs.

I find it funny that I’m consulting with a nerdy girl, but I take it back once the bus stops at the dreaded Sanders Middle School. Taking on this prison is going to be a lot easier with an alliance.

School gets easier. It doesn’t get better, but it gets easier. I no longer slump alone on the toilet, but sit proud at an empty table with Ally. On Friday’s she takes me bowling and on Saturdays we go to a movie, eat at Wendy’s, or simply take a walk in the park. She somehow finds joy in everything. I’ve learned that rain is actually rebirth, loss is just an incentive to get better, and bullies just train you for later life. Even when I drop my popcorn on the sidewalk, Ally comments on how “Now the birds are fed.”

Perhaps the best part of all is the cute boy who comes up to my locker one day. I’ve noticed him before, but as he approaches me with a smile, his features get 100 times better. Nothing can compare to those golden locks, crystal eyes, and bulging muscles. Ally says his name is Alec. I’ve had boyfriends before, but that was just for show. In 7th grade when everyone was dating left and right, I’d decided to jump on the bandwagon and get a guy of my own. He was hot, (nothing compared to Alec) but he was pretty rude and creepy. I dumped him when everyone else dumped their dates.

It’s one rainy November afternoon when everything changes. Alec comes up to me after History, looking nervous.

“Hey I, uh” he stammers, running his fingers through his cute hair. “I, uh, was, um, wondering if you would want to go to the winter formal with me?”

My jaw drops in sheer disbelief.

He panics. “No, no, no, sorry it’s ok, I mean, you can say no, I don’t care, yeah…”

I laugh out loud for the first time in what feels like years. “Of course I will go!”

“Good.” We smile, hug, and walk down the hallway together with the smiling Ally.

Tick tock tick tock. My head clock starts running again, except this time it’s not out of extreme panic. This time, I’m counting down the moments until the best day of my life.

“Come on!” Ally whips her head out of the car, sending her mane of chocolate hair flying. “We’ll be late! You don’t want to be late for Alec!”

As weird as she is, I admire her optimism. I’ve never had a friend who’s actually cared so much about me. Before Sanders, friends didn’t mean someone who was actually concerned about your well-being. I had always thought friends were for security purposes- someone to sit with at lunch, someone to walk with in the hallway, someone to be partners with in science class. Maybe the best friends aren’t the ones with the most Instagram followers- they’re the ones willing to follow the most people.

“I’m coming!” I catch a quick glance at my purple gown, accented with a simple diamond necklace. The diamond pendent used to be my Grandma Sue’s, but I inherited it on my 11th birthday. My autumn colored hair is pinned up, with curls overflowing in exactly the right spots. I reach for my mascara. It almost feels alien, and I take a long hard look at the plastic tube that has boosted my self-confidence for three years. I don’t need this. These expensive chemicals might have aided my center stage
impression, but they were fake. They were always fake. Makeup was just another way to hide my heart from the world, a way to challenge the “new girl” stereotypes that I was so fearful of taking on.

The tube goes back on the counter. Surprisingly, I don’t feel bare. I don’t feel ugly or tarnished or any of the things I thought I’d feel without my little tube of lies. I feel real. And for the first time in a while, I leave the house with something truly valuable, and it’s not Aunt Winney’s china. Confidence.

“Mom! I’m home!” I rip off my wedges. Tonight was an amazing night, but the heels have got to go. Tripping your way across the dance floor isn’t the most comfortable thing to do in a tight dress.

Mom walks in with a smile plastered across her face. “OH good honey. I have great news!”

I didn’t think this day could get much better, but apparently it is.

“We’re moving again! I got another job transfer!”

I blink once. Twice. Three times. I pinch myself. The world spins around and I feel like Dorothy in the tornado, caught up in confusion that I can’t understand. My eyes frantically search the room. I’m not sitting on the green couch. Erin isn’t by my side. Every year it gets worse than the next, but this year is the final straw.

“That is, of course, unless you’d like to stay at Sanders.” Mom laughs it off as a joke, but the sarcasm registers a bit differently in my mind.

Every year the pleads are the same. I scream desperate battle cries to a commander who walks away. I slam my door, scream and holler, stop eating, but nothing works. Nothing saves me from the moving truck and cardboard boxes.

Instead, today I keep it simple. Ally once told me that simplicity can turn even the most complex situations into a piece of cake.

Screaming just adds fuel to the fire, remember? Just use water, just use water, just use water...

I look into my mom’s emerald eyes and smile a confident, radiant beam.

“Actually, Mom, I’d prefer to stay right here.”

Madeleine

Caroline Scholastic Art Award-Silver Key
Fog started to build up in my goggles, the scorching heat from the volcano started crushing my mask, and all I could hear was the sound of my breath leaking out of the cracked oxygen mask.

“My second mask is up, start the oxygen removal,” I say as I start pulling off the mask.

“Ok, Grayson, initiating it now.” I could hear Scarlett through my ear mic. Scarlett was my partner, and I climbed every volcano with her right in my ear. “Wait, Grayson, get out of there. We are experiencing a high erosion level in the inner core of the volcano!” she screeched.

“English?” I ask sarcastically.

“Run, get out of there. It's gonna blow!”

I race down as fast as I can, stumbling over tons of rock and coal. I can hear blasts of lava behind me; I turn around to look at the top of the volcano but trip backwards over a big rock and land on my head. “You've got to keep going, Grayson!”

“I can't, I'm stuck.” The rock was over my leg, and I couldn't squirm out. I ripped my oxygen mask off, and took the cord containing all the air off the mask. I put the cord under the rock, hoping that the air could give a boost for me to get my leg out. 3...2...1... it worked! I scurried up, running down as the volcano grumbled. I heard the loudest boom that I've ever heard, and then everything went silent. I know I have lost my hearing, and I know that the volcano had erupted, but this time I didn't turn back. The volcano started drooling scorching hot lava right at my feet. I feel a deep burn at the back of my feet, and now I'm lying on the ground being covered by burning lava.

1 year later

Krisko Connan awoke in his run down basement sweating. He looked over to his mom and his brother, both sweating so much, they were sleeping in a puddle of sweat. Krisko reached over towards the television remote and turned on the news.

“Another burning day in Pāhoa, Hawaii. For some reason, the Mauna Loa volcano is acting crazy. We don't know much about it now, but I'm about to talk with FBI agent, Davis Harriet. How are you Davis?” The man on the scratchy screen had a black prickly beard.
“I’m good, thanks for asking Joe.” The FBI agent was a tall black man, with a thin layer of hair on his head. “So what we discovered about the volcano was, on this exact day 1 year ago, a volcano expeditioner died on that very exact volcano, and his name was Grayson White. The only primary source we have of his death is Scarlett Crouch, a doctor who has been secretly helping Grayson climb the volcanoes. We can't communicate with her, but others can, so we are going to draw house addresses to help us out, thank you.” The FBI agent walked away.

“Ok then,” Joe the television guy spoke awkwardly, “Let's get to the drawings.” He took out an abnormally large iPad and tapped a button. Everybody watching this right now waited in silence.

“Alright, I have 5 house addresses, 42358, 7356, 9870, 3174, and 63590,” he finished. Krisko heard a high pitched shriek; he rapidly spun his head towards his mom with fear. He could see her covering her face with her hands.

“I’ll go, Mom,” he said to calm his mom down.

“No, you can get killed out by that volcano!”

“I've been studying them, and we need someone to take care of Capricio.” He references to his brother sleeping on the floor.

“Be careful,” she whispered to him. Crash! The front door from upstairs smashed open, a guard with a gun ran down to the basement and grabbed Krisko harshly. “Be smart!” His mother shouted as he got dragged up the stairs and out of the house. When he got out of the house, he immediately closed his eyes; he hadn't been exposed to sunlight in a week. It got harder and harder to breath for him, until the guard slipped an oxygen mask over his head, and shoved him into a highly advanced vehicle. Slowly, as the car began to move, Krisko looked over to the other seats, four others, sleeping.

“Take us to her house,” he could hear the guard say to the driver. The car started with a jerk, and then they were moving. For miles, the car drove closer and closer to the volcano. Suddenly it stopped. “We’re here,” the guard said opening the side door. Krisko stepped out of the vehicle and looked back inside; the other four were sweating as they slept. The guard took out a stick, and whacked the first guy with it; it made such a loud noise, all of the people in the car woke up.

The door smashed open; Scarlett ran into her basement and hid behind a couch. Slowly, slowly, slowly, Krisko kept saying to himself. They followed the guard into the basement, where Scarlett was hiding. As the guard approached the couch, Scarlett popped out and jabbed some sort of shot into the guard's neck. He dropped to the ground.
“Follow me,” Scarlett said to the rest of them, and started walking towards another door. Inside the door, there was a giant screen with a map on it, “I've pinpointed every spot the volcano has affected, and the only solution I've been able to come up with was that Grayson is alive, and is looking for me! I know it sounds crazy, but the only way to know for sure, is if somebody with a well, healthy body, such as yourselves, went to the exact spot of Grayson's death and looked for signs of life.”

“I don't know crazy lady, we might not survive.” One of the people from the car said. Scarlett walked toward him slowly then jabbed the shot into his neck.

“Don't worry, it only puts them asleep for a few hours. And I didn't want him on my team anyway,” she walked toward the 4 others and handed them each an ear mic, “put these around your ears, so I can communicate with you at the volcano.” She walked towards another door and opened it. “Follow that path straight all the way, until you hit the volcano, got it, good bye,” and she shoved the four out before they could say a word.

They walked and walked down the thin sand path, avoiding the streams of lava on the other sides. Eventually, one of the four got so tired, he fell over into the lava and got sucked away. The last three made it to the volcano, and then called in for Scarlett. “What should we do now?” Krisko asked Scarlett.

“Twist the knob on your ear mic to the right.” They all twisted their knobs. “Good, now I can see what you’re seeing.” The three started up the volcano with Scarlett in their ear, telling them where to go.

“You're there!” Scarlett shouted. The three teenagers looked down at the spot of Grayson's death. The volcano grumbled, two giant rocks came flying down the volcano, dragging two of the three into the lava. Krisko, the last one, fell through the volcano floor, falling, falling, and plump! He landed right on a little rock platform, floating on the lava inside the volcano. The ear mic had lost connection, and everything was silent.

“So, oh mighty, kid! How could I be at your service,” a sarcastic voice said, echoing around the area. Krisko looked around everywhere, but couldn't find where the voice was coming from. A huge gust of wind blew through the volcano, Krisko turned around. Grayson was running right at him, he grabbed Krisko’s throat, and lifted him above the ground. “Where is she?!?” he shouted.

“I don't know what you're talking about,” Krisko said choking. His neck started heating up, burning faster and faster. Grayson let go, and Krisko immediately grabbed his own neck. A fireball
shot from the man’s hand, it hit a large rock, the Rock collapsed, and there was a picture of Scarlett behind it.

“Where’s Scarlett!” he yelled, threatening to burn Krisko.

“I know where she is, and I’ll take you to her if you let me live,” Krisko could barely speak; he was so out of breath.

“Well then you better hang on.”

“Huh?” Grayson blasted himself right at Krisko, grabbed him, and took off into the sky.

“Where are you going? Put me down, you might burn me,” Krisko said frustrated. He squirmed to get just a little bit looser from Grayson's grip, but when he saw how high up he was, he grabbed onto Grayson's arm tightly.

“Where am I going, I need directions,” Grayson stopped in midair looking all around for Scarlett's house.

