



What's Your Story?



2017 Seepe Walters
Short Story Contest



*The Future.
Starts Now.*

Produced by Innisfil ideaLAB & Library
December 2017

Seepe Walters



Seepe Walters was a well-respected and dedicated member of the Innisfil community until her death in 1995.

She was involved in many different facets of Innisfil life: the Historical Society, 4-H, the Women's Institute, her Church, her family and various political arenas.

It was her love of writing and all things literary which led her to journalism at the University of Toronto. She then worked as a freelance correspondent with the *Daily Construction News*, taught English to immigrant children, and worked with the Barrie Literacy Council, before helping to found the Innisfil Friends of the Library.

Seepe Walters' commitment to her community and specifically her legacy to the Library, which is now supported by two incredibly dynamic Friends of the Library groups, is being remembered through the Innisfil Public Library's Seepe Walters Story Writing Contest.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Innisfil IdeaLAB & Library would like to congratulate all the students who entered the 16th edition of the Innisfil ideaLAB & Library's Short Story Contest. This contest has been known as The Seepe Walters Short Story Contest since 2004, in memory of the woman who was a driving force behind the creation of the original Friends of the Innisfil Public Library group.

The contributions of many have made this contest and this publication a reality. The Innisfil ideaLAB & Library would like to thank the Friends of the Library, and the Ferraro family for their ongoing support and sponsorship. A special thank you as well to our judging panel: award winning authors Philippa Dowding and Marina Cohen, and local creative writing instructor Wendy de Blauw; we greatly appreciate your time and thoughtfulness in reading the entries. And finally, the efforts of all the wonderful young writers. Although there is only one name on the Seepe Walters Award, you are all winners for having the courage to pursue your writing dreams.

Many thanks to all those involved. And to everyone else, we hope you enjoy the stories submitted to the 2017 edition of the Seepe Walters Short Story Contest.

Kathy Hammer
Librarian, Curiosity, Literacy & Learning
Innisfil IdeaLAB & Library

DISCLAIMER

The viewpoints and opinions expressed in these stories are those of the individuals themselves and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints and opinions of the Innisfil Public Library or its staff. Some content may not be appropriate for all audiences. Parental discretion is advised.

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The Robot

By: Topper McGinty (Gr. 6)

Bzzrt. Spark.

Those are the noises a robot is making, trying to wake up after 400 years of not being used. He is fully automatic, can think for himself, and resembles a velociraptor. He was made of steel. His face is a small, blue dome of glass. He is magnificent. He recognizes this place, something feels very familiar. He, however, can't make out why. He has faint memories of it. It is a garage, in the middle of a forest.

As he gains control of his body, he steps outside. As he walks, he trips over some vines. He still has trouble walking. He doesn't understand why but he can tell what year it is. Four-hundred whole years since he was last awakened. The year 2427. He sees a playful deer and decides to chase it. He gallops. Across a stream, through some bushes, and onto a bridge. He isn't paying any attention to where the bridge leads. He has his sights set on the deer. The deer leads him into a post-apocalyptic looking city. The deer trips on a crack in the road, which leads him plummeting onto the ground below the bridge. The robot has lost his target. He watches it, falling. He doesn't think much of it, he just keeps running. He doesn't know what he is doing, where he is going, and nor does he care. But he keeps going.

He reaches the city. He is excited and carefree. He comes across a building. It has an arrangement of vertical symbols on its side. They say B A N K. He is amazed. These are new to him, and yet probably ancient. The door is half destroyed, giving him clear access in. There are pieces of green paper with faces on them scattered on the floor, metal boxes with doors open, and a room full of these boxes. He doesn't know what they are, but he likes them. He prances around the bank trying to find out what it is. He, however, cannot make any sense of it and leaves.

When he is outside, he sees a building with items similar to him lying, lifeless, on the ground. They have different bodies, but are made of the same material. The sign on this building says 'Robots' - is that what he is? He decides, instead of going elsewhere, to investigate. He enters the building and sees wires connected to the other objects. They have round indented buttons on their heads. The symbols on these circles are not recognizable to him, so he ventures farther into the building. One of the rooms has an image of another species with his arm around a robot. It looks similar to him, identical even.

A blue screen, the same colour of his dome on his head is flickering in another room. It hovers above a machine. The robot sees it and decides to make a screech, hoping to get a response. Surprisingly, he does. A video is played on the screen. It makes no sound, but the specimen in the image of the other room is in it. A wire drops from the

roof and plugs into the robot's head. He can then hear murmurs. The specimen talks of the robot. He says something about the robot being his greatest creation, that he will change the world one day. The message ends and the wire detaches. He stumbles backwards, amazed from the experience.

He is confused and scared.

He leaves the building, pondering what to do with the information he has inherited. He can tell he and the human were friends; maybe he was even created by him. He wants to find him. He wants answers. However, he cannot find where to start. He investigates the city, searches high and low for anything. He visits a barber shop, three apartment buildings, and a university. But still nothing. He decides maybe the man is not within the city, maybe he is elsewhere. Little does he know, humanity has been wiped off the face of the planet, and all humans have died. He decides he will leave the town, he will find the person. The robot begins to lose power. He has a very advanced battery, but things don't last forever. He doesn't notice it and begins planning for his journey. Where will he go? How will he get there? These are questions he is asking himself. But he will go, he will find him. He is determined.

He leaves for his journey, heading north. He comes across a town, it has taken him three days to come here. He searches, scavenges, and takes cover as a storm is coming. He finds a car repair garage. He thinks this will be a good place to rest. He stays here, entertaining himself. He runs in circles, chases his tail, and finally, sits. He replays the video on the hologram, over and over in his head. Hours pass until the storm is gone. He hears a boom as he watches a power line outside fall into a house and destroy it. He leaves to investigate. The house's roof is crushed, the power line was snapped, and the pole was on fire. As the storm was clearing, something must have hit the line and snapped it. The inside of the house is fine, so he goes in for a look. He figures the man could be in there however, no one is. This upsets him. He continues to travel, his battery now half depleted, and yet he still doesn't know. He sees a tall tower. He has interest in it, so he proceeds.

Another two days travel to the city he saw. He enters it and there are skyscrapers everywhere. This will take a while to search. It does take a long time. Sixteen and a half hours. He only has one eighth of his full battery left at the end of the search, still clueless to battery life. Nothing is here. He is disappointed. Not as much that he wasn't able to find him, but in himself. He has been on such a long journey, and hasn't found anything. He is upset. But he will continue. He doesn't care how long it takes, he will find him. He wants to meet him. He wants to thank this amazing being that created him. But at this battery life level, he probably won't get to. He is too determined to even notice. So he repeats his small rest period that he took during the storm. Then he leaves the city, heading east. East is a forest, about half an hour away.

He ventures into the forest and instead of searching; he just glances while he walks. Any movement, sound, or light that he catches he looks at and continues his walk. He gets sidetracked and follows a bird, tailing him through every turn. He enjoys the

company of the bird. It is blue, silver, and red coloured. He likes these colours. The bird is only a baby - probably abandoned. The bird also enjoys the robot, and stays with him for a while. They give each other a sense of security in this lonely forest. The path opens into a small valley, surrounded by the forest. Mossy rocks and a pond cover the area. This place is beautiful to both of them. Except for one small, disturbing, detail: the area is littered with human skeletons. The robot now has ten seconds to live. Each with a gun. Nine seconds left. These are automatic machine guns, covered in red stains. Eight, seven seconds left. Dead. Empty. Only six seconds. A wrecked robot, which reminds him of the shop, sits lifeless, by one of the skeletons. Five. The robot stumbles back in disbelief. Four seconds. He gathers the reason he couldn't come across any humans. They are dead. Three seconds. Probably from a massive war. Two seconds. He takes his last look at the world. One. He falls. Zero. The world fades to black. It has all been for nothing. The baby bird is sad. His only friend has just died, right before his eyes. Even if they just met, they connected. He's gone. Forever. They are never to meet again. His battery has depleted.

He's gone.

Blood Moon Mansion: The Start of a New Nightmare

By: Sawyer Marling (Gr. 6)

It was a dark and stormy night. I was out for a walk when it suddenly started to rain. But I had checked the weather report earlier and it's supposed to be a nice and bright day, no rain at all. Then it started to thunder, "BANG, BANG, BANG!" The clouds roared and the thunder seemed to be headed straight for me. I was so scared, I was paralyzed with fear. And now I was soaking wet.

I saw a house on a nearby hill, so I ran over there as quickly as I could trying to dodge the lightning. I made it up the hill. With a closer view, I saw that the house was really run down and looked kinda creepy. I climbed the steps of the front porch and stood in front of the door. The door was black with an antique knocker in the shape of a crow's skull. "I think it's real", I said to myself. Totally grossed out, but with nowhere else to go, I went inside. I hadn't closed the door yet but, I heard the door closing on its own. It made a faint creaking noise as it closed. It was almost like the wind was blowing the door closed. It suddenly locked. I had no way out. I was a prisoner for the night. I had to find a way out.

So I adventure off, up the stairs to the second floor. The first door to my right slowly opened. It felt like it was calling out to me. I went in. It looked like a little girl's room, but old and creepy. I saw an old-fashioned floral bed. The dusty, old red curtains were ripped up and there were some frightening dolls sitting all around the room. I went to the window to see if it was locked. It was locked, just like the door downstairs! I looked out and there was a blood moon outside!

There was a full length mirror at the back of the room covered in crystals. It was strangely beautiful. The mirror itself was mostly broken, shattered pieces lay on the floor. There was a tiny crack in the mirror and I could see myself in it. When I looked in, I saw an elderly lady sitting in an old rocking chair creaking back and forth, back and forth. I turned around quickly, but there was no rocking chair in the room or elderly lady. I spun around again to look in the mirror and everything had vanished. In its place, there was a little creepy doll standing up on its own. More of the dolls had also stood and started walking toward me. I can see their menacing smiles in the reflection. Their smiles could certainly strike fear in the heart of anyone. I want to go to get out of this place! I closed my eyes. When I opened them, they were gone.

The old lady had returned to the room. This time she wasn't just an illusion, she was actually IN THE ROOM! She spoke to me and said "It's good to see a another living vessel in this old house. I hope you're not too scared of me, I only want to tell you that there is another way out of this mansion." I was shocked. "How?" I asked. "Oh my dear, this place is haunted by many spirits and monsters. You will have to be very brave to

escape.” She rocked back and forth in her chair. “You need to collect special crystals.” Why was she talking about crystals? I just need to get out of here now. “Then where can

I find these crystals? How many are there and how will I know that it's a special crystal?” The old lady continued explaining, “There are four crystals: Fear, Happiness, Light and Darkness. While you're searching for you for them you'll find friends and foes along the way.” “But then why would I need to collect the crystals” “Oh heh heh heh, you'll find out soon my dear.” With a puff of smoke, she vanished.

I'm alone, only with the supposed spirits and monsters. I search around the room looking through the bookshelves and looking under the covers of the old bed. Then suddenly, I found something in the closet. It felt cold and hard. It was glowing. It was a scary grey colour, it looked like... A CRYSTAL! I took the crystal out, it was as big as my hand. I heard voices behind me. “She found a crystal?!”, “I can't believe it!”, “Wait, she has the locket!” The voices started to cry out together, “The locket, the locket!” I spun around in fear, grasping my locket around my neck. Why were they talking about my locket? I was scared and confused. I looked up and a doll was standing in front of me. I wondered to myself if this was just another illusion. I knelt down and poked it. It was REAL! It stretched its tiny, porcelain toward my locket. I stepped back, tripping on a Ball. I fell to the floor with a loud, THUMP! Luckily I was able to hold onto the crystal. Swiftly, I put it into my bag. More dolls came out of the shadows, walking towards me.

But then out of the blue, I heard a voice. It was yelling, “Look out, I'm here to save you!” The voice belonged to a tiny stitched doll covered in filth. He jumped in front of the army of porcelain dolls and grabbed my hand. He dragged me to the door and we burst through, closing it tightly behind us. “Oh my darling Rose, I've come to save you from those devious dolls!” he said as he kissed my hand. I whipped my hand back. “Okay, first off, who are you and how do you know my name?” “My name is Frances and I've always known your name.” The dolls started to bang on the door, “We need that locket! Let us out!” Frances quickly said, “We have to get out of here, that door won't hold them for long!” He grabbed my hand again, “Wait where are we going?”

We ran through the hallways, he seemed to be searching for something. “Ah, there it is!” he said. We were standing in front of a wall. I was puzzled, “Frances, this is just a wall, what exactly are you looking for?” “I'm looking for a button.” he replied. He held his tiny hand over a piece of the wallpaper. He ripped it down to reveal a button. He pressed the button and the wall flipped. “In we go!” He said happily. We ran in together. The wall flipped back behind us. “What now?” I said. Frances just turned and winked. “Welcome Home Princess.”

...to be continued.

The Pencil of Life

By: Riley Ma (Gr. 6)

Have you ever wondered what it would be like if your doodles came to life? Well, you've stumbled upon the story of me. I'll introduce myself.

My name is Soren, and I'm a doodle of a barn owl. The person who drew me, we'll call her Artist (her actual name is Kylie, but Artist is my nickname for her), drew me on a lined sheet of paper and wrote the word "Soren, from Guardians of Ga'hoole" above me and the title "Owls From Books and Movies" above that. Beside me was a doodle of a snowy owl, who was labeled "Hedwig, from Harry Potter". We looked at each other, then looked at the girl staring at us, lost in thoughts. I informed her that staring is quite rude, and she snapped out of her trance, staring at me with awe. Hedwig then informed her that this was even more rude, and her mouth dropped open. Since then, Artist and Hedwig became my best friends.

During class, when Artist was learning, Hedwig and I would frolic on the sheet of paper we were in. I made a huge discovery that if we stared at a particular sheet of paper and imagined being in it, we could teleport there! But we could only go to paper we could see. Artist would take us out in her binder during recess and sit by some trees planted in the school's field, and she would talk to us and draw us cool things like trampolines and pools to keep us entertained in her desk while she was in class. She told us that she had found a purple pencil in the grass by the edge of the field, and that she was astounded that it could create living doodles. In fact, many times during recess she would ask us "Am I hallucinating?" and we would have to tell her that no, she wasn't. Everything was fun and games until...

We were telling jokes under the trees, when suddenly, her pencil flew up in the air. Hedwig's and my beak dropped open. Then, the pencil started moving in the air, leaving a trail of floating graphite behind it. It drew a picture of a woman with a vivid blue hair and a cold pair of stone grey eyes, and a twisted slant for a mouth. She was in a huge room.

"World domination is exhausting, you know that, my army? Drawing all of you gave me a sore wrist for weeks!" the woman complained to the hundreds of little blob shaped figures around her. All of them were on pieces of paper plastered around the walls.

"Well, I guess it isn't world domination, but once we invade all those important documents on paper, we can change what's in them! Then the law will change to our will! My magic purple pencil was worth the pain to create! There were only enough materials to make one, so if anything happens to it.... I'm not making another one. I'll start with attacking school documents for practice. Let's start with Plainside Public School, shall we?" "That's here!" Artist gasped.

"We'll attack tomorrow, ten o'clock sharp! A trail of paper will be enchanted to appear at ten, so you can teleport, so don't worry, our first destination should be easy to conquer!" The woman cackled as she faded away and the pencil dropped, leaving nothing but sprinkles of graphite behind.

We were all silent for a minute, until I spoke up. "Umm... aren't we going to do anything to stop her?" I asked timidly.

"She hasn't seemed to notice that her pencil's gone" Hedwig added. "Are we supposed to stop her? Shouldn't this be up to some heroic figure?" Artist asked. "I'm not anything like a hero. I'm self-conscious, timid, and shy. I can't do this!" She buried her head in her hands, and let out a shuddery sigh.

"Don't worry, we got this. On the bus, you can draw up an army, so we can hold back the witch's. Tomorrow's the weekend, let's tell Mom and Dad that a friend was meeting here with us, and that it was scheduled at nine thirty, so we have time to plan. We got this!!" Hedwig hooted cheerfully.

