



what's your story?



2014 Seepe Walters
Short Story Contest



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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, to a job as a freelance correspondent with the *Daily Construction News*, to teach English to immigrant children, to work with the Barrie Literacy Council and to ultimately help 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 Public Library would like to congratulate all the students who entered the 13th edition of the Innisfil Public 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 Public Library would like to thank the Friends of the Library, and the Ferraro family for their ongoing support and sponsorship; as well as the judging panel: J.L. Witterick, Barbara Reid, Kelley Armstrong and William Bell for accepting such a difficult job; and of course, the efforts of all the incredible young writers who submitted entries. Although there is only one name on the Seepe Walters Award plaque, 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 2014 edition of the Seepe Walters Short Story Contest.

Melissa Harris
Innisfil Public 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 Barber

By: Reed Percival (Gr. 12)

You know, it's been a hell of a long time since I walked into an old-fashioned barbershop.

You remember the kind. You've probably gotten a haircut at one. There was a time when every street corner in America had one. My own hometown (population thirteen-hundred, I'll have you know) featured one of the little white shops right on the main drag. It was parked right between a soda shop and a diner called Benny's Burgers and Shakes, over a cracked cobblestone sidewalk. It was something right out of one of those old Archie comics I used to save up a month's allowance to buy at the newsstand by the post office every time a new issue came out when I was a boy. But as clichéd as it sounds, it was real, and it was a magical place for young me. My mother would always do my haircuts herself, and love her as I did, she was a hack. She was a real Freddy Krueger with those rusty old steel scissors, which in my home served everything from haircuts to hedge trimming. Chopped off damn near everything from the ears up, and I had hell to pay for it at school. The little girls giggled as I walked by with a fresh wound on my scalp, and the boys brayed with laughter and called me names like Frankenstein and Mr. Clean. I always hated getting haircuts from my mother, but whenever I brought up the idea of going to the barbershop, she brushed it off, claiming that it was too expensive.

"Two dollars and thirty-three cents for an inch of hair, Henry?" she used to say to me. "For those prices, I might as well do it myself. How hard can it be?"

I never had the heart to tell her that her haircuts were akin to, and I'm quoting one of those boys in the schoolyard I mentioned earlier, getting scalped by an Apache chief. She was the only person who cut my hair right up until she died from a massive heart attack when I graduated from public school. But I always dreamed. When I went out for a soda with my neighborhood friends, I would put my little chubby face against the glass to see if I could peek inside. The shop in my town had only one chair, and it had big red cushions on it. A little aluminum step at the bottom of the chair controlled the height of the chair, adjusted for the height of the customer. The mirror was surrounded by curious little blue and green bottles of liquids unknown, as well as various scissors and razors for the actual cutting.

The owner of the barbershop (Eddie's Barbershop it was called, I remember now) was Burt Bishop, son of the original owner Eddie Bishop, who developed dementia in his early nineties and died the same year Marilyn Monroe did. Eddie had been the richest and most popular man in town when he was younger. When he wasn't cutting hair or shaving beards, he was known to be found sitting in a short blue stool at the counter of Benny's, parked right beside the register so he could make conversation with whoever the young female cashier was as well as any passing customers. All greeted him pleasantly, and wished him a good morning, or good afternoon, or good evening, depending on the meal he was currently sitting down for. I remember thinking that he was the nicest old man I'd ever met. His son however, was quieter. Burt almost never went over to Benny's, or the soda shop. In fact, I don't believe I ever saw him

leave the barbershop. He was tall and thin, contrary to his short stout father, with thinning black hair and a dashing handlebar mustache. He always wore a white apron over a light blue collared shirt, an interesting ensemble for a barber. He was a friendly man, but nothing compared to his father. He would engage in conversation with his customers if prompted, but otherwise stayed completely silent as he slowly clipped away at their hair or scraped at their cheek with his steel straight razor. For this reason, the gossipy old men and women of my town considered the poor man odd, or even a bit on the slow side. But they could not be more wrong about old Burt.

I gawked at Eddie's Barbershop every single time I passed that place. I would admire the old red white and blue pole you saw at every barbershop, even though it had stopped spinning and the paint was chipping. I would peer into the front window to see if anyone was sitting in the chair getting a haircut. If there was, I sometimes watched them. It was probably curiosity that made me do it. I had never been in a barbershop before, and I was intrigued by it, as well as by the barber himself. I watched Burt many times. He had such precision, took such care with his customers. It took him ten minutes just to trim a man's beard. But for as long as it took, it was undebatable in my town that no one cut hair better than Mr. Burt Bishop. Most agreed (save the old folks, whose unwavering motto "things were better in my day" struck true for barbers as well as everything else) that he was even better than his retired father. His style was unlike any barbers of the day. He believed in a trust between barber and customer, a trust that cannot be broken. It was his responsibility, he believed, to provide every customer with the perfect haircut. And he always succeeded.

I remember the first time I visited Eddie's Barbershop. I was fifteen at the time, and Eddie himself greeted me as I walked in. He was ninety years old at the time, and it was probably the last good year he ever had. His face was lined heavily with age, and his wrinkles were evidence of a life well lived. But his smile was the kindest any man, young or old, could have, and any doubts or worries I had melted away. He ushered me into the plushy red chair, and told me to take a seat. It was as comfortable as it looked. Old Eddie smiled at me in the mirror as he pressed the aluminum step of the chair down, making it sink (I had yet to have my growth spurt; I was quite short) and placed a white sheet over my body, which he then tucked into my collar. I took the opportunity to examine all the elixirs and tonics which had confounded me as a boy. There was a clear glass jar with some translucent blue-green liquid in it labeled Barbicide. There was a dark red glass vial that had the words Hair Tonic written across the top. There was a silver metal tin tray filled with a dollop of thick white shaving cream, accompanied by a golden coloured brush that I could tell just by looking at it was as soft as silk to the skin. And the blades! Scissors and razors and trimmers and clippers with shiny silver blades that glinted in the sun shining through the window like the hood ornament of a brand new Chrysler. Nothing like the battered, broken old scissors my mother had used on me. Now, by this time Eddie was too old for cutting hair, and Burt performed all the actual barbering. I had short hair as a boy, and yet it took Burt a good half-hour to finish the job. As he cut away, tiny clippings of my coal-black hair fell to the floor, where Eddie swiftly swept them up in his red dustpan, despite his oft-sore back. By the time Burt stepped back from the chair (I can still remember the click of his heels on the tiled floor), he had sculpted a masterpiece. After years of shoddy crew-cuts delivered by my butcher of a mother, I had beautiful hair for the first time in my life. I shook both men's hands vigorously, and paid each a generous tip in addition to the two-thirty-three my mother had had such an issue with.

Everyone in town complimented my hair, which they agreed had never looked better. The girls I had seen giggling at me back in grade school now stared in awe at my sleek hair, which complemented my thin face and square jaw perfectly, as I walked the halls of my high school. Many girls, who had previously avoided me, now approached me at my locker, nervously asking to take them down to the soda shop. I, of course, always accepted. The change in my life caused by a simple haircut was astounding. I pledged never again to have anyone but Burt cut my hair. But life turns on a dime, and tragedy can strike without warning. My father was killed in a labor accident, crushed by a Ford that fell off the assembly line at the automobile plant where he worked. I was an only child, and I was sent to live with my uncle in the city. I left my hometown, and didn't return for years. The last I heard, Eddie's Barbershop had become a real estate office.

But now here I stand, on the even-more-cracked cobblestone sidewalk on Main Street in my hometown. On my left I see the soda shop, which had big glass windows that are now barred, and a big sign that used to say Soda Shoppe (with the extra "pe" on the end to make it seem fancy), but now says Smokes and Variety. On my right I see Benny's Burgers and Shakes, which is now a seedy looking bar called Kenny's. Looking closely, I notice that the letters "-enny's" looks exactly the letters in "Benny's", but the bright white "B" has been covered with an off-white "K" that makes the whole sign look lopsided and substandard. In between these two businesses sits Eddie's Barbershop, still standing solemnly in the middle of Main Street after all these years. I can't believe it's still here. In the city, if you want to get your hair cut you have to go to a hair salon, a terrible place reeking of perfume and fruity shampoo, where an old man like me will leave with his hair looking like that of the latest pop star. You *never* see barbershops in the city. Eddie's looks good, too. Compared to the other businesses on Main Street, Eddie's looks like the one gold tooth in a pirate's rotting smile. Despite this, nobody seems to register the barbershop as they walk along the cracked sidewalk. In fact, they don't seem to realize that it's there at all. I suppose my sources were incorrect. This place could never have been a realtor's office, because it looks exactly as it did when I left town...no, wait! There is something new. The red white and blue pole is slowly revolving above the glass door, as if it is beckoning me to come inside. Come to think of it, my hair is getting a little long along the sides, and my stubbly chin could use a shave. I wonder who's running this place these days.

For the first time in thirty years, I step into Eddie's barbershop. No Eddie to greet me this time; he's been in the ground for twenty-eight years. Instead, a silver bell dings above my head to announce my arrival. Standing there beside the chair (the *exact same* red plushy chair, I should add) is Burt Bishop. I tell him something I've told dozens of old friends and obscure acquaintances before, but it's the first time I say it truthfully.

"Burt! You haven't changed a bit!"

Burt smiles at me. He still has the tailored black handlebar mustache, and it curls up along with his mouth.

"Hank, my old friend. How are you? Have a seat."

That was Burt. He was quick and to the point. In his speech, he acts like he has a specified number of words to say in his lifetime, and he thus has to use them sparsely. I sit down

in the chair. The seat felt comfortable when I was a boy, but now it's like heaven. Doing wonders on my bad back, I'm sure. Burt comes in with the white sheet.

"How's the city treating you, Hank?" he asks as he tucks the top of the sheet into my collar. It's the first time I've heard him speak unprompted. Perhaps he's overcome his quietness. Burt presses the aluminum step down with his foot

"Uh, it's great, Burt. But it's fast. Too fast for old small town boys like you and me. Lots of people, too. It's a big change from here, that's for sure."

He smiles. "Well, you should visit more often. I don't get a lot of customers anymore." Now, he grabs a sharp, glinting pair of stainless steel scissors. He starts to clip away at my greying hair, which falls to the floor tiny piece by tiny piece. No one sweeps it up, and it starts to collect in a little pile at my feet.

"You don't say, Burt?" I tell him. "This place looks better than ever! I figured you'd be swimming in dough!"

He smiles grimly. "As did I. It seems no one wants to go to the barber these days. Phased out, I suppose, like drive-in restaurants and roller-skating rinks." He pauses. I no longer hear the faint *click-click* of his scissors behind my ears. He steps back from the chair.

"All done."

I look up at the mirror. My hair looks just as perfect as it did thirty years ago, maybe even better. My short grey sideburns complement my dapper black hair to make me look wise, but grizzled. It looks fantastic. But how did Burt do this so quickly? He was only cutting for a minute, two at the most.

"Do you like it?" he asks me.

"I-uh, yeah," I stutter. "I love it. It looks great."

He smiles at me. "Wonderful. Now, let's get on with the shave."

I ponder for a second. *Did I tell him I wanted a shave?* I must have. Burt starts spreading thick white shaving cream on my face with his golden coloured brush.

The barbershop has gone very quiet. For some reason, I can't hear any noise or commotion outside on the street, when moments ago, it was rather loud. Now that I mention it, I can't see outside either. The windows are tinted so that I can't see anything. I look up at Burt. He smiles kindly as he finishes putting the shaving cream on my face, and grabs his sharp, steely Gillette straight razor. It has a black ebony handle.

"You like a close shave, if I recall," he says.

I look at him with curiosity. "I never got a shave here before." Despite this, he was right. I do like a close shave.

"I'm sorry. Must be mixing you up with another customer." He continues to scrape at my skin.

I shrug this off too. However, Burt is starting to startle me a little. So much of him that was just a little abnormal before is now becoming eerie. He looks like he's my age, but he should be in his seventies. His appearance has not changed at all since I last saw him, thirty years ago. He finished a haircut that would have taken him half an hour thirty years ago in only two minutes. And he seems to know too much. What has happened to Burt? I wonder this, but I stay silent as he shaves me.

Without looking at me, Burt starts to speak. "Did you ever hear how my dad died, Hank?" he asks.

"No," I answer. "I heard that he passed, and that he wasn't doing well toward the end, but I never heard the, um, details on it."

He continues to shave me. "Yes, he did have dementia. Barely knew who he was. Couldn't distinguish between me and the President."

"Jeez, I'm sorry, Burt, that must have been awful."