“It's that house right by the volcano over there,” Krisko pointed to Scarlett’s little house nervously. Grayson zoomed down towards the house, ignoring the the frightened teenager on his back. When he hit the ground, he flipped Krisko off his back and walked into the house in front of him.

“Hello? Scarlett?” Grayson slowly looked around the house.

“Grayson,” Scarlett came out from the basement, “it's me, Scarlett.”

Grayson took a step forward, “Scarlett, it's been so long, I've been looking for you, and now since you're really here,” he took another step forward, and reached out his flaming hand towards Scarlett.

“Well, Grayson, I can tell you have gone through some... tough times,” she took a slight pause.

Grayson got closer and closer to Scarlett, and Krisko snuck into the house. Right when Grayson was about to make physical contact with Scarlett, Krisko picked up a wooden chair, and whacked it over Grayson's back.

“We have to get him to some jail where he can't harm anyone,” Krisko said in front of Scarlett who was still shocked.

“I know just the place.”

***

“Here we are on the news once again. This is officially the 3rd day of regular temperature in Pāhoa, Hawaii, and it's all thanks to Krisko Connan and Scarlett Crouch. Grayson White is now in
a safe jail cell with his powers, so that he can't harm anybody in any way. That's all for today, thank you and goodnight.”

Krisko and his family sat on their creaky old couch finishing the news. Krisko reached for the remote and turned off the tv.

“I'm so proud of you, Krisko, you really saved the day,” Krisko’s mom kissed his head, “now get some sleep. Both of you,” she gestured to Krisko and his brother.

All three of them got good sleep, and they didn't have to worry about Grayson one bit.

William

Rory
Scholastic Art Award - Honorable Mention

Holly
Scholastic Art Award - Honorable Mention
As the teams stepped onto the pitch I could feel the grass underneath my cleats launching the adrenaline from my feet all the way to the top of my head. Sounds of the strong winds in the distance were slowly approaching the field. Dry air was entering my lungs. Rain was pouring down. I was dying to get this match started.

When we were warming up it seemed like time stood still as we did stretch after stretch. The clock inside my head kept bothering me. Tic toc tic toc tic toc. “Captains please!” the referee yelled from the middle of the pitch. Tyler and I were the captains in green. “Okay, head or tails” the referee said in his low pitched voice.

“Tails,” I answer.

“You get heads,” he tells the other captains. He throws the coin in the air, catches it, moves his hand so we can see, and it is tails. “Tails never fails.” A couple of minutes later we had discussed tactics and both teams get to their positions and the whistle is blown...

I have always liked to run around in the park kicking the ball with my brother. My parents signed me up to start playing for a soccer team when I was 5 years old in a town 15 minutes away from where I lived called Farsø. This place was where the great players in our area played and stars were made. The team challenged me to work harder every single day. It paid off. Within the first few months I am already able to keep up with even the best players on the team. I had fallen in love with the sport.

Five years later I am living in the U.S and playing my first soccer match for my new team.
I was so nervous, but I was hungry for the win. The drive was long but we finally got there and I see my teammates. We started warming up and waiting for the other team to arrive so we could finally get the match started. Our opponents never showed up. There was one team though. Our team of nine and ten year olds were facing the thirteen and fourteen year olds on the other side of the field. The whole team was surprised and thought it was unfair to play against them, but we had to. The whistle is blown and immediately we strike them with high pressure. Not afraid of them and just focusing on winning the match. I knew they were going to struggle because I was ready to give 110%. I was not giving up. Everyone was surprised because the match was very even between the two teams. Both teams had many chances and counterattacks but we had more shots and they were pushed back in defensive position.

In the dying moments of the match, my whole body was enervated. Out of breath, legs burning, muscles start giving out. But I was not stopping. I wanted to win! We had the ball. I knew we had to end this now! I saw the opportunity and took it. I rushed in to tackle the defender and I knew exactly where I was going to hit the ball. I was surrounded by all of the eleven players from their team. They were so close to me that I could feel the grass vibrating when they were running behind me, in front of me, to my left, to my right. I felt like a small fly flying all around a human in hopes of getting a free lunch. With the finest shot I hit the ball on the bottom left side and it flew like an arrow straight into the back of the net. I could hear the ball hitting the net and it sounded perfect. It felt magical. Like a dream come true. The adrenaline was flowing through my body like the fastest river as I run over to my team to celebrate. We jump all over the place like crazy kangaroos. In the middle of the celebrations I glanced toward my parents and I could see the pride in their eyes. I could tell by the coach’s expression that I totally blew his mind. The other team couldn't believe it either,
their eyes facing the ground in disappointment as we celebrate. When the other team kicks off we need to start focusing again.

They immediately rushed onto our side of the field in desperate hopes of scoring the goal to tie the game up, struggling to get past our rock solid defense to try to put the ball in the net. With every second passing by my legs start to slowly fall apart. You never know when the match is over so you have to keep pushing and pushing and pushing until the whistle is blown. As their number 10 takes a shot worry enters my mind. Please don't score. Please don't score. Our goalie Jacob flies like Apollo 13 to the right side of the goal stretching his body as far as possible to make the save... and he does.

“YEAAAAAH.” I was almost sure you could hear it all the way across the globe. We dance, smile; do whatever we want. This was so great. As the celebrations slowly end and we get over to the coach he is very proud of us and what we just did. We had loved getting to play with the U14’s... and beating them.

When I got home I was the most tired person in this whole entire universe! Being so worn out with my legs crushed I went straight to bed. We did it.

Peter
Hallie
Scholastic Art Award-Honorable Mention

Flash

My heart thumping when I hear hike
I bust through the line like lightning in the night
Spinning, moving, and grooving away
From the big, bad, ugly players

Sam
Family Over Everything

Genesis,
Giovani, Lucy
Susan, Alex, Tony,
Julie, Vicky, Vivian, Derrick,
Kobe, Marco, Sophie, Alex, Nicolas,
and Vaneza compose 16 people,
but are one loving bundle;
Family to me is like a quilt
Carefully sewn with cordiality
Each person carrying exclusive traits
As we get older our bond is irrefutable
Learning that blood is thicker than water
As agglomerations of memoirs
are distributed throughout the years
**The Ocean in Motion**

Christmas day was spent
adjacent to the bay
with fulfilling exquisite cuisine
each bite is indulged
carefully like a homeless person being
generously nourished
harmonizing with the winking waves of water
and captivating boats
all striding lithely on the crisp water
as the brisk breezes of the ocean besiege us
Aahhhhh! so this is the delectable
smell of living the life of Riley
Effortlessly, the dark night foreshadowing
The blazing sun as it was
Crumpling, leisurely drifting away

**Fireworks Ignite A Light In Our Hearts**

A combustion of people
disembark like millions
of fireworks about to detonate
all the nieces and nephews
heading beeline for the
Jungle Obstacle Course Moonwalk
hollering and squealing,
But overall hedonism
The stench of sweat absconding
Charged and ready to take over the world.
Jubilance, exuberance, and exultation
Captured on each and every champion

**Michelle**
Somebodies and Nobodies

It’s bad to be a nobody.
That’s what they all say.
But for whom?
Somebodies or nobodies,
I think it can go either way.

It’s good to be a nobody,
You are free to be yourself,
While somebodies are pushed to be perfect.
Both you and I know that no one is perfect.

We all crack,
We all have our flaws,
We are all different like the various colors of plastic straws.
Because being a nobody is standing out from the crowd.

Poetry by
Sophía

Victory

Sprinting hard,
dribbling with speed.
The cheering.
The booing.
Both loud and clear.
When you work hard a win is near.
The battle is almost over,
but the war has not been won.
There are many more games and the journey has just begun.

Sprinting hard,
dribbling with speed.
Score a goal.
Crack a smile.
The opponents’ glare,
the crowds stare.
With this new found energy,
you could run a mile.
**Your Room**

Go to your room  
You will find me there  
Leaning against  
A not so stable chair  
Once you are there  
You will see  
There is more than just one of me  
We come by the dozen In little flocks  
And hide among  
The radio box  
You can’t let anybody see  
So now  
You must scram  
With All your fright  
We hope you can sleep tonight  
In the room  
Where we will be leaning against the not  
so stable chair

**With Me**

This is very rare  
I would assume  
As I watch the sky fade to dark blue  
As the stars pop out  
The night you see  
Right above you and me  
I tell you to close you eyes for just a mo- 
ment  
And let the breeze take you  
I open my eyes and the dark blue is gone  
I have lost you too  
To where it is I cannot tell  
So I close my eyes again  
And there is no dark but  
Blues and greens and pinks  
And you’re there taking in it all, with me
The day was gorgeous, the sun shining here in Kansas City. I was sitting up in my families' creaky old apartment, looking out of the frosted glass window. My family was at the top of the skyscraper building, level 20. Mama's in the kitchen making her famous Pot roast, Papa in the office groaning at the tax bills, and Emily in the playroom amusing herself with her beat-up Barbie dolls, most of which have had a haircut done 'specially by Ems.

"Aiden, set the kitchen table, I asked you ten minutes ago!" screams Mama from the kitchen.

As I saunter into the room, a scent fills my nose! Filled it up so high, I close my eyes for a minute and breathe it in.

"What are you doin', set the table!" commands Mama from her post behind the counter.

Before obliging, I hear a knock on the door, and quickly race to grab it.

"Hello!" I greet before even opening the door all the way.

"I need talk to Mrs. and Mr. Darren?" instructs the black landlord of our building, barging in.

"Sure, one minute, if you please, Mr. Dackle. Please come in," responded in a fright. Scrambling into the kitchen I warn Mama and Papa who's here.

"Aiden, sweetie, you and your sister STAY OUT OF THE WAY! Papa and I will deal with this. Take care of your sister, and stir the roast every five minutes," whisper screams Mama, trying to hide her terror.

"John, we have a guest!" she then calls.

As instructed, I wander into the playroom and join Emily in her 'so amusing' game of dolls. "Hey, Ems!"

"Hi, A! Who was at the door?" Emily questions in her baby-like voice.
"Oh, just the landlord, no big deal," I lie, but hey! You can't blame me for protecting my baby sister; she's only five for crying out loud!

"Aiden! Come here sweetie!" beckons Mama.

My lightning fast feet burst into the room without time for my body to control them.

"Yes?"

"Did you see a white man running outside of the building a few minutes ago? I know you were looking out the window," asks Mr. Dackle.

"No? Must've been the other side. Why?" I respond, protecting Mr. Wern, who was, in fact, running outside.

"The man is being accused of..." starts Dackle.

"May I speak?" questions Mama.

"Let me finish!" Dackle booms.

Papa stands up, looming over the rest of us, and speaks slowly and angrily, "Do NOT speak to my wife that way!"

Bad decision.

Now Mr. Dackle rises, walking toward Papa, "I can speak to you whites whatever way I want! You're worthless, pieces of trash!" At least he spoke what everyone else thinks...

I try to sneak away, but Mama catches me red handed. "Don't leave, we are having a conversation!" she accuses.

I decide it's time to speak up. "I don't know what you guys were talking about, but I do know that us whites should have as many rights as you blacks! Just because of our skin color, doesn't mean we have any less quality than you! Mr. Wern should have the right to do his exercise outside of a building because it's a beautiful day! No excuses! This does NOT just go for him, either. Many a time have whites been punished because we do things that we should have the right to do but don't! Just because we're white doesn't mean we're idiots! If anything, blacks are the idiots for not realizing this!" I blurt.

The landlord slowly meanders over to me, making me back up into the rustic, cream wall. Everyone is thinking the same thing 'He just let the cat out of the bag'. "I admire you standing up for what you believe in," he says, smile plastered on his shiny black face, "but that's the rules. What is a small, incapable boy like you gonna do about it, hmm little Mr. think-I-own-the-world?"