Artist got a little...creative with our army, as we had a lot of time to draw them. It consisted of fifty elephants, twenty wolves with razor sharp claws, thirty hedgehogs, three dozens of unicorns, a couple of dragons, and some stick figures, who were armed with little erasers. Artist drew them pretty well, despite the fact she was nervously trembling. We told the army that we were to hold off the witch's army off so that Artist could collect the trail of paper.

The next day, we told Dad that Artist's friend Melissa invited Artist to the school field for a game of soccer at ten o'clock until eleven thirty (we were considering eleven, but we didn't know if we needed extra time). After breakfast, Dad drove us to the school, and Hedwig, the Army, and I were all silently panicking in Artist's binder. We arrived, Artist said goodbye to Dad, and she carried us to the field, then hid in the trees we would sit at during recess. Artist was drawing weapons, such as bows that shoot arrows with erasers at the end and spears with erasers too, while the Army, Hedwig, and I kept watch.

"Ok, it's nine fifty-four" Artist said, her watch's black hands glinting in the sun. We waited at the minutes ticked by. After a while, Artist started counting down.

"Five...four...three...two...ONE! GO!" Artist ran towards the biggest sheet of paper that appeared, and we saw the little blob creatures, all holding erasers. They were multiplying onto the paper, and starting to teleport to the next sheet. We ran ahead by about five sheets of paper, then Artist stopped.

“Spread out around the paper here” she instructed. “That way, if some of the witch’s warriors gets past one wave of us, the next group could stop them. I’m going to grab the paper and crumple it into my backpack, so they can’t see the paper and teleport.” We all went on and waited, and I saw Artist run ahead. About ten seconds later, we saw the first wave of warriors arrive.

“Brace yourselves” I heard Hedwig hoot. We ran forwards, attacking as fast as possible, trying to get close enough to attack but not so we could be attacked. After the first wave was defeated, the second wave arrived. We kept fighting, hopeful thoughts racing through my head.

Finally, we had defeated all but one warrior. It was exceptionally quick, and raced between us. I saw Hedwig fire at it, then watched as the creature attacked back, with eraser gloves on its hands. It hit her directly in the beak, and everything else was in slow motion. I saw her fall back, giving me a look, which said “*Continue. You can do this.*” She was disappearing into scraps of eraser. A few seconds later, only the memory of her was left.

I was blinded with rage, firing towards the one who did this. He disappeared. Artist came back, just as it died. Her eyes scanned our army, saw the lack of Hedwig, and immediately understood. After so much bravery, at the last moment. We lost her. Artist put us back in her binder, and we left to the parking lot, none of us speaking.

It’s been two years since that happened. Artist is in grade eight, and she talks with us just as often as before. She drew a gravestone for Hedwig, and some flowers as tall as me around the grave. The grave reads: “Here lies Hedwig, a brave individual. She will be missed. 2017-2017.” Artist couldn’t draw her again, because she would end up drawing the same figure, but with a different personality. Believe me, we tried *many* times to bring her back.

I don’t think “witch lady” has any other plans, though if she does, we’ll be ready. Artist and I are currently sitting under the trees again, telling jokes. Wait, is the pencil rising again...?

The End....for now.

Behind the Lines

By: Oliver Booth (Gr. 5)

RCAF base camp

Sam freeman was just about to board his b7 bomber to fly over Normandy to carry out a top-secret bombing mission. Sam, who was 20 years old was excited since this was his first time in action since joining the RCAF. He was also scared because who knew what could be down there?

“Sam, Sam! Wake up!!!” Yelled the lieutenant. “We’re leaving for Normandy!”. “Finally.” Sam told himself. He was relieved not to have to wait any longer. Sam boarded his airplane. *Drrrrrrrrrruummmdddrummmmm....* the plane’s engines started up for Normandy.

As soon as Sam’s b7 crewmen flew over Normandy all they could see were black clouds of smoke, fire and anti aircraft guns firing at the approaching b7. Sam’s b7 was ready to drop the bombs and head straight back to England when suddenly, an enemy fighter began to fire shots at the b7. Sam thought his time was up when suddenly, *Kaboom!!!* The back of the b7 was thrown to the black sky. The plane was going down.

“Bail!!!! Bail!!!!!!” yelled Sam to the crewmen who jumped out of the airplane. All Sam could see was a sea of white parachutes. At that moment, everything went still. Sam’s heart started to pound. Suddenly he jumped. Then his body jolted as his parachute flew open. He was falling into the sea of black clouds.

Sam’s parachute was caught by a big oak tree. He noticed his parachute and ropes were a tangled mess. At that moment, he heard voices of enemy soldiers. He thought he might be seen and be executed as a spy. But the two enemy soldiers just walked under Sam and kept going. “Phew” Sam said he pulled out a pocket knife and cut his parachute and fell to the ground. “Yeow!” Sam cried when he fell on his hands and knees. He saw that he gashed his knee, then he thought about his crewmen. “Are they ok?” he thought to himself “or are they dead?”.

He started to walk and saw a plane catch fire. It was his plane. Then he saw his crewmen emerge from the wheat field that belonged to a French farm. Sam asked his crewmen “Are you alright?”. They said, “We’re fine”. “That’s good” said Sam. “We have a long walk ahead of us to get back to friendly lines.”

The crewmen walked on and on. They had no idea where they were or how to get back to friendly lines. Suddenly, they heard gun shots. They ran toward the loud noises of guns and were right in the line of fire. “Get down!!!!” yelled Sam. All they heard were loud

explosions. They took cover in an abandoned farm house. *Crash!! Bang! Boom!!!* went the sounds of artillery. Then it stopped and everything fell silent.

As they emerged from the farm house all they could see was a wasteland. They could see where the explosive shells dropped and ripped the earth apart. Suddenly they heard sounds, strange rolling sounds. Sam looked back and saw the front of a gigantic enemy tank. The crew did not know what to do but run. *Bang!!!!!!* the enemy tank shot a shell at the crewmen. *Thoom!! Bash!!!!* The shell shattered the ground, throwing up dirt and chunks of earth. Luckily, they met up with a team of American paratroopers who landed there days earlier. They knew where to seek shelter from the tank. They followed the paratroopers to a destroyed enemy bunker. They climbed down the concrete steps and stepped into a smoky, dusty room. It had the looks of an enemy field hospital. They stayed there overnight listening to endless fire from enemy artillery. They knew the enemy was out there or right on the hospital doorstep.

The next morning Sam gathered the crewmen and the American paratroopers to head off to their lines. They walked and walked and were running low on food, water and other supplies. They were beaten down by the endless artillery and gun fire and just wanted for the war to be over. As the crewmen walked down to another little French farm house that was old and empty, they opened the creaky door. After the dust settled they realized that people were living there overnight and there was a chance they could come back any time. The crewmen stayed there with the paratroopers overnight.

As morning came the crewmen and the paratroopers were awake and ready to embark on the journey back to friendly lines. They walked through an open field with corn and hay bails. They walked on and on when all the sudden they heard voices. As Sam tried to figure out what country they were from his thoughts were disrupted by the sounds of machine gun fire shooting right at them. Sam was terrified. He saw a lot of enemy foot soldiers charging at him and he was pushed to the ground with a thud. Sam found himself being pulled off the ground by an enemy soldier. He took him down a little stairwell and he fell to his knees. He found himself face to face with an enemy officer. Sam was thrown to a chair and tied up. The enemy officer started yelling at Sam and made a hand gesture for everybody to leave, except for Sam. The officer turned off the lights and left. No one knew Sam was there.

Would Sam return to England? Or would he still be tied to the chair? Waiting and waiting until someone rescued him from captivity.

Extraordinary

By: Madelyn Burton (Gr. 6)

I woke up at my normal time, made my cup of coffee, had breakfast, drove to the subway station and was off to work. Once I got to my stop I got off, walked to the south building of The World Trade Centre and went up the elevator to the 45th floor. It was a miraculous sight. I could see for miles. I looked down at the cars below. It was just like any ordinary day. But little did I know that today September 11th 2001 was not going to be like any ordinary day. It was going to be an extraordinary day.

My name is Jim Bander. I work in the south building of the World Trade Centre. It was just before 8:50 when something caught my eye at the North building. There were fire balls falling from the building. So just like any normal person would do I called down to the lobby. "Why are there fire balls falling from the North building?" I exclaimed. "Don't worry sir." the man assured me. "This building is secure." The man said calmly. "Don't worry?" I mocked. "There are fire balls falling from the building!" But the man hung up. "Something is terribly wrong." I whispered to myself. I asked other people if they knew what was going on but none of them knew. Then all of a sudden I saw a plane heading straight for our tower just above us! A few seconds later it hit our tower. "We have to get out of here." I screamed. Everyone was panicking. People started heading for the elevator. "No! It's not safe!" I yelled. "If you go in there and something else happens you will be trapped." "Use the stairs." The crowd moved toward the stairs grabbing pictures and phones off their desks as they went by. I made sure no one was left behind before I went down the stairs. I grabbed my phone, my wallet, a picture of my family and checked the time. It was 9:11. I raced toward the stairs and tried to call my wife but there was no signal so I tried again Still no signal. When I got tired of trying I started to run down the stairs. As I was running down the stairs a woman who worked on my floor tripped in her high heels and fell down the stairs taking down many other people. "Ow!" She whimpered in agony. I ran down to help her and she claimed to have broken her wrist. "Here let me help you up." I said softly. "Thank you." We walked/jogged down the rest of the way together. After a 20 minute busy and treacherous walk we finally got down to the ground. I took the lady (I found out her name was Sarah on the way down) to one of the many paramedics on the streets. Sarah said she would be okay on her own so I ran as far away as I could to a sheltered building. Then I called my wife. "Honey! It's me Jim! I'm ok!" She didn't answer but I could hear her crying in the background. "I was so scared!" she said through tears. "Get home as soon as possible and stay away from the towers!" She continued. Who knows what's going to happen next." "I will." I said a little frightened and she hung up. I ran towards the nearest station. I turned around to look at the towers when I saw the most horrific thing I had ever seen in my life. People were jumping out of their windows above where the plane hit so they didn't burn to death in the ferocious fire. I kept walking and tried not to look back but

when I couldn't any longer I saw the south building sway. So I ran into the subway station to take cover. I was far enough away so I didn't get hurt when it collapsed. But when I looked out everything was covered in a thick layer of dust and there was rubble everywhere. I knew I had to get out of there now so I hopped on a train heading for home. I got off the train and found my car I was so happy to be safe but so sad about all of what just happened. I sat in my car for a while trying to take it all in, wondering if my co-workers were alive or not. I drove home to see my wife and my 3 beautiful children who were so happy to see me. I never knew I could be so happy to be home. Once the kids were in bed I turned on the news. The North Tower had collapsed too and another plane hit the Pentagon. I knew this was not an accident. I turned off the T.V and called all of my friends who had been in the North and South buildings. The first person I called was Sarah. " Hello this is Jim calling." "Jim!" She shrieked. " How are you?" I asked. "I'm fine just a broken wrist and a mild concussion. After you dropped me off with a paramedic they told me I had broken my wrist and had a concussion. I started walking to the station when I saw the south building moving. I thought it was going to fall so I ran to a restaurant to take cover. I was still sort of close when it collapsed so it shattered the glass in the restaurant and I got cut and dirty. I managed to make it home safely but my family didn't recognise me." " Well I am glad you're safe." I responded. I called my other friends. Miraculously all of them survived. Everyone agreed that today was not an ordinary day. It was definitely an extraordinary day.

Mercy

By: William Wang (Gr. 7)

I sat there, handcuffed to a chair, sitting in a police interrogation room in the outskirts of London, England. I watched a clock tick one second, and then another, then another. I was dreadfully tired, but I refused to let myself sleep. I had chosen to be chained like this and I planned not to make my suffering easier to handle. I was determined not to show any signs of weakness, and falling asleep would show exactly that. I tried to find ways to keep myself awake. I tried to anticipate what would happen next to me, I tried to find a pattern on the wall, and I even tried counting the number of stitches on my shirt. But nothing could help keep me awake. My head finally drooped, my eyelids closed, and I fell into a deep sleep.

When I woke up, I realized, to my horror, that I had fallen asleep. I told myself that it would not happen again. That's when I actually looked around, and noticed the police officer sitting in front of me. I screamed. The officer seemed calm, maybe even slightly amused by this young boy, handcuffed in front of him. He stood up, and walked around my chair three times, inspecting me carefully, like a bug he was debating whether or not to step on. After he returned to his seat, I asked him, "Why are you here?"

"I am here to question you," he replied.

"So then, what do you want with me?"

The officer just chuckled. "Are you supposed to be asking the questions, or am I?"

I fell silent, seeing that it was pointless to ask any further.

The officer continued. "So why did you turn yourself in?"

I remained silent, as I did not wish to divulge this information.

"Stubborn little fellow, I see. Let me ask a different question. Where do you come from?"

"Spain." (This was no lie, I truly was from Spain).

"I see. If that is so, how did you come here, to the city of London?"

"I would need to tell you my whole story."

"I have time to spare. Tell me everything."

“Okay.” And I began:

“My first clear memory was from thirteen years ago, when I was two years old.”

The officer interrupted. “Which means you are fifteen, as of right now?”

‘Yes, yes I am. But I must go on, if I wish to tell my story and you wish to hear it.”

Hearing no response from the officer, I continued, “This memory was of me at an orphanage, being handed to a maid. The person who handed me to the maid was obviously someone I loved very much, as I began to cry. The orphanage apparently did not like me, as I was kicked out of one orphanage into another. They too, did not like me, as I left that orphanage also. This process happened an agonizing number of times, each time ending up into an orphanage that did not like me. Eventually, about ten years later, I had been to every single orphanage in London, and again at the orphanage is was dreadfully hated, and they knew that there were no orphanages that wanted me. None. I ended up on the street, without anything except the clothes on my back and some pocket change, only enough to buy a small meal.”

The officer interrupted me again, which made me impatient. “So you resorted to thievery?”

“I had to. There was nothing else I could do. No one wanted me, not anywhere,” I spat bitterly, (partially from this memory, and partially from the fact that the officer kept on interrupting me).

“One more ques-”

Now, it was my turn to interrupt him. “If you really want me to finish, I suggest you stay quiet and not interrupt me again. Understood?”

The officer just nodded, probably taken aback by the fact that I had the nerve to interrupt him.

“At first, I just took everything I could. I needed anything I could get my hands on. After I had taken up residence in an abandoned shack and made myself comfortable, I cut down on the amount I stole, only stealing as much as I needed and only sometimes I would take more, and only if my victim looked too rich. I never robbed anyone who looked like they could barely sustain themselves, because they were just like me. Anyone who had more than enough money to spare would not be as lucky. I felt no remorse stealing from them.”

“My first attempts at robbery were usually failures. Most of the time, I ended up with a beating and several harsh words in my ears. But as time went on, I was able to steal more and more successfully. I even managed to smuggle myself a couch.” I smiled,

remembering the frantic chase from the police, carrying a forty pound couch, hoping that I would not be caught.

“But as my money and satisfaction went up, so did the ransom on my head. It eventually reached a high of-”

“Twenty-million pounds.”

I was now seriously annoyed with the police officer. This had been his third interruption. “I know the amount of money for my capture, thank you very much. Now why don’t you just shut up and listen?”

Without waiting for a response, I continued. “It came to the point where your comrades would actually shoot at me if they caught me stealing. I knew I had to do something, and fast. Otherwise, I might just die during a robbery, no matter how small. I could not go out into public, as people would recognize me and turn me in. I decided to go to church and ask God for help. He had never helped me before, and I hoped he could help me then.”

“I decided to head for a small church, on the edge of the city, when it was dark, to almost guarantee my safety. I snuck in without a problem. Inside, I marvelled at the colored glass pictures, and the pews with red velvet seating. I looked at all the candles, seeing hundreds upon hundreds of them. Then, I heard a voice which said, ‘By the Glory of Almighty God, I demand of you, your name and the reason you are here!’”