He frowns. "Not really. I never liked the man. He wanted me to continue barbering after him, but I wanted to study science. He refused, and demanded I become a barber like him. I didn't argue. So when he lost his mind, no, I didn't feel bad, Hank. It looked good on him."

I'm shocked. I can't believe I'm hearing these things coming out of Burt's mouth. The man was always so quiet. It's completely out of character for him. "Burt, you shouldn't say those things! I'm sure you don't mean them."

He glares at me now. His straight razor rests on my throat, his bony, nimble fingers tightly gripping the ebony handle. "Are you sure, Hank? Are you? You all thought you knew my father. If you knew who he really was, you wouldn't have dared go near him. He was an evil man, Hank. He had vices, lots of terrible vices. Do you really think he got all that money from a barbershop? You're more naïve than I thought."

I'm speechless. I eye the glinting blade pressing on my skin below my Adam's apple, praying he will calm down.

"The only positive of being that man's son was the continually growing pile of money. I knew if I was a good boy and followed in his profession like he asked, I'd have the money to start my own life after he died. But Hank," he says, through clenched teeth. "He *just wouldn't die*. He lived into his nineties as healthy as a horse. Once he got dementia I thought the fortune was mine, but no. Doctors said despite how sick he was in the head, his body had never been healthier. I had been patient. I had cooperated, and I wasn't getting any younger. That's when I took things into my own hands. I put a bottle of sleeping pills in his coffee and made him drink. I smiled as he fell asleep for the last time. But I was deceived," he says, looking angrier than ever. He turns to me. "I didn't tell you how my father got all his money, did I?" Want to hazard a guess?"

Too afraid to move my throat in fear that he will cut it, I shake my head slowly.

He laughs. “He met a man named Lucifer on a lonely dark road. Lucifer made him an offer. Father accepted.”

I refuse to believe it. Not him, not—

“Satan, Hank. It was Satan,” he answers starkly. “The Devil himself dressed up in a black suit. He offered my father a million dollars in return for one thing: my soul, after he died. You see, Hank,” he says to me, grinning like a madman. “Even the Devil needs a barber.”

He jumps up, cackling and howling with fits of maniacal laughter. I see my chance. I jump out of the plushy red chair and make a beeline for the door. The white sheet is still tucked in my collar. I rip it out as I rip open the door. The bell rings in farewell as I pass. *Ding-ding*. I sprint away from Eddie’s barbershop as fast as I can, without looking back to see the boarded windows and the derelict Blue Sky Realty sign. I don’t stop running until I’m out of town.

Nolla's Great Adventure

By: Avery Bradley (Gr. 3)

Once upon a time in a little cottage, in the woods, there lived a little girl and her grandma and grandpa. The little girl's name was Nolla. She was an 8-year-old girl. Nolla had dreams about going out further than the old oak tree. She dreamed about what was in the woods. As she was dreaming, something interrupted her thinking. It was grandma. "Dinners ready!" she shouted.

Nolla ran downstairs. Right as she got downstairs, she asked what was beyond the old oak tree. Grandma just sighed. "You know Nolla, what you find behind the old oak tree is very dangerous. Promise me you won't go past the oak tree."

"I promise," said Nolla

The next day Nolla woke up with a grin on her face. She got dressed and ran outside. She walked to the oak tree and said, "Today is the day. I can do it" and she did. Nolla ran into the woods, past the oak tree. Nolla ran farther and farther, then out in the distance a great big castle appeared.

Nolla was amazed as she got closer and closer to the castle. Just then an old woman emerged from the forest. "Do not enter, it is dangerous."

"Danger is my middle name," said Nolla. Just as soon as the woman left, Nolla ran into the castle. Once she was inside the doors slammed shut. Nolla tried to open the doors, but they were LOCKED! The only way out was to go down the long hallway. She saw a skeleton hanging on the wall, and Nolla began running. Nolla ran for such a long time that her legs began to hurt. Nolla was really scared. "What if I never see grandma and grandpa again?" Nolla thought.

"What are you doing child?" said a voice in the dark, dark hall. Nolla felt a gust of wind and turned to see a lady in a purple dress, with a white hat floating towards her. The mysterious lady held a black cat in her arms.

"My name is Nolla. I am lost in the castle, and the doors are locked, and...and...I AM SCARED! Help me please! I want my grandma and grandpa. Things have gone from bad to worse." Nolla cried. Nolla began wiping the tears from her face.

"Come Nolla," said the lady. But Nolla did not want to go. She wanted to wait for her grandma and grandpa to come rescue her.

"I don't want to go with you," said Nolla "Besides, you are a stranger."

"I will help you child, for a price" said the strange lady.

"What? What? Anything you want! Just get me out of this creepy place. I should have listened to my grandma and not gone past the old oak tree. Now I am hopelessly lost!"

“Well then, you must give me the first thing that you see when you leave here. It can’t be a tree and it can’t be a rock. It must be something valuable,” answered the stranger.

“Anything, just get me out of here. Please!” cried Nolla.

Immediately, Nolla felt a gust of wind and before she knew it, she was back out in the woods. In the distance, she could hear her grandma calling her. “Nolla! Nolla! It’s lunchtime!”

Nolla forgot all about her promise in the castle, and ran towards her grandma. After she hugged her grandma, and went in to have her lunch, Nolla remembered her promise. “Oh no,” she muttered. “Grandma, can I tell you something?”

“Anything,” answered her grandma. She quickly and speedily told grandmother what had happened. The both realized that the witch would soon be coming for grandma. Nolla’s grandpa came upstairs and heard them talking. “I have a plan,” he said. “You were in the castle and met up with the Autumn Witch. Her weakness is chocolate chip cookies. She can’t resist them. We can put “Rid-Witch” in to the cookies and she would be gone. If we can get her to eat just one, she will disappear into a cloud of smoke and return back to the castle forever.”

Nolla and her grandma began baking, while Nolla’s grandpa kept watch. Right as soon as the cookies were done baking and out of the oven, Nolla’s grandpa spotted the Autumn Witch riding on the wind towards their humble cottage. There was a knock at the cottage door.

“I’m here to take the first thing that little Nolla saw,” said the Witch with an evil grin.

“Well this is exactly what Nolla saw, some delicious chocolate chip cookies,” said Nolla’s grandpa.

The Autumn Witch grabbed each cookie greedily and stuffed her mouth full of them. In an instant she was gone – POOF!

Nolla and her grandma and grandpa were safe, and Nolla now knew the dangers beyond the old oak tree.

Walter's Computer

By: Jack Quibell (Gr. 5)

Walter wanted a computer more than anything. He wanted a computer so he could write emails, watch videos, but most of all, he wanted to play the game *World of Legends*, the most exciting game of all time.

Walter's mother said he should not have a computer. She said he should play outside. He could only get a computer if he bought it with his own money. He saved up all his birthday money and Christmas money, but it wasn't enough. He had to work to try to earn more money. It was awful. Every job he had brought him face to face with things he was most scared of.

First, his neighbour Mrs. Rose asked him to help her with her garden. He was bending down, pulling out weeds when he felt the slippery slither of a garter snake across his legs. He jumped up and ran, screaming, running in circles around the yard as if his head were on fire.

"Snake! There's a snake in your garden! Ahhhhhh!"

Next, his grandpa asked him to help clean the attic. He lifted up an old box and three huge spiders started to scurry towards him. He jumped back, yelling "Spiders!"

He tried to stay calm, but suddenly he felt something on the back of his neck. He brushed at it with his hand, and felt an enormous spider before it fell on the ground.

"Ahhhhh!" He ran away screaming.

Then, his aunt asked him to help babysit his little cousin, Toby. Walter's grandma was there too, but she was busy making pies. Walter had a great day, playing with Toby. Then, there was a loud sound, "pfffttt", and a bad smell. Toby started to cry.

Grandma called, "Walter, please get Toby ready for a diaper change".

Walter wasn't sure about this. He lay Toby down on a blanket. He unbuttoned Toby's baby suit. He even undid Toby's diaper. Then, Toby suddenly twisted and rolled over. His foot mashed into the poop, smearing it like peanut butter on toast. The poop oozed everywhere. A terrible smell hit Walter's nose. Then there was an explosion.

"Grandma! Grandma! Help!" Walter ran away screaming, covered in brown.

Even after all that terrible work, Walter only had \$288.36. He thought he would never have enough money.

Then, he went out with his mom. They came to a store he had never seen before called *Curiosity*. The store was full of weird things. Plastic eyeballs, fake vomit, and a leg lamp were on some shelves. There was a robotic skeleton that walked around and gave customers drinks. It said, "Greetings".

Walter noticed a computer on a shelf. There was a sign that said "WARNING", but the price was \$288.36, exactly what Walter had saved.

A bald man who was so skinny that you could see his bones walked up. "I do not recommend this computer."

"Can I play games on it?" Walter asked.

"Yes, yes, you will experience gaming like never before," the man said, and laughed.

Walter bought the computer. When he turned on the computer at home, the lights in his room flashed. The computer made a little whizzing noise and then made a ticking sound like a clock. The smell of a swamp came out from the back of the computer.

A bright yellow "WARNING" flashed across the black screen, and then disappeared.

"STOP NOW" appeared in dark red letters, and then swirled away. "Weird," thought Walter. Then, he could smell the swamp smell. It filled up Walter's nose with a horrible stink. Then a bright green light showed up on the screen.

The room felt like it was moving. Then green smoke came from the computer and Walter could not see a thing. Then he felt like he was falling. When he opened his eyes he wasn't in his house. He was in the computer, but not just inside of the computer -- he was inside a different world. He could see an enormous wall of wires and computer parts standing in the middle of a jungle. It looked just like the scenery in his favourite game *The World of Legends*.

He was sitting down, his arms reaching behind him in tall grass. Tall trees stood all around, with big leaves of more shades of green than Walter had ever seen. Vines hung down from the trees like ribbons. Monkeys were climbing on some of them, shrieking as they jumped. There were also birds, parrots with red blue yellow and green. They watched Walter. The colours were bright but there was a terrible smell. A swampy smell.

A parrot yelled something that sounded a lot like "*Watch out!*" Walter leaned back in the tall, damp grass. He felt something heavy and slimy slither over his hand. He froze for a minute. He slowly turned his head to look. At first, he thought it couldn't be a snake, it was way too long. It reached as far as Walter could see. He only knew which end was the front because that was the direction it was slithering.

He stared at the scaly back of the long curving line until he realized that it had to be a snake. A snake! A snake! The biggest snake in the world! He jumped up and ran away as fast as he could. He was sure he could hear something sliding along just behind him and a quiet hissing sound in his ear, "ssssssssss".

He ran and ran until the sound was not behind him and he started to slow down, when suddenly he stopped, tangled in a sticky web the size of his backyard trampoline. Walter looked all around him at the stringy web. The more he moved, the more tangled he became. "Great," he thought, "Just great."

Walter held still for a minute, trying to think up a solution, but then he saw the long legs of a huge spider. Its body was as big as his neighbour's Great Dane. It had eight eyes, all staring right at him.

He could hear the hissing again. Sssss. So could the spider. As the snake crawled up to get Walter, it also got caught on the web. The spider went over to it and quickly began to wrap it up in its web. In the struggle, the snake's long tail thrashed and ripped at the web around Walter.

He didn't stop to thank the snake for freeing him from the web, he just ran. He ran and ran and ran. The smell was getting stronger but it wasn't just a swampy smell anymore. It really smelled like the porta potty by Walter's soccer field. He ran and ran, nearly choking on the stink.

He stopped, trying to breathe. Then, he heard the hissing sound as well as the sound of eight giant legs rushing. The snake escaped the spider and was being chased right toward him.

He started to run again, but there was a cliff. He saw that the snake and the spider were close behind him. He looked over the edge of the cliff. There was a big swamp, full of poop at the bottom of the cliff. He looked back, and seeing the snake rushing his way, he had no choice. He jumped off the cliff, falling into the poop. It squished all around him. The smell was terrible. He couldn't move.

He looked up. At the top of the cliff he could see both the spider and the snake starting to climb down, coming his way. He tried to get up, but he couldn't move.

The spider was at the edge of the swamp. The snake slithered down the cliff.

Walter thought he was going to die.

Suddenly, there was a rustle of leaves at the side of the swamp.

Walter's favourite character from *The World of Legends* appeared. His name was Lucan. He was tall, with dark skin and long black hair. He wore a red cape around his big shoulders. Lucan's powers included super strength and flying.

"Lucan!" Walter was amazed.

The spider charged at Lucan, hurling a web at the hero. Lucan grabbed the web, and spun the spider around, making it dizzy. Then, he swung the limp spider by its own web in front of the snake, using the spider to hypnotize the snake.