"Excuse me, but I don't think you have the right to blab to my son like that!" Mama protects.
"You're darn tootin' I do! Glad of it, as well. Now I can put y'all in jail for the fun of it," threatens Mr. Dackle in an aggressive tone.

To make it worse, Emily comes trotting into the living room with her favorite dolls, colored with markers for clothes, and remarks, "Oh, we're playing jail! I call security guard!"

"Ems, wrong time! Go back into the play room, please!" Mama requires, "Hon, will you take her back into the playroom?" asks Mama to Papa, and as he gets closer, she whispers, "I'll take care of Aiden, the poor baby."

Dad nods, and returns Emily to the playroom.

After a long fight, the landlord leaves, taking my pride, and some of the pot roast. We're left with a couple slabs of meat, and about three cups of gravy, all to feed four of us.

After cleaning the dishes, I head to the back room of the tiny apartment, also known as my room. In there, I lay on my hard bed pondering over the reality of this world. 

How did the Emancipation Proclamation free slaves, but not ban segregation? Why can I only know about the Emancipation Proclamation from Mama, Papa, and books found in rotting old dumpsters? Why do people have to go through this? People are people; why do people think differently? Why would God let this happen? Why do blacks think this is right? Has there ever been a white leader? Why doesn't the president change this? Why can't I have an education? Could I possibly be a leader one day? Who is trying to change this reality? What can I do?" A thought hits me, and as it does, I bolt out of my confined bedroom space and clutch the phone.

Putting in my best black boy accent, I start talking. "Hello, my name is Muhammad, and I would like to speak to the manager please," I inquire, a forceful tone escaping the walls of my mouth.

"One moment please," comes the other side. After a moment, a different voice clogs the receiver. "Hello?"

"Yes, hello. My name is Muhammad. I was wondering if there was a booking for the stage free soon, maybe October 13?" I ask, voice shaky with excitement.

"Yes, the stage is open that day. May you specify what for before you make the reservation?" he confirms.

I hesitate, unsure of what to speak next, "Uh, it's a surprise!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but we need to know specifics before making the reservation. We
can't allow you to book unless we know.
Policy," enforces the man on the receiver.

"Yes, I understand. It is a lecture,
more or less." I cringe.

"For whom and what?" interrogates
he.

"Anyone who wants to come, and a
lecture on fairness," Well, it's half true.

"How long will you need the stage
for?" he asks.

"An hour at most," I inform.

"Any specific time?" he asks.

"Whenever is available," I
compromise.

"Any setups needed?" Man, he's
interrogating me!

"Just a podium and a microphone," I
suggest.

Last question...

"To whom and where should I charge
the bill to?" inquires he.

Aw, man! First of all, if I said my
Mama's and Papa's account, I would be
busted. Second, if I cracked open my piggy
bank, I wouldn't have enough, and even if I
did, I'd have to give my real name away! This
can't be good!

"May I do cash up front, please?" I
inquire.

"We can certainly do that Mr.
Muhammad, there are just a few conditions.

Number one is you'll have to come in early to
fill out a form, about 30 minutes tops. Just
ask at the front desk. Two, it all has to be
there, no giving in sections." responds he.

Why was I so stupid to think this
would work? "Let's book it!" I agree, mouth
moving with a mind of its own.

"Okay, October 13, 1:00 to 2:00 pm,
please be in at 12:30 to fill out papers." he
confirms.

Now all I have to figure out is how to
find the money to pay $150! That's going to
be easy...not!

"Aiden, bed time! Take a shower and
brush your teeth. I'll be in in fifteen minutes
to say goodnight!" suggests Mama.

"Come on, Mama! It's only eight
o'clock. It's not like I have school or
anything!" I plead.

"No, but we have work! You need
sleep! Go to bed!" harshly forces Mama.
I oblige, unhappily.

"insert dream sound here"

I wake up in a fright, not wanting, not
needing to remember those hard days. My
legs are spread out on the sleek leather sofa
placed in my dressing room. My suit is a little
wrinkled, nothing that a pat down can't fix.
All my brain can think about are the days.
The days where I raised $200 walking dogs and bake sales for the opportunity to speak in front of people. 300 to be exact, I got a friend at city hall to print out flyers. From that day forward, I was a protester for white rights, I wanted everyone to be equal because no one is better than the next. Today, my biggest speech of all, one that could change my life forever... everyone's life forever... I stepped up to the podium and cleared my clogged throat.

"God gave us the gift of life, a life worth living. If we can't live that life to its full potential, there's no point. If God's intention was for us to live, let's live!

On May 12th, 2016, our black landlord came into our apartment, convicting Mr. Wern, who unfortunately could not be here tonight, of going outside to exercise. When I was pulled into the equation, I felt the need to speak up, I quote, I don't know what you guys were talking about, but I do know that us whites should have as many rights as you blacks! Just because of our skin color, doesn't mean we have any less quality than you! Mr. Wern should have the right to do his exercise outside of a building because it's a beautiful day! No excuses! This does NOT just go for him, either. Many a time have whites been punished because we do things that we should have the right to do but don't! Just because we're white doesn't mean we're idiots! If anything, blacks are the idiots for not realizing this! In this time I was almost put in jail.

From that day, I admit, we have made changes, but not enough. Let's change! Today, I stand in front of you all asking for one simple favor...to simply accept the person standing next to you. This is the only way we will not perish, but live hand in hand, almost like a Happily Ever After.

*Georgina*

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*Georgina*
I've read it in books.
I've seen it in movies.
"I feel invisible," they complain.
"It's like I'm invisible," they whine.
They don't know what they're talking about.
They don't know what it means to really be invisible.
When I was born, the nurse knew that the baby was special.
She just didn't quite know where the baby was.
My name is Olivia Ibis Nisby.
Liv I. Nisby.
Which is spelled with all the same letters as invisibly.
Because that's me.
Invisible.
When I was born, they told my parents to keep me a secret. As a baby, they didn't want me to have to deal with the press, at least until things got figured out.
Things never got figured out.
As a newborn, they took me into the science labs and did everything they could possibly do to me. But I was still invisible.
Apparently it has something to do with the way light reflects off of me or something. They say that technically my eyes are green, my hair is brown, my skin is warmly tanned. They put face paint all over me once. They said I was "strikingly beautiful". I heard one nurse whisper to her friend a couple minutes later, "It's a shame she's invisible. No one can see her beauty." But really, that's not
what I care about. I just want to see my eyes. They say the eyes are a window into the soul, and I want to make eye contact with someone. But every day, when I look in the mirror, I still see that same empty bathroom.

I've never worn clothes. Which is why it's a good thing we live on the southernmost part of California, in the middle of nowhere, where it hardly ever gets too cold, and there's not a lot of people. I wore clothes as a baby, because all babies need diapers, but when they realized I was going to stay invisible forever, they figured it would just be creepy to see outfits floating in thin air. As if it wasn't creepy to see diapers floating in a stroller.

I'm never going to get braces or get my ears pierced. Thank goodness I don't need glasses. I always wear my hair down because ponytail holders are visible. I can't carry anything on me, from a purse to a phone to my dog Elvis Ian B's leash. At least not in public. Notice Elvis I. B. has all the same letters that "visible" does.

I was 12 when my life changed.

It was 9:17 AM.

I woke up on a Saturday morning like I usually do. I went downstairs for breakfast, and my mom was already there as usual. Along with a breakfast of steaming hot pancakes.

I sat down and dug in after a quick "Good morning."

No, you cannot see the food as it travels along my digestive system.

"Olivia."

"What?" I asked, my mouth full.

My mom slid a piece of paper over to me. It was a letter, and it said something like this:

_Dear Mrs. Nisby,_

_We have become aware of your daughter Olivia. Confirmations with various hospitals confirm for us that your daughter is indeed invisible._

_I am the principal of a private school in Utah for children such as yours. I am asking that you consider sending Olivia here to learn with us. She would be around other kids like her, and she would get the education she needs. She would be able to visit you often, as she will have breaks for every holiday, and many long weekends, because we know a lot of our students come from all_
around the globe.

It went on to state the tuition, how glad they would be to have me, etc., etc. It was signed by Principal Daniel Glass.

Indeed invisible.

All around the globe.

Goodman Middle School of Utah.

"There are others," I said hollowly.

"Apparently," my mother said. "They've been sending us letters for a while, but I always had doubts about the legitimacy, the safety, the costs..."

"But you want me to go now."

"I think we could try it out."

She was giving me that worried look, where her eyebrows scrunched together like caterpillars frozen in time.

Like she was hopeful I would say yes.

But also terrified that I would say yes.

I took a breath to give my answer, but then my dad walked in, wearing his flannel pajama pants and a t-shirt from who-knows-where. Probably Target.

"So, what'd she say?" He asked this in a loud voice that disrupted the mood like a pebble dropped in a serene, glassy pond, sending waves through the air that toppled my boat with all my thoughts in it.

With my train of thought scattered at sea, my mother answered for me.

"I just told her."

"I'll go," I said. After all, if it was really bad then I could just tell my parents that and they'd let me go back to living my life that nobody knew about. And it would be nice to have friends. And school wouldn't start for another month anyway.

A month passed a lot faster than I thought it would.

I wasn't worried about whether I could keep up with the other kids my age in school. The letter had said that the kids there started school at all different times in their lives, and my parents had homeschooled me on the basics of math, English, science, and history. I could read and write, and knew how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide. I knew my grammar and spelling. I knew about
the Civil War and the Revolutionary War. What I didn't know was how to make friends. How does one get along with other people their own age? What are other people even like? I'd seen other people, and I'd read about them, and kept up with them by the news, the newspapers, and my magazine subscriptions. But I'd never had a real flesh-and-blood friend, besides Elvis and my sister.

Did I mention my sister? Her name is Marilyn Hope, but everyone calls her Bubbles because for the longest time, she's loved water. She swims on her swim team, and her room is decorated like the ocean. She wants to be a marine biologist when she grows up. Or an Olympic swimmer. What most people don't know about her is that she had gills. They removed them only a year ago. She has scars on her sides from the surgery. She's 10 years old now and the smartest 10 year old I've ever met.

She's also the only 10 year old I've ever met. But not having gills, she had to learn how to breathe and swim at the same time all the time, because she'd always been able to breathe water through her swim suit if she had to.

I won't be able to bring either of my friends to school. I'd have to make new ones. My parents drove me to Nevada, where there was a bus that would take me to school with all the other kids. My mom told me that plenty of the boys and girls were probably new as well, but I knew that plenty of them would probably be coming back from last year, and they would already have friends.

Before I knew it, I was sitting in a faded gray seat, squashed against a window, in a bus with barely any people. At least, barely any people I could see. The people I could see were strange. Like freaks of nature strange. Not like Siamese twins. They're not freaks, because they can be explained. Those people I was looking at, they were unexplainably freaky.

Like me. There was a boy with three eyes. I saw a boy and a girl with wings like angels. One girl had red skin. Another boy's skin was a deep violet color. Another boy and a girl had watery blue skin and webbed fingers. I wondered if they had gills too.

Some children looked perfectly normal, besides the haunted look in their eyes. Their countenances were grim and stone gray, weathered by years of not fitting in.
I saw a boy walking down the aisle. His hair was tousled and light brown, like sand. Not peachy, sun warmed beach sand, but dusty desert sand. He had gray eyes and a sharp, elfish jaw line. I saw him eyeing my seat, and I prayed that he wouldn't decide to sit next to me.

He sat next to me.

"Oh!"