“I looked up. I saw the priest, all dressed in his white robe and his fancy hat that was inlaid with gold. I would have liked this moment immensely, if the priest had not been pointing a very real sword at me. As he came down the steps, I noticed a striking resemblance between him and myself. We both had the deep blue eyes, the slender limbs, the messy chocolate-colored hair, (it stuck out under his hat), and most of all, the strong and deep voice. I have never found anyone with quite the same voice as me. But to see this man, who looked so much like me, to mimic that voice, would have to mean something. Evidently, he also realized this. As he approached, he began to lower the sword, eventually dropping it. He uttered a single sentence. ‘Nicholas, is that you?’”

“At that moment, I knew that this man was my father. I rushed into his arms and held him fiercely. We walked around the church, and I was telling my father about my life so far, when a question came into my head that I had been dying to ask ever since I could speak. ‘Why did you abandon me?’”

“Father’s eyes swelled up with tears when I asked that, as did mine. ‘I had to, Nick. See, we came from Barcelona in Spain. Your mother had just given birth to you and thought that London was a better place for you to grow up and live. On the voyage, your mother became dreadfully sick. She never reached London. I was unable to go to work with

you, so I had to put you somewhere where I could know you were safe. But if I knew you would end up on the streets, I would never have sent you there.”

“We suddenly heard a ferocious pound on the door. ‘We know you’re in there! You can’t run!’ It was your comrades. Father gave me instructions and money. ‘Here, take this money and run out the back door. I’ll hold them off as best I can.’”

“ ‘But father, they have guns. They could kill you!’ ”

“ ‘I don’t care, as long as you are safe.’ ”

“At that moment, your comrades broke in. One bullet was fired. One bullet hit my father. I know it took only a second for him to fall, but it seemed like an eternity. His robes turned as red as the pews. I had no time to waste. I fled from the scene, and didn’t look back.”

“I ran back to my shack, and cried for hours. I had barely known him for an hour, but now he was gone for eternity, and I had no living relatives left. I was constantly hunted by the police. I could barely step outside without being chased. I had nowhere left to go, and more importantly, no reason to live. So I had no other choice. I turned myself in, and here I am.”

For the first time in a long time the officer spoke. “I see. Let me guess. You want to be released?”

“Yes. I would like to see my father again.”

The officer drew his pistol. He loaded it, and pointed it at Nicholas.

“Are you sure you really want to do this?”

With tears in his eyes, Nicholas replied, “Yes. Do it without hesitation.”

As the trigger was being pulled, Nicholas asked the police officer, “What is your name?”

“Mercy. Mercy A. Angel.”

And then there was a bang, a flash of light, and then, Nicholas the thief, and Mercy A. Angel, were both gone.

Moonlight Thief

By: Thea VanKesteren (Gr. 7)

Only parts of the rusty metal handle shone in the moonlight. It felt gritty in my hand as I jerked the splintery door to our old wooden shed against the tall neglected grass, hoping that things didn't topple out on Max and I. Once I got the shed door open enough I slipped through into the musty air and pulled Max in behind me. I turned and immediately got a face full of spider webs. I was vigorously swiping at my face when the handle to my dad's rusty lawn mower jabbed into my stomach. I stuck my hand out into the darkness to make sure I didn't hit anything else, but my head hit the tire of a hanging bike and sent it spinning. When my eyes started to adjust to the darkness I could barely see my little brother's baby pool lying right under the bike. That looked like the only spot with room to put Max, so I tied his tattered leash to the handle of the bike above and persuaded him to jump into the blue mini plastic pool with little boats on it.

I slowly unzipped my backpack getting a whiff of rotten banana from Friday's lunch. After hesitating to stick my hand in I rummaged through my gross bag for the plastic container and water bottle I had grabbed from the house. I emptied the water into the makeshift dish and Max started licking at it before I could even put the container fully in the pool in front of him. *When was the last time this dog has had a drink?* Not thinking, I grabbed one strap of my backpack and swung it up onto my shoulder like I usually do at school, knocking a bin over onto the floor with a loud clatter. I froze there for a few seconds, listening for noise or movement from the house. Max froze too with his ears perked forward. *I hope nobody heard that...*

Making sure I didn't knock anything else, I slowly made my way over to the door. Before I crept into the night I paused and peered back at Max one last time to make sure he was alright for the night. He was bent over the water dish again so I snuck out of the shed.

I could hear the humming of the tree frogs as I walked back to the house. I felt like I was walking through a wheat field; the grass was so long. Cody's toys were scattered everywhere. *This isn't a much better place for a dog. Max will be just as miserable here as he was with the neighbour.* I climbed up the deck stairs to the back door, holding my breath, hoping they wouldn't creak. I slid the patio door open to the kitchen and immediately smelled Sloppy Joes from supper. I felt a quick panic rise inside me thinking about Max. It wasn't too late to take him back quickly. But Max needed me and I needed him. I didn't need to think about that now. I just had to get to my bedroom without waking anyone. Usually noise was my specialty. I tippy-toed across the kitchen tiles and up the carpeted stairs to my room as the clock's ticking faded. I could hear my mother's clogged snoring down the hall.

Hours passed and I couldn't fall asleep, my ceiling fan ticking and spinning round and round. Mice were busy in the walls scratching so noisily as if they knew I was there and they wanted my attention. And Max, what was he doing, feeling, thinking. I finally stepped out of bed in search of something to take my mind off of him and felt something soft and fluffy under my foot. I crouched down, peered under my bed and pulled a large fleecy blanket out from under it revealing all the hidden treasures that seem to end up under there. I rummaged through clothes, papers and stuffies. That's when I noticed a white box. I reached for it. It was decorated with red hearts and pink sparkles. This box was made especially for what was inside. I blew off the dust, fighting back a sneeze and opened the lid. A bunch of mangled letters tied together with a brown twine lay inside. I paused for a moment and then hesitantly lifted the bundle out of the box and loosened the string letting all the letters fall onto my lap. I picked one of the letters up and gazed at the return address: Aunt Maggie, Calgary, Alberta. My mom's sister was closer to me than my own mother. She listened to me, never ignored me and always loved me, but then she had to move away. After that she often sent letters asking how I was, telling me to come for a visit and reminding me how much she missed me. I always forgot to write back to her. Eventually I stopped receiving letters and I forgot all about them. I spent the next hour or so reading her letters again.

...

I heard distant barking and a man's unsteady voice shouting. My eyes popped open and I jerked up, scattering my aunt's letters to the floor around me. I darted to my window and saw dad dragging Max up to the back deck. I looked at my alarm clock. 6:30 !!! *I slept in too late! I'm dead...* I drudged down our stairs toward the kitchen. Every step let out a creaky sigh. I winced. The smell of freshly-brewed coffee warned me that mom was up. A cold shiver ran up my back. Once at the bottom of the stairs I peeked around the corner into the kitchen and saw mom standing at the window in her grey Roots sweat pants and stained house coat with her hair mangled on top of her head in a clip. *Just play dumb.* I strode into the kitchen and said as sweetly as I could, "Good morning! Why are you up so early?"

"Why are you up so early?" my mother replied sternly, not even turning to look at me. I felt scared already for what was waiting in mom's mouth just ready to burst out on me like a rushed train leaving the station. Dad finished tying Max to the back deck and came inside.

"Jessica, explain to me please how the neighbour's smelly filthy dog ended up in our shed," he demanded, sounding tired. "I heard a ruckus in the shed last night and I thought it might be a racoon or something. When I went out to check this morning, I found this," he said, pointing at Max through the patio door. I looked out the window at Max. Like he was reading my mind, those sad black eyes told me he knew he had no

chance that I would be able to keep him. I wanted to give him a better life than the neighbours did. They didn't even care about him.

I looked back at dad and then at mom who was now sitting at the cluttered kitchen table.

"But they don't even...", I started to explain to them, but I got interrupted by my mother who I could tell had a whole lot she wanted to say. She was like an exploding bomb. She was yelling her head off and now Cody, who was still in his crib, started crying. I tried to finish my story but she kept interrupting me. Dad tried calming her down finally, but it was too late. I have learned not to cry when she is yelling at me like this because she does it so often, but standing there without a sorry expression on my face made her even madder.

"You don't even care about what I'm saying to you! Go to your room! I don't even want to see your face!" she hollered.

I feel like she never wants to see me...

I stomped to my room, slammed my door and flopped onto my bed. Here I was again watching the blades of my ceiling fan rotate slowly, dust dangling from them. One of its light bulbs was missing. A mosquito buzzed and bumped in and out of its empty socket. I've lay here so many times listening to my parents argue into the night and I've never noticed before that the paint on my ceiling wasn't ever finished. How did I deserve living here? I wish I could get away.

Suddenly, I had an idea. I jumped up, bolted over to my desk and snatched a piece of note paper and a pen. I settled down in my chair and began to write.

Dear Aunt Maggie,

I haven't heard from you in a long time...

Crushed by a Falling Swastika

By: Aytal Everstov (Gr. 7)

My name is Ferdinand Schulz and the year is 1945. Of my name, the year I live in and my hometown, my hometown is by far the one I hate most: Berlin, Nazi Germany.

I walk into the kitchen of our small apartment. My mother sips her tea; I remember her old disposition, she would have smiled, handed me my breakfast, and asked me how I was. Nowadays, she simply stared into the swirling bubbles of the tea; her tightly-sealed lips, bony face and bleak expression matched the dreary wallpaper that was peeling off as if it had forgotten how to be wallpaper, as the only person who would have fixed it, my father, was who knows where now, my mother could have breathed life into the room, but seemed to be busy with staring into her tea, perhaps hoping her problems would dissipate like the bubbling froth.

Ever since my father, Heinrich Schulz, was arrested for plotting against the Nazi regime his absence plagued our family, sucking the life out of my mother and forever changing me.

My little sister Alice, who was twelve, was also slowly dying from sadness, little by little every day, even though she tried to hide it behind a smile as sweet as sugar, but fake as plastic, walked in wearing a perfect example of the smile I just described. The sad little charade, which had come to define our life, was abruptly interrupted by a knock at the door. Alice opened the door, only to find Colonel Schmidt towering over her. The chief of our local SS (Nazi special forces) division had skin so pale it was fighting a war with the pitch-black uniform framing it, pale blue eyes that looked like the last drop of sanity in them had dried up, a smile that was as fake as the one that my sister wore, but instead of being sweet, it was intimidating. He was in full uniform with 2 patches on the collars, with two lightning bolts on it spelling SS and a red armband with the Nazi symbol, the swastika, on it. He looked at my mother and smiled, "Beautiful apartment you have here, Mrs. Schulz". My mother, who drank all her tea, appeared to become hypnotised by her bread. I think it was all just her plan to ignore the officer in our doorway. I wish I could have followed her lead, but as I hadn't sat down yet I was completely defenseless when Schmidt turned to look at me. "Ah Ferdinand," he boomed, "How are you?". I swallowed and said, "I'm fine s-sir". "Are you prepared for the future, Ferdinand?", the Colonel asked. I looked at him like I didn't understand, which I didn't. "You see the Allies are already on the Third Reich's territory, we will need many soldiers... how old are you Ferdinand?" I looked at my mother she was so pale she only rivalled the Colonel in her pallor. "I'm 15," I replied. He simply smiled and said, "You are a strong boy Ferdinand, you will make a good soldier some day." My mother said her first words of the day, "When he turns eighteen, you mean." Schmidt replied with ten words that would change my life. "No, boys his age will have to fight as well."

My mother seemed to choke on her bread. The Colonel kept talking. "Most boys his age would fight in the regular army, but I would be pleased to accept Ferdinand into the

ranks of the SS, in fact in my own division.” He looked back at me, “Don’t worry Ferdinand, I wouldn’t deprive you of the honour to be an elite soldier and fight for the swastika.” He said with a smile. I stared at him in silence. He kept talking: “We will be marching down your street at 6, I suggest you watch.” With a sickening smile he walked out the door and left. My mother turned to look at me, her eyes which had been deprived of emotion for two years were now flooded with fear. “Ferdinand, I lost your father, I can’t lose you, if you go with that horrible man you will die. We need to survive this, we need to leave Berlin.”

What sort of a morning was this? If I had simply stayed asleep, I wouldn’t have had the conversation with Colonel Schmidt.

“But where will we go?” I asked. My mother sighed and said “The night before your father was taken away from us, he told me we had to run away, he wanted to go to Switzerland, a neutral country, and stay until Germany would be a democracy again. I didn’t want to leave, I thought I could protect you, I was wrong, Berlin isn’t safe, we must leave.” I thought this over, “But Schmidt’s division regularly patrols this region.” My mother smiled, “There is one time when that man is blinded by his own beloved banner”. “When is that?” I ask. “He’s already told you about it, the parade at 6, his division is all there, entirely focused on the rhythm of their steps.” My mother might have faded away years ago, but now she was displaying her old self’s intelligence. I ran down to the kitchen and threw some food into a sack. I told Alice about our plan and told her to pack her bags, I then ran into my room and took my books and my old photographs.

I noticed a photo of me and my old friend, Ezra, we were smiling and standing in front of his house, a week after that day, Colonel Schmidt, before he was even a Colonel, walked up and took Ezra away from his home I never saw him again. When I asked Schmidt where he took Ezra, he said his kind, the Jews, belonged six feet underground.

After we packed away our pitiful possessions, it was already 5:57, so we left the house. As I walked out of my house, I looked back at the building and wondered if I would ever return. We walked out into the street as I remembered my childhood. How had everything changed so quickly? A few years ago, my friends and I would walk to school down this street. Today a parade headed by a man who wanted to send me to war had taken it over.

We pushed to the front of the crowd, at the curb. Suddenly, music flooded the street; Colonel Schmidt was marching in front, waving the Nazi flag. He looked me right in the eyes somehow without him saying anything I could hear what he was thinking. “Ah, Ferdinand, I knew I would find you up front.” Behind him were a group of uniformed musicians, playing military songs on brass instruments, the sun glinting off the brass and keys. Further back was an army of men, all lifting their legs in utter synchronisation and bringing them down as if trying to punish the street as harshly as possible. Every face in the horde of men was uniformly lacking of emotion. I shuddered to think of how Colonel Schmidt made them march with such conformity; I couldn’t imagine myself marching in that army.

As we watched the last row of men turned their backs on us, my mother gestured for us to move, I followed my mother and Alice out of the crowd and cautiously ran to the other end of the street at an intersection. I must tell anyone who may be reading my story, to always, no matter what, look both ways before crossing the street, to save yourself from being hit by a car is one reason, but if there was a parade you were hoping to evade and whoever told you about the parade neglected to tell you that a second column was taking part in the parade, it would be advisable to look both ways, because if you don't and have my luck, you might smash into the flag bearer of the parade and knock him to the ground, eliminating any chance of yours to escape. Needless to say, this is exactly what happens in my story. Colonel Schmidt's disgruntled colleague lies on the ground, the parade descends into chaos, I stand up, in the process ripping with my shoe the Nazi flag beneath it and blindly running on. Scarcely had I ducked behind a building before I hear deafening cries of "Stop that boy!".

Four gunshots ring out and see four bullets barely miss me. I keep running, oblivious to the fact that three officers are chasing me. I only notice them when I dodge a bullet and follow Alice and my mother into an alley. As soon as I enter, I realise it's a dead end.

The officers arrest, handcuff and seat my family into a car. We drive down the street. I recognise the building we stop at as it's the headquarters of Schmidt's SS division, at gunpoint we are taken into the building, up a flight of stairs, down a hallway and into a study.

The room is paneled with oak and bookshelves. The furniture consists of a handsome wooden desk, a high-backed chair with an eagle emblazoned on the top of the backrest, right above the head of the person sitting in it, the man sits and studies a globe, on the walls he has hanging a world map and a map of Germany, dotted with pins and arrows; one wall has 2 windows. In between these windows hangs an enormous portrait of Hitler. The man in the high-backed chair is none other than Colonel Schmidt in all his glory.