"Follow me," Lucan said.

Walter slowly climbed out of the poop. Lucan led him to a waterfall. He pointed, "You must pass through here to return to your world."

Walter went through the waterfall. It fell on him like a shower, rinsing the poop off him.

Then he was back in his bedroom, soaking wet. His computer was on the desk, with smoke coming out of the back of it.

Walter's mom came in. "Why are you wet? Look, you stepped in dog poop. Hey, what did you do to your computer! It's smoking!"

Walter didn't know how to explain it. He didn't say anything.

His mom looked at the computer, "Oh no Walter! It is broken. You won't be able to play your game on it."

"That's ok," Walter said, "I think I will play."

The Dangerous Boat Ride

By: Thea Vankesteren (Gr. 4)

As my family and I sat on the creaky deck, we watched the sky go dimmer and dimmer as the big, red sun dropped into the water to shine on the other side of the world. Finally, my dad told us it was time for bed, so I just ran to our cabin leaving everyone else behind. When I got there, I was panting and trying to catch my breath. Finally, I was able to yell out, "I beat you!" As my mom walked towards me of course she said "Shshshshshsh." I turned around and glared at the metal cabin door and heard the click when my mom unlocked it. I burst open the door and ran inside.

I was with my parents and my older brother and sister and we were heading to the island for a family vacation. We were staying on the ship for 3 days until we got there. This was our third day and tonight was our last night to sleep on the ship.

When we got into the room my dad told me to get ready for bed. My mom tucked me in and said, "Good night, Carol."

I wiggled around in my bed that night trying to get the right position. Then, I heard my mom and dad whispering to my brother and sister in the other room. My brother said the word "storm" very loudly, thinking that his little sister was asleep. When they were done talking they sent Andrew and Lisa to bed and told them to be quiet about the storm. I quickly shut my eyes and pretended to be sleeping. That night, my parents put on some nice music to help everyone fall asleep. I didn't want to fall asleep because of the storm, but my eyes faded slowly and I eventually drifted off into a sleep.

I suddenly woke up from a loud bang. The clock on the shelf had fallen off. I jumped out of bed and felt the cold water flush through my toes. Was the boat sinking? I slipped and slid all the way to the other side of the room. I tried to push open the door. It wouldn't budge. There was so much water at the other side of the door. When I couldn't get the door opened I screamed. My brother and sister woke up and sprinted to the door and helped me push. We finally pushed the door open and ran to the deck. It was so windy I could hardly stand on my feet. I could hear the waves crashing and the wind rushing. The air was foggy and I could hardly see. I felt my shivering goose bumps as the waves and the rain mixed together and smacked us down.

Our parents came running to get us back to the cabin, but I wouldn't listen. In the distance, I saw five, slimy rocks jumping and sailing in the water towards us. I slid to the railing to get a better look. They were five dolphins. Suddenly, I slipped on all the water on the deck and fell into the salty, cold, crashing sea. I screamed for help. One of the dolphins splashed over to me, and I exhaustedly grabbed his fin on his back. The dolphin started to swim away from the boat. I looked back and saw the other dolphins calling to my family. They were trying to help us. My brother jumped in first, then my sister, mother and finally my father followed. The dolphins hurried to everyone else and saved their lives.

They swam for a while and then finally the water started to feel warmer and I could feel the wet sand between my toes. Then, the dolphins stopped when we could touch the bottom. My family and I slid off the dolphins and pushed through the water and crawled onto the shore. The dolphins had saved our lives and brought us to the island safely. After we caught our breath I ran

to my family and hugged them. Then I remembered to thank the dolphins for saving us. I turned towards the water and saw that the dolphins were already swimming away. My family and I stood on the shore feeling sad and happy. We waved good bye to the dolphins.

The Adventures of Orphans

By: Jean Hough (Gr. 4)

One day my family and I went to the barn and we found that our rabbit Peppermint was dead. We were all sad. Later that day, when we went to take the dead rabbit out we had a surprise. Four little soft, squirmy, and fluffy baby bunnies were hiding in the nest. They were adorable! We had to decide what to do. We just couldn't leave them there. We decided we would take them home and make them a pen out of a cardboard box.

We fed them powdered kitten milk because cow's milk does not have enough fat. The kitten milk has 25% fat. Cow's milk can only get up to 3.25% when pasteurized. The bunnies grew and grew and we decided to name them: Buckwheat, Cottontail, Domino, and Stripe. They were all one of a kind.

They all had very different personalities. Buckwheat was the ultimate escape artist. Buckwheat's passion is to explore, escape, and scale things. Cottontail is the runt of the litter. We did not think that she was going to make it. But later on we found out that she was the most aggressive eater. Domino cared more about her looks than food. When we started to teach them to drink out of a dish, Buckwheat and Cottontail were the first to learn. Stripe learned quickly after them. Domino would not drink from a dish because she was worried that her face would get dirty. Stripe is not as eager to be handled.

These are some of the adventures they have had. One of them was when they dug out of their outdoor pen. Usually we just let them roam around in their outdoor pen and just check on them every once in awhile. But when we went to check on them, they were not in the outdoor pen. They had dug a hole under the outdoor pen and all four bunnies got out. Buckwheat and Stripe were nowhere to be seen. Cottontail was found first. We found her running around in our yard. Domino was found running in our hedge. We were worried that Buckwheat would not come back because of his desire to get out. But luckily he did come back. When Buckwheat showed up we caught him. A half an hour later, Stripe came back. We were relieved when all the bunnies were safe in their cage.

Another day when we were giving the bunnies their morning milk, Buckwheat hopped out of the basket he was in and stepped in the green paint my brother was using to paint a picture. His paws and his face were covered in paint. Buckwheat looked hilarious, silly and unusual. It took a lot of scrubbing but eventually we got him clean!

We learned that rabbits are highly trainable. We went to the store and got a pet training clicker and some other supplies and then started to train him to do tricks. We taught him how to go up on his hind legs and walk, to go through a hoop, spin in a circle and to go over jumps. Buckwheat did amazing with the tricks. It was fascinating to watch him go over jumps. It was easy to train him because of his passion for exploring.

Weeks later we found out that you can buy rabbit harnesses. We got a rabbit harness for Buckwheat. When we put the harness on him he tries to run for the hedge but we try to teach him not to do that.

The bunnies are all doing well and loving their lives. They are very special to us and we are looking forward to many more adventures with them.

Bernie the Dog's Big Day at the Circus

By: Jacsian Muralitharan (Gr. 6)

One very hot day, I was walking with my owner who is very mean. Oh my gosh, I almost forgot to introduce myself. I'm Bernie, Bernie the dog. I always wanted to be in the circus. I really wanted to trapeze. So as I was saying, we were walking to the dog park. My owner wanted me to be the best dog racer. We were walking until I saw a sign. Not so far from here, Messi Town, they were going to put on a circus. I barked as loudly as I can so my owner could see the sign but he was tugging me like he didn't hear me, which was probably why he was tugging me.

So when we arrived at the park I was running to see the sign again, but my owner zapped me. My owner is extremely rich so he bought this collar that zaps me whenever he presses this button on his remote. The zap really hurts. So I came back to him. He told me to run 8 laps around the track. That's about 10 miles!! And he told me to run 10 min/lap. Now that is insane. I hated him sometimes. Actually I hated him all the time. He doesn't even give me the right food for goodness sake. That's it, I'm going to find Bolt the cat to cut the collar off me so I can run away. But I can't find him anywhere. Then I saw him. He was trying to run away too. So I ran up to him and he cut my collar off. So now we both ran. But before we went, I went to my owner's bag to get some collars. Don't worry these collars can't zap us. These are spare ones in case there are police around.

So as we ran off while we were talking. Bolt asked where we're going to live, get food, get water, and have fun at the same time. We were thinking really hard but half an hour later I got an idea. We can go to the circus nearby. I can trapeze and we both can live there too. So we ran off. It was just 3 miles from where we are. I was calculating how long it will take for us to get there. Oh and if you are asking how I am very smart here's the answer. Apparently when I was born I had a human brain instead of a regular dog's brain. So when I finished calculating I got the answer. We could be there in half an hour at this pace. But if we go faster, it will take about 15 min. We both agreed to go faster.

So when we arrived at the circus we were right on time. The ring master saw us and asked us if we wanted to be in the circus. I said yes. He found out I was very smart. Fortunately they were trying to find someone to trapeze. I asked if I can trapeze and he said yes. I was very happy, but Bolt wasn't. He didn't have a part in the circus but I got an idea. The reason why he is called Bolt is because he can run as fast as Usain Bolt. So I asked the ring master if Bolt can show the audience how fast Bolt can run. He said yes to it. Right when he said yes we both ran in the tent to practice. I rocked at being on a trapeze. Bolt rocked at running.

The ring master is really nice. I wish I could've been his pet before. We practiced with him every day. He doesn't yell at us, even when we make mistakes. He is nothing like my other owner. When it was time for the circus to start, we were very nervous but the ringmaster told us to be very calm and to think of the audience clapping for me. I wanted to do my act second last so I

can watch. The people in the circus are awesome. There was this act where a tiger had to go through a ring that was as tiny as a wedding ring. It's weird. But it wasn't weird until they lit the ring on fire. Now that's insane. I thought the tiger wouldn't survive but it did. It was time for me trapeze. I did amazing flips. They were so amazing that the audience looked amazed. That was my lucky day at the circus.

Wake Up

By: Cole Shropshire (Gr. 8)

Adam woke up on the cold, cracked stone floor. “Where am I..?” He thought to himself, lifting himself up off the ground. Upon getting up and taking in his surroundings he realized he was in an old abandoned prison. Plants and vines were overgrown, wildly grown everywhere, all over the roof and the cracked floor. There was a cool, refreshing breeze blowing through the hallways. “Well, I’m not getting anywhere by standing here” he said to himself. “I should look around and see if I can find anyone...” Adam started walking aimlessly through the dark hallways of the prison, every so often calling out “Hello!” He wandered for what felt like hours, finding nothing but empty cells. He could barely see now, he hadn’t noticed it before, but it was becoming progressively darker as he walked through the hallways of the prison. All of a sudden, his head started to hurt. He began to see something, it was barely visible and very blurry. “I remember... A car...” He thought to himself. A car? What could it mean? What was he missing? He continued wandering, but couldn’t forget about the vision he had earlier. What was going on? Why was here? There had to be answers! He froze. There was something down the hall. A cell with a single burning candle. He was hesitant at first. Someone – Or something – Must’ve lit that candle. What if they were dangerous? What if they attacked him? He decided it was worth the risk and started to slowly approach the cell. He began to shake, nervously checking over both shoulders, ready for anyone that might try to jump out at him. “Okay... Calm down, Adam...” He thought to himself. “I’m strong enough to fight, and fast enough to run, if I need to... I’m faster than anyone I know...” When he entered the cell, he was relieved to see it was empty, except for the candle and a note laying on the frame of a bed where a prisoner would’ve slept years ago. He picked up the paper and began to read:

Dear Adam,

Here are the answers you have been looking for.

It has been reported that some victims of car accidents would, after the act, retreat into a world

*of fantasy from which they could not **Wake Up**. A car accident... It made sense now. He*

continued to read. In this paralyzed state, they would live in a world just like their own, except

*they had not been in a car accident. The mind of the victim would often try to **Wake up** the*

*victim by leaving hints, giving them visions, and even, on some rare occasions, leaving notes for the victim to find. These notes would often tell the victim to **Please Wake Up**.*

Everything made sense now, he remembered. The screeching of the tires as he tried to stop, the feeling of his car hitting the other. Everything started spinning. “What’s happening..?” He thought to himself, as everything started to go black. He tried to scream, to yell for help, but nothing came out. Then darkness, silence, nothing. Then there was a bright light. A hospital light. He was waking up.