I'd say the look on his face was priceless if I hadn't been so terrified. If my heart hadn't been beating so fast at my first encounter with someone my own age.

"Sorry - I mean, it's fine, I'm just - yeah, hi, I'm..." I stammered helplessly.

"Invisible." The boy simply said.

"Yeah," I said. Thank goodness he couldn't see the heated blush I felt rising to my cheeks. There are some perks to being invisible.

"I'm...Olivia. Olivia Nisby."

"I'm Dylan," he said. "Have you been to Goodman before?"

"No," I admitted.

"Neither have I," he said. "These people..." he gestured to the kids slowly filling up the bus, "are crazy. You're the least crazy person that I've seen." Dylan realized his mistake immediately. "Or well, um, met."

"It's ok," I laughed it off. But my mind was firing questions like a machine gun. Was I doing ok? Did he think I was weird? Should I ask him a question? Human society is rough. "I think you're the least crazy person here."

"Well, I'm, ah, I guess you could say, a shape-shifter," Dylan said. "So it is pretty crazy."

I'd read about shape-shifters in the many books I had read. Books were the only thing that connected me to the outside world. "You shift shapes... like into animals?"

"Yeah," Dylan said. "I'm hoping to learn to control it better. It doesn't help when you keep turning into a rat in the middle of class."

We both laughed. Like, we laughed together. I hardly ever laughed. It probably looked weird to see Dylan laughing at what appeared to be the window, but he didn't care, and neither did I. I just hoped I would be doing a lot more laughing in the days to come.

Before I knew it, the bus had come to a stop in what appeared to be the middle of nowhere.

"Where's Goodman?" Dylan asked.

"I don't know," I replied softly. People had started filing out of the bus, and Dylan and I followed
them. Everyone huddled in a large group as the bus pulled away, leaving them stranded in the middle of the desert.

A man with slick black hair and striking icy blue-gray eyes stepped to the front of the group.

"Welcome to Goodman Middle School of Utah," he announced in a smooth voice that carried through the dry desert air. "If you belong in the high school, please follow Jeremiah to your designated entrance." He gestured towards a man who appeared to be half bear. He grunted and began walking away, and a group of teenagers happily followed him. "If you belong in the elementary school, please follow Bella." A minuscule woman with pointed, elf-like ears led a small group of young children away to their right.

The man turned to face my group again, which had diminished greatly. I then realized that there were only about 15 middle school kids. Not even enough for one class. And if you split them into 6th, 7th, and 8th grade...

"Welcome, again to Goodman. My name is Mr. Glass, and I am your principal." He scanned the group menacingly. "I am now going to open the entrance. As you walk by me, please tell me your name, and whatever got you here. Like mind-reading." He then pointed his finger at what appeared to be a distant, almost-dead tree, but his finger stopped, as if he were pressing a button. Then a whole section of the scenery slid to the left. I realized that what I was seeing was a huge dome over the whole school, but it made it look like just a continuation of the desert. I don't know how they got it to look so realistically 3D, but I thought it was the coolest thing I had ever seen.

As the huge door slid away and revealed the actual brick-and-mortar buildings of the school, and whole new wave of fear rushed over me, like when you notice a giant spider sitting right next to you. I had to go in there. And learn. And make friends. And live there, without Elvis or Bubbles. And I had to survive it all.

Mr. Glass stood at the edge of the doorway as kids filed in past him. I stayed right behind Dylan at all times.

"Dylan Hills," he said when he got to Mr. Glass. "Shape-shifting." He nodded and checked him off his list. Then it was my turn.

"What's your name?" Mr. Glass asked the kid behind me, because he wasn't saying anything, because it wasn't his turn. Because it was mine.

"Olivia Nisby," I said, ignoring the fact that he jumped in surprise when I said it. "Invisibility." He nodded and checked my name off of his list, muttering, "We've never had one of those before."
then noticed that his eyes were not blue-gray, but one was icy blue, and the other was devoid of color, a grayish circle surrounding a pupil as dark and deep as a black hole. I believe that was a condition called heterochromia iridis.

I hurried on and entered the school grounds, joining the huddle of students waiting for the rest of the kids to get past Mr. Glass.

"Mr. Glass looks perfectly normal," Dylan was murmurining to another boy as I walked up.

"He can read minds," the other boy said. "As long as he's making eye contact with you. I don't really know much else. He wasn't here last year. Our old principal retired, and I guess they hired him."

"He can't read my mind then," I said. Both boys jumped at the sound of my voice.

"Olivia!" Dylan said. "This is Conner. This is his third year here. He's another shape-shifter."

"You're invisible," Conner stated.

"Yes," I said, even though it wasn't really a question.

"Most people usually have one or two more people like them, but I've never heard of someone who's invisible."

Great. I'd come here to be around more people like me. All I was around with was more freaks.

The rest of the day was a blur. Before long I had walked my schedule, gotten my dorm room, and was settling down for bed with another 7th grade girl.

Her name was Zoe Fringlec, and she was freezing cold. She always wore special heated gloves because everything her hands touched turn to ice. Just her hands, though, so her pillow remained perfectly thawed in the morning.

She was nice enough, but she always watched me in that way I'd already seen people do in the short time I'd been here when they think I'm not looking. She looked at the sheets as they flew up, at my slippers as they shuffled across the floor. She looked at the empty space with those frosty blue eyes of hers.

But she was the least of my worries this morning.

Dylan was in my first class of the day, which was literature. Our teacher's name was Mrs. Bulberry, and she had four eyes. Which meant she could read books twice as fast. She was a very nice lady, actually.

But in the middle of the class, a voice came over the intercom.

"Mrs. Bulberry?" It was Mr. Glass.

"Yes?"
"Can you send Dylan Hills and Conner Vercelli to the office, please?" I didn't like the sound of Mr. Glass's voice. It was like he was faking cheeriness. But neither Dylan nor Conner could have done anything wrong already.

"They're on their way!" Mrs. Bulberry said, with her realistic eternal cheerfulness.
Dylan and Conner slowly got up out of their chairs and walked out the door, silent as a pair of hunted hares.

Classes continued on without them, but at lunch I finally got to talk to them.

"Dylan?" I skidded to a stop behind Dylan and Conner's lunch table. We had lunch outside, in a large grassy area scattered with picnic tables, and their table was under a large tree.
Dylan glanced around in surprise, then realized it was me. "Olivia?"

"What did Mr. Glass want you for in English?" I asked.
Dylan's eyebrows were bunched together like the wrinkles at the edge of his shirt from twisting it around his fingers with anxious energy. "Nothing."

"It's not nothing," I said, my invisible green eyes narrowing.

"He was just trying to learn more about shape-shifting." Conner was much better at lying than Dylan was. But I was mostly uneducated, not mostly an idiot.

"Come on, I can tell you're lying," I said disapprovingly. "What did he say?"
Conner shrugged. Dylan bit his lower lip.

"He wanted us to help someone, using our shape-shifting," Dylan said. Dylan was also worse at keeping secrets.

"Help who?" I pressed.

"We can't tell you," Conner explained. "He'd know."

"Who would know?"

"Mr. Glass," he said. "Because he can read our minds. And he told us not to tell anyone."

"Oh," I said.

"Sorry, Liv," Dylan said.

"It's fine," I said calmly. But my head was buzzing with questions. What was Mr. Glass doing that he didn't want the other student's to know? It couldn't be that bad, because then Dylan or Conner would have told me for sure. So it had to be a good thing. Then why would he tell Dylan and Conner about it, and not the whole school?

I was pulled back to reality by the bell. Lunch was over. Time for science.
Mr. Connelly, the science teacher, seemed to be half-amphibian. He was bald, and had green eyes, a long tongue, and webbed fingers and toes. No gills though.

To my surprise, I was called down to the office half-way through the period. I walked down to the office, almost getting lost twice. When I got there, Mr. Glass took me into his office.

Only then did I understand why Dylan and Conner were too scared to tell me. Being alone in that room with those multi-colored eyes staring at the wall behind me gave me the chills. Mr. Glass was an intimidating man.

"Olivia," Mr. Glass smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. Nothing could soften that gaze.

"Hey," I say, because what else is there to say?

"Have you heard of the Glass Shadow?" It was probably the last thing I had expected him to say.

"The mastermind criminal?" I responded. "Of course."

"Did you know that if you unscramble the letters in her name, it spells "Dash Lowsgas"?" Mr. Glass said. He probably felt very cool saying that. Then again, I hadn't even known the Glass Shadow was a she.

"Did you know that if you unscramble the letters Liv I. Nisby it spells "invisibly"?" I felt that very cool saying that.

Mr. Glass tilted his head and looked down his nose at me. "Very interesting. Did you know that she is planning on robbing the Natural History Museum of Utah next?"

My face went slack. "Oh, really?"

"Yes," Mr. Glass said. "And you're going to help her do it."

"Oh, really?" I said, raising one sassy eyebrow.

"I don't appreciate that tone, Olivia. I mean it. And we're both going to get lots of money for it." I saw his jaw muscles tighten as he gritted his teeth. I felt a moment of pleasure for making this creepy principal start to lose it. Until he said, "You leave tomorrow."

"What?"

"You will meet Dash, and she will tell you what to do. You'll go in, take the artifacts, and get out. You'll be back here before you know it." He paused a moment before adding, softly, "No one will miss you."

He wanted me to help a criminal rob a museum. I considered this for a moment, then said, "How do you know that she's going to rob the museum?" Some radical part of me wondered if he was the Glass Shadow. I mean, his last name was Glass.
"I don't know if I can trust you with that information," Mr. Glass said.

Because he couldn't read my mind.

Because I'm invisible.

That's still pretty sketchy though.

Or should I say, shady.

I had to take this job, no matter how despicable it sounded, because in doing it, I could get Mr. Glass to stop doing whatever he was doing, using freaks of science to help criminal masterminds.

I realized he must have been doing this with Dylan and Conner too. Turning into an ant to get in somewhere, then turning into a human, stealing something, then running could be very helpful to someone like the Glass Shadow. And that made me mad. He had pressured them into this, as I know they would've never done it unless he had threatened them somehow.

But he would never know that. Because he couldn't read my mind.

Mr. Glass drove off with me in a car the next day at 6:00 AM, an hour and a half before school started.

The car was simple, typical. Unsuspicious. Unsuspecting.

Mr. Glass clamped a metal bracelet on my wrist. At the push of a button on his remote, lights turned on, showing him exactly where I was. He could even make me make noise.

Dash was staying in an empty office complex in Salt Lake City. The drive there was an hour and a half long. We parked the car in a parking garage and walked to the building. We entered through the back door, and climbed three flights of stairs.

We found Dash sitting at a desk, surrounded by stacks of cardboard boxes. The blinds were pulled, and no lights were turned on.

"Name." Her voice was gravelly, dangerous, and feminine. Sly, but dignified. And way too intelligent for her own good.

"Daniel Glass and Olivia Nisby."

There was a pause.

"She really is invisible."

"Yes. Where's the money?"

"You don't get money until she does her job."

Dash Lowsgas stood and walked towards us. Her hair was pulled back in an elaborate braid. She had high cheekbones and a broad forehead. She was maybe 5 1/2 feet tall. She could run very fast,
based on the muscles rippling in her legs as she stalked towards us. Her serpentine eyes caught on my bracelet, then raised to where my face approximately was. I tried to hide my shivers as she glared daggers at me. Goosebumps were crawling up my spine like a tidal wave. I couldn't even tell what color her eyes were. Brown? Green? Gray? They could've been orange, for all I knew. But they were very intelligent, like she was analyzing everything she saw, everything we did.