"Ah Ferdinand. How do you like my office? I would have much preferred you admiring it as I give you a medal for bravery. Instead, you knocked down my colleague, Colonel Mayer, and plunged his column into chaos. Might I ask why?". I realise I can't say the truth, so I grit my teeth and tell a lie. "We saw a family friend and rushed to meet them.". I search the Colonel's eyes for a hint of believing in my tall tale. Nothing but irritation and frustration met me. "Do you think I'm an idiot? You still have bags on you, likely still filled to the brim with supplies. You were trying to defect to the British, maybe the Americans, perhaps the Soviets. Although, with all due respect, I don't think Mrs. Schulz here has the courage to defect. You were most likely headed to a neutral country, to Switzerland, for example." he smiled. "I'm right aren't I, Ferdinand?" I look down at my handcuffed arms, and at my mother. She seemed to be fuming at the Colonel's opinion of her. "Ferdinand, do you know why I wanted you to be in the SS?" I shook my head. "Ferdinand, when I was 12 it was 1918, my father died fighting for the German Empire. My mother was grief-stricken and she was never the same. Sound familiar?" I turned pale. Schmidt chuckled, he didn't seem to care, if anything he seemed amused. "After

that day, I was on my own. You remind me of myself at the time, Ferdinand. But I got stronger, more intelligent, my wits became sharper, I joined the Nazi Party, and the SS. I hoped the prospect of joining the SS would have made you stronger, more intelligent and sharpen your wits. I hoped you would grow up to be an officer like me. Judging by your utter control and concealment of your emotions, perhaps even your lack of them, I decided you were ready to join the SS". I was confused, did I not have emotions, had I become a hollow shell like my mother, was I on my way to become like Colonel Schmidt? What sort of a day was this?

Schmidt cleared his throat and continued talking " But I see I was wrong, you are still a coward Ferdinand. You are not ready for the SS. In fact your treachery today leads me to conclude that you must be sent to a correctional facility until you are no longer a coward."

My mother, Alice and I all turned pale, our father was sent to a correctional facility and we haven't heard from him since. "That would be all." He walked over to the door, opened it and called out: "Muller, get the car started, Schneider, help with the convicts!" The ride over to the station breezed over like a cloud on a windy day. I ran my fingers through my hair my bright, green eyes seemed to flood with tears. Colonel Schmidt stepped out and escorted us to a small platform at the back. Two men gave him the Nazi salute and opened the doors to a boxcar. There were no seats. There was simply a poorly cleaned wooden floor and the stench of despair. Colonel Schmidt looked at me and said "Ferdinand, you will become like me eventually, one way or another, it's your destiny." He turned to the two men and said: " Close the doors, it reeks of despair." I couldn't take it anymore. I snapped, "SCHMIDT! You will lose this war and you will lose the peace that follows! Freedom will come to Germany and with it will come justice! You will pay for what you did to my father, to Ezra, to my family and to all the people you slaughtered! You will be seen for what you are: a murderer who kills without remorse! You will soon find yourself staring down the barrel of a gun!" Schmidt smiled " You're not as big a coward as you seem to be and you will be like me. We shall see what my fate will be, but your future self is standing right in front of you. Now close the door. I can't take the smell anymore". With that he turned on his heels and started to leave.

Suddenly, another Nazi officer walked in, he and Schmidt saluted one another. They began to talk, Schmidt asked a question that sent my head reeling, " Have you loaded in the detonators yet?". The officer nodded. Schmidt smiled " The invaders will never expect this. We have the plans and detonators for a German atom bomb in this train. Moscow, London and eventually Washington will burn thanks to us!" He gave the man a final nod and left.

I began to think, judging by the smell there was explosive in the car in front of us. I looked down at my hands. Colonel Schmidt replaced our handcuffs with rope. A foolish choice, rope was much easier to wriggle out of. I stumbled over to the keyhole of the door. We were already out of Berlin and in a forest, I looked back and noticed my mother and sister, wriggling out as well. I also noticed two rocks beside a tiny hole in the wall.

I looked at my mother and said "If we are where I think we are, there will be a bridge over a river that is deep enough for you two to jump into." She looked at me strangely. "Why us two?" I deflected the question with another question, " Alice, do you have a hairpin you can use to pick the lock?" She nodded and got to work, in thirty seconds the door was opened and we were on the bridge. My mother looked at me, her eyes were full of sadness. "Ferdinand, you must go with us. I can't let you stay on this train, heading on to your doom." I looked at her and said, " Schmidt and the Nazi regime did this to us. Their lives now depend on this train arriving. If I do not do this, millions will die. The Nazis win. Schmidt wins. I must do this. I must destroy this train. I must destroy Schmidt's bomb." My mother was crying. " Ferdinand, I love you, I don't want you to die." " I love you and Alice too Mom; you must survive. Jump. For me and dad." With that they jumped. I ran over to the rocks and rubbed them together, until a spark flew out and gracefully drifted to the other car, igniting the fumes from the explosives. Perhaps my life was going to end, but Alice and my mother would survive and the look on Colonel Schmidt's face when he found out about how I destroyed his precious bomb made it worth it.

EPILOGUE

Ferdinand is killed in the ensuing explosion. The engineers rush to replace the plans for the bomb, but the entire project falls through. Berlin falls in May 1945. Colonel Schmidt is executed for crimes against humanity.

Orion's Fall

By: Ben Rayner (Gr. 8)

Regan walked back to his family dorm on the satellite Orion confidently. He had made the force ball team, his grades were good, he was fit, He had good friends, and Thalia had smiled at him today. Life was amazing. He put his hand on the door to his family dorm and as it slid open, he was instantly smacked in the face with a pillow. Life was amazing that is, until he went home. He sighed as the pillow fell to the floor and a small voice from inside started giggling. "Really, Len" he said in an exasperated voice. Len was his little brother his full name was Leonard but nobody called him that. "I got you!" Len said with a huge grin on his face. Regan picked up the pillow and threw it back at his little brother knocking him to the ground but that only made him giggle harder. "I got you too" he said with sarcastic joy. He walked past his little brother and saw his dad sitting hunched over his network of glowing screens. That was his dad, Ferguson Frayland - always working never paying any attention to his kids or even his wife. He sighed again and kept walking, being careful to avoid the kitchen where he knew his mother would be. If his father didn't care about his children's lives his mother was just the opposite. He slowly walked past the kitchen trying not to make too much noise but it was too late. His mother saw him and rushed over. "Hi, Regan" she said happily

"Hey Mom" he said tired already from his mother talking

"I thought I heard you come in" she said quickly "How was school? I heard force ball tryouts were today how did it go? Did you make any new friends? What about that Thalia girl she seems nice". She paused and waited for him to answer all her questions

"School was good" he said "and I made the force ball team."

"That's wonderful," she said "but you must be so tired after force ball tryouts. I'll let you go to your room" and with that she turned back to her work in the kitchen. Regan sighed with relief. That was his Mom, Kirsten Frayland the exact opposite of his Dad always wanting to talk and wanting to know everything that her children did. He walked into his room and closed the door behind him flopping on the bed and soon he was asleep.

Regan awoke to the sound of someone knocking on his door and a little voice calling his name. It was Len "Regan! It's time for dinner!" he said excitedly.

"Alright I'm coming" he said, sitting up and pressing his palm against the pad on the wall, opening the door and revealing his little brother who, like always, had a big grin on his face. "Come on" he said in an exasperated tone of voice. "Mom made spaghetti" and ran back down the hall. Regan followed him, confused. Spaghetti was an earth meal that they almost never got on Orion except on special occasions. He wondered what the occasion was today. When he walked into the dining room and sat down, he was even more confused. From what he could tell, the dinner was proceeding as normal - Dad sitting at one end not really paying attention to what was happening, while Mom was listening intently to something that Len was excitedly telling her about. He didn't really care what it was. It could have been the most boring day and Len would have at

least twenty things to ramble on about. Regan sat down and his dad looked at him “Hey Regan” he said

“Hey” Regan replied as he sat down and ate his spaghetti while he waited for a break in his little brothers chatter. When he finally got one he turned to his Mom “what’s the spaghetti for?” he asked.

“Your forceball tryouts” she said. “Your father and I are very proud of you.”

“But I could have not made it. You didn’t know until I told you a while ago” he said confused.

“We would have made it for you anyways” she said. Regan went back to eating. He decided not to question his Mom any more on the subject because he knew he wouldn’t get a better answer than that. When they were all finished, Regan washed the dishes and put them in the cupboard then went down to the gym to practice a bit of force ball. Force ball is a game played in a zero-g gym. There are four of them on Orion one for each section. Regan lived in the East section even though you couldn’t really call it that for there was no North, East, South, or West on Orion. The north section was supposedly the one pointing up when they launched it into orbit around the earths moon. When he reached the gym, he started putting on the harness and testing the ropes which he could fire out and would attach to the walls and other square objects in the middle called starlets. He put on the gloves which would force the ball away from them when it was activated. He put on a helmet, grabbed a ball closed his eyes and launched himself into the gym.

When he opened his eyes he found he was among the starlets. He looked around and found he was not alone Thalia was floating not far away from him, eyes closed short brown hair floating in a cloud around her head. He let go of the ball and shot a rope out to the starlet closest to her and grabbed onto one of the handles. He looked at her for a second, she had a quiet beauty, not one that demanded attention like the other girls that he knew but one that was just there. He called out to her and she opened her blue eyes “Oh, Hi Regan” she said smiling “I didn’t hear you come in”

“Hi” he said trying his best to smile back.

“Were you going to practice?” she said looking worried. “I can leave if you want”

“No, it’s fine. You can stay” he said, glad that she didn’t leave and he could try to start a conversation. She shot a rope out to his starlet and grabbed onto one of the handles beside him “Did you finish the work for tomorrow at school?” she asked.

“Yeah, did you?”

“Yeah, I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t” she said looking at the timekeeper on her wrist “Oh shoot” she said to herself “I have to go now. Bye Regan.” And with that she shot off a rope to a near starlet and rocketed herself to the doorway. Regan watched her fire ropes expertly from starlet to starlet. That was Thalia Revanold - the most confusing person he had ever met. If either of them had known what was about to happen maybe

they would have talked longer or Regan would have at least practiced. But he didn't he was thinking about Thalia. He shot off to collect the ball and headed back to the door. He took off his harness, helmet, and gloves, put the ball away and headed back to his family dorm where he flopped in bed and was quickly asleep.

He was rudely awoken by an alarm blaring. He jumped out of bed and put on his clothes, then looked at the timekeeper by his bed. It read 0:21 then he realized what the alarm was. It was the intrusion alarm for the ship - in case someone or something broke into Orion either from the prison satellite or somewhere else. They always announced a drill. He opened the door to his room and walked into the front room of the dorm where he saw his Len, his mom and dad all with the same confused look on their faces. Then there was a pounding on the door and it burst open. Three figures burst in - ends of their laser rifles glowing. "Everyone on your knees" said a slightly muffled voice. Regan dropped to his knees. He knew that defying them was useless. They had probably been planning this for months. He saw that his parents had dropped like they were supposed to but he also saw Len. He stood defiantly in front of them. "No!" He said angrily. "You can't just come in here and start ordering people around. You haven't even introduced yourselves yet and you think you can tell us what to do. Well you're wrong."

"Len, No just get on your knees before they hurt you." it was his dad's voice. This surprised him as much as Len because neither of them noticed the charging of the laser rifle "we'll introduce ourselves then" said the one aiming the rifle at Len. "Starting with this gun his name is destiny." There was a bright flash and a slight zap and then Len was gone.

Regan couldn't move he couldn't speak, yesterday he would have given anything to see Len gone but now that he had disappeared before his eyes he couldn't do anything. Not even cry they moved to his parents and in two more flashes of light they were gone as well. The next few moments were a blur he knew he was looked over then picked up and dragged toward a cell. He could barely remember any details except something a guard had said just before he was pushed into a cell "We're going to get you all out just don't act like a hero."

Regan didn't know how long he was in there he just tried to grasp the fact that his little brother was dead that his family was dead. He didn't feel angry he didn't feel sad he didn't feel anything except a cold empty thing in the pit of his stomach. He couldn't so he just sat there 'Maybe I'll die here.' He would think to himself sometimes and he welcomed it as a fact. Randomly food would get pushed in and sometimes when he was really starving he would eat some of it. He didn't care if they poisoned it, he didn't care if he starved, he didn't care about anything anymore. He would just look out the window blankly at the stars and the lunar landscape below. Sometimes he slept he didn't know how long he didn't care. Every once in a while there was a note in his food some had cheesy encouraging messages. Some an update on the escape, he meticulously ripped all of them to shreds but one meal the note only held 2 words "It's time." Regan stared at it he was almost as still as he was when his family was killed. Almost, he ripped the small sheet in half then again and again till there was nothing but shreds of it all over the floor. He thought of Len and felt again the cold ache. He picked up the tray to slip it through the slot and felt the familiar pressure of someone taking it on the other side. He

let go so they could take it then there was a small whooshing sound from the other end of the door and he could see a small flash through the slot. The tray fell back in then there were footsteps on the other side and a small electronic beep as the door slid open. On the other side there was a strange man and behind him was Thalia and a nerd from his class named Rodger that everyone always picked on. Thalia looked tired with her hair messy and her face pale. He walked up to her and she hugged him "you look terrible." she said

"Have you looked in a mirror lately" he said pulling back slightly. There was a slight grunt from behind them. It was Rodger "I don't know about you two but I think we should get going" he said. Regan looked at him nodded and blushed. Then he looked back at Thalia. He started to grow angry, how could they shove her into a cell? How could they kill his parents? And even Len a small child. He stepped forward now completely angry. The first emotion he had felt since the invasion and he accepted it fully. "Follow me" the strange man said sternly and he did. He didn't care who he was as long as they were able to get vengeance on the people who did this. The next few moments were a blur they ran through the hallways shooting out cameras and guards eventually they reached the pod room on the edge of the satellite. There was about 7 guards by Regan's count but in that rush there may have been many more or many less. They all rushed in the strange man in front shooting at enemies left and right Thalia behind him Rodger behind her and Regan at the back. Suddenly in a flash of light the man in the front disappeared, his gun clattering to the floor. There was a small cry from Thalia but they didn't stop moving. Regan picked it up and kept firing to cover Thalia and Rodger as they opened the pod door. He heard a Mechanical grinding as the pod door opened. He turned and ran for it Thalia and Rodger were already inside then a blast of pain went through his arm and it sent him spiraling through the air. He landed in the pod with a grunt of pain. He moved his arms and tried pushed himself up but he only rolled over. He looked at his arms thinking something was wrong then he noticed it. The reason he had rolled over was not a problem with his arms it was because his left arm had been disintegrated not even the shoulder was left and there was a gaping hole in his side. He stood up slowly and walked farther into the pod collapsing on one of the beds in the main living area. Thalia looked back, saw him lying there, and rushed over tears starting to form in her eyes and roll down her face. She looked at his side and started crying harder "I'm sorry" she said through her tears.

"Don't be" he said smiling at her "you have to go back to the closest human colony and inform them of this. Live your life don't think about me, anyways I should be sorry for being such a jerk" his vision started to blur and he closed his eyes. He felt Thalia hug him lightly he felt a tear on his shirt he wanted to tell her not to cry to be happy but he couldn't he heard her say something but couldn't figure out the words then it all faded away.

Thalia looked up she couldn't cry anymore he was dead his pulse had faded a long time ago but she had cried all the tears she could muster now there was only a cold ache in her stomach. She kissed his body on the forehead "I love you" she said and went back to the cockpit. She had to tell everyone what had happened. For her family, for everyone else still prisoner on that ship, and finally for Regan.

Last Light

By: Catherine He (Gr. 7)

I race into Atland City Hospital, worry clouding my mind. The receptionist looks up at me, unfazed even though I probably look like a madman. "Hello sir, how may I help you?" she asks emotionlessly. "My name is River Light, and I'm here to see my best friend, Parker Hale!" I screech, jumping up and down. "Room 148," she mutters, pointing down the long hallway on the side. I'm in such a hurry to see Parker that I forget to say thanks.

Room 148 is at the last room in the hallway. I frantically twist the doorknob and step inside. My eyes widen in horror at the scene in front of me. There, laying on the blue hospital bed with breathing tubes attached to him, is Parker. "Parker," I whisper. My best friend rolls over to face me, wincing in pain. I cautiously walk over to him and sit on the side of the bed. "Who told you I was here?" he asks, slurring his words together. "I'm first on your emergency contact list, remember?" I respond quietly.