The Struggle of the Race

By: IsoBelle O'Neill (Gr. 8)

Feb. 23, 2084

It's been eighteen years since the revolution. All is well, for the most part. I have no struggles to record other than the main struggle of middle school. Though, I shall not bother to waste space on my page or the ink in my pen to write about something not worth my time. I guess I shall do as my mother has instructed and tell you about myself. You see, she is fearful that World War 111 is not truly over, merely delayed. I still like to call it World War 111. As a reminder that us as humans, had not learned from our mistakes, three times. This is why my mother makes me and my sisters write these journals. In case it does come back there will be something that others can read to remind themselves about the pain and suffering World War 111 caused. The others do not call it World War 111 though. They have chosen to call it The Struggle of the Race. As in, the Human Race. Yes, as in the struggle for Man Kind. As I said it had started eighteen years ago, in a place of darkness. The world was slowly slipping into chaos, until finally there was only one answer. Fight for the supplies needed to live. War started at once, explosives everywhere. After about ten years of war the human race was basically nonexistent and the world was in ruin. Water tables, broken. Air, polluted beyond belief. Fresh water, basically gone. It was then the tectonic plates shifted, and the seven great continents became three. There was the right continent Bala Olddali. The left continent, Jabben. Finally, the center continent, Mitte Zentrumenson. The human race, at the brink of extinction, then realized we had to work together to live in harmony. The world was built back up in a less harmful way to the earth. Every single bit of old world (That is what we call the pre-war life) creations, technology, buildings, even power was destroyed. We started again with the one thing you could not get rid of... knowledge. Of course there are still the lázadók, or the "rebels" as you might say. They believe the way that society is running the system is wrong, and will do almost anything to overthrow it. Not that they have ever gotten close to doing that. That is where we are today. I guess I should now tell you more about myself.

I live in Mitte Zentrumenson, which I believe is made out of the old countries Sweden, Germany, Hungary, Madagascar, Norway, Russia, Asia, and the state of Ohio. I know odd, but the world was severely broken up. I am 15 and have two sisters, Kanin and Nyuszi. My father, Daniel, was killed as a young boy back in the old world. He lived in Germany and was eighteen when he died. My mother, Alice, had lived in Sweden and was sent to Germany for safety when the war had started. To prepare for another war my sisters and I take self-defense and karate three times a week. I am in the top of my class. My name is Haase Venicema. Pronounced Has. My sisters and I were named after the German, Swedish, and Hungarian words for rabbit. It is because, after all the war, the species that had the biggest population on this planet by far, was rabbits. They were able to outlive the war. No matter how weak and useless they had seemed in the old world, they outlived all expectations. Now rabbits are used as a sign of strength. A sign that you do not have to be anything but yourself to pass all expectations. That is what we live by, that is what I live by.

Yours Truly,

Haase

"Haase! Let's go! We have fourteen minutes!" Nyuszi yelled at Haase from down stairs. Haase wasn't listening though. She was too busy looking at the birds from outside her window. She looked around and studied the meadow around her. The wild flowers grew everywhere. Covering the fields, like vibrant coloured snow. The butterflies danced all around them, as if wanting to say hello to everyone. She looked up at the clear blue sky and watched the clouds move briskly across the sky. They were so graceful. They floated as if they owned the air and everything around it. She watched the mountains surrounding the valley as if they were stone guards. The river below them, that wrapped around the valley like a cape. The water rushed fast enough to be heard, but soft enough to cause no harm to any crossers. The meadow was beautiful. Almost every town in Mitte Zentrumerson looked like this. Each one unique to its city. Haase's city was called Hopen. Dutch for Hope. There were eighteen meadows or "neighborhoods" surrounding each city. The main cities looked a lot like old world malls. Just a lot more kiosks and grass and less buildings and cement.

"Haase! I'm serious! I'm leaving in ten minutes, with or without you!" Nyuszi yelled. "Feel free to stay home and get yelled at by mother when she comes home! I'm sure she will have some kind of house work for you!" Haase gathered her bag and finished putting away her things. She grabbed her journal and tucked it into her bag, to write in later. Then she went down stairs to meet her sisters. "There you are!" Nyuszi said, finishing with their lunch. "Look at you! Your hair is a mess!" She pulled Haase close to her and sat her on a stool. Then she began French-braiding half of Haase's head. "You have such beautiful hair like mama. Its time you start taking care of it." She said as she turned the stool the other way and started braiding the other half. Nyuszi was seventeen and thought she knew everything. She started to lecture her sister on how she was almost sixteen, and needed to start acting like a young lady, rather than a child. Haase just rolled her eyes. She had heard this lecture too many times before.

When Nyuszi was finished she spun the stool to face her and looked Haase up and down. Haase had curly, almost white, blond shoulder length hair and big blue eyes. She had lips as red as an apple and a smile that could light up a city. Nyuszi was right, she looked just like her mother, other than the longer lengthen hair. The other two girls had dark brown, waist long hair and dark green eyes. They looked a lot like their father. The family all together was a beautiful sight to see.

Haase stood up and straightened out her dress. She watched her sister's ponytail swing back and forth as she cut a sandwich. She knew her sister was speaking to her but she wasn't listening. She was more interested in the meadow outside the window. She watched in joy as her seven year sister Kanin, ran up and down the meadow, chasing after butterflies.

"Are you even listening to me?!" Nyuszi exclaimed shoving Haase's lunchbox at her sisters' chest. Haase took the lunchbox with two hands and with a smile looked up at her sister.

"No." And with that she took her lunchbox and bag and ran into the meadow after Kanin.

Once in the meadow she ran in the open field and dropped to the ground. She looked up at the sky above her and listened to the wind. It was so peaceful. The bees buzzing and her sister's distance laughter could only make Haase smile and think about how wonderful life was.

"Yes, I have it mum. No, I don't need it. Okay, I'm leaving now. Love you." Haase listen to a door shut, and sat up on her elbows. She watched as a boy, about her age, maybe a few months older, fussed with his tie as his satchel slipped off his shoulder. He flicked his dark blond hair off his eye brows, which made his chocolate brown eyes very visible. He was a tall boy. Around two or three inches taller than Haase. He was so busy with his tie, he did not see his untied shoe lace and tripped. Haase laughed a little, then got up to help. She walked over to the boy and stood above him, her hands on her hips. The boy looked up and smiled.

"Hello Haase"

"Hello Becket" She replied with a smirk. Haase held out her hand, and helped Becket up. She then reached towards the collar of his shirt and started tying his tie. "You would think that after nine years of grammar school you would know how to tie a tie."

"Well it's hard to learn with you always helping me." He smiled and the two looked at each other, until finally Haase cleared her throat and looked to the ground. She then started walking towards the east part of the valley towards her sisters and the other neighborhood children, with becket at her heels. He finally caught up to her, and went to grab her hand. Haase looked up in surprise and shook her hand away. She turned and looked at Becket with anger in her eyes, but it softened when she saw his face.

"Becket, I-we can't do this. Be anything more than friends that is." She looked to the ground once more.

"Why not?!" He exclaimed.

"You know why." she sharply replied. All the anger rushing back. He smirked and looked at the ground shaking his head. Haase turned around and continued walking. She fought back the tears as she walked towards the bus stop. She loved Becket. She knew that much was true, there was just simply no way they could ever be together. The bus arrived and slowly all the chatty children of the meadow climbed onto the bus. She walked past her little sister, who was chatting with her best friend, Nancy and sat next to a quiet ninth grader. She looked out the window at all the houses and rolling hills and just stared. She wasn't really looking or thinking about anything, she was just sitting.

Haase sat there, and listened to the bus's engine come to life. The bus jerked to a start, and she watched as the rolling hills of her meadow disappeared and was replaced by forest. She watched as the bus moved faster and the trees became a giant blur.

She sat there watching them for at least fifteen minutes, when all the sudden the trees became clearer and clearer. The bus was moving to a halt. She pressed her face against the window, and looked side to side. They were at least twenty minutes away from school still, and her meadow was the last stop. Something wasn't right. The bus grew quiet as others realized what was going on.

Suddenly someone, just loud enough for everyone to hear whispered in fear “the lázadó”. Haase turned around to see who had muttered, but she couldn’t see a thing. The bus, in the coverage of the trees, was completely dark. As her eyes slowly adjusted she could see figures but not faces. She along with everyone else, sat in fear. Then, the bus doors opened and a single person came in. Haase could tell she was a woman by the click of her heels. The mysterious woman scoped the bus and walked out just as quickly as she came in. The bus continued to sit in silence for a few more seconds, but what felt like minutes. A squeaky noise came from the bus speakers, as with a strange fog type substance. Haase felt the air get thicker as she started to cough. She turned her head to look out the window, but her head got heavier, as well as her eye lids. She rested her head against the window, and closed her eyes for a second, a second to long.

She woke up with a jolt, scanning the room around her. She was in some type of board room, with a giant screen in front of her. She looked at the wall and saw that all the windows had the blinds pulled down. She went to wiggle her arms and feet, just to notice they had been tied to a chair. She began to think of a plan, when she heard a door behind her open. Three people walked to the front of the room. Two women and one man. The two women were both wearing black body suits and black heeled boots. The man was wearing black jeans and a black leather jacket. They all had their backs to Haase. One woman, with a long, dark, brown ponytail, started fiddling with the computer. The other woman had a ginger coloured pixie cut. She started typing things on the screen. And the man, well, the man was sitting on a table sharpening a knife. Silently, Haase started untying the knot binding her hands. She worked on it until it was loose enough to fall off.

After a few minutes Haase started to get annoyed. She cleared her throat as a sign as annoyance. The lady working with the screen, turned around looked her up and down, rolled her eyes, and turned back to what she was doing. Haase did this again, and the lady turned around once more. As well did the man. The lady sighed and started talking.

“My name is agent Klouff.” She said in a thick Russian accent. “And this is agent Rimouski.” Rimouski just grunted, refusing to take his attention away from the knife.

“Who’s she.” Haase said, nodding to the lady at the computer.

“Not important right now.” Agent Klouff said, glaring at Haase.

“You might as well tell her Klouff.” The woman at the computer said, without taking her eyes off the screen. Klouff just looked at her, clearly annoyed. “Okay, well, I guess I will.” Computer lady said, in a voice that was way too familiar. All Haase could think was that she had met this woman more than once. Someone she knew helped kidnap her. The woman shut off her computer, and turned around. The anger rushed through Haase. This woman wasn’t even technically a woman yet, it was Haase’s teenage sister, Nyuszi.

“Y-you!” was all Haase could get out. She was filled with anger and questions. Her own sister had kidnapped her, and worked for the lázadó. Nyuszi was on the bus that morning. She knew what was going to happen. She lived a lie. Haase was so confused and lost in her thoughts she almost didn’t hear Nyuszi speaking to her.

“- have been part of this project for the past three months and its brilliant. The capital will be brought to justice this time, we are positive of it. My only wish is that you join us now. You have more fighting skill than most of our soldiers, and if we keep training you, you-we would be unstoppable.” She looked at Haase with hope in her eyes. “Don’t you see? We don’t have to live in the forceful way society makes us. Haase, we can live the way we want to. More than one woman per family can be married to whomever they choose! No one would have to be shipped away. We could all live happily once this is over. That’s why I joined, for us, for you. For you and Becket.” It took Haase a minute to piece the sentence together. She did like that idea. The idea of not being shipped away to a less populated place and marrying there. She liked the idea of staying with her family... and Becket. Then she remembered, another war. Having to battle all over again. Once she thought about this she shook her head in dis-belief.

“You are *actually* trying to get me to join you. Ha, I would never join you. Just wait ‘til mom finds out you’ve joined the rebels. I’ll for sure be her favorite.” Haase said with a smirk.

“Haase, this isn’t a joke, and joining us, or not joining us, you aren’t leaving. Not now, not until this battle is over. You, Kanin, and the other children must be safe. You can’t leave.” Nyuszi had Kanin and Becket.

“Want to bet.” With that Haase pulled her hands out of the binding and stood up, barley keeping her balance. She slipped her feet out of there binding before anyone could process what was happening. She grabbed the chair and used one of its legs to knock the knife out of Rimouski’s hand and into her own. Then she hit Rimouski in the side of the head with the back of the chair, and he was out like a light. She turned to hear Agent Klouutt asking for backup in her radio. Haase ran over to Klouutt and hit the radio out of her hand and onto the table. She stabbed it with the knife, and looked up in Klouutt’s shocked eyes. Then, just like she did to Romouski, Haase picked up the chair and hit Klouutt in the head and watched as she fell to the floor. She left the knife in the radio and looked around for her sister.

Nyuszi was clapping in the back corner with a big smirk on her face. “Fast work sis. See, we would make a great team. Now, I really don’t want to fight you, but I’ll do what I have to do to keep you safe from the outside world.” Haase didn’t reply, she just ran at her sister with all the anger she had inside of her. Haase tried to hit her sister with the chair, but Nyuszi just grabbed it and twisted it, throwing Haase to the ground. Haase swung around, trying to take out her sister’s ankles, only for Nyuszi to grab her feet and push them back. Haase summersaulted backwards and stood up only to be pinned up against a wall with the chair.

The two sisters were now in an attached room, with pillars acting as a doorway into the board room. Haase thought of a plan as her sister was talking.

“Don’t you see Haase? You can’t beat me. I’ve taken karate and self-defense with you for the past ten years. I know all your moves. You have no tricks I don’t know. You might as well just give up. Are you even listening to me?!” Haase grabbed the chair with two hands and smiled up at her sister.