So this is what a criminal looks like. I'd expected something more laid back, like she didn't care. I'd always pictured criminals as greedy people who had given up on life or were just very, very confused. But this criminal was not confused. She knew exactly what she was doing.

"You may go now."

It took me a moment to realize that she was dismissing Mr. Glass.

"You will return here to pick up this...Olivia...in 24 hours."

A whole day with Dash. Then sleeping who knows where. With Dash. A murderer, thief, mastermind.

Sounds fun.

I had no idea how much thought and planning and time and effort it took to plan a robbery. Dash wanted to steal some artifacts from the storage rooms after the museum closed tonight, then sell them for some big money.

"You can't steal anything big, because people are going to recognize it when you try to sell it. But we're trying to steal something a little less...documented. But something that people would still want to see in a museum," Dash lectured me. She made me memorize the floor plans of the museum, the guard schedule, where every single security camera was, where the keys were to unlock every door. Once I asked her how she knew all this.

"I can read minds," she said. "Like Glass can."

"How did you know I existed?" I asked.

Dash tilted her head. "Your...principal didn't tell you?"

"No, he didn't," I said.

"You were on a website," Dash said simply.

"I'm on the internet?" This was a terrifying idea for me, as my whole life I've been hiding from the public, the press, and most certainly social media and the internet.

"On Glass's website," Dash explained. "He has all of you guys out there. People like me find kids like you very useful. You're pricy though, so you better do your job well, because all you have to do
is successfully steal something, it doesn't matter whether you or I get caught doing it, I still have to pay you."

So Mr. Glass was the real mastermind here. But it meant that I could purposefully get caught. Successfully steal something.

But it didn't matter at all to me whether I was successful or not. I didn't care whether Mr. Glass got money or not. I actually didn't want her to get money. I just had to make sure I didn't get caught.

So I had my plan.

Kind of.

Dash and I were there, watching, hiding, as the museum closed. Dash had placed cameras there last week, and we watched on her phone as the tourists emptied out of the museum like water runs out of a popped water balloon. The museum staff cleaned and locked up the museum for the night. Then we prepared to go.

Apparently, my bracelet was also a tracking device, so as Dash switched off my lights, she turned on the tracker, and so now she knew exactly where I was.

Great.

I climbed in through a window, landing on the smooth tiled floors as soft as a ballet slipper. The museum was cold, colder than the fresh Utah autumn air outside. The floor was like ice on my bare feet. I glanced around, even though I knew that no guards would be there right now. I knew one, Luke, would be coming around the corner to check on the fossils in three minutes. I had to stay silent in this hallway, then after he passed I could go back around the corner he had come from.

Luke was tall and handsome and very, very tired as he came around the corner. As soon as he was out of sight behind the T. Rex, I slipped around the corner, almost running into a "Welcome, Please Give us Money" sign. Well, it actually said "Donate Here, and Help us Make Your Experience Better." You get the gist of it.

I found the key to the storage rooms, then I unlocked the door and headed downstairs. Dash had told me that sometimes the scientists worked overtime on the artifacts in the basement. That was where being invisible came in handy.

I ditched the key at the edge of the top step of the staircase, then padded noiselessly down the concrete stairs. Rows and rows of tables and labeled boxes filled the entire basement beneath the dark museum. I wandered the aisles for a minute, before finding what I was looking for.
A late-night scientist, tiredly tucking a stray strand of hair behind her ear as she tugged a cart full of boxes down an aisle.
Then I realized something.
I was about to reveal - to a scientist, of all people - that I existed. Invisibly.
But scientists had dealt with me before.
I cleared my throat.
No reaction.
I hope you're not deaf or something, I thought anxiously.
I cleared my throat again.
The scientist paused, glancing around with a slightly annoyed look on her face. Her eyebrows furrowed and she glanced back at the boxes she was pulling, then started walking again.
I sighed. "Excuse me?"
The scientist stopped. "Who's there?"
"You can't see me."
"Why? Where are you? You sound young, like a child."
"I'm invisible."
She looks really annoyed now. "Just tell me who you are."
"I'm Olivia Nisby, I'm 12 years old, and I'm invisible. I've come to warn you, and I don't have much time.
"The principal of my school has a website where she sells kids like me to criminals to help them with their crimes. The Glass Shadow, also known as Dash Lowsgas, is outside, waiting for me to steal one of your artifacts. Please, I don't want to be a criminal. You can catch her."
"Hands up, both of you."
The fear, the terror that overcame me at that moment is indescribable. My whole body went numb, my heart stopped working, and my brain drowned in a wave of panic. The voice was low and gravelly, yet feminine.
Sly, but dignified.
And way too intelligent for her own good.
Dash Lowsgas.
The scientist's eyes widened as she recognized the mastermind that was all over the newspapers.
Her hands slid above her head. It took me a moment to realize mine had followed suit.
I slowly turned to face the Glass Shadow. And I then realized why they called her that.
Glass had a shadow, a rippling, translucent shade on the floorboards of the kitchen, but it wasn't like other shadows. It wasn't a solid gray thing, it wouldn't protect you from the sun. It was almost... Invisible.
But there nonetheless.
And Dash, standing there in all black, with the distant emergency lights of the museum basement illuminating her from the back, was exactly that.
A Glass Shadow.
You almost had to squint just to make out the outline of her face, her eyes as dark as a winter midnight, her cheekbones as sharp as knives.
Her gun as black as tar.
Pointed straight at me.
"Little do you know, Olivia, that I don't have to make eye contact with you to read your mind."
I couldn't even move as this sunk in, as slow and thick as oatmeal.
"Do you realize what you've done, Olivia?"
What, was all I could think. What did I do.
"She has to die. Now."
No.
"No."
"No?" Dash's gun had shifted, pointing straight at the poor scientist's heart. "She knows, Olivia. You told her. No one can know." I could hear the scientist hyperventilating behind me as Dash released the safety on the gun. Click. "You of all people should understand this."
My next move was purely impulsive, too fast for Dash to react to my thoughts.
I bet she couldn't read between the lines of adrenaline.
The gun was out of her hands and pointed at her forehead it less than a second.
"Call the police!" I rasped. The scientist, her hands shaking, whipped out a phone and dialed 911.
Dash sighed. "Do you know how many times I've had to break myself out of jail?"
With that little distraction, the distraction of her voice, was all she needed.
I'd forgotten.
The mastermind part of criminal mastermind.
Daniel Glass, of all people, jumped down from some boxes to my right. I don't even know how the
gun got from my hand to Dash's.

With Dash's gun pointed at me, and Glass's gun pointed at the scientist, Dash took the cap off of a sharpie marker with her teeth and scrawled Glass Shadow on the concrete floor. She then reached into the nearest box, stuffed some artifacts into her pockets, then turned and ran, Mr. Glass right behind her.

The scientist was sputtering nonsense behind me, but I knew I had to do something. I sprinted, fueled by adrenaline, after Dash and Glass.

They took a right at the top of the stairs, but thanks to my knowledge of the floor plans of the museums, I knew a short cut to where I knew they'd be going. I sprinted off in the opposite direction, my feet barely touching the ground, my breath short and fast. I could hear my heart hammering in my chest like the police knocking on doors in the movies - Boom-boom-boom.

"Open up, it's the police!" - and I wished some police would get here now.

Through the floor-to-ceiling windows, I could see the peaceful late August night outside. I was far from peaceful, however, as I could hear Dash and Glass's footsteps quickly approaching.

I was in a large, open room, two stories high. I could imagine the tourists gathered along the low glass wall that surrounded the room up on the second floor, looking down at me and the T. Rex. But they'd only see the T. Rex, of course.

Suddenly I had an idea.

I scurried up the T. Rex skeleton, like they do in Jurassic Park. Just as Dash and Glass burst into the room with an explosion of footsteps, I leapt from the precarious neck of the dinosaur, over the glass wall. And I was on the second floor.

"Stop!" I shouted in the most commanding voice I could muster.

Dash and Glass skidded to a halt. Mr. Glass squinted in confusion at the rocking T. Rex, while Dash just glared at it. I sprinted, keeping close to the glass wall, all the way around the room.

"The police are on their way."

"Olivia?" Mr. Glass looked up at my general location. "Where are you? Come down from there, we need to leave, now!"

I glanced around. There, behind me, was a snack bar.

I grabbed fistfuls of Doritos, and started hurling them at Dash and Mr. Glass.

My first one hit Glass square in the face. My bag aimed at Dash was not so successful. With barely a blink of an eye, Dash's arm whipped up and knocked my Doritos bag out of the air. I felt
strangely ticked off at this, and proceeded to send my Doritos hurtling through the air at increased velocity. Dash simply started to run through them, dodging them easily, Glass racing alongside her. They didn't slow down as they burst through the doors of the museum—And straight into the hands of the police.

What a sight it must have been.
The head of the T. Rex lay in the sand below its body, but the rest of it remained intact. Doritos bags littered the floor, and some security alarm had finally gone off. By the time I was back on the ground level, Dash Lowsgas and Daniel Glass were handcuffed and being led away. A policeman was interrogating the scientist, who was babbling nonsense and waving her hands in the air.

I, for one, didn't know what to do. None of the policemen knew I was here, they were leading the scientist away, and if I didn't get out now, I'd be locked in the museum for the rest of the night with nothing to eat but Doritos and nowhere to sleep but beside the fossilized jaws of a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

I slipped outside just as a policeman was closing the door. Once I was outside, I still didn't know what to do. Then, just as the police cars were pulling away, another car pulled up. The window rolled down, exposing one person with four eyes.

"Olivia? Olivia Nishy?"
It was Mrs. Bulberry, of all people.
"I'm here!" I shouted with joy, running to the car.
"Get in, honey!" Mrs. Bulberry said, and I gladly obliged, even more excited to find Dylan and Conner in the back seats.
"Olivia!" Smiles and a comfortably heated car greeted me.
"Hi, guys," I said, breathless as I pulled my seatbelt on. Mrs. Bulberry zoomed off as soon as my seatbelt clicked in.
"What are you guys doing here?" I asked.
"We heard that you had gotten called down to the office," Conner said. "And figured that Mr. Glass had sold you off to some criminal as well. We woke up early to see if you got picked up, and we saw you did. Then, we told Mrs. Bulberry, and we followed you here."
"We lost you though, eventually," Dylan said. "We looked for you all day. We were just about to give up when we heard the sirens."
I laughed, so incredibly grateful they had found me. They drove me back to the school, where I promptly fell fast asleep in my dorm room. The next day, Mrs. Crystal, a cheerful woman with 12 feet of blonde hair, was our new principal. They accessed Mr. Glass's computer and shut down his website, prohibiting any more kids from being sold off to the masterminds. Mr. Glass and Dash were put in jail.

And after that, I had a great school year.

_Hannah Etienne_

__Michelle__
A flower
Growing beautiful
surrounded
by thorns
caged
trapped
but that doesn’t stop it,
it

And keeps growing.
Whispering
Flowing
Secrets trapped
Moving
Mystical
magical
whispering

It flickers
Bright and burning
Surrounded
By
Darkness
All of
them
All the same
Identical
All circling the same thing
But one of them
Shines brighter than the others
Leads us

She knew she shouldn't
But she did it anyway
Everyone warned her
But she did it anyway
And even though
She did it anyway
She was
Happy

Orna
"Ding" the elevator opened to a cold and oddly smelling hallway. My sisters, Haley and Erica, stood next to me, staring into the hallway as if we were entering our worst nightmare. As we began to walk down the hallway the horror of seeing my grandmother for the last time hit me like a bag of bricks to the chest. I had not thought about seeing her for the last time until that moment.