I take a good long look at my best friend. Gauze is wrapped around all the visible parts of his body, but the blood from his wounds are already seeping through. "Park, what happened?" I ask, whispering. Parker sighs. "River, I'm part of the Atland Archers gang. I sell drugs to provide for Alexa and I. I know, it's really illegal, but I what other choice did I have? I don't know how to do anything involving math or language. Today, a member of a rival gang found me and tried to kill me."

I stare at the ground blankly. Parker was in a life-threatening situation that could've been easily avoidable had I been a better friend and helped him out. I'm such a failure.

"Riv, I'm going to die. And if I don't die now, I'll die a slow, painful death very soon. Please take care of Alexa like she's your second chance at a sister."

I prepare to give him a huge lecture about how he's going to make it when suddenly, he gets up, unplugs the machines and rips out his breathing tubes. He throws himself onto the bed, eyes wide with no trace of fear.

Parker Hale dies at 5:56 p.m on October 12, 2017. Cause of death: suicide.

I wipe my misty blue eyes so that any trace of tears are gone, though they probably won't be visible in the twilight. I run my hand through my messy golden brown hair so it doesn't look like I just rolled out of bed. Finally, I take one deep breath before ringing the doorbell of 21 Winter Street, the Hale home.

It's been 2 days since Parker died by choice. Since most of his family is dead, there won't be anyone to have a funeral with, so they're just burying him in his backyard.

Now, since he has always stuck by me through everything, the least I can do is complete his dying wish: take care of his 14-year-old sister, Alexa Hale.

Suddenly, the front door opens, revealing the last living Hale: Alexa. Her usually vivid cerulean eyes are dull and bloodshot and there are dark circles under her eyes. I look down sadly. I'm so scared of screwing her up.

"Hey Alexa, how are y- actually no, you're not fine and I know that. Can I come in?" I ask, mentally facepalming myself. Alexa nods slowly and steps out of the doorway, motioning for me to come inside.

I cautiously step in and take a look at the house; I haven't been here in a month, but everything seems to be the same as it was when I left here. Their family photo is still in the middle of the living room table, and the vase of flowers is still on the window ledge, though they're all wilted. Alexa taps me on my shoulder, making me jump in surprise. "River, why are you here?" she asks quietly, as if she talks any louder she'll break. "Alexa, you're brother's dying wish was for me to foster you. But if you don't want me, I'll leave."

I close my eyes. I'm such an idiot. Why would Alexa want me? I'd be such a failure. Gosh, I don't want to fail with Alexa like I did with Ocean and Atlanta.

Alexa's eyes widen in surprise, a slow smile creeping across her face. "Really? Of course, I'd love to have you here. Y'know, I'm scared of being alone." She laughs and runs over to me, hugging me tightly I feel as if I'm about to explode. My eyes widen. Alexa actually wants me?

She lets go, and looks up at me joyfully. "We've got to celebrate!" she exclaims, giggling like the child she's supposed to be.

And so we do.

Over the next 3 weeks, Alexa and I do a lot of catching up. Every morning, we go to a cheap coffee shop, order coffee and doughnuts, and just sit in a booth talking about life. Suddenly, all of my failing Parker and Alexa nightmares disappear.

Tonight marks the beginning of our third week together as brother and sister. Since the incident with Parker, Alexa is too scared to sleep in her room by herself, so we moved Park's bed to Alexa's room. It's currently 1 a.m, and Alexa has been sleeping for about an hour. I, on the other hand, can't seem to fall asleep.

I look over at my sleeping sister. Her light blond hair frames her face, and her long blond eyelashes cast shadows on the top of her cheek. Suddenly, Atlanta and Ocean crawl

into my mind. This would've been them if I had taken better care of them. Atlanta would've been 14 and my twin would've been able to celebrate our birthday together in December. It's all my fault; those masochists killed both of my sisters right in front of me.

I fall asleep thinking about Atlanta and Ocean Light.

I jump into a flower field, holding hands with Atlanta and Ocean. "River, that was fun!" Atlanta laughs, hugging me tightly. I smile gently, hugging my little sister back. The three of us have a ton of fun jumping and spinning in the field of flowers.

Suddenly, the sky darkens and the flowers disappear, revealing a bottomless pit of fire. "How could you!" Ocean yells, tripping over a hot rock. Atlanta grabs onto her arm, keeping her steady. I stare at them in fear, not daring to move.

Atlanta looks at me, tears shining on her misty blue eyes. "I can't believe you replaced us..." she whispers, just loud enough to be audible. My eyes widen. "Atlanta-"

Ocean pulls Atlanta away from me. "River, you did it. You replaced us with...HER. I hope you guys have nice lives. Just remember, you betrayed us..."

Their golden brown hair whips around from the hot wind. I try to reach out to them, but they keep moving further and further.

Then a wave of fire takes Ocean and Atlanta. I watch my sisters die right in front of my eyes, once again.

I wake up with a start, gasping for air. I crawl out of the bed, to be greeted with Alexa sitting at the side of my bed. "River, you okay?" she asks worriedly. I shake my head. Alexa gives me a sad look. "Did you dream of...them?" she asks quietly. Other than my mother and Parker, Alexa is the only one who knows everything about what happened that night.

I nod, rolling out of the bed and onto the neon pink fuzzy carpet of Alexa's bedroom. I don't get up. I feel Alexa's hand on my shoulder. "River, you're not okay. Here, I'll get you some hot chocolate and we can-"

"NO ALEXA! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! I'M BETRAYING MY SISTERS!" I scream, extremely frustrated. I turn around breathing heavily, and look into her cerulean eyes, which are clouded with hurt. "What do you mean? I thought you considered me as one of your sisters!" she cries out, voice cracking. I roll my eyes. "Alexa, I mean biological sisters, my REAL sisters. I'm betraying them by making you a sister of mine. And I can't do that! I can't betray Atlanta and Ocean!" I cry out, tugging furiously at my hair. Alexa turns around, but I hear the sniffing. I scoff. "Jeez, stop crying Alexa. Parker's dead, and you know no one can replace him. Just like you can't replace Atlanta and Ocean!" I shout. I feel a tinge of guilt as Alexa turns around, tears streaming down her face.

"Leave," she says, voice quivering with hatred and anger, but I could pick out the pain.

"Gladly," I reply, walking out of the house and slamming the door behind me. I hear Alexa's muffled sobs from inside, almost begging me to come back.

I want to go back. I want to hug Alexa and tell her that I'm too sorry for words; that I was out of my mind. But I can't. Because I am a coward.

Because I am a failure.

10 years later...

"But daddy-"

"No buts, Carson! We need to go get your mother and sister things for the girl's night in!" I say sternly. My 3-year-old son, Carson Lake Light, pouts as we walk down the street to Margo's Everything Store. We're two steps from the entrance before I stop abruptly, face paling.

"Daddy?" Carson asks. I silence him and walk towards a homeless girl, who looks about 24 years old. She has light blond hair, and cerulean blue eyes that are red and bloodshot. She sits against the brick wall, holding a cigarette in one hand and a bottle of cheap liquor in the other.

"Alexa Hale?" I whisper, just loud enough for the girl to hear. She turns to look at me. Once she gets a good look at me, she freezes, eye wide. She stands up and walks over to me and Carson. "River Light. You look pretty good," she states emotionlessly. I blush, tightening my grip on Carson as she focuses her attention on him. "And who are you?" she asks, her voice filled with curiosity. "Carson. Who are you?" asks Carson, smiling at her. I cringe.

"Well Carson, your daddy and I used to be almost sister and brother. But something bad happened, and he left," Alexa replies, looking down. Then she stares back at me. "Who?" she asks, nodding towards Carson. "A girl I met through counselling. Her name's Ariana. We're married, and we have an older daughter named Atlanta-Ocean."

Alexa nods. "Glad that you're doing good, River. I'm not at all. After you left, I got kidnapped for a year. Then I dated a guy who turned out to be a murderer trying to kill me! So I joined the Atlant Archers gang, and so now I'm a homeless gang member."

I feel guilt running through me, spreading like wildfire. This is all my fault. I abandoned Alexa when she needed me the most, and now here she is. Tears fill my eyes, making

them an even mistier blue. I was a failure once again. I couldn't even complete my best friend's dying wish. I can't take anymore of this.

"Okay, we'd better get going. See you around, Alexa," I say awkwardly. As we turn and start walking away, I hear a soft and pained voice from behind.

"Actually, this is goodbye."

Alexa Hale dies at 5:56 p.m on October 12, 2027. Cause of death: suicide.

The Pear Tree

By: Ainsley Shaw (Gr. 11)

The buildings rose tall all around me. They were so tall, I had to crane my neck just to see the top. I sat at the base of one of the grand structures, on a small hole-ridden blanket I had scavenged from a dumpster. The small scrap of cloth poorly insulated me from the cold of the ground. I could feel the cold seeping into my body as I sat, and the frigid wind blowing through my hair. It bit at my face and ears, and numbed my spindly fingers. I pulled my limbs closer to my core and rub my hands together to try to combat the cold. I stared ahead of me, watching the people scurry past. They avoid eye contact, acting as if I don't exist. I see the looks of guilt flash on some of their faces, disgust on others.

I craned my neck again to stare at the towering structures, the sun reflecting into my eyes causing me to squint. I stared until a blue blob forms across my vision and closed my eyes to watch the shapes dance. I only opened them when I heard a cough in front of me. I raised my head and stared at them. The man in front of me wore a beige coat with a black scarf. He had a narrow, pinched face adorned with hooded eyes and thin lips. He was lanky and greasy, looking more like a weasel than a person. He held a cup, steam rising up out of the top. He stretched his hand toward me, an offering of the cup of hot liquid. I cupped my hands around the cardboard cylinder and nodded my head toward the man in thanks. He smiled slightly and carried on his way, fading off into the crowd.

I bring the hot container up to my mouth and take a sip of the boiling drink. It burnt my tongue as I pulled it through my mouth and down my throat. I felt it slide down into my stomach while letting out a contented sigh. It tasted like chocolate, but was severely watered down. The man must have gotten it from a local coffee shop, or perhaps out of a packet. I would have preferred that milk was used instead of water to enhance the flavour, but I'll take what I can get. I can't afford to be greedy. Literally. As I drank, it gradually warmed my insides and made me feel drowsy. My eyelids felt heavy, and I felt the energy seep from my limbs. I yawned loudly while leaning back against the edge of the skyscraper. What could be the harm in closing my eyes for a few minutes?

Hands on my shoulders shook me out of my slumber. The frigid fingers were pressed under my jacket and seemed to suck the heat out of me. I heard the crashing of waves all around me, and smelt salt in the air. Warm air softly brushed against my face and carded its fingers through my hair. The rays of the sun beat down on my face and body, covering me in a blanket of warmth.

"You need to wake up," said the owner of the freezing hands.

The words were passed through aged vocal cords, and tasted like they were laced with honey. I opened my eyes a sliver and looked up at the woman with the freezing hands with confusion. Her face was a worried one, but soon relief washed over her face when she noticed I had woken up. She stood and wobbled slightly while walking away. I heard the voices of many others in the direction she wandered away to. I sat up and rubbed at my eyes, trying to rid myself of any grogginess. I looked around to take in my surroundings. A wave of panic flushed through my body finally coming to rest in my stomach like a stone. I sat on an island about the size of a football field. This island had a hill, and at its peak stood a single tree.

I stood up and peered over at the source of the voices. They belonged to 3 other people besides the woman with icy fingers. She stood off to the side, listening. I felt a weight on my neck and look down at a blue amulet hanging off my neck. It had a calming bluish glow, accented with flecks of silver. Ignoring the odd and unfamiliar piece of jewelry I walked over toward the group, remaining at a distance. The four others all had amulets too, but they didn't seem to pay them any mind.

"Yah, but that still doesn't explain how we got here!" said a lanky boy with a squeaky voice. His words overflowed with anxiety. "I know. Right now we need to figure out a way to get off this island back to some sort of civilization, and need to find water and shelter. I suggest we split up and look," said a ordinary looking middle aged man with a confident, deep voice. The other three agreed with him and went their separate ways. I headed down to the beach and followed along the shore line to the parts that were obscured by the hill. The hill dropped down into a cliff and jagged rocks lined the bottom. I spotted a small door sized opening in the middle of a stone wall. It was partially hidden behind one of the spires of stone. I walked inside the darkness and dragged my eyes across the room. There was a small pool of water in the middle of the cave and a large recessed shelf in one of the sides. I walked up to a pool of water and knelt down next to it. I dipped my cupped hands into the cool water and brought the liquid up to my lips. The smooth water soothed my hoarse throat as it flowed down into my stomach. I stood up to hear footsteps coming up behind me, and swiftly whipped my head around to face the source. The noise belonged to a well built man with an angry face. He looked around the room, and his eyes landed on me. He looked behind me at the pool of water and smirked. He left the cave and I heard him yelling to the others. The 3 strangers flooded into the cave and hope gleamed in their eyes.

The leader came up to me placed his hands on our shoulders. He smiled down at me, then walks away toward the exit. Everyone followed and listening intently to his speech. "Alright team, we got water, shelter, and that pear tree sitting up on that hill. This won't be enough to fully support us, but it's better than nothing!" the leader said. He's appeared calm despite us not having enough supplies to last any major amount of time. He spoke up again "That's ok though, we are surrounded by ocean, we'll find a way to get fish."

"Now that that's out of the way, let's get to know each other. You can call me Sam."

Said the leader, his brown eyes glowing.

"Im Grace," said the icy fingered woman.

"Victor," says the lanky teen with an annoyingly high pitched squeal.

"Name's Jack," said the mountain of a man standing next to me.

It's my turn, I open my mouth and whisper out a shaky sentence, "Thomas, the name's Thomas.'

"Alright, now that that's out of the way let's go see if we can find anything in the waters," Sam said throwing his thumb over his shoulder toward the great expanse of blue.

We all go our separate ways, the others going to 4 different points of the shore and wading into the ocean. I went and sat by the tree on top of the hill. I looked over the large body of water surrounding us and felt a wave of loneliness and anxiety. I slouched against the bark of the tree, staring out into the endless blue. After what felt like an hour the sun started to recede to the horizon. The bright reds, oranges, and yellows accenting the blue of the sky and sea. The sun finally dipped below the line, seeming to disappear into the ocean. The others are returned to the shore. The hope that had been on their faces now gone, replaced with exhaustion. They had found nothing. They all decided to retire to the cave to sleep. I followed them into the darkness. We all started climbing into the shelf, and huddled together there for warmth and company.

Shrill screams pierced the morning air and rattled around in my head. I shot up in a panic, and ran outside to see what the commotion is. The teenager, Victor, flailed his arms around and screamed about our predicament. Tears streamed down his face and he was shook with either anger or fear. The others tried to get him to settle down, holding their hands up. They spoke in hushed voices but wore worried looks on their faces. Victor lifted his shaky hands up to the glowing crystal hanging around his neck. He ripped it off and chunked the stone into the sea. The gem collided with the surface with a satisfying plop, and it is lost. Instantly Victor stopped crying, his sobs replaced with a deafening silence. His hands untangled themselves from his hair and instead clawed around his neck. His panicked and confused face started going red and he fell to his knees. He flailed around on the floor like a fish out of water for a solid few minutes, frantically pawing at his throat. Dread lay heavy in my core. He stopped moving. His eyes glazed over, flat and colourless. Everyone sat around him in disbelief.

Astonishingly, Victor then crumbles apart. Turned to ash. His remains disperse rapidly through the air while everyone is silent. I walked away silently toward the pear tree. I sat down, and took a pear from the tree and bit down. The sweet grainy fruit crunched between my teeth. I overheard a conversation from the others. They talked about what's happened.

"The amulet. He died and turned to ash after he took off this damned amulet and chucked it into the ocean," said Jack. He clutches his own amulet, the light peeking through his fingers.