“No.” and with that she pushed the chair, with her sister in front of it, into a pillar as hard as she could. Her sister, obviously badly hurt, fell to the ground and out of the way as the pillar crashed

to the ground. Haase ran out of the room and grabbed the knife out of the radio and ran for the door.

“Haase! “ Her sister’s weak voice yelled. “I tried to protect you. When the battle comes, sister or not, don’t expect me to do it again.”

“That’s okay, I really didn’t need your help anyways.” Then she ran out of the room, to find Kanin and Becket.

Finding Kanin and Becket was not very hard for Haase. Obviously no one had heard Agent Kloutt’s call for help because the halls were practically empty. The agents that Haase did run into believed her story. She told them all that she was now a junior agent in charge of explaining to the children what was happening and that agents Kloutt, Rimouski, and Venicema were out to find more children. Once she got directions to where the children were being held from a soldier it was super easy. She was speed walking down the children’s section when she heard crying from a broom closet. She opened the door to find a crying Kanin and Becket.

“Haase!” Kanin, practically screamed as she hugged her sister. Haase looked around to make sure no one had heard her sister’s cries. Once the coast was clear she knelt down and hugged her sister.

“See Kanin, I told you she would find us.” Becket said getting up and brushing off his slacks. Haase let go of her sister and stood up as well. She looked at Becket and noticed he had a black eye.

“Your eye!?” She exclaimed. Becket then explained how when they woke up, everyone from the bus was in this board room, except for Haase and Nyuszi. He had asked a guard where the two sisters were and when the guard didn’t answer he asked him again, and he got punched out. Becket went on to explain how then, he just knew Haase was in trouble so he grabbed a knife from the guards pocket while Kanin distracted the guard by telling him stories in her cute little girl voice. Then when the guard went to the bathroom he used the knife to open up the vent and then he and Kanin escaped. No one else wanted to come, they didn’t want to take the chance of getting killed. Once they found a vent exit in the hallway, Becket had kicked it open and Kanin and he crawled out to find a guard looking at them from about ten feet away. He had grabbed Kanin and they ran until they had lost the guard. The closest empty room was the closet, where they had been hiding ever since.

Haase then explained what had happened to her, and how they needed to leave right away. Haase and Becket sat on the floor of the closet and came up with a plan to escape, while Kanin played with Haase’s hair. Becket mentioned that while running he saw a loading dock, but you needed a key card to open the door, and only the soldiers had one of those.

About thirty minutes later they went over there plan one last time and when they were ready they split up. Kanin and Becket went to get the key card and Haase went to find their backpacks.

Haase ran down a hallway for about fifteen minutes until she stumbled upon a room labeled “storage”. She jiggled the doorknob but it was locked. She then pulled the knife out of her back pocket and used it as a substitute key. Five minutes later, she opened the door and

searched for the light switch. Once she found it, she clicked it on and there on the floor were about forty backpacks. Haase put the knife back in her pocket and looked around. She quickly found Kanin's, Becket's, and her backpacks. Then she grabbed as many other backpacks as she could comfortably carry and ran out of the room and towards the loading dock.

Meanwhile, Kanin ran right past a soldier giggling like a mad man.

"Halt! Stop! Stop!" He yelled chasing her. She ran down the hallway and into an empty, dark board room. She hid under a table as the soldier entered. The soldier found the lights and turned them on. Then Becket jumped out from behind the door and hit the soldier over the head with a chair. He then grabbed the key card from the unconscious soldier's belt and grabbed Kanin. They ran to the loading dock where Haase was waiting for them.

"I checked the schedule while waiting for you guys, the loading dock workers have gone home for the night, we have about thirty minutes until it gets dark." She said pacing in front of the door.

"So we have thirty minutes to escape and find shelter. Let's go." Then Becket put Kanin on his back, Haase scanned the card and they ran. The building that they were held in was on a cliff close to the ground on one of the mountains surrounding an empty meadow. They figured it was pointless to go down, because that's where the soldiers would look, so they went up. About twenty minutes later they were on a ledge so high up the mountain, you couldn't even see the building below them anymore. They decided to stop for the night. The ledge had some trees for coverage. They decided it was warm enough that they didn't have to make a fire. They found about six sweaters in the backpacks, plus the one Kanin was wearing. One sweater that probably fit a tenth grader was a perfect blanket for Kanin. So they put three backpacks down under her as a mattress and the sweater as a blanket and put Kanin to bed at the very back of the ledge. All of the lunch boxes they had found were safe up in a tree, away from any animals. All that was left to do now was think.

Haase and Becket sat on the edge of the ledge, with their feet dangling. They sat in silence for the longest time. Finally Becket broke the silence.

"So what now?" He said staring out at the world. Haase had no clue. She didn't know what to say. "We'll be fine, we just got to, you know, pass all expectations." Haase wasn't sure who he was trying to convince more, her or himself. She believed him though. She didn't know whether it was the mountain air talking, or the fact that she still hadn't processed half of the day's events, but something just made her believe that everything would be okay in the end. Haase felt Becket grab her hand, and for the first time in ever, she didn't pull away.

Beautiful

By: Angela Luan (Gr. 8)

Pulling someone down, will never bring you to the top.

Wind ripples through the fluttering leaves of a tree, and the whole aura of the setting screams fall. Kids buzzing with the excitement of school, bright coloured leaves scattered all throughout neighbourhoods, and thick woolly sweaters paired with various coloured mittens, scarves, and hats. Everyone seems happy and excited for the new school year. Everyone but me.

30 pounds have found its way to my body, and no doubt this will affect my social status.

At school, I manage to stay away from people, crossing my fingers that no one will notice me. It works until third period. Avoiding my so called friends is not easy, considering they are the popular people of the school. Above all, in charge.

The attendance is called, and my palms start to sweat.

“Isabelle Pearce?”

I stay quiet, my heart beating so loud, I’m sure everyone can hear it.

“Isabelle?”

Silence.

“Isabe- Oh! There you are sweetie! You should speak up.”

All heads turn to me, multiple pairs of eyes burning through my skull.

And at that moment, I knew I was no longer Isabelle Pearce, the envy of every girl of the school, with a perfect life. No, I became the big cow, with a life far from perfect. All in the blink of an eye.

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“I remember when you only had one stomach... Good ol’ days!”

“I see you were so impressed with your first chin, you added two more!”

“I would never make fun of you! I already know you have too much on your plate.”

Of course all of it stung. But that’s not what hurt. What hurt was all my peers, my old classmates, people I’ve grown up with; they didn’t even bat an eyelash at me. They barely could even look at me, shame, fear, and pity in their eyes. Oh, the pity. They felt for me, I could tell. But no one could stand to look at me, much less say hi, or smile at me. Even a glance longer than 2 seconds would make me feel better. But it never happened.

So I did the only obvious solution. I stopped eating. At first it was hard, every inch of my being ached for the taste of food. But what kept me from opening that bag of Doritos? The constant



fear of my bullies coming after me, like a cougar hunting its prey. I could hear their voices in my head, every second of the day; taunting me, calling me fat, and most of all, the whispers and sneaky glances at me, darting between the victim and offender. I could put on a strong exterior, acting like none of this bothered me, like I couldn't hear the gossip passed between people. I could be carefree, acting like this didn't bother me. But it was only acting. Every. Single. Day. There was no escape. And I was losing grip.

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In a single parent home, my mom could care less about the number on the scale. But at the same time, she could care less about my health; too oblivious and caught up in the divorce. So when I lost the 30 pounds, and got sick, more and more frequently, guess who came to the rescue? No one.

The words that haunted my very existence, the taunting, it stopped. What was left to tease? But the confident girl who could do anything she tried? That girl was gone. Swept away in the fall wind, along with dignity, pride, and happiness. So even though the body I had longed for, for months, was back, I wasn't. Depressed and anti-social became my favorite adjectives, and the food? It was gone too. Meals were practically non-existent, and the only thing I let myself consume, were appetite curbing pills.

Per my daily ritual, after a day of school, with a label as loser nonetheless, I shut myself into my room and popped two pills. Every day it worked, and that's all that mattered to me. I pulled off all my clothes and stared at my naked body. To any sane person, I was extremely underweight, bones popping out in every direction, not a single inch of fat to be seen. But to me, I was fat, and that's what I would always be. I pulled on my clothes, and pulled out my math homework, and that's when it all went black.

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I woke up, tubes stuck in my body. Most people would be confused, and demanding, but I had been expecting this day for months. I just never expected to wake up. I was thrust into my mom's arms, while listening to a monotone voice droning on about food, nutrients, and awareness. I mean, I guess I wanted to stop this disorder that was eating me alive. But most of all, I wanted to make sure it would never happen to anybody else.