My mother began the stunt speech she had been telling us the whole way there, "You girls need to prepare yourselves for what you might see in there, she's very sick." We walked down the hallway to a half cracked open door; the nurses were taking her blood so we had to sit in the lounge area outside. The ripped open cushions gave me as much comfort as a stab in the back. I sat, trying not to think of the condition my grandmother was in, yet the thoughts kept creeping into my brain like a catchy song. What if this was the last time we saw her? What if we didn't get to say goodbye? What if she didn't remember me? When the nurse finally came out she told my mom how she was doing. From the look on my mom's face her speech wasn't far from it. When we walked in all I could see was my strong, beautiful grandmother laying on a bed barely moving, she saw us enter the room and her infamous smile lite up the room like a candle in the night. She weakly said "Hi, girls" as we walked over to hug her.

Her hands were white, shaking, and cold, we gave her a quick hug and sat down on the chairs next to her bed. My sisters started talking about what was going on in their lives. Haley showed my grandma pictures of her boyfriend and started talking about homecoming. The conversation lagged on as Haley ran out of topics to yammer on about. When she finally stopped to look over at me and Erica for some help my mom jumped in bringing up Erica's new job to get the conversation moving. As my mom and Erica traded off topics I stayed silent, trying not to think about what I was going to say. I stared out of the dust covered window to the parking lot below, my mind wandered through the cars and people walking out of the hospital. Suddenly my mom poked me and told me it was my turn to talk.

I got up from the dusty seat by the window and walked over to the chair right next to my grandma's bed. I sat down and picked up her cold, white, veiny hand. The room was silent other than the sounds of the machines tracking her heartbeat. I tried to
talk, but the words were stuck. When she opened her eyes tears formed in my eyes like the Hoover Dam about to open. Suddenly all the times I had been anxious to leave our visits, all the times I didn't appreciate her hit me like a punch to the throat. I knew though, that there had also been times when we talked like best friends, times we laughed at my dad's stupid jokes, and times when we looked at her old pictures and I heard the stories from her childhood. So I blinked a few times, willed the tears back and talked with my grandma for the last time.

The conversation was just like any other, I started by telling her what was going on in my life, but this time it was different. I would tell her something and she would understand, but she would not respond, she just laid there staring at me.

I went on for a few more minutes running out of things to say to her about my mundane life, then I remembered something my dad told me. "Did you know my mom played clarinet?" During that time I played clarinet and it made me closer to my grandmother than ever. So I made an attempt to maybe make her feel the same connection I felt. "You know I play the clarinet, you play-" I said, but my grandmother interrupted me mid-sentence. "No, you play the cello" she said weakly. My heart dropped, I felt everyone in the room gasp at the fact that my grandmother remembered. My Grandmother could not remember her grandchildren's name. My grandmother couldn't remember she had a cat, but she remembered I played cello. I sat there trying not to cry, she had remembered. Within a few seconds I had snapped myself out of it and began telling her how cello was going. How I had learned a new song and when my concert was. I had never felt closer to my grandmother, I felt like it was just another day, sitting in her living room talking about my week.

By the time I was running out of things to say a nurse walked in saying that she had to give her evening medicine. My mom took this as a chance for us to go. I stood up, leaned over, and kissed my grandmother on the cheek. I knew this was the last time we would see her so I stood up and said my lasts words to her "Goodbye grandma, I love you." The words tasted like acid coming out of my mouth, I wanted to sit there and talk with her forever. Yet, my sisters pushed past me to say their goodbyes. I stood, trying to take it all in, I listened to the sound of the machines.
tracking my grandmother's heart. I touched her cold, white, shaky hand. I smelled the horrible mix of death and hospital food. I looked at my sisters starting to tear up as they said goodbye. As I moved closer to the door I looked back at my beautiful, strong, and inspiring grandmother for the last time, and knew I would see her again someday.

Grace

Ellie
Scholastic Art Award-Honorable Mention

Morgan
Scholastic Art Award-Honorable Mention

Simi
Scholastic Art Award-Honorable Mention
Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there lived a benevolent king and queen. They always gave what they had and never asked for more. Over time, in return for their kindness, they were blessed with two baby girls. The first was born in the spring, with brown hair that matched the bark of the trees outside and green eyes. Ten years later, the other girl was born in the winter. With skin as white as the snow outside, lips as red as blood, and hair as black as the ebony trees surrounding the forest, she was said to be "the fairest in the land." The kingdom was joyous and content but their happiness was at its peak.

A few years later, Snow White, the youngest, was being tutored to read and write. When her tutor left, she wanted to keep practicing. She lit a candle and read for an hour. When she blew it out later, the flame carried itself through the air to the shelves nearby. The only one in the library, she was vulnerable to flames, and with the oak shelves, timber walls, and paper books, this tiny spark could burn down the entire castle!

"FIRE!!" Snow White shrieked. She was frozen in fear. The king and queen both rushed into the room. The older sister, May, heard the crackles, pops, and felt the heat of the fire, so she dashed downstairs to investigate the commotion.

"Evacuate every one out of the castle immediately!" The queen fearfully yelled at Snow White. "No one shall be left behind!" She nodded her head and ran away.

Fire was extending quickly, engulfing the room in a matter of minutes. May ran, frantically trying to make her parents leave the room. A flaming beam fell from the ceiling, and she screamed. Her parents were trapped! May began to cry as the flames started to creep up her legs and onto her chest, back and arms. She fell to the floor and smothered them until they were gone, then jumped out the nearest window. Landing in the thorny bushes below, she ran into the woods, following no path with no destination.

May continued on the path for days, following the creek, her only source of water, which doubled as her guide. She had heard stories as a young child about the village by the kingdom, the only place she knew outside of the castle. Her skin still burned under the pale moonlight and smooth breeze, but as she carried on, there was a faint smell of fresh bread in the air. Puzzled, she
left the river and followed the scent, leading her to the town and the source of the smell: the bakery!

As the sun came up, the small town was bustling with workers. Quiet conversations and wonderful aromas drifted through the air. Clank! The sound of metal pierced through the shushed atmosphere. Clank! Clank! She followed the noise to the workshop of the local blacksmith. She watched in admiration as the man sculpted and broke the metal with his tools. Briefly, he looked up and saw May. Leaving his workstation, he walked to the back of the small space to retrieve another slab of a silver metal, putting the other project aside. The metal grew red-hot as he carefully sculpted it: picking, chipping, and cutting. He continued until he finished his shape: a beautiful rose. The man walked over and knelt down to May's height. He held out his hand to give the beautiful flower to her. Although the metal was silver, the glare of the sun reflected to make the creation look like a true flower.

"Hello," he said. Looking around, he asked if she was alone, and when she nodded, he invited her to come into his workspace. "Why?" May explained her tragic story of the fire, her sister, her parents and the castle to him. He seemed very friendly, and she needed some help, so she gave him her trust.

"My name is Piev. My son, Luca, is about your age; you two will probably get along. He likes to hunt, and can teach you if you'd like."

"Thank you," May mumbled.

"Luca is in the woods right now, but he should be back soon. You may explore the house if you would like." May started to walk away when Piev stopped her. "And May?" She turned around. "You can stay here for as long as you want. It's just us two, so some company may be nice." He smiled at her, and May walked away thinking that this could be her fresh start, where she could forget her tragedies, her loss, and look ahead. She knew that she had two paths: a path to darkness, hate, and revenge towards her sister, or a path to happiness, love, and peace for the rest of her life.

When Luca came home, he was surprised to see another placement at the table. Piev came into the house from working just as the sun sank below the horizon. Clearing up Luca's confusion, he introduced everyone and explained May's story. They ate their meal not inquiringly, for her benefit.
The next day, when Luca went out to hunt, May went with. Eventually, she started to go with him every day, and once she asked if she could try holding his bow and arrow, he started to teach her. He taught her the basics first, like how to aim and hold the weapons correctly. As she became better, he showed her more advanced techniques and skills. It took 15 years until they both became masters. By then, they were both 26, and May made a decision to claim the throne that was rightfully hers. She was sent off by Piev, with warm regards, but Luca decided to come with her. They traveled through the forest in the way that she came long ago.

This trip was a little different than she had expected; before they reached the castle, they made a discovery. They found a single plot of land, surrounded by a black gate and a sturdy fence. Three lonely graves were dug into the ground, with bouquets of flowers near them. Curious, May and Luca wanted to get a closer look. May knew that two of the headstones marked the death of her parents, but she didn't know who the third one was for. She wiped the dust off of the engraving and gasped. The headstone was for her!

"What? How...?" May was perplexed. "By the time I got out of the fire..."

"...No one was around, so everyone assumed you were dead," Luca finished. Thinking, May walked calmly towards the castle, with Luca close behind her. They knocked on the gigantic doors, and after a moment, their knock was answered by the kingdom's chancellor.

"Can I help you? You may not see the crown princess without a meeting scheduled." He looked very comical, for he had the traditional wig worn long ago. He was just taller than Luca, and he acted politely and properly.

"Actually, I'm not here to see the princess. I'm May. I've been in the village for the past 15 years."

"It is a pleasure to meet you, miss. I have heard stories and rumors about the fire that plagued this kingdom, but I did not know if they were true. Please come in." Even in his flustered state, the chancellor still acted very dignified.

When they arrived inside the castle, the chancellor immediately created new orders. "Gunter! Call a kingdom meeting immediately! We have important news!" The servant walked away quickly to deliver his orders.

After one hour, the entire kingdom gathered around the entrance of the castle. The chancellor and May stood on the balcony, high above the others. The room was full of anticipation; everyone was eager to find out what was so important. Whispers and quiet rumors
floated through the room, about May and the chancellor. One particularly loud comment startled her: "Why does that stranger have any authority to stand next to our chancellor?" Trying to be ignorant, she asked the chancellor to start the meeting. He agreed, and tried to get everyone's attention.

"You have been gathered here today for something that shall soon go down in history. As you may know, I was not here to witness the tragic fire from our past, but that does not mean that I am clueless towards it. I know that three died: King Levin, Queen Rochelle, and the Princess May. This woman, standing behind me, witnessed this event and survived." He waved for her to come forward. "And in two days' time, she will be our new queen. Her name... is May." Applause slowly filled the room everyone realized how critical she was to their success and survival as a kingdom.

After suppressing the enormous crowds, May followed the chancellor into her room. She unpacked her belongings; she decided to fall asleep after a long day. Shortly after being settled, she heard a soft knock on her door. She opened the door to see her sister, Snow White.

"Um... May? Are you really my sister?" She asked.

"Yes. I have been in the village for 15 years trying to forget the fire, but it was really hard. I learned how to hunt and survive in the wilderness. But since I am 10 years older, you don't have to think of me as your sister. Think of me as... your stepmother."

May became the queen, and she was doing very well: she handled requests, wrote treaties, etc. She appointed Luca to the position of the royal huntsman. She was always at the center of the kingdom's attention. But that became a problem. As everyone grew older, Snow White became more beautiful, and she became more popular than May. May became less focused on giving out kindness, and more focused on being the most beautiful and popular. Adding to her condition, Luca gave her a present to try to ease her concerns: a magic mirror. She could ask it any question, and it would answer truthfully.

Mirror mirror on the wall
Who's the fairest of them all?

You, my queen, but beware
For Snow White is just as fair.

She asked this question every day; the answer stayed the same. May paid no attention to the last part about Snow White until it affected her. A few weeks later, she still asked that question, but something had changed.

Mirror mirror on the wall
Who’s the fairest of them all?