"That seems to be what happened, but it still makes no sense! How did he turn to ash only seconds after choking on absolutely nothing!" screamed out Sam, his voice wobbling slightly. He's breaking. Sam continued, "We need to get off this island! We need to leave, and we need to leave now. There is not enough food, or water, and we have no supplies. We need to build a raft and try to get to another island or we're all going to die here!" The others nod along.

"But how are we to leave if we have no raft, or supplies to build one?" counters Grace. Her voice has lost it's honey, now favouring a stale robotic tone.

"We just have to look, and look again, we'll cut down the tree!" Sam said, becoming desperate. But with nothing else to do, the other just nod and separate. They looked for supplies that were nowhere to be found. I remained at the pear tree, the sweet aftertaste of it's fruit still on my tongue. I craned my head back, and rested my eyes. I imagined myself back in the city, craving the familiarity. I fell asleep in that position, knowing I would be sore when I woke.

I'm rudely awoken again by screaming coming from the cave. The image of Victor flashed across my eyes and I leapt up. I ran over, and peered over the cliff to listen. "It's wood and rope! We can leave! We can build a raft and leave!" This was obviously Sam, he's too obsessed with that damn raft.

Everyone was celebrating, but nobody asked. Where had it come from? Did someone hide it when we first got here? Was it brought here? How is it here? I didn't have time to ask, they rushed back in, dragging the materials out and constructed a makeshift raft. Sam looked up at me, and waved. He then yelled out to me "Hey, can you climb that tree up there. Try to see if there's any nearby land, yah?"

I nodded to him and walked up to the base of the tree. I gripped some sturdy branches and lifted myself up the trunk, straining my muscles. I kept going, receiving scrapes along the way. I reached the top and peeked through the foliage. The sun reflected off the surface of the water, and stabbed at the back of my eyes. I squinted my eyes to combat the piercing light and search for hope. I scanned the horizon carefully, checking 3 times to be sure. There was nothing. I couldn't see anything, there was no hope. We would never make it off this damned island, and would die here.

I clambered back down to the soft grass below and knelt down to shout toward Sam "There's nothing, we're alone here." He looked back at me, the hope in his eyes disappeared. He mentally shook himself and smiled at me. "That's ok, just means we have to pick a direction and hope to find something!" He shouted back, grasping at hope.

I left them to build the raft and went to sit at the base of the tree. I picked up a brown leaf I found at the base and crunched it in between my fingers. I looked around and see many dead leaves scattered around the base of the tree. That's odd. I placed my head on the trunk and looked over the expanse of water again, trailing my eyes over the horizon. I listened to the excited ramblings of the others as they built the raft. Hours later the sun had lowered under the horizon and the moon has risen. I looked at the stars, brighter without the city lights. But they don't appear to be blinking. They look bland, and stale, as if someone had just dotted white paint on a black canvass. The others have finished the raft and left it on the shore for tomorrow. I rose from my seat, having gotten bored and headed to the cave. I slept away from the others.

I woke up on my own for the first time in days. The others are gone again. I run outside, and frantically look around. I spot them on the edge of the island stocking the raft with food and water in flasks. I settled down a little and go over to them. They glanced at me for a second and got back to what they were doing. "Alright, it's fully stocked and ready!" Sam said, excitement in his words, and asked "you ready Grace?" She nodded her head and climbed on board. I looked at all the food and flasks of water. It's sufficient for maybe a couple days for a single passenger, but it's wouldn't last. I kept my mouth shut and looked away. I crouched down and stuck my hand into the water. The warm waves lapped at my arm. I heard them push Grace in the the raft off the shore. I focused on the warm water under my hand. I heard the sounds of screams in the distance, and I squeezed my eyes together and raised my hands over my ears. There were sounds of panic, and water splashed on me as the others tried to get to Grace. I glanced to see her writhing around on the deck of the raft, and choose to close my eyes again. I sat there for what felt like hours waiting for the screaming to stop. I looked out at the ocean to see nothing, everything had disappeared, disintegrated. Panic had washed over everyone back on shore. Sam is kneeling, Jack looks as if he's going to murder someone. I got up and walked back to the cave. The water in the cave now had an odorous new coating of green algae. While I stared at the wall, I watched the blue from my amulet dance. The remaining two join me soon, but no one said anything. I closed my eyes and slept.

I woke up to yelling, angry yelling. I looked around confused. Disgusting. I stand up and walk outside. Sam and Jack were standing at the top of the cliff, they yelled about someone killing the pear tree. I joined them at the top of the hill, but kept my distance. It seemed overnight the tree had died. Brown leaves scattered everywhere, and rotten pears littered the ground. The pear tree dead, the fresh water in the cave now stagnant. I walked away to the shore and looked at the ocean again. Jack and Sam continued to yell, whenever they get too loud I flinch, and the others flash before my eyes. I lay on the beach and shook. I closed my eyes and rested.

I woke up the next day to a growling stomach. I stayed where I am. I don't want to move. The yelling continued today, this isn't going to end well. But I'm tired, so I shut my eyes and tried to block out the yelling. I woke up to what feels like the next day. I heard yelling again, but it seemed more desperate. I looked up at the source and saw Jack had backed Sam into a corner. I sighed and stood up although my legs felt like jello

from lack of food. I walked over to them to get a closer look. Then Jack lunged at Sam and started biting at him. A look of shock and agony passed over Sam's face, and I sprinted away from them to the cave. I collapsed to my knees and looked for a place to hide. My eyes found themselves staring at one of the walls. The stone seemed to be cracked all over, and a blue light peeked through. The light looked like the light my amulet produced but brighter. I rammed my shoulder against the stones but they didn't budge. I continued to ram my shoulder against it, until I was bruised and raw. Eventually I crashed through the wall landing in a pile of rubble. I got up and headed down a corridor to the source of the blue light.

At the end of the corridor there's a large room. It's circular and in the center stood a woman. She glowed a cold blue. She stared at me with her completely blue eyes. She outstretched her arms and motioned for me to come towards her. As I got closer I realized she was standing on top of the water and was a good foot and a half taller than me. She stared at me, and I stared back. Her hands pushed towards me, and I lifted my own. I slotted my hands into hers and felt the warmth of her flesh. Black frames my vision as I stare up at her, energy being drained out of my body through her hands. I fall against her, my legs becoming too weak to support my body. She lets go of my hand and picks me up, cradling me in her arms.

"Sleep," she whispers softly into my ear. The hairs on the back of my neck, I'm in danger. I can't move, and I'm just so tired. Her warmth pushes up against my skin, lulling me to sleep. I close my eyes, and press up against her. My vision fades, I could only see blurred shapes and that awful black. I close my eyes and relax into her arms. I'm so warm.

Stuck

By: Vincenzo D'Orazio (Gr. 9)

Darkness. That's all that I could see. The pitch black darkness of the room was too much to bear. Having a fear of the dark was a great weakness. Fear. People say we have nothing to fear but fear itself. People say there are things stronger than fear. However, there are things far more frightening than death. I struggled to my feet and felt around the room, in search for anything that could help me. The eerie silence did not help either, only making my fear grow. I felt along the walls, but that was it. Nothing but the smooth concrete walls were all that I could feel. Until, a different surface touched my trembling hands. A switch of some sort. A wave of relief washed over me as I quickly flicked it on. The lights blared, illuminating the room. The darkness slowly crept away, as it was fought off by the light. The room had white concrete walls, stained with the blood of whoever was in here last. In the corner was a case of some sort, however it had a key lock, therefore leaving it unable to open. Ahead of me was a door, which I could now see. I walked toward it with caution, not knowing what lay ahead. My hand grasped the doorknob, and turned slowly. The door opened with a creak, with a lonesome hallway on the other side. It was better than nothing, so I continued on. I could feel the eyes of the hallway's paintings burning into me, the bland, pale figures looking rather angry. At the end of the hallway was a big painting, one containing a picture of a family. They all had the same, bland expressions as the others, with gaunt, pale faces. Their eyes wide, staring into mine. I had to look away, and came to a crossroads. One hallway going left, the other right. Right, being my dominant hand, was the way to go. I could feel it. More paintings glared at me, making me feel slightly uncomfortable. Until I had reached a set of stairs leading downward. A noise behind me caused me to gasp, and I spun around quickly to see the darkness. Coming back for revenge. It crept along the walls and floor, engulfing everything and anything in its path. I didn't want to be in the darkness. Not again. I quickly ran down the stairs, doing the best I could trying not to trip during my downward descent. Something caught my footing, and I took a nasty tumble to the floor. Behind me the darkness was stopped, and was defeated once more. I sprang to my feet and pressed on. The main floor of the mysterious house was no different than the upper floor. The painted walls had been scraped of their colours, by claws of some sort. The wood floor having the same, creaky floorboards and jagged, holes in the floor taking the shape of wooden spikes. Lights flickered and bugs scuttled out of every corner. This was a mad house. I continued on, looking for my way out. It was eerily quiet once more. Suddenly, the worst sound that could be heard reached my ears. The sound of scraping, the sound of moaning, like the undead. I quivered in FEAR as I slowly turned around. Behind me, was a shadow of a figure, coming around the corner. I couldn't move. I couldn't run. I couldn't speak. The figure finally reached the corner, and I could finally see "it". It was a monstrous creature that had crawled from the depths of the darkness. It was a tall, slender figure, with sharp, jagged claws for fingers, stained with a red substance. Drool dripped from its hanging mouth, its soulless black eyes glared at me. It screeched like a creature I had never heard before and began to charge. I finally found myself and broke into a run, as fast as my legs would carry me. I didn't look back, however I knew it was close behind me. I turned a corner, to see a dead end. There was nothing but a wall. I couldn't turn

back, as the creature reached the corner and blocked me in. It inched closer and closer, scraping its claws on the walls. I closed my eyes, accepting my fate.....Darkness. That's all that I could see. The pitch black darkness of the room was too much to bear. I felt as if this had happened before. I recognized this eerie silence. I struggled to my feet and felt around the room, in search for anything that could help me. I felt along the walls, but that was it. Nothing but the smooth concrete walls were all that I could feel. Until, a different surface touched my trembling hands. A switch of some sort. A wave of relief washed over me as I quickly flicked it on. The lights blared, illuminating the room. The darkness slowly crept away, as it was fought off by the light. I was back in the empty room. The walls still bloody, the case still locked, and the same wooden door stood ahead of me. By this time I was utterly confused. Why was I here again? What happened to the monster? I pushed my questions aside and pressed forward once more. I passed the same hallway and paintings, and fell down the same stairs.

Reaching the main floor once again. I remembered what happened next. The monster scraped the walls once more. This was my chance. This time, I ran before I allowed it to reach the corner, giving myself a head start. I turned a different corner and came across a door, leading outside. My freedom awaited me. Being outside made me feel no better. It was DARK. The wind howled, as it carried the crippled, dead leaves through the air. Crows cawed and watched me as I walked down the dark, forested path. Ahead of me, something could be seen, I picked up my pace and walked faster. I had reached a graveyard. Many graves stood before me. Some broken, some faded, and some crumbled to pieces. I walked in between them slowly, doing my best not to make a sound. Until suddenly, a sharp pain pierced my head. It was so painful I fell to my knees and screamed in agony, clutching my head tightly. I looked up and saw everything before me was flashing. The scenery before me flickering back and forth like a broken television screen, or a broken light bulb. Every time it flashed, I could see thousands of creatures all looking like the one I had encountered before. They all stood in front of the graves, like it was their own. A loud roaring could be heard in the distance getting louder and louder. A bright, red light appeared over the horizon. Continuing to get brighter. Something was burning. The creatures laid down in front of the graves, as if they were going to rest when.....it all disappeared. The creatures were gone. It was DARK once more. The creatures were gone and the roaring had stopped. I breathed heavily and clutched my chest, attempting to process what had appeared before me. I was now in front of a grave. For some reason this grave called to me. The name was covered with dust, and it was cracked. I couldn't stop myself, and began digging. I dug with my bare hands until I hit the solid coffin. I didn't know why, but I opened it, to see it was empty. Getting up from my crouched position, I wiped the dust off the grave. In bold letters, was my name. Before I could back away, I was shoved into the hole and felt dirt being thrown onto me.....Darkness. That's all that I could see. The pitch black darkness of the room was too much to bear.

"NOT AGAIN!" I screamed in anger as I flicked the light on.

This had been the second time I was sent back to the room. Too much was happening at the same time for me to process.

“LEAVE ME ALONE!” I screamed once more at no one in particular, and began punching the wall with my bare hands, over and over again.

I continued to punch the walls until my hands were scabbed and bloody. I couldn't take anymore. I didn't want to be killed once more, just to be sent back to the room I feared the most. I had finally been broken, and curled up in a ball, putting my head in my hands. I looked up to see the case that had been locked, was open. I reluctantly crawled over to it and looked inside. A singular, crumpled piece of paper lay inside. Whoever had written it used very splendid handwriting.

To whoever reads this.

I have been trapped in this home long enough to realize what is going on. You are asleep, and can only wake up if you face your fears. The creatures weren't always monsters. They are former people that never found a way out, and are doomed to walk the hallways of this God forsaken place forever. You only have three chances to get out. If you die three times, you won't wake up in the room, you'll wake up as a monster. I will attempt to get out, however if I fail, I hope this letter was of assistance.

Signed, A fellow prisoner.

The letter ended there. This was my chance, my saviour, my way out. It said I had to face my fear to.....wake up? Somehow I've been asleep and this is just a dream I can't wake up from? My fear. My fear was the dark, it had been in front of me all along! I sprinted over to the light switch and flicked it off, the darkness befell the room once again. Never before had I been so happy to see the darkness before me..... I woke up. It was still dark, a cold breeze brushed against me. But nothing could be seen, not even my own hands in front of me. Before I could make a move, a booming, yet civilized voice rang out.

“YOU HAVE DONE WELL. BUT YOU HAVE NOT ESCAPED. NOT YET.”

I looked up to the sky, in hopes to see who this voice belonged to. But to no avail.

“You must commit. Prove you are not afraid, and walk through.”

“B-But I don't know what's ahead of me!” I protested with sudden fear cracking in my voice.

There was no response. I breathed in, then out, and stepped forward. Nothing could be heard except my echoing footsteps. Tak, Tak, Tak. I couldn't see at all. I feared if I'd walk into something, but pressed onward.

‘Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid.’ I thought to myself.

I had a sudden spark of confidence and broke into a run. My fears flooded out of me, and disappeared into nothingness. Ahead of me, a welcoming, merciful light shone brightly before me. It's warmth comforted me. I ran towards it in reckless abandon. I wasn't afraid. Not anymore.....

Brothers In Arms

By: Mackenzie Horlings (Gr. 12)

The sky was darker than usual the morning he saw his brother again.

Waking up in the trenches made every day seem dreary, but there was just something different that morning. He could feel it in his gut.

He woke before the sun, knowing his brother was doing the same thing somewhere else on the battlefield. They had made it a habit to wake up before all the others, if only for a little bit of alone time before plunging into the ongoing chaos.

They used to sit in silence together and watch the sunrise, though it was hard to enjoy it much when they both knew what they would have to do to survive that day.

He missed his brother. It had been a shock to both of them when the higher-ups had announced his promotion to sergeant. They had been together on the front lines for 3 months, so while they had been prepared for separation, having to leave Evan was hard, even if it was to lead his own platoon.

Being the older brother, he constantly had to worry about Evan. He hadn't wanted him to enlist, but it was what their family did. Both their father and their grandfather had served; it was their duty.

Every day felt like a lifetime, even when they had been together, so it was no surprise that they felt even longer apart. Watching the sunrise like they used to was the closest he could be to his brother now, and he would take what he could get.

Even if it hadn't been their ritual together, the way the sun rose every day gave him hope for what was to come. The sun was oblivious to the fighting going on. It rose without fail each morning, providing him with faith that he would make it through another day.

That morning, however, though the sun rose in the same way it always did, he couldn't help but feel that something was different. Watching it didn't give him the sense of hope he always felt for the day ahead.

He sat watching the sun try to peek out from behind the barbed wire until he heard the other members of his crew stirring. Putting his unease to the side, they began preparing for another day at work.