Rehab took up most of junior year, and by the time I was out, it was almost time for senior year. Recovery was hard. Forcing myself to eat, throwing out my mirror, and most of all, abandoning the voices in my head telling myself I wasn't good enough. I replaced them with positive thoughts, and soon enough, I started to like my body. I relapsed twice in the course of a year, but anorexia would never go away permanently. But hopefully for a long time.

~~~~~

6 years later

"Excuse me Miss, but you're up now."

Nodding, I wipe my sweaty hands on the back of my dress. This is it. Time to change so many lives.

“In high school, I got bullied by kids I knew as my best friends. The past summer, I had gained 30 pounds, and that was apparently not acceptable to my ‘friends’. I fell into depression, and gained some severe anorexia in the process, and stopped eating. I soon was back into my old body, but not my old mind, and lost control. One of my favourite pastimes was popping dieting pills. I also liked to look at my body in the mirror, criticize it, and weigh myself frequently. That number was all that mattered to me. I almost died that day, but you don’t have to go through what I did. The number that seems so important? It’s not. Don’t let that number define you, because that’s all it is. A number. It is more powerful than most things, but you. You are stronger than it, because, you are beautiful, more beautiful than society. So if you are going through something similar to what I was, please listen to me. *Nobody cares. I care. Maybe if I just stop eating.* Stop that monster inside that controls you. *Maybe I should just end it. I’m ugly and a waste of space.* You are beautiful. Absolutely, positively beautiful, and don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. Thank you.”

I’m breathing heavy, but I did it. I killed my eating disorder, after years of blood and tears. I did it.

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*If anyone you know is showing signs of an eating disorder, please visit <http://www.nedic.ca/>. You could help save a life.*

**Tell the person who bullies you the most, “It’s over”, and walk away from the mirror.**

## Smile

**By: Minoosh Fathi (Gr. 8)**

I can never forget that horrid day; the day when my whole life would change.

My mom and I were walking home from the hospital that was right down the road from our house. We had just visited one of my mom's friends, Carry Armstrong, who was soon to undergo treatment for breast cancer. I remember she would say to me, in her Old Western accent, "Aren't you a sweetheart Emma?" whenever I brought her a gift. I always felt comfortable around her. She brought this warm feeling to the room which made me happy to visit her with mom every once in a while.

The walking signal flashed the white human figure and we started to cross the street. But then, it happened. I reached the other side of the street, and as my mom was coming towards me, a red Ferrari zoomed past the red light.

My mother's scream would be the last of her voice that I would ever hear.

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It's been 2 weeks since my mother's death. At her funeral, many of her friends attended, including Carry, who had made it through the treatment. My dad held me close at the funeral, and all of mom's friends gave their sincere apologies for our loss. When I went up to say my speech, I didn't say as much as I had planned to, I just couldn't.

"My mom...", I started. "...was the best person I had ever known." A short pause sent silence through the crowd. Then I simply whispered, "I love you mom," and I burst into tears.

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The first day at my new high school eventually came. I didn't speak to anyone that much because I was still shocked about the incident. It just happened so quickly. As the day went on, I finally met someone who made me smile. She was in my art class. The only reason I met her was simple, I didn't have a ruler. Anyways, I asked to borrow one from her, and what she said next was very surprising.

"Yes of course, but please be gentle with it. It was a gift from my mother who recently passed away. I know it's a little stupid but..." She continued on, but I didn't listen. All that I thought at that moment was that another person had gone through the same thing as me. I was kind of relieved to know that someone was feeling just like me, but at the same time, I felt really sorry for her. For the rest of the work period, we got to know each other a lot more and I was already feeling so much better. Her name was Ali Summers, the girl who I thought of as my future best friend.

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When I got home from school that day, my dad was on the phone with somebody. I found out just last night, that he had been seeing someone a week after the funeral, so it was probably her.

He glanced at me, and then said, "I've got to go now. I'll see you soon." He hung up the phone. I glared at with fury in my eyes. It all made me really mad. How could he just forget

about mom so quickly? I yelled at him and said that I hated him! He tried to explain that it was for the better, so that I could have someone be with me when he was at work.

“Please, let’s just give it a shot. I promise you I’ll make this better for both of us.” He looked at me as though asking for my approval, but I stormed off to my room without saying a word.

A few minutes later, the doorbell rang. I peered outside the window to see who it was. A woman, about in her late 30s, stood at the door. One thing that surprised me was that she wasn’t one of those ladies who wore such fancy clothes, like 4 inch high heels, and a dress. She wore some Nike running shoes, a pretty casual t-shirt, and some jeans. With a coach bag at her side, she smiled as dad opened the door.

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They talked for a while to each other, until my dad called me downstairs to meet her. At first I ignored him, (keeping my pride up after the fight, if you know what I mean) and just listened to what they were going to say next.

“It’s alright,” the woman said to dad. “I can understand how hard it must be for her.”

I felt a little bad now after what she said, so I finally gave in and walked down the stairs. She smiled when she saw me and my dad looked somewhat relieved, as though I would have embarrassed him if I hadn’t come down. We all sat around the table, and talked. Her name was Angela, and surprisingly, I liked her. She was so energetic and happy, that I was almost excited for dad. But remember, I said *almost*. Angela told me lots of stories of my childhood, and the things she loved to do. As she was talking, I could see that my dad was happy. He had been so depressed after mom’s death, that this was probably the first time in a whole month that I’ve seen him smile.

It was almost 6 o’clock, when Angela had to leave. Dad offered her to stay for dinner but she said she had to go somewhere. She thanked us for having her and said that she had a great time. I politely waved good bye as she left.

Dad and I had dinner after that, but I didn’t speak much to him at all.

“So what do you think of Angela?” he asked me. I tried not to sound too excited about it.

“She’s okay.” His eyes sort of lit up when I said that, and I really wanted to apologise at that moment about the fight we had earlier, but I just couldn’t.

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The next day, I talked a lot to Ali, and found that we got along really well together. Her favourite subject was art just like mine, and she enjoyed all sports, although I only play basketball and volleyball. The day went by really quickly and soon I waved goodbye to Ali as she got onto her bus. On my way home, I walked to the lights where my mother and I use to cross together. Then I remembered the day that she died, right in front of me. Tears started to form in my eyes, and another sad thought suddenly struck me.

“My dad is the only one I have now,” I crossed the street quickly. “He’s the only one I’ve got,” I repeated.

I decided that I wanted to do something for him. I wanted to apologise for all the terrible things I said to him, and how I almost refused to accept Angela, a person I now knew he really cared for. I went into a store, and bought him his favourite Lindor chocolates. Then I decided

that we should all enjoy ourselves for a night, and bought 3 tickets to see “The Sea of Monsters” (which was newly released). One ticket was for me, one for dad, and the other for Angela. I was really excited. I knew he would be so happy once I gave these to him. As I walked out of the store, I heard sirens in the distance, but continued on home. I opened the door and walked inside.

“Dad, are you home?” I put the gifts on the table for him to see, and went up to my room. “Oh! I almost forgot a card!” I picked up a black pen and folded a piece of paper in half. Then I wrote him a short note, in beautiful calligraphy writing, and smiled. The phone rang. I got up with the card still in my hands and soon picked up the phone. I listened eagerly to the person on the other line. Then I stood there breathless, and his card fell gently to the floor.

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I rushed through the glass doors with tears streaming down my face. I explained to the nurse who I was and she pointed the way for me. I ran as fast as I could to a small room in the hospital. On the bed lied my dad looking helpless, with his eyes closed, and a machine attached to him. Angela was beside him crying. She looked at me and motioned me to come. I sat down beside her, and for a moment I felt safe. She kept assuring me, and probably herself at the same time, that everything was going to be okay.

The nurse came in later, and told us what happened. She said he’d been in a car crash on his way home and that they would do as much as they could to save him.

“His condition is critical, but we’re doing whatever we can to help,” my heart was pounding so heavily as she said this. Angela understood me, and left the room so that I could have some time with my dad alone.

I wasn’t sure if he could hear me, but I spoke to him anyways. “Hello daddy. It’s me, Emma,” I paused to see if there was any reaction. Nothing. I continued. “I love you so much daddy. I never meant all the things that I said earlier. Just please wake up,” I was crying so hard. “I got you a box of chocolates, and we have to go out tonight for the movie. I got the three of us tickets. If you want I could get you...you,” I couldn’t go on. I lost my mother, and now maybe my father, I didn’t know what to do. I placed my hand on his, and felt his warmth. When I was younger, I remembered he’d hold me in his arms and we pretended I could fly. My mother would just watch from the window and smile.

Suddenly my dad’s hand moved. It was so faint but I felt it. “Daddy?” I said desperately, but with hope in my eyes. And then, he smiled. He smiled ever so slightly though, and I thought, “He’s alive!” But then, the machine beeped rapidly until it held its sound. Doctors ran into the room.

“What’s happening?” I shouted. I was so scared, but I braced myself for what was about to come next.

A doctor looked at me and said “He’s gone.”

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There I was again; the same place my mother’s funeral was at. But this time, it was for my dad. Angela stood beside me, as we said our last goodbyes to him. Many people came and said they felt very sorry for me. Ali came too, which made me happy to know that I had a new friend.

Soon it was my turn to say my little speech, but this time I had so much more to say.

“Hi. I know you guys feel sorry for me, and I am very thankful for all your support. My dad and my mom were the greatest things that ever happened to my life. They were always there for me, and always ready to lend a helping hand. I was very lucky to have such parents, and I already miss them so much.” I started to swallow my words, but kept going. “But even with all these terrible events that happened, I have gained so much experience and knowledge over this past month. I’ve learned that life doesn’t always wait for you to make the right move. And you never know if the worst thing that you say to someone you care about, will be the last thing they’ll hear from you. The point is, stay true to your friends, family, and everyone you meet. We are all so lucky to be given the gift of life, so why not use your chance well, and live everyday like it’s your last.” I stopped and looked around the crowd. Tears were rolling down my face again, and I was just about to walk away from the microphone but stopped to add something else. “I’d also like to say that no matter how bad things may seem, there is always a rainbow waiting for you on the other side. So no matter what life throws at you, the best thing you could do for yourself, and everyone around you... is smile.”

## **The Outcasts**

**By: Ainsley Shaw (Gr. 8)**

It was dark, I was on my cot next to Kevin, he was snoring lightly, and it's damp in the building. It has no glass in the windows anymore and the wallpaper was falling off the walls, it was raining outside, water was misting in through the squared holes, there was no moon tonight, the clouds blocking out the stars, sleep seemed imposable, there was too much noise to fall asleep, but I eventually fell asleep.

The next morning I woke up to Sarah saying "Breakfast! Breakfast! Breakfast!"

We didn't have breakfast very often so she was extra excited, she was a glass half-full kind of girl. I went into a large room with brass chandeliers dusty, dusty and covered in cob-webs, it had ripped up couches filled with mice, it was a windowless room, the only light coming from the two exits and the lamps spread around the room, a mouse ran past me as I sat next to Kevin "Hey Lucy." He whispered to me as I sat down next to me,

not everyone was awake so we tried to stay as quiet as we could, Sarah was yelling "breakfast!!" so it was it wasn't like people were asleep anymore, "Hi, how are you?" I asked

"Ok, I guess," he answered,

We ate our food in almost complete silence, you can thank Sarah for that, and we finished our oatmeal and put on the stack of bowls for it to get washed. Kevin kissed me, and said "Good-bye Lucy."

As he went to go hunting for food in the forest, I went to do my part cleaning and hanging clothes.

I finished up the job and went to eat left over breakfast the few that we had, I knew that we weren't having dinner unless the group with Kevin came back with enough for all of us so I ate as much as I could. I rested a bit on my cot until I heard yelling in the main room I ran out of the sleeping area and ran to the place where we ate to see what was going on, I ran into the room to see a middle aged man on the floor with his arm blown off. I ran over to Kevin to see what was going on, "we were jumped by the government's dogs," he said out of breath

"Did they follow you here? They could be outside preparing to attack us!" I screamed

"I don't know we were going slowly enough for them to follow us." He answered

"There also is a blood trail probably hard to ignore."

I hadn't thought of the blood trail "we need to move now!" I ordered.

"What about him?" He asked.

"He got here he can go a bit farther." I said to him.

"Guy's what's happening?" Sarah asked.

“Someone was shot by the dogs,” Kevin answered.

The dogs are people hired by the government to hunt us down and “dispose” of us.

“But we haven’t had any trouble with them for a couple of years.” Sarah spoke.

There was a knock on the door, three long hard knocks. I ran to where we slept last night to pack clothing, food, water, a flashlight and other essentials, I put on my backpack and ran to Kevin and Sarah and pulled them towards the back door and opened it slightly, checking before we made a break for the woods, some people followed us but the dogs got in and started shooting everyone, we kept running not looking back to see the people lying on the floor bleeding to death, one fell, then another, and another, one by one we were being picked off, one by one we were slowly dying, then Sarah fell, she was in front of me, I stopped to pick her up but she was already dead, I kept running warm tears falling down my face, reach the forest, survive that’s all that mattered now survival, I wonder what death feels like, is it easier? We got to the forest, we kept running to make sure that we weren’t being followed anymore, we set up camp and carried on some people were crying, some just sat there a dullness in their eyes everything that just happened was horrible, we heard an explosion, we expected it to be the building that we spent our most our lives at, Kevin came over to me, kissing the top of my head, I felt his warm tears on my scalp.

“It’s over now,” he whispered, “it’s over.”



The Arctic Air

By: Meaghan Theodore (Gr. 12)

*I have a story to tell you, one that may change your life forever. It is a story of forgiveness and faith, but also of truth and despair. Things need to change, and I believe with your faith and spirit, it can be done. I'm not a writer, but I do have something important to say. I breathe the same air as you do and feel the same things you feel. I have a heart and lungs and flippers too, but were not that different after all. Not many people take the time to listen, but you're here with me. Now come see my life in the arctic air.*