I used to say it was you, my queen
But now it is Snow White I see.

Envious, the queen went to the village to try to prove that the information was false. But all she found was the opposite. She saw people talking and laughing in groups, so she went over to see what was so funny. She listened (for quite a while) and heard nothing, so she decided to leave. As she walked away, she heard even louder laughter and a rude remark. "Snow White is so kind to us. She should be the queen instead! Her and the queen are so contradictory, they should call them Snow White and Snow Black!"

May quickly flung off her disguise. "Who said that?" The villagers all pivoted, and when they saw the queen, they immediately bowed. "Who?" She repeated, "If no one speaks up, everyone in this group will be severely punished." One woman stood up sheepishly. "What is your name?"

"J-J-Judith Ered."

"Well, as the queen, I declare that you, Judith Ered, are under arrest for utter disrespect against me. Guards! Seize her!" Guards poured out of alleys; driveways; anywhere else concealed by shadows or walls.

"Please! Please! Have mercy, Your Highness! Please!" Judith cried. No mercy was delivered. She was the first of many that were captured, and soon enough, the kingdom was no
longer happy... again. The joy of having their queen back disappeared, and the citizens now knew better than to say anything against her.

To May, it was clear that she needed to do something about Snow White if she was ever going to be the fairest again. She was pacing the floor of the ballroom when it came to her. "Huntsman!" Luca came running into the room. "I have a job for you. I want her gone." Even though May never said it, Luca knew that she was talking about Snow White.

"Away?" He asked.
"No. I want her dead. It's the only way I'll be the fairest in the land."
"Are you sure this is what you really want?" She ignored him and continued.
"Take her into the woods and... you look uncomfortable." Luca looked slightly scared. "I don't think you'll do it. I'll just get someone else then..."

"No! I mean... I will do it. I will."
"Good. Now go."

When Luca and Snow White left, he tied up her wrists with iron clamps to prove he was trustworthy; he gave May the key. He led her to the heart of the forest, looked around, and without hesitation, shot a single arrow into the keyhole of her cuffs. She plucked them off, contemplating why he was so generous.

"Why did you do that when you she told you to get rid of me?" Snow White asked. "She is your friend.

"She was my friend. She's not who I grew up with. Now run. Run until you can't run anymore. Go! Go!" Snow White ran away as fast as she could go.

Meanwhile, at the castle, May still didn't trust Luca's commitment to his job. So she used her mirror to spy.

Mirror mirror on the wall
Show me the awaited Snow White's fall.

Snow White is still alive today.
So she is still the fairest in every way.

"No!" She screamed, throwing her hairbrush. It hit the mirror, which shattered into a million pieces. Aggravated, she waited until Luca came back, and when he did, she sent him to the castle dungeon... forever.

When Snow White became too tired of running, she wandered around the forest. She did not know where she was or where she had been. She was lost, until she found a small cottage, tucked away between the trees. Letting herself in, she explored further, to find seven beds, seven settings at a small table, and sets of seven utensils, seven plates, seven bowls, etc. Snow white was so tired from running, but she decided to take a nap on one of the beds. She was sure that whoever lives there wouldn't mind, so she laid down until she drifted off to sleep.

By the time she woke up, standing over her were seven short men. All of them were startled by her unexpected appearance. They all introduced themselves and Snow White quickly realized two things: they were dwarves and their names matched their personalities, like Happy and Grumpy. She lived with them for a while, and also doing their dishes, laundry, and cleaning up.

While Snow White was content, May wasn't. May had been busy trying to figure out how to truly get rid of Snow White. Using old spell books from the castle library, she extracted the magic from that mirror, found a couple more magical ingredients (unicorn horn, trolls breath, etc.) and poured everything into an old cauldron from the kitchen. She mixed everything up, and adding sugar and honey to sweeten, she dipped a regular apple into the poisonous mixture. The apple instantly started changing, and eventually, it had the venom from the serum inside of it. To a normal eye, this was deceiving, as it looked completely normal. Mixed with a basket of normal red apples, the victim, Snow White, would never know. Using her last bit of magic from the mirror, she concocted a viable disguise: an old hag.

With the old guide from her mirror, she quickly figured out where the cottage was. By then, Snow White had become quite fond of the dwarves, and the other way around. So that day, when the dwarves went to their job in the mines, May struck with her plan. Knocking on the door, she tried to look very innocent and frail.
"Good afternoon, dearie. Would you like an apple? I bought too many for my apple pie, so I thought I could give it to the fine gentlemen who live here. I hear there are 7 of ’em!"

'I'll take some for them. They're at work right now, but they'll be back later today.'
Knowing how kind Snow White was, May replied: "Are you sure you don't want one? I definitely have enough!"

"If you're trying to get rid of them, then I'll take one. Can you pick one while I put these away?"

"Of course," May replied happily. Deliberately, she picked the poisonous one. "How's this?"

"Great!" Suspicion slowly arose inside of her as she remembered seeing the woman outside, arranging the apples mischievously. She had a theory that this could be May! They haven't had any visitors ever, especially since the Huntsman interaction. "On second thought, I ate too much porridge for breakfast, you can have it. You look like you haven't had anything to eat yet today!"

"I had plenty, thank you. I'll leave it right here on your windowsill. Then you can have it whenever!"

Still arguing, Snow White politely refused to accept the apple. As they kept going, her suspicions were only confirmed. The lady only became more aggravated. Snow White demanded that she take it, as it was the only one left after the dwarves share. May realized that she had sealed her fate.

No! She could fake it! And she did. After no poisonous reaction, and no visible bite marks on the apple, Snow White was positive it was May... and a fake.

"Take a real bite, May."

"How did you...? Fine. I deserved it. I was cruel, and I despised you. Still do. I'll do it. I was a bad ruler. And a bad sister. Just give me a few minutes."

Her time was wasted quickly: sobs of regret escaped May. She murmured a few words, that, at the time, Snow White couldn't make out, and took a bite of the apple. May, the Evil Queen, was gone. Forever.

In the next few years, Snow White assumed the position of the queen, and completed the legacy her parents started. The dwarves stayed miners, but in the royal caves that they gained access to. Snow White took the time to decipher May's last words; it took a while but she figured it out. Her last words were her redemption:
Mirror mirror on the wall
I'm not the fairest of them all

Maddie

Kaia
I AM
I am bubbly and talkative
I wonder what's going to happen in life
I hear the sounds of trees singing in my ear
I see all the stop signs in life
I want the world's heart to always be good
I am bubbly and talkative

I pretend that I will always be alive
I feel an ocean come and play with me
I touch my dog's furry skin
I worry about what life is going to be like without me
I cry about the day my dog goes
I am bubbly and talkative

I understand life won't last forever
I say friends are like lollipops because the flavors you like are the friends that stick with you
I dream that one day you will become big
I try hard to peruse my dreams
I hope that sun will always shine
I am bubbly and talkative
Winter

Everything is white
The snow, trees, and Christmas lights
You can feel the warmth
Coming from the hot chocolate
When your boots are wet
Put them on the drying rack
So that the next day
You may go outside and play

friends
friends are hard to find
but if you look hard enough
you can find them all

Brianna
The Beast

My sweaty clothes clung to me as the hot summer air lay still. Screams of riders faded in and out, the roar of the coasters intimidatingly loud. Internally conflicted, I began to wring my hands. One part of me knew how much fun it would be, how I would never forget this ride, but another part of me continued to recite the list of alarming reasons not to go on. I was baffled by my sudden fear; I had never been afraid of them before. But then again, at the time, I had never been on any real, large, roller coaster. My only experiences had been with mediocre children’s rides. I stared at the towering giant of metal and screws.

"Okay." I stated, continuing to stare at the beast. "I’ll do it." My family cheered a little and a few of my cousins and my sisters guided me to the line. As I began my long, agonizing wait for the ride, I knew that this would be a Six Flags trip to remember. I began to perspire in the hot, thick air. My hands and feet fidgeted in nervousness. I watched as we grew closer and closer to our final destination. The mountainous ride seemed to be taunting me, attempting to convince me to leave. Its sinister orange glow was luring me in and pushing me away all at once. My mind wandered, speeding up the waiting process. Before I knew it, we were nearing the front of the line, only three or four riders ahead of us. My family chose one of the middle rows, knowing that I was anxious. One ride came and went, then another, then another. Soon it was my time. Knees noticeably shaking, I inched toward my seat, then carefully sat down. The woman operating the coaster came around and made sure our seats were secure and protective. Her bright blue polo with the Six Flags logo on it nearly blinded me with its neon glow. Click!

"Have a nice ride!" I was locked in. No turning back now, I told myself. My heart began to race, along with my mind, last minute doubts overflowing my brain. Still contemplating if my decision was made well, I tuned out the operator, talking through the speaker. I didn't hear her count down. The coaster suddenly jolted forward, throwing my head against the seat. I became exposed to the light after coming through the shaded area, the sudden brightness startling. The coaster glided around every turn and corner like a metal snake searching for its next prey. I had just become comfortable with the smooth turns and twists, when we suddenly started slithering into the sky. Higher and higher the beast climbed, the people below became insignificant dots of color. The loud click clack of the coasters chains reminded me of a clock counting down to something traumatic. As we ascended, the pit in my stomach grew larger, while the stands of cotton candy and stuffed animals shrunk. The roars and screams below became a whisper, my mind slipping into a type of strange meditation. I was calm, yet waiting for an inevitable drop to the ground on a chunk of metal secured to a few rails. The beast slowed and neared the peak. I dreaded the fall, yet anticipated it too. A gust of wind grazed my face, and I grasped the handles attached to my seat. Then, we plummeted. We were facing the ground, straight on. Every last bit of peace had been blow away. Screams of passengers surrounded me, the once unrecognizable dots below were made
out easier and easier as we descended. A few riders, who were much braver than I, raised their arms in a rebellious manner, cheering all the way down. As we became closer to actual concrete, the ride turned away from the ground in order to keep us alive, as it would ruin the park's reputation if they did not. We swerved a few more twists, turns, and loops before settling back where we started.

"How was your ride, everyone?" The operator enthusiastically asked. The passengers answered with cheers and whistles, all pleased with their experiences. I, on the other hand, was speechless. I had so many thoughts, so many emotions, that it all came out in one word to my sister next to me: "Wow." I had no expression on my face but astonishment. I turned to my sister, who smiled. Her happiness must have been extremely contagious, because I broke out a grin spreading from ear to ear. "Wow," I repeated. "What a ride!"
This Beast

You better watch your back
     For this beast never sleeps
Trust no one,
You better start running
     Running from this everlasting evil
This beast silently stalks you
Slowly creeping up behind o

You cannot hide

     Don't be fooled
These shadows will trick you
They will dance and prance around you
But step carefully,
For if you join them
There's no going back
You will forever be in the darkness

There is no running from this apocalypse
For this apocalypse is already here
It's here and it’s ready to strike the last killing blow
Humanity is hanging on by a thin thread
And this monster is holding the scissors
Our time has run out

The world as we know it,
is gone for good
The Darkness Gets Closer

Twas the day before darkness
Twas the day before chaos
Secrets were spilled
Friendships made
And abolished

For twas the day before darkness
Won over the light
The day before chaos
Won over peace

Families torn apart
Over secrets kept
As darkness gets closer
Chaos grows stronger

The dark abyss swells
And grows stronger
Chaos will rule tonight

For twas the night before chaos
Rose to the throne
Twas the night before the darkness
Of an endless night

With a swoosh
Darkness will reign
Over the light
With the biggest fight

Who will reign supreme?
Who will get banished from their realm?