They hadn't been out of the trenches for more than 5 minutes before enemy fire began raining down on them. It was the same every day, and in the 2 months they'd been

stationed here, they'd barely gained an inch. Every time they tried, the casualty rate skyrocketed.

But they refused to give up. That's what it meant to be a soldier. They had to do what needed to be done, regardless of the price.

As they tried to gain ground, he could see other crews emerging from various points in the trenches. He couldn't help but wish that his brother was there with him. He knew that was wishing danger on him, but they had always felt more at ease knowing that the other wasn't far away. He resolved to focus on the mission at hand, lest he be injured for being lost in thought.

They had moved together as a unit, pushing forward on the enemy until they could no more. They had been lucky until that point; they had made it a fair way into no man's land, losing only three men. They were scattered now, hiding behind any debris and in any craters they could to protect themselves from the bullets still being fired.

He couldn't see anyone through the smoke from the grenades. He held up his rifle, still hiding in his crater, taking aim on the enemy. He fired many times, unable to tell for certain if his bullets were hitting their mark, but determined to try and help his friends survive.

Shot after shot rang in his ears; bullets fired from his gun in a steady stream, until there were no more. The rifle clicked as he ran out of ammo, and he had no choice but to hide in that crater until the smoke cleared.

An hour passed, then two. As the smoke began to clear, the sounds of war did too. He could see the outlines of others on the battlefield, but remained hidden until he could tell which side they were on. With no weapon, he was a sitting duck.

He hated that he couldn't do anything. He hoped that the rest of his crew had managed to make it through. He hoped his brother was safe, wherever he might be.

As he thought about his brother, a shadow emerged from the smoke, looming over him. Defenseless as he was, he had nowhere to go and no way to protect himself. He watched as the figure lifted a gun, closing his eyes and preparing for what was to come.

The shot rang out, and blood splattered his face, but he felt no pain. Opening his eyes, he saw another shadow, the first having fallen to the ground. He grabbed the fallen man's gun, ready to defend himself if necessary.

"Who are you?" he shouted.

The figure didn't answer, but he paused midstep. He lowered his gun, and as the smoke cleared, it was clear why.

“Drew? Is that you?”

That voice. He knew that voice, almost better than he knew his own. But how could his brother be here?

“Evan? What are you doing here?”

The figure, Evan, leapt down into the crater. He crushed his brother in a hug, the two of them remaining like that for a few moments before letting go. They looked at one another, disbelief clear on both their faces.

“I was so worried about you! I thought I’d never see you again after I was transferred. I’m so glad you’re safe.” The words fell from his lips before he could stop them. He looked at Evan to see tears in his eyes.

“We need to talk, but we need to get to safety first. Let’s go.”

Drew was ecstatic that his brother was back, but he needed to make sure he remained safe. The two began crawling out of the crater, staying low to the ground for protection.

They had only made it ten feet when bullets began whizzing past their ears. They dropped to the earth, using their arms to drag themselves towards their side.

It didn’t take long before they reached another crater. They crawled down into it, knowing it was only a matter of time before they were discovered. They readied themselves, making sure their guns were full of ammunition, and prepared to make a break for it.

“When I say go, we run in opposite directions, got it? Don’t run in a straight line; zag. It’ll be harder for them to hit you. Ready?” Drew made his instructions clear, intent on getting them both out alive. At Evan’s nod, he peeked up to check their surroundings.

As his head peeked out from the top, he heard a dull thud behind him. He thought nothing of it, continuing to survey the area.

One second he was looking out at the battlefield. The next he was thrown against the wall of the crater.

Then all he knew was black.

It was only a moment later that he came to. His head pounded from being smacked against the ground, and he couldn’t move his leg, but he was alive.

Ears still ringing from the blast, he began looking around. Though his head was foggy, he thought he knew what had happened; a grenade had been thrown into the crater he was in, and he had been too focussed on getting out of there. And someone had been with him...he knew that. But who had it been?

All at once, the memory of finding his brother came rushing back. He scrambled to turn, needing to find Evan, but the sight that met him brought tears to his eyes and guilt to his heart.

Evan was nowhere to be seen, but the smell of burning flesh was brought to his attention. He could see the torso of a man, his intestines exposed. As he dragged himself closer, he could read the nametag on the uniform.

Stevens.

He couldn't hold back his tears at the sight of what used to be his brother. The thud he had heard. He had ignored it. He shouldn't have. His brother had covered that grenade with his body to protect him.

He had been so intent on getting Evan out alive that he had become the cause of his death. It had been his fault.

As he lay in the crater, he began to feel drops of water on his cheeks. He thought it was his tears, but as he stared up at the sky, he began to realize just how dark it had gotten in those hours.

The beautiful sunrise that he had witnessed that morning had felt different than normal. It hadn't provided him with the same assurances. He couldn't help but feel as though the sun had been trying to warn him, to prepare him for the loss that he would suffer. The sun was hidden behind the clouds now, rain pouring down on him.

He remained in that crater until he was discovered. It had stopped raining, but the sun had remained hidden, as if it was mourning with him. As the men before him took aim, he looked up at the sky one last time.

He could have sworn he saw the sun begin to peek out from behind the clouds.

Madhouse

By: Annabelle Vetro (Gr. 12)

They pulled up to the house, Angelina smiled with joy and bounced with excitement. She opened her door quickly and let out a squeal. The wind blew lightly, wrapping her white dress around her legs, and blowing her long brown hair behind her. Her brother, William, exited the car, grimacing at the atrocity of the home.

“Remind me Angelina, why are we here?”

“Because this place is magnificent! Look at the perfect whiteness of the siding on the house. I can’t even begin to imagine the inside, William!” She said, and grabbed his arm to pull him inside. He looked at her in confusion, after noticing the off-white siding that’s begun to peel, and the dead plants that climbed up the side. The wooden steps leading up to the door creaked as Angelina swiftly made her way up them. She twisted the rusted door handle and gasped when the inside was revealed.

“William look! The polished floors are beautiful. Is it marble? I bet it’s marble. And the walls! Look at the wallpaper, it’s such an exquisite pattern,” exclaimed Angelina as she danced about. William walked in and coughed as a wicked smell passed over him. He looked around and what Angelina described to him was unrealistic. The floors were covered in dirt, and the wallpaper was tainted yellow and peeling.

“Angelina, what are you going on about? Do you not see?” William grabbed her hand, but she slipped away and skipped down the hall.

William pursed his lips in confusion, but followed her. Something fell behind him and he turned around quickly, his eyes scanned the dark space around him. “Angelina did you hear that?” William asked his sister as he turned back around, but she wasn’t there.

“Angelina!” He yelled and began running frantically down the halls like a madman.

“Angelina, where are you?” He felt the walls for a door, and when his hand met cold metal, he gripped it tightly, twisted, then pushed open the heavy door. The room was lighter than the hallway, with a sliver of light shining through a crack in the boarded-up window. William approached the window and attempted to pry the wood from it. One piece came off, exposing more light through the room, and he looked out.

The day had grown gloomier than when they first arrived. Dark clouds hung low over the fields, and a strong wind blew the trees roughly. He looked higher in the sky and saw two crows circling around the perimeter of the house. The sound of footsteps behind

him broke him from his concentration on the outdoors. William turned around, expecting to see someone standing there, but there was nothing. The footsteps continued towards him, and he looked around to see if it was coming from another direction. The door to the room slammed shut, and the footsteps disappeared down the hall. With his heart in his throat, William keeled over to catch his breath. When he looked up, he searched the room for someone, or something out of place.

The room was fairly large, with a bed in the center of the wall to his left. Two large dressers sat on either side of the bed, each accompanied by a mirror. William walked over to the bed and ran his hand over the silk blanket while looking at the engraved detail on the dresser drawers. He looked into the dirty mirror and saw Angelina standing behind him.

“Angelina?” He said, sighing in relief as he turned around, but she wasn’t there. He faced the mirror again in confusion, and this time she was standing right behind him, her hand on his shoulder, but he couldn’t feel it. The atmosphere around him began to lighten, sunlight beamed through the un boarded windows, revealing the simple, white wallpaper that was tainted yellow, and torn moments ago. The mirror shone like it was just cleaned, and no dust covered the top of the dresser.

A scream disturbed his awe, and he turned around quickly, facing the door. The room was back to its dark, dingy atmosphere. There was another scream, and William ran for the door. He grabbed the rusted handle, but it didn’t turn. He pushed against the door with his shoulder, yelling Angelina’s name in a panic. William searched for something large enough to break the handle off the door and spotted the silhouette of a candlestick on a shelf across the room. He picked it up, and hit it against the door handle several times before it popped off and fell to the ground. Pushing the door open, he ran down the hall towards where he heard the scream.

William stopped at an open door; the only open door, and walked in. There stood Angelina, staring into a large mirror at herself, but it wasn’t her. William walked further into the room, to get a better look at her reflection. She was in the same white dress, only it was torn and stained red with blood, as were her hands. Her long wavy hair was now a frizzy mess, strands stuck to her forehead, and a bleeding bruise on her cheek.

“Angelina, what’s going on?” He asked calmly, taking a step towards her. She looked at him in a panic when he put his arm out to grab her. He glanced over at his reflection, and knew what was staring back wasn’t him. A wicked grin was placed on his lips as he looked down at the blood covered knife in his hand, examining the red liquid as it dripped onto the floor.

The mirror began to contort, and twist into a spiral. Angelina, mesmerized, walked towards it, putting her hand out to touch. A bad feeling washed over William, and just

before her hand made contact with it, he grabbed her arm, but it didn't stop her from touching it. Nothing happened at first, and then the house began to shake. A ringing sound filled the room, and slowly, a bright light began to consume them. They shut their eyes tightly, and then everything stopped. The ringing faded away, and the house remained still.

William opened his eyes to a scream, the kind of scream you can distinguish between pain and fear. The knife he was holding was now in his sister's side, and she looked down at it, then up to him. He blinked then took a glance around, and realized this wasn't the same room he was just in.

"Why?" She asked, and he opened his mouth to reply, but was cut short when two people who looked like his parents barged into the room.

"William, what have you done?" They ask, and their mother begins to cry as she rushes over to help her daughter.

"I-I didn't do anything. It wasn't me!" He exclaims as his father tries to hold him down so he doesn't run away.

"You're the only one in the room, and you've been tormenting her for years, you've fallen off the wagon, how can we believe it wasn't you?" He scoffs, and William frees his arm, pointing to the mirror.

"It was *him*! It wasn't me, I would never do anything like that to my sister." The reflection staring back at them was nothing out of the ordinary, and his father sighed.

"Son, I think it's time for you to go away for a while, they'll treat you very well there. Your uncle Frank was there after your aunt Marie passed away, remember? He came back just fine." William ignored him, while staring in the mirror, glaring at his reflection. His father brought him to a room, and locked the door. William tried to break open the door, but it didn't work. He ran to the window, but it was too far of a drop to jump out of.

He walked over to the mirror hanging on the wall and frowned, not knowing what has happened. He leaned in closer to the mirror studying it, and then his reflection jerked back and he jumped. William's reflection grinned and turned around, revealing Angelina. He hugged her, and William banged on the mirror, trying to get the attention of his sister, but she just walked away without looking back.

* * * *

"So dear sister, what shall we do now? We've explored the house as you wished." William's alter ego said.

"I want to stay, we packed a picnic lunch. Will you grab it from the car?" She smiled at him as they walked down the hall.

"The car?" He questioned, as it was a new word to him.

"Yes, the car. The one we drove here in?" She paused and looked at him with confusion. "Are you alright?"

"Yes, just a little light headed." He said, but it wasn't a lie, he felt kind of nauseous.

"Well, I'll meet you in the back yard, I saw a patio with a table." Angelina smiled brightly, and walked away before he could say another word. He huffed, but made his way down the hall and to the car. Angelina got sidetracked and went back to the room they had just been in, she saw something that caught her eye, but didn't want to tell William about it.

She walked over to the table beside the bed and picked up the ring to examine it. It was a beautiful gold ring, with an emerald stone in it, and diamonds down either side. The ring had lost its shine, and was covered in dust. Angelina rubbed the dust off onto her dress to see it better. She turned it over, and saw some writing on the inside. It was scratched in, not engraved like most rings are, and it read 'mirror'.

Angelina looked at it in confusion. 'Why mirror?' she thought to herself, then took a few steps over to the mirror. She gasped when she looked in, and dropped the ring on the floor. "William!" She yelled and put her hand on the mirror. "No, I knew that couldn't have been you, the person downstairs that looks so similar, but sounds so strange."

"What is it, are you alright?" William's alter ego asked, his voice lacking emotion.

"Yes, I-I just saw a spider is all, you know how I hate those things."

"Well, shall we go?" He asked, holding out the picnic basket. She smiled fakely and nodded. They made their way down the hall once again, this time Angelina was focusing on every little detail. She noticed a picture on the wall and then stopped.

"Oh my god, is this me?" She asked aloud, and William –no this wasn't William, she resolved to call this imposter Will– stepped over.

"She looks so similar to you, it's uncanny." He said flatly, and began to walk away.

"Why is her face scratched out though?" She asked, as frown pulled at her lips. Her eyes flicked over to another picture. "In this one too, and the mother's face...she looks like my mother."

"It's an abandoned house, someone surely came in and did that to spook people like us that come in." Angelina began to put the pieces together after seeing another picture, this time with the faces scratched out of everyone except Will. She lifted one of the pictures off the wall, and flipped it over. The date on the back read May 3rd 1857.

"53 years!" Angelina exclaimed aloud, and Will turned around.

"What are you going on about?" He asked, his eyes dark.

"This picture, it-it was taken 53 years ago." She stammered out quickly. Will raised his eyebrow and turned back around, walking towards the back door. He pulled the door open, and a warm gust of wind blew some fallen leaves in from the patio.

"'Tis beautiful out, isn't it dear sister?" He glanced back at her, and she began to run without any hesitation. Will dropped the basket, and ran after her. For a second, she had stopped and quickly looked around. She then decided to go up the stairs and to the room she had seen William in the mirror. When she entered, she ran right to the mirror and looked in. William was sitting on the bed, just staring at the wall.

"William!" She yelled, banging on the mirror, but he couldn't see or hear her.

"*You*," Will said from behind her, and she turned around. He stood in the doorway, breathing heavily, a silver kitchen knife glistening in his hand. She took a step back, and he just grinned. "It's time for you to meet your demise."

"No. I won't let you win." Angelina looked around slowly for something to use against him, and her eyes landed on an iron. As she went to reach for it, he ran at her, knife in the air. Just as the knife was about to swing down, the house began to shake, and everything around them turned white. Angelina was expecting a sharp pain somewhere on her body, but was met with a warm hug. She pushed whoever was on her off, and screamed.

"Angelina, it's alright!" William said and she opened her eyes, backing away slowly. "Angelina, look at me." She hesitantly looked into his eyes and her face softened as she realized her brother is back.

"Brother, what happened?" She asked as she engulfed him in a hug.

"I'm not quite sure, I ended up on the other side of that mirror. Mom and dad were there...but they weren't them, they locked me in a room to await them sending me off to an institute. I was contemplating how to escape, then I saw my... reflection trying to hurt you and the mirror started to spin, so I touched it, and all of a sudden I was here." William scratched his head, and looked around the room.

"We should go home...I've had enough of this house," said William, as he walked out of the room, Angelina following close behind him. She paused at the doorway and looked into the mirror. Will stood there, scowling, his fists clenched in anger. Angelina shut the door and ran to catch up to her brother.

They head out the front door, and get into the car, driving away without another glance and never speaking of the events that occurred in that madhouse.

Country Doctor

By: Sierrah Zawacki (Gr. 12)



1824 Yorkshire, England

Dear Theodore,

My dear brother. I bare terrible news.

Our sweet sister Maria had refused to stay home from school when it was discovered that thisdisease had swept the area. She has a typhoid fever.

We've went through a few doctors and each one states that there is nothing that they can do. They keep telling us to make her comfortable. But I am not ready to just give up on her! She's so young and a gorgeous, sweet girl. She had so much ahead of her. Since you are going to Mcgill University to study medicine I want to know if there is anything we can do. I Know you won't be like every doctor who doesn't even touch her or try anything at all and just leave. She is your sister if there's anything we can do we have to try it. Anything.