The crisp arctic air greeted me as I peeked out from my den and as the gentle breeze ruffled my coat, I bravely slid out into the open. Clumsily, I gained my balance and Mama followed close behind, urging me on to the common grounds, where all seals meet. Many young pups like me, were also crawling and sliding to the same destination, which was where the ice ended. Today is an important day for all the pups as this would be our first time in the arctic waters.

The ice clearing slowly came into view as Mama and I rounded a corner of ice and snow, and past that, the deep gray of the sea stretched on in the horizon. I could see some pups in the distance, hesitantly nearing the edge of the ice, but still looking up to their mothers for guidance. I suddenly became increasingly nervous; I had always wanted to venture out into the water, but now that the opportunity has come, I couldn't bear to leave Mama. Instinctively, I drew back and nuzzled Mama, afraid of the unknown.

She reassured me and kept nudging me over to the smooth edge of ice until I came face to face with the water. I could hear splashes of seal pups making their way into the sea, and the water lapping against the ice. As I leaned over the edge, I couldn't see the bottom, but I could make out a reflection of a young pup, with a white fluffy coat, barely starting to molt and I could see the bright reflection of the sun that rose high in the sky each day...

Suddenly, from behind I felt an aggressive push and before I knew it I tumbled into the water. As I flipped myself upwards, the feeling of the water against my coat was amazing, and being in the water was more like home than on the ice floes. I felt so free and graceful in the water and propelled myself on, rushing past the other seals. The long plants that sprouted from deeper below tickled my stomach and for the first time, I felt like I was alive.

When my chest started to burn, I swam to the surface to greet Mama, but when I heard the sounds from above I knew something was wrong. Still under the water, which began to feel frigid on my body, I looked around and saw the other pups playing around in the water,

completely unconscious to the groans and howls onshore. Some mother seals joined their young in the water, but were wailing hysterically and swimming their young farther away from the ice floe.

That's when I realized Mama was still on land and with that thought, I quickly rushed through the water, my flippers frantically climbing and once I broke through the surface, the sounds of the hunt were over. What was left were only human tracks my Mama told me to always stay away from, some red on the snow banks and paths of snow that used to be smooth were now rough and broken. I scanned the entire shoreline and the edge of the ocean but could not see Mama. Only a few seals who were brave enough came back on land to examine the dismal scene.

Eventually, my herd returned on ice and as some of them passed by, they bowed their heads towards me. I patiently watched as the parade of seals slid by, still waiting for Mama to appear in line, but she never did. Many other seal pups couldn't find their mothers either, and some mothers could not find their pups, but I and a few others did not rest until nightfall. By the time darkness came, bright lights of green and blue filled the sky, but I did not stay to watch them as I once did with my mother. Slowly, I climbed over the snow banks and found the den and as I entered it, I curled up in my corner and fell asleep, tears slipping through, making a pattern on the white coat of my face.



I didn't leave the den for two days and couldn't bear the hunger anymore. As I made my way to the edge of the ice for the second time, I saw my herd carrying on about their daily routine; lazing around in the sun. I entered the water and mimicked the other seals, snapping at the fish and krill that came my way. After some time, when my belly was full, I just floated under the surface staring out into the distance, fascinated by the openness and vastness of the ocean. My mind couldn't help but wonder where my Mama went, but I knew deep down, things would not be the same. Frustrated, I surfaced and saw motherless pups like me, lost and alone, and heartbroken mothers resting on the rocks, with blank stares. Seeing the suffering in their eyes and hearing the noises of the hunt that day turned my heart towards man cold and bitter. It was then and there, looking out at my herd, I vowed to not let another human take another one of my kind.

As time went on, my white fluffy coat was shed and replaced with a thick silver coat. I gained size and fat which kept me warm from the waters of the arctic and the storms that also came through. I learned the way of the seal and how to hunt, becoming stronger each day. I took care of myself and as a herd, we all stuck close together, the elders leading our pack into safety for a while, but danger and greed was always lurking by.

The next day I was out on a rock, with the sun high in the sky and the air calmly cool. I was preparing to dive in for a snack when I caught a scent in the air different from the seals. I looked out to the ice where most seals were, but didn't see anything. Although, I saw nothing, I knew something was wrong, something else was here. A few other seals lifted their heads high, acknowledging the scent as well. I left the rock and dove into the refreshing water, swimming back to the ice floe to investigate. I clambered over the edge of the ice floe and slid over to a pillar of ice where the scent was extremely strong and that was when I saw it.

A small group of humans were clustered around a small black box. Shocked, I did the best gallop I could to intimidate them and stopped a few feet from where they were gathered. They were in these large suits of what looked like blubber, to keep them warm. I didn't see no sharp weapons with them which relieved me. Some other seals followed my position, but hovered behind. I grunted and stood brave and tall although I was not as big as the older seals. The cluster of humans just stood motionless, a glint of excitement in their eyes, but as I stared them down, my glare softened into curiosity and then I finally relaxed, realizing they were not a threat. The other seals went back to lazing around, not worrying about the humans here. I stayed close to keep an eye on them, wondering if these were really the creatures who took away so much of my kind every year.

As hours went by, the sky grew gray and the wind picked up. Some seals left to take shelter from the storm coming and so did the humans. In a flash, just as quickly as they came, they were gone. The storms in the arctic were never loud or thundering, but always deathly quiet, where only the *whoosh* of the powerful wind could be heard. The herd huddled close together while some mothers took their young to the dens. Having no den to go, I stayed out in the eye of the storm with the rest of the herd, drawing close for warmth and protection.

Waking up, I was coated with a layer of snow. Wriggling my body, I shook it off and immediately felt the sunlight hit my fur with a tingle of warmth. I made my way over to the water to get food along with a few other seals my age and with the humans gone, it felt like an average day in the herd. Slipping into the water, I still thought of Mama and that fateful day. I was feeling miserable until the other seals came over curiously, prodding and playfully bumping me. I hadn't played with other seals before, so I didn't know what to do, but they kept at it. Finally, I realized that it was a chase and joining in, I chased one seal. She sped on, whipping past ice structures and into the darkness. I stopped at the part in the water where the darkness was thick and retreated back to the brighter side. Worried, I look around for her to come back and to my relief she did emerge, but was looking up. I followed her gaze and through the surface I could see the sky darkening a little.

Something in my gut warned me that things weren't right and as I surfaced, she also followed. I broke through the surface and the first scent I caught was different yet familiar; human. They were tall and muscular, menacing in spirit, but the sight of what was taking place on the ice broke my heart. Blood was already dripping everywhere and the hunter's had begun their work. Some pups were not lucky, but I could hear other seals cooing, guiding all the pups they could to the water. The seal with me had a look of mourning and sadness in her eyes, but I couldn't leave her onshore in all of the chaos, so I pushed her back into the water, just like my mother did when I was in danger.

The group of humans this time were different from the others that were here before. They had sharp things with them and walked aggressively. They also had a large stick with a black hard part at the end. Terrified, I, like many others were grunting and wailing, warning the others to get back to safety. No seal stepped up to face the men, but just as one little pup was desperately trying to slide on his clumsy flippers, I could see one tall man with a red and black covering and a large hood, raise the black club high above the poor pup's head and bring it down.

Everything around me stopped and as I could see the hunter swing his club down, a flash came out of nowhere, stopping the club in its path with sheer strength. The seal pup scurried away and the thing that stopped the hunter from killing the pup was another human. I recognized him as he was here earlier, watching my herd bask in the sun. The rest of his group came, yelling loud at the hunters. The hunters yelled back, waving their weapons furiously in the air and I could tell the other group was in trouble. One hunter aimed a sharp long knife at a petite girl and I could not stand to see these protectors get hurt.

With all my strength, I galloped in between the two groups of humans and stopped a little distance from the hunters. Looking them directly in the eyes with a glare of fierceness, I bellowed as loud as I could in the face of one of them. He had some fur on his face, wore boots of seal fur and a hat made of some sort of animal. As I had my stand-off with the hunter, his eyes were glinted with fear and adrenaline, but surprisingly he was taken aback a little. I could tell he never came face-to-face with a teenage seal before, but as I looked behind him, I saw that the other hunters were also taken aback. One took a spear and aimed it in my direction, trying to intimidate me by jabbing the air in front of me, but I stood my ground.

I could feel breath on my back and turned my head to see the protectors behind me as well as the elder male seals puffing their chest out, standing up to the hunters. In this moment, everything seemed to be in our power, the sun shone brighter, the air felt clear, the world was at my flippers. As we stared down the hunters, things seemed to cool down and after some persuading, they shook their heads, but dropped their weapons. My herd and I backed away, howling in celebration for our brave efforts and mourning the ones we lost. After some time, the hunters shook hands with the people who protected my kind and threw their weapons into the water. They came close to observe my herd leaving the ice and had a look of remorse on their faces. It was as if they had learned that we were creatures with feelings and a soul. As they packed up to leave with the humans that protected my kind, I felt happiness knowing that there were others out there that would fight for the creatures who could not and protect them.

I found my friend and she was safe, but just a little rattled. I followed her around for a while, and we left the ice floe together as our herd began migrating to a new home for the season. Before leaving, I looked one last time at the ice clearing, remembering the sad days and the good ones. Going through the loss of my mother and the threat of being hunted was something I learned to grow through. Once I vowed revenge on the humans, but after this day, forgiveness and hope fills my heart. In that moment, as if God was listening to my heart, a bright array of colours filled the sky; it was a rainbow. Something in my gut fluttered and as I turned to face the horizon, I lifted my head up triumphantly, breathing in the arctic air.

*Arctic seals constantly face the threat of being hunted for greed. Millions are harvested each season, and pups barely three weeks old suffer the same fate too. Unfortunately, a few people we look up to in making our country's decisions supports sealing. The hunting of these innocent*

*seals brings no justice, but only heartbreak. The coats are the only thing of value to the sealers and are collected to be made into various items including clothing products and much more. Today, like many other species, arctic seals are endangered and as if it isn't enough, they are losing their homes to increasing carbon-emissions. I have told my story, and it is one of reality and anguish, but also one of faith and compassion. Not many people took the time to listen, but you did. You heard my voice, the voice for my friends : the animals.*

## Ripper

By: Jordan Paxton (Gr. 12)

January 19<sup>th</sup>

*My name is Thane Moran Brewer. For a long time I denied my true self; I rejected my urges, I fought my very nature. It was foolish to think I could stop myself from fulfilling my overwhelming compulsions. Nonetheless, for years I went about my life as if I were just like the other kids. Finally, after 14 years of this battle, I killed for the first time.*

*It was three years ago, today. The first time in months that my mother did not have a man in her bed. That night, I crept into her room and stood over her small frame, watching her. She was passed out, with a bottle of vodka on her bedside table. I would not say that my mother was an alcoholic, however she did drink herself to sleep on occasion. I suppose on clientless nights, such as that one, she had nothing better to do.*

*Disgusted, I made my decision. Slipping one arm beneath her knees and one below her neck, I lifted her gently, so as not to leave any bruises. I brought her to the bathroom and placed her on the floor, so that I could begin what was to be the most taxing part of the evening. My mother never wore much clothing and that night was no exception. There she lay motionless, in nothing but her undergarments. I was unprepared for the difficulty of stripping off what little clothing she wore, not because her nudity fazed me, but because her dead weight made sliding off her delicacies, challenging. When I finally finished undressing her, I situated her in the dingy tub that I had filled earlier. I adjusted her so that her back faced upward. Not wanting to leave anything up to chance, I held the back of her head, forcing it beneath the water's surface. After five minutes of this, I checked her pulse. Nothing. It was done. As a final touch, I carefully moved the nearly-empty liquor bottle next to the tub, where her fresh corpse lay. I used my sleeve to hold the bottle, so that I might avoid leaving fingerprints.*

*When the full weight of what I had done hit me, I felt a euphoria beyond anything I could have imagined. I felt like I was on top of the world, as if I was its omnipotent ruler. The exuberance did not fade in the slightest, when I collected the pile of newspapers from my porch and began my daily rounds. Usually, all I could think about when making deliveries was how my intelligence was wasted on such a menial job. That pivotal day however, not even the paper route could diminish my high spirits. Besides, it would have presented a decent alibi, had there been need for one.*

*The next morning, I sent for the police. They removed her corpse without saying much, after all, she was just a prostitute who passed out in the bathtub. No investigation required. I was then sent to live with my uncle and cousin, where I would begin work as a butcher's apprentice. Although my living quarters were cramped, it was an upgrade from the squalor that I had come from.*

*Upon my arrival to my uncle's house, a surprising development occurred. I felt neither apathy nor enmity towards my cousin, Tobias. It did not happen immediately, but I have truly formed an attachment to him. It is the first bond that I had ever developed with anyone. The closest to fondness I had felt towards someone before meeting Tobias, was indifference. "Thane, lunch time's over. Back to work," my uncle announced.*

*Snapping my journal closed, I quickly deposit it into my pocket, so as not to let my uncle see what I had been doing. As I walk to the backroom, my thoughts return to my mother. Three years have passed since I murdered her. I have been able to refrain from killing again thus far, only because my work as a butcher has kept me satiated.*