Lost in forever darkness
Needing light
Striving for just the
Tiniest
little
Bit
Of recognition

Light and dark dance across the sky
Chaos and peace cause riots and uprisings
Light shooting beams
And darkness shooting right back

The darkness grows smaller
Chaos grows weaker
families at last
Friendships repaired

Wanderer

Explore, explore, all around
So much to see, so little time
Atleast thats what you thought
As you wander alone, with so much to explore
Darkness creeps up on you from behind,
As you slowly weaken the darkness closes in
Falling, falling into the abyss
Loneliness prowls all around you, it sinks its teeth into you.
And then you spot it,
That tiny speck of light
So close it seems,
But the distance seems to grow,
Like fate just vetoing your hope
All hope is lost
Not a single soul to be seen
(Not living ones at least)
The darkness overtakes you,
As you are now one of us
With us now we wait for our next victim
A new wanderer, full of curiosity and joy
Set out on a journey, much like yours,
But now you are not the prey, but the predator.

Paige
The First Snow
Frosty winds brush my rosy face
The frost on the ground looks like gentle lace
The time has come for fall to end
For the dawn of winter is around the bend.
The sending off of fall
Is a sunset becoming small
Then comes winter's sunrise
Followed by a wonderful surprise.
First one, then another,
Sister followed by brother
Shimmering, shining,
Sparkling and thriving.
White crystals descend from the sky
They are the tears that the Heavens cry
They come together and collide on the ground,
So gentle, so soft, and don't make a sound.
The Harold Angles sing tonight
As a snowflake falls ever so light
Watch for their fall and you will know,
The natural beauty of winter's first snow.
Stars
Have you ever wondered how the stars align?
How they glimmer, sparkle, shimmer and shine?
How they are but little diamonds trapped in the sky,
They are the reflection of the Universe's eye
When the sun shuts its eyes
And night begins to rise,
The stars light up the sky
Like distant fireflies
Millions, billions, trillions of stars
They seem so close, but yet, they're still far
As the clock of night ticks away
The time is near for the dawn of day
Away, away the stars must go
When the sun is up, the stars won't show
But if you just glance up at the sky again tonight,
You'll see them again with all of their might.

Erin

Shooting Star
The sun is setting and day is fading
The dusk keeps the moon and stars awaiting
Finally they come out as they cover the sun's final ray
Tonight they shine in the eve of May.
Like shattered glass trapped in the sky,
Or the clear reflection of the Universe's eye
For hours they shimmer, sparkle and play
But the clock of night is ticking away.
Away, away the stars must go
The time has come to wrap up the show
But for the grand finale, so quick and so far,
Across the sky, flies a brilliant, slicing shooting star.

Erin
The Secret Game

The sun set, and the New York lights shined like golden crystals. The public was out and away doing their New York thing on a late, ordinary Friday night. Of course I was laying around, by myself, catching up on my TV shows. My mind was taking time off, from being the famous writer Claire Hoffmann. My books have been New York Times best seller, that's why I'm here in New York. I was meeting with many publishers and authors at a convention. That took up most of my day. After six hours of socializing to people I was done. I practically ran to my hotel, kicked off my shoes and jumped right into bed. It's 11:38 and I'm watching my favorite show, I feel the odd idea to look back at my old work. I never look back at my writing. Especially the bad ones. I was going crazy at this moment. My computer was resting on my desk and I was heading to it. I click it open, put in the password, and go to my writing documents. When open up my short fiction story The Secret Game I wander my eyes over the page looking for different features I could use in my writing now. Minutes later, before I close my computer satisfied by my previous work, I feel force put on my body. As if someone is grabbing me, pulling me closer to the computer. I try to hold back, but the force is too strong. In a sudden moment as if the whole world had been put into one tiny grape, I'm being sucked into my computer. My body emerges into a small ball like shape. I gasped and screeched like a little girl. I'm traveling through a dark, black hole. Panic spreads through my entire body. Where am I going? Is there ever an end? Is this a dream? Time is unknown at this point. I see nothing around me; everything is completely gone, clear, vanished.

After what felt like an eternity, I fall out of the dark hole. FLOP! I fall down roughly onto the ground. My eyes open to a large, open grassy land, almost like a nature preserve. The wind goes through my ears and follows around my body. I grip on to the spiky, vibrant green, grass to haul me up. I feel like as if I went in a kid’s indoor maze and got stuck. I attempt to stand up, and then I hear practically every bone in my body crack. Well that's a great sign. I think to myself. I try to look around to see if I know anything about this unknown place. Nothing clicks. I really, really hope this is a dream and before I go into full out panic mode, two figures start running towards me. I panic and start to run away from them, sprinting as fast as I can. I was never good in gym class. This is why I became an author, not an athlete. The two figures catch up with me. I already lost my breath. When the two figures come closer almost a feet distance away, I notice them. Very familiar. Then it hits me hard in the head like a rock. The tall, brunette girl and the skinny, long,
dark haired boy are characters from my book - The Secret Game. Their names are Cate and Carter. "It's about time," he says with a sheepish grin.

I'm shocked to see the characters in my book. "How do you guys get here? I mean how did I get here?" I question.

"We are the people you wrote in your book; we have been waiting for you to come so we can leave. Here."

"Leave? Why do you want to leave?"

Carter spoke up, "Because that is how you wrote it in the story. The author gets sucked into the book and is forced to play The Secret Game to get out."

"Is there another way to get out besides playing the game?"

"No, we have to play the game it's the only way you and I can leave," replies Cate. I go start instantly worrying.

"What happens if we don't win the game?" I say forgetting that I was the one who wrote this story.

"Then we can't leave," says Carter.

Confidence starts building up in my body. "Okay, when can we start playing?"

"Right now," Cate says. They take me into the forest where a little house is, almost like a cottage. The dark brown, wood house was set for the two children: Cate and Carter. The forest fully resembles what I had written in my story. As we enter the house, the game is set up on a small wooden table next to a burning fireplace.

Cate speaks, "So do you even know who we are? I mean, looks like you forgot what you write about."

"That's true. Okay so tell me about yourself." I say.

"We are twins and we're 14."

I nod my head.

"We also like to win things," she says.

I smirk. "Okay so how about we start playing, so we can all run outta here?"

We sit down and decide who will take the first turn. After minutes of fighting with children at least 15 years younger than me, we decide Cate is going first. Her palms sweat a puddle as her deft hands roll the die.
We all look up to see her number, six. Her small, monkey figure piece that moves up six spaces by itself. She reads the space:

Climb the hills,
unlucky you!
But don't forget,
your friends have to
go up too!

"Oh, I remember writing this!" I exclaim. Cate and Conner start running out the door. "Where are you guys going?"

"To the hills!" They say together.
We walk pass the grassy land, and soon approach an area where five hills are located.
"We have to climb up these hills," says Cate, pointing to the large hills in front of us. They are like mountains almost.
"But we all have to climb up there," Conner states, anxiously looking at the hills.
"Okay guys what are you waiting for? Let's go!" We start running towards the hill, as Conner and Cate whiz pass me I lay behind. Why did I have to make such a complex story? When I begin to climb up the hills I continuously fall every time. Connor and Cate quickly climb up the hill while I struggle.
"Come on!" Cate pushes me. "We don’t got all day!"
I attempt to pick up my pace.
"Claire! If we don’t finish the game in twelve hours we won’t be able to leave!" says Conner.
"Wait! I don’t remember writing about that!" I yell out, tumbling on the hill. Almost immediately Conner and Cate finish climbing up. They come running towards me helping me up. I finish quickly and safely with their assistance.
We rapidly run back to the house to roll again. Connor’s turn.
We continue playing the game. Conner rolls his turn, to get a three. His space says:

They fly above you,
they sometimes bite
But be careful!
Run as fast as you might!

"Oh, no," I say. We all exchange glances.
The table starts to shake, Cate takes the game with her and she shouts,
"Run!"
The table breaks and a swarm of birds start to fly around us.
"Where do we go, Conner?"
"To the cave!" he screams.
I probably ran the fastest I have in my whole life just then. We were running in the mid-dark forest over the moist, wet dirt. The birds following us were jet black like coal. Flying at the speed of light the birds were swarming around us. The birds pecked our arms and legs as we ran. A small little snip can be an extraordinary pain.
"The cave is this way!" yelled Cate.
I saw that the cave was nearby. Before I could praise Conner and Cate for their accomplishment, I see Cate being held up in the air by a swarm of birds.
"Help!" she cries out.
Conner and I race towards her to pull her down. The birds were taking her away faster than we can manage to get a hold of her. In quick thinking Conner picks up stones front the ground and hits the birds with them. One by one, they lose their strength and fall down. Cate was released, and joined us in the middle of the grass land. She hugs tightly together.
"Are you ok?" I question worriedly.
"I'm fine. Thanks to you guys we can finish the game," she says.
"I did not imagine spending my Friday night like this," I say as we all share a laugh.
We open up the game as I take the last turn. I rolled a one. My space says:
Secrets, secrets,
are no fun,
unless you share,
with everyone!
"This is the last one, Claire. Share a secret with us, so we can all leave the story!" says Cate.
I know I must share a secret to leave the game, but my mind tells me not to. My secret cannot be revealed. Cate and Carter are depending on me to tell my secret so can leave the game. "I'm sorry, guys. I can't tell you my secret," I say.

Conner and Cates faces give me a disappointed look. "Why?" asked Conner.

I explain to him that I just can't. They nod their heads, as if they understand. They start to head out of the cave, but I call for them.

"Okay, guys, my secret is," They keep their eyes wide open. "I never wanted to write this book in the first place. I was never confident about my writing and always thought of myself low, but I learned something from you guys."

They smile.

"We have to be confident and never give up. We can do this with the help of friends." We all exchange happy glances as we start to be pulled into the game. We hold hands. The force was sucking us in the dark hole. I close my eyes and imagine my journey today.

Before I know it, I am sitting by my computer in my hotel room. Everything around me seems normal, as if nothing has changed. The time is 11:46; it's only been 8 minutes since I was gone. I look around for Conner and Cate, but they're nowhere to be seen. I gently close my computer and head to my bed. I learned something about myself today. No one’s perfect the first time, you have to keep on practicing to be better and be confident. I smile as I close my eyes and go to sleep. Another journey tomorrow.

Zoya

Michelle
My family is my life.
“you say”
I will do anything for them.
“you say”
We never lie to one another.
“you say”

But the time comes when your family falls apart

I hate them!
“you say”
I will never talk to them!
“you say”
They lost my trust.
“you say”

You locked yourself away from the outside world

You tried to be the glue of the family

But when you open up that door that sealed you away

your family will be waiting

Family always sticks together
“you say”
Poetry Collection

Umbrella

I remember,
rainy days,
Drip,
Drop,
Clouds moving in like troops on a battlefield.
Staring out a dewy window,
Watching the people.
Some have umbrellas,
And some have a raincoat,
But I also see,
The ones that don't.
They walk in the rain,
No coat,
No umbrella,
Like they are in a trance.
And I say to myself,
If I were there,
I would take a chance,
And share my umbrella.

Mirror

There is a girl,
And she tries to be poised with her head high,
But on the inside,
She cries.
She wishes she was perfect,
She wishes she was pretty,
She wishes she was liked by all,
She wishes she was witty.
She looks in the mirror and sees,
A thousand imperfections.
She looks in the mirror and sees,
A thousand shards of glass.

Smoke and Fire

Fire rages,
Flames dance,
Dust rises,
Heat advance,
Fire dies,
People cry,
Embers live,
Smoke will rise.
Again.
It will end.
And come back,
Again.