I hope to hear from you soon. I'm sorry for this urgent letter to you. But if she does pass, this is your last chance to see her again with life in her sweet blue eyes. For she already is becoming to weak to walk far distance herself.

Love Emily

1824 Montreal, Quebec

Dear Emily,

I will set out immediately to get to you. I am collecting every piece of information I can about this disease.

Sadly, it will take at least a week till arrive. In the meantime, yes make her comfortable. Try your best to keep her fever down and make sure she eats whether she wants to or not. I have found some experimental remedies but if they are going to be used I would like to perform them myself. So please try your best to keep her breathing steady and let her have some of those wonderful smiles grace her face again.

Don't forget to comfort our other siblings and father. Make sure they are coping and helping the best they can. I'm not ready to have this family broken so easily by another passing in this family.

Sincerely Theodore

1824 Yorkshire, England

I remember the scene so clearly. I tried my best to make Maria smile and laugh for her time left. It was a cloudy dark day as Theodore made his way up the lawn passed the white gate and through the wildflowers. He rushed in the door and made his way straight to Maria lying in her small fluffy bed. With a fever as worse than ever before and rose coloured spots down her chest. Theodore dropped his bag and took out several different materials. Checking different parts of her body. Her heart rate, fever, colour. He took out so many bizarre things out of that bag. Anything that had any chance of healing. From indian gooseberries to unknown liquids. He then halted dropping all of his things to hit the wooden panels of the floor in a bang.

He just held her hand in his. It was so small and fragile as a dolls with that porcelain skin laying in his rough dark hand. With the other he stroked her hair ever so lightly and looked her in the eyes as a tear began to fall. He whispered to her in his deep rigid voice, yet it came so softly and smooth.

"My sweet child. It is all okay. We all love you with all of our hearts. But god is calling you home now. You see my darling;

God looked around his Garden and found an empty place.
He then looked down upon his earth and saw your loving face.

He put his arms around you and lifted you to rest.
His Garden must be beautiful, he always takes the best.
He knew that you were suffering, he knew you were in pain.
And knew that you would never get well on earth again.
He saw your path was difficult, he closed your tired eyes,
He whispered to you "Peace be Thine" and gave you wings to fly.
When we saw you sleeping so calm and free of pain,
We would not wish you back to earth to suffer once again.
You've left us precious memories, your love will be our guide,
You live on through your children, you're always by our side.
It broke our hearts to lose you, but you did not go alone.
For part of us went with you on the day God called you home."

As he choked the last words the room was filled with silence as her eyes dropped closed. The cold wind entered through the windows touching our skin in the way it always had. I recall that Theodore had not let go of Maria's hand for what felt like forever. When I peered to view her now lifeless face, although her skin may have been white as snow. She was bright, she shined.

For there was a content smile gracing her lips. She was now in peace. Free from this world.

The Blade of the Storm

By: Simon Thiessen (Gr. 9)

I ran. Put simply, I ran.

The enemy was closing in fast and the hour drew near. I deflected a sword's blow and used my momentum to slay my attacker by jabbing my blade into his side. My sword reflected the dark red light emitted from the surrounding volcanos, and was now stained bloodied and black in the bleak lighting. I hastily glanced over my shoulder to see the black knights crest the peak of the tall hill behind me. I didn't have much time and my much more efficient way of traveling had ended when Syntemnon was shot by a poison-arrow of the enemy. I had no time to mourn my valiant, stead. The hour drew near.

Running was a challenge for me. I was not able to move as fast without my trusted beast, but thankfully I had a large head start. I focused on my breathing and my strides, but was losing ground to my assailants. My attention was jolted back to reality when an arrow impaled itself into the huge volcanic rock nearby. More arrows flew dangerously close. A direct hit would be complete luck because the archers could not take a precision shot while running, nor have a solid chance of hitting me without first hitting the projectiles of black rock that provided cover on the rear of my trail. However, I was in grave danger if my legs wouldn't move any faster.

Black rock covered everything as far as any a keen eye could see. The currents of molten lava were the only exceptions. They gushed from the mountain like a wound.

These rivers radiated heat and their lava kept coming steadily down into the back valley which now I came upon. As I crested the top of the hill, I surveyed the valley before me.

The black setting continued to make this place look like a vision of hell due to its terrifying manor. All it would take was enough lava and this valley would be my lake of fire. I had little more than fifteen minutes at best before the lava flooded the entire of the valley cutting me off from the tall rock that stood in the middle. It was there I was headed. If all the legends were true, it would hold something of unthinkable value for me in these dire moments. There was the very place where my prize lay. Racing against my mortal enemy, I had to retrieve the famed Storm Blade.

This blade was no ordinary blade you find in the barracks. No this blade was one of the three swords of Dragon's Bane himself. Known in the Gaelic tongue as Aillill, it was made of the most expensive metal in the earth. It was indestructible and sharper than almost any other blade, save one. The stories said the wielder of the Storm Blade could control and summon a storm at will. They also said it could control the elements. The wielder would be able to blast anyone with electricity, beat them with torrents of rain, pound them with wind, and blind them with mist. Since the wielder controlled the winds, it was said also they could fly. My ruler had asked me, one of his most trusted

commanders, to retrieve, and wield such a blade against the enemy. And in the Kings name I would do all in my power to complete my mission.

As I descended the valley's bank, I heard a swish of a blade and ducked just as a battle axe flew above me. I turned and slashed upward striking up the man's thorax. Only a few were fast enough to catch me this quickly for the rest were not as bold and moved slower in the safety of numbers. As the tall man fell down the hill, another charged to take his place. My goal was not to draw out these fights, so I throw a dagger at his jugular. It struck its mark. He struck the ground.

I could see I was still ahead of the closing force by about a hundred and fifty yards, but the foot soldiers were not my main concern. It was the dragon riders that stirred my fears, for a multitude of reasons. They could blast you with fire, snatch you up in a claw, or worse, speed ahead of you to your goal. I counted a little over twenty in the skies above as they were circling down upon the large rock in the centre of the valley where the blade must lay inside. Yet something slowed their descent. It was as if a storm cloud swirled over the rock itself. A storm of light and darkness.

I was fifty yards away when the first five dragons touched down right in-between me and the rock. The rock was large: twenty feet tall and forty feet in diameter, easily big enough to hold a cavern with the sword inside. And even at my distance, I could see stairs leading up the rock-face and the crude door that seemed to take the shape of an ugly mouth swallowing anyone who entered with the doom of total darkness.

I stopped and quickly glanced behind me. The enemy forces of foot soldiers had descended the hill and began to fill the valley. They seemed so intent on catching me that they were oblivious to the rapidly flowing lava, which was not more than seven minutes from reaching where I stood. Back in front, four of the five dragon riders stood beside their mounts with their weapons drawn while the final rider disappeared into the dark doorway.

Now I was desperate. The fifth rider would surely get to the blade long before me. I would never defeat the four men in time. Even if I could get the blade, how would I escape? The lava would kill me even if the legion of knights didn't. My heart thought to despair. If the enemy got the sword, then only to King would have a chance to defeat evil since he held the third of the three great swords. But his was supposed to be the least powerful. What if the enemy found all three swords? They say the Kings Blade and the Storm Blade crossed together would point like a compass to the Black Blade that had been missing for ages. I did not know what to do, for if I attacked the four knights now and attempted to retrieve the blade now, I would not succeed or escape death. But if I fled, the enemy would have the blade and might be unstoppable. But I couldn't fail the King.

I sprinted for the rock. They charged as a line. As I saw their faces, my thoughts softened as my muscles tensed. I was trained to fight, and trained to kill, but I did not take joy in death. Nay, even though I had never lost a single battle in any of the kings

tournaments, I did not enjoy the dance with the blade. “Taking life is not to be celebrated,” was one of my first lessons as a knight. Yet to achieve what had been set before me, and to follow the Kings order, I saw no way around this battle.

I brought my sword heavily down upon the first of the four assassins and cut his arm right off. But when I drove my blade at the second, he blocked my swing and swung his sword at my neck. I spun myself out of his reach and into the reach of another. I hastily blocked a blade from the third knight and struck at his chest, carving a large gash. Then I drove my blade through the heart of the second and turned to finish this skirmish. The fourth and final of the black knights was not caught unaware, and came at me with a flurry of high blows. I blocked and waited. Finally he took a break, not a large one, but just a shift backwards in his weight and a draw back of his blade for a slash at my head. He never was able to deliver the blow. For at the moment of his pause, I used a move that has been labeled ‘*dirty*.’ For it forced the knight it was used against into a awkward position by shortening his stroke. I leapt at him with a single handed underhand stroke. He was able to block it, but I was not intending to kill him with that, ‘*dirty*,’ stroke. The moment he blocked it, I slugged him in the face with my metal gauntlet. As he stumbled back, I did not waste the moment and cut his wind pipe. He fell to the ground, never to move again.

The battle had been a short one, but even this small amount of time was very costly. I ran past the dragons and the riders who had landed but were too late to get into position between me and the rock. Even though dragons are much smarter than most beasts, they would never attack unless told to by their rider or provoked. So I ran past them with no trouble and disappeared into the tunnel’s depths.

It was a longer way down than I anticipated, probably fifty or more large stairs to reach the bottom. I dreaded what I would find at the end of this dark staircase. Had the fifth knight already taken the blade? Had I, for the first time, failed the King? Trying to push these troubling thoughts from my mind, I continued into the depths. I had to travel the stairs with care or I would trip and roll the rest of the way down, but I traveled these with no trouble and reached the bottom. There in the centre of a large underground cavern, with ancient writing on every inch of the walls, was a pedestal, and on the pedestal was the sword.

The Storm Blade was the most impressive blade I had ever seen. It was a slightly curved blade, about three and a half feet long including the hilt. The handle had a small cross guard and a black leather wrapping. There were silver lines coming from the bottom of the hand grip up to the cross guard. The Storm Blade shone an eerie, but powerful, blue. It had the oldest northern writing engraved on the blade and I feared its power just looking at it. But what was remarkable was the metal. I had never seen this material on a blade. I knew it must be *Krusmittum*. This was the rarest metal of all metals. It was indestructible, also known as Stone Cleaver. For when used in blades, it could easily cut through, and mine the hardest rock in the earth.

But I was too late. For just as I ran into the room, the blade was lifted off the

pedestal by a hand appearing from behind the bright glow of the room. Rackel, the enemy's second in command, lifted the blade with eyes fixed on his new weapon of destruction. His black armour flashed in the pure blue light, revealing his greedy, but in awe face. He starred at the blade and took in every little detail. As he finally stopped looking at the blade, he realized I was advancing. He grinned with an evil smirk. He held afloat the Storm Blade and I heard thunder rumble above. He spoke in a voice deep, but it creaked in a unnerving manner. "You are still live!" he said.

It wasn't a question, but he could not keep the surprise out of his voice. Neither could I contain the pleasure that I had passed his test. "Yes, I'm live, and in the name of the King, give me the blade and no harm will come to you. However, if you refuse my generous offer, I will destroy you." I did not expect him you agree, in fact I feared him more at this moment than ever before, but I would not let my fear control my actions or thoughts.

My opponent scowled, "Save your honourable oaths for the crowds, you will win yourself no favour with them hear. Do you not fear this blade in my hands? I am in command of my masters legions, you do not tremble? Do you not fear the darkness of this whole from which you will never leave?"

I knew a lot depended on my reply, so I spoke the truth for it always prevailed in the past. Though I feared that it would cost me my masters mission, I said, "Fear the blades power? Yes. Fear the blade in your hands? Again yes. But fear you? No. I fear no mortal man. So again I ask you, give me the blade or die." I held my ground and raised my blade at the ready.

I now saw a glimpse of fear in his own eyes. But he mastered himself and replied defiantly, "I would rather eat a foot of steel." I grinned, for this was a challenge and I never turned down a challenge, nor lost one.

"I can arrange that," I replied. Then I came upon him. I was the quicker of the two of us and caught him by surprise, forcing him to back against the wall. But he deflected my blow with the Storm Blade. Even though it was not a powerful block, I felt a shock of electricity go through my arms. I backed away for just a second. It was all he needed. He aimed the Blade at me and shot a pure blue blast of electricity at me. It hit me square in the chest. I flew backwards and landed at the far side of the carven with an uncomfortable crash. My enemy took the opportunity to let for the stairs and ran up them as fast as he could. The blow had not harmed me, only winded me, so I was able to get my feet under me quit quickly. I strided to the bottom of the stairs and followed in pursuit.

As I reached the top of the stairs, I looked out at the enemy forces. They had all fled, save the dragon riders. The lava was coming faster than before and was about 25 feet from the first dragon. When the dragon riders saw their leader come over the top of the stairs, they took off. The dragons, whose riders I had slain, followed the first dragon to the leave the ground. Rackel was just getting his dragon ready, when I spotted him.

I ran for his dragon just as the lava was upon us. I grabbed the leather strap that held the saddle in place with one hand, and grabbed one of the dragons claws with the other. The dragon took off just as the molten burnt into my boot. I held on to the claw as we flew higher. I hated heights. They're were one of my few fears, and I hated them with a passion. I almost fainted when I saw the ground become distant beneath me. I was carried away under an enemy with a powerful weapon and I knew I was out matched.

Just as if things couldn't get any worse, the dragon shifted its weight and I was shaken off the claw, only to be caught by the armour on one of the dragons tail spines. I realized the dragon either thought I was one of the fellow black knights and was trying to get me into the riders position or was trying to get me in position to kill his master and set him free. Either way, he saved my life. I was able to wrench my armour free and set a hand onto a bone of his spine at the same time. Then I began moving closer to the rider by pulling myself up, spine by spine.

Just as I was near him, he glanced over his shoulder and almost fell off the beast with surprise. Obviously, he had overestimated his electrical blow. But his surprise quickly turned to anger. He attempted to draw the Storm Blade, but this was not an easy task while trying to stay on the high neck of a dragon. This gave me enough time to catch him by the arm before he could draw the weapon. He reacted fast and elbowed me in the face. I fell backward, but dragons are large enough to have two work horses on its back, so there was enough room to catch myself. I got to my feet and drew my last dagger from my boot as he again attempted to draw the Storm blade. He got it out of its scabbard just as I drove my dagger into his arm. He dropped the famed blade and it was almost lost, but I was just able to grab it before it plunged to the volcanoes below. Unfortunately, the grab had thrown me off balance, and my enemy slammed the back of his hand across my face. I fell again, but managed to grab a claw. As I dangled I looked down, a mistake. I was again reminded of my fear of heights. I now saw the sea below me as we left the volcanos behind. At this height the water would feel like a plate of iron. I looked at my enemy. He stood menacing above me with a dagger drawn. He leaned down to drive it through my hands. I feared the pain. I feared the fall. I feared the impact.

In that moment I made a choice. I knew it was the only way to ensure victory. The King had made it clear that the blade could not fall into the enemy's hands. I saw no other way, so I made my choice. As the dagger plunged into my arm, I grabbed Rackel with the other. I used the claw as an anchor, holding myself down with my legs. I pulled my enemy off the back of the dragon and as his momentum raced towards me, he knocked us both free of the animal.

The noble beast, my only hope, raced away from his owner. I longed for it to turn and come to my aid, but it had already saved my life once and now the majestic creature fled in panic. The rider, knowing he had lost, screamed in rage and horror, as he fell to his death. His words were drowned in the wind, but I was sure the curses would make my ears bleed. As I fell I thought of my Kings instructions, "Go retrieve the Storm Sword. Find it before the enemy. Wield it against the enemy. And, above all,

keep it from our enemies reach.” As I fell I realized I had done all that had been asked of me. So I was satisfied. I was ready to meet death with honour.

The fall seemed to take forever and my thoughts wandered to one of my favourite legends about the Storm Blade. Puzzlement crossed my mind and I tried desperately to remember something. Then, the something clicked. A strange gust of wind blew in my face and I knew the wind was the key. I laughed out loud for this was not the end. It was the beginning. It was time to return to the King. It was time to find The Black Blade. *The End*