I arrive in the backroom and lead one of the waiting pigs from its pen. Tying a rope around its hind leg, I hang the creature upside down. Usually, the butcher would slit open the beast's stomach immediately, allowing it a relatively quick death, but I do things differently. I look into its terror filled eyes and listen to it scream, as I slowly carve into its delicate skin. Listening to the uncannily human-like, pig screeches is exhilarating. I take a step back to watch while the creature bucks wildly, futilely flailing its free limbs, causing it to swing around in the air. Now bleeding profusely, the last of the animal's strength ebbs and it finally dies. What a wonderful thing it is to watch the life leave a mortal's eyes. I smile to myself, I only wish it lasted longer. Killing is the only thing that makes me feel good, though the pigs and neighbourhood cats are no longer sufficient. The feelings that accompany slaughtering an animal cannot compare with those that follow murdering a human. My urge to take another life- to gut someone like swine, is growing; consuming my conscious thoughts.

To distract myself, I turn back to the fresh carcass. Much of the blood has drained, so I begin the rather monotonous task of slicing the meat into pieces, to be sold in the shop. I go about the task robotically, as I derive no pleasure from cutting my prey, once it is dead. When I finish, I slip the pig's tail into my empty pocket. I like to keep souvenirs, it makes the memories more vivid.

### August 7<sup>th</sup>

*Today is my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and I am still unable to comprehend why people make such a big deal over a stupid day. Anniversaries seem meaningless and senselessly sentimental.*

*Despite my telling him it was unnecessary, Tobias bought me a cake. I do not know how he could afford something so frivolous when we barely have enough money to put food on the table.*

I put my journal away and walk over to the window. What a marvelous night- or rather morning, I think as I glance at my watch. I slide my old, scuffed window open and breathe deeply. Despite it being early August, there are already signs that autumn is nearing, most noticeably the crisp, refreshing air. Fall is easily my favourite season, it may seem romantic, but I love everything from the smell to the changing leaves. Fall is like one last burst of life, before everything dies.

I retrieve a hoody from my immaculate closet and sneak quietly from the house. I walk along Jarvis St. and am nearing Allan Gardens, when I am approached by a woman. When I get a better look, I realize 'woman' is the wrong word. The approaching creature is a whore. This is the first time I have seen a prostitute aside from my mother.

"You lookin' for a good time?" she slurs.

I am about to angrily refuse, when an idea hits me.

"Yes. Come with me," I say through clenched teeth.

"Okay, baby. It's gonna cost you 150," she says with a seductive smile.

"That's fine," I reply curtly.

Feeling thoroughly repulsed, I usher her into a nearby alley. When she begins leaning towards me, I throw her to the ground, landing on top of her. Shock registers on her face and then fear. I rip off her shirt and shove the fabric into her mouth, before she can scream. She makes a clumsy attempt to push me off, but I am much stronger than her, especially with the alcohol in her system. My resentment towards her grows into fury. I fumble around for something sharp and come up with a shard of glass, the size of my hand. Using the dirty implement, I stab the loathsome creature again and again. After puncturing her abdomen 39 times, I pull out her

deformed intestines, spreading them around her. I love the feeling of hot innards in my hands and the sensation blood creates as the sticky, viscous liquid runs down my skin. When my excitement lessens, I leave the repulsive whore among the trash, where she belongs and head for home.

The thrill of the kill still has not completely worn off, even as I arrive home. The first thing I do upon entering the house is shower. It is incredibly fortunate that my blood covered hands went unnoticed, in the dark streets. The water turns scarlet, as it washes away all traces of the night from my skin. I watch, as the beautiful, crimson tendrils swirl around the drain. When I am satisfied that there is not even the slightest hint of blood left on my body, I dry off and go to bed.

### **November 1<sup>st</sup>**

*After the last kill, I barely get excited from torturing animals. There is nothing I want more than to mutilate the flesh of another human. No matter what I am doing, my thoughts always return to murder. I plan to go on a hunt tonight, this time however, I will be prepared.*

I put down the journal and begin gathering supplies. I take my favourite knife, a lighter and some leather gloves and then proceed to dress in all black. It is not as late as it was last time, it is only midnight, but I am too excited to wait any longer. I open the window, looking for a way to climb out. Realizing that the drop is too high without anything to soften my fall, I decide to use the front door.

This time, I do not wait to be sought out, I being looking for a whore. It does not take long to find one, after all, the city is crawling with them.

“How much?” I ask simply.

“For you, sugar? Only 90 bucks,” she says putting her hand on my chest.

It takes the utmost restraint not to stab her then and there, but I manage to refrain. Rather than converse further, I simply motion for her to follow me. I take her to a secluded place in the park, surrounded by a cluster of trees. When I remove her shirt and tell her to lay down, she obeys without hesitation. I get on top of her, using my knees to keep her pinned, while I use her shirt to tie a tight gag. Something about using her clothing as a gag, amuses me greatly. At this point, she is bucking and trying to scream. I am however, too heavy for her to push off and the fabric muffles her cries. I take off my jacket and put on my gloves. Then, I produce my knife, at which point her face twists into a mask of pure, unadulterated horror. This only serves to intensify my elation. I decide that enucleation is as good a place to begin as any. Using one hand to hold her eyelid open and the other to slide the knife under her eyeball, I extract the organ, which gives little resistance. I take a moment to admire the way the bloody orb hangs from the gaping hole in her skull. I contemplate removing the other eye, but decide against it. I want her to be able to see what I do to her.

Next, I make several deep gashes on her chest and abdomen. The torso is my favourite place to slice. I do not want to let her die from exsanguination just yet, so I grab my lighter and heat up the blade. When the metal attains an orange glow, I use it to cauterize the deeper of the wounds. The smell of burning flesh is not entirely an unpleasant one, which is unexpected. As I close the last of the potentially fatal wounds, my prey falls unconscious, probably from the pain. I begin shaking her, but it realize it is fruitless, she is not going to be roused. Enraged that my night has been ruined by her lack of pain tolerance, I begin stabbing her face and chest, twisting the knife upon each penetration. Only when I am panting hard and her body resembles hamburger meat, do I stop. Then, I wipe off the blade and gloves, before returning them to my jacket pocket. I put my coat on and adjust my disheveled clothing, before leaving the scene.



When I enter my house, I am greeted by the sight of Tobias' kind smile. For the first time in my life I feel uncertainty, tinged with something else. I think that it is guilt. It is not an overwhelming feeling, just a spark, but a bothersome spark nonetheless.

"Where have you been?" Tobias asks.

"I just went for an evening stroll," I respond coolly.

"It's a nice night for a walk. I would have liked to join you," he says.

"Sorry, I assumed that you'd gone to bed. Anyway, I'm feeling fatigued, I'll see you tomorrow," I say ending the subject.

Doubt flashes in his eyes, but disappears as quickly as it had appeared. He has no reason to disbelieve me.

"Alright, good night," he replies.

### **November 2<sup>nd</sup>**

*What has Tobias incited in me? How can I feel remorse over slaying such a repugnant creature? Not only does every female deserve to die, but I enjoy being their executioner. I know that I will not cease killing, so what is the use of feeling such a nonsensical emotion?*

### **November 15<sup>th</sup>**

It seems my compulsion to kill is increasing in force and frequency. One kill no longer satiates my urges for long. After drowning my mother, I did not need to kill again for three years, after the second I could only wait a month and now with the third, I need to kill again after only two weeks. I will go out again tonight and I will find someone else. This time I want to try something new.

The only thing I take this time is two flasks full of gasoline and a lighter. I walk to the front door and am about to exit, when I am halted by Tobias.

"Are you going out, Thane? It's 2 am," he says, putting a hand on my shoulder.

Tobias is the only person whose touch does not infuriate me.

"Yes, I'm having trouble sleeping."

"Then I shall accompany yo-"

"No," I cut him off before he can finish, "I need solitude to reflect."

His face falls, but he removes his hand from my shoulder without a word. I contemplate Tobias' disheartened face for a moment, before encountering a middle-aged woman, at which point my mind switches to hunter mode.

"What is a fine lady like yourself, doing walking alone at this hour?" I say by way of greeting.

Would you like me to escort you home?" I ask her with the most charming smile in my arsenal.

She looks me over and laughs, "You seem like a nice young man, but I think I'll be okay. I don't want to trouble you."

"It would be no trouble at all. Are you certain you don't wish to walk with a companion? You know, I heard a rumor that there's a murderer on the loose, who targets women."

"I heard he only goes after prostitutes, but I guess you can never be too careful. I think I'll take you up on your offer. I'm glad that not all young people today are without manners."

He 'only goes after prostitutes?' No, he only targets whores and all women are whores. I do not say this of course, I just keep up light-hearted conversation, while she leads the way to her house. It is not hard for me to charm people, I can be quite amiable, when I want to be.

When we reach the end of her driveway, I cross my arms tightly against my chest,

rubbing my biceps and even give a little shiver.

"It was nice meeting you. I'm going to head home now," I declare cheerfully.

"You look cold, come in and warm up. I'll make you coffee," she says.

Not wanting to seem too eager, I refuse, "No, I'm alright. Seriously."

"I insist. After you were kind enough to walk a lady home, you deserve a nice cup of coffee. It's the least I can do," she answers.

"Oh, alright," I reply while glancing around, making sure nobody is watching.

When I enter, I ask with feigned shock, "Do you live alone?"

"Yeah, my children have all moved out."

"You're not married?" I wonder aloud.

"Nope, I never married," she responds.

This confirms my suspicions, she is clearly a whore and a stupid one at that. She lives alone and she allowed- insisted even, that a male stranger enter her house. My thoughts are interrupted, when she offers to take my coat. I politely decline, saying I will not be staying long. She leads me into the kitchen, where she motions for me to sit at the table. When she turns her back to me, to boil the water, I pounce. I begin with what has become standard; ripping off her shirt to use as a gag. She struggles more than the others, so I keep punching her, until she submits. I demand that she removes her pants and sit in the chair. When she obeys, I use the jeans to fasten her to the seat. It is certainly not the most effective way of tying someone up, but it will hold long enough for me to accomplish my goals. I take out the flasks and pour them over her, taking care not to splash myself in the process. She realizes what I plan to do and tries to scream, but there is no one around to hear the muffled sounds. I walk over to the counter, where paper towel is situated neatly. Removing it from its holder, I light one end on fire and place the flaming roll in her lap. The fire spreads immediately and it does not take long it to consume her. Even with the gag, I can hear the agony-filled moans coming from the melting figure. When her body begins to char and the noises cease to escape from her mouth, I feel something gnawing in my stomach. I think of Tobias, who was devastated after the loss of his mother. This woman had children- I quench the thought. Instead I laugh, what is it to me? They matter not and their odious mother matters even less. Despite this reassuring thought, an ember of doubt (and dare I say it? Remorse) remain as I leave through the back door. I cannot risk being seen exiting the scene of the crime, so I climb several fences, making my way silently through backyards, before returning to the roads.

The remainder of the night is uneventful. I just think about how interesting it was to light that bitch up. Fire is definitely an interesting tool, but the level of enjoyment was low. It seems a little impersonal, which must be why I got that unpleasant feeling. The reason must not be that I am remorseful, but that I was not entertained by observing from afar as someone writhed in pain. When I slice someone to ribbons, they can feel each stroke of my brush. I feel like an artist, painting a masterpiece with my knife. With fire however, I just leave behind some charred bones, which takes away the beauty from the death. It takes away my power to mold their face and body- to shape their fate even...

Poe once wrote, "The death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world." I highly doubt that he intended for the quote to be interpreted in this way, but I like to think of it in the literal sense, that watching a beautiful woman die is an amazing sight to behold. Physical appearance means nothing to me though, as the allure is in the light leaving her eyes, in the power one feels taking a life and of course 'what she looks like on the inside'. I laugh to myself as I walk up the stairs to my house. How ridiculous it was for me to not once, but

twice, attribute unpleasant feelings to guilt. I am not that weak, I think, as I jump into bed and fall asleep.

### November 17<sup>th</sup>

*Today, while I was walking, I noticed how few leaves remain on the barren trees. Winter will begin soon and all the beautiful flowers and leaves will be gone. It is strange how deeply this thought saddens me, as I am not a sensitive person. Although, I love autumn, this is the first time that its end brought me a feeling of melancholy. Even more uncharacteristic is that on my way back from the aforementioned walk, I began creating a poem. I have never been one for poetry, aside from my occasional reading of Edgar Allan Poe's works, but here it is:*

*Autumn leaves float to the ground  
They fall delicately, without a sound*

*The last burst of colour, before everything dies*

*The composition remains unfinished, as the final words evade me. Oh well, I have things to do and cannot keep worrying about the silly rhyme.*

### November 18<sup>th</sup>

Being that I used fire as the method of killing the last woman, I am not satisfied in the slightest. Experimentation can be fun and it was interesting watching her skin melt, but all in all fire was a disappointment. So, I am going out again tonight.

I make my way downtown to find a prostitute and as previously, I experience no difficulty in finding one.

"How much?" I ask her.

"I'm going home for the night. Sorry doll," she responds and walks away.

I was rejected by a whore. Shock turns to fury in a matter of seconds. How dare she! She will be the one to die tonight. I follow her home and wait. It should not take long for her to fall asleep.

An hour later, I stalk the perimeter of the building, looking for a way in. I spot an open window, at the back of the dwelling. I climb through the opening with ease and find myself in the whore's bedroom. Seeing her asleep in her bed, I flash back to three years ago. I had not felt this amount of hatred towards anyone, with the exception of my mother. I produce my knife and as the blade bites into the girl's abdomen, my rage blends with excitement. I make several incisions, as she opens her eyes. Before she can scream, I puncture the hollow of her neck. I ignore her gasps and wet, bloody coughing and return to my work on her torso. Reaching into the opening, I made, I begin removing her organs, placing them neatly around her. Then, I disembowel her as I would a pig. The hot blood running down my hands only serves to greaten my exuberance, it causes me to go into a feeding frenzy. I make two deep, perfect gashes that almost sever her head from her body, slice off her breasts and stab her face repeatedly. Blood flies everywhere as the knife enters her skull again and again. She is completely unrecognizable, but still I continue to stab. I do not stop until I completely obliterate her femininity, which enrages me so.

When I finish, I take her heart with me, placing it in my pocket. I pick my hat from the floor and return it to its place, atop my head. I quickly check myself over in the grimy mirror, making sure there are not any visible signs of what transpired. When I am satisfied that I will not

stick out, I turn to the window, where a horrified Tobias is standing.

I grab my trembling friend by the jacket and pull him inside.

“How did you know I was here?” I demand.

“You’ve been acting strange lately, so I followed you. When you went into the woman’s backyard, I lost sight of you. I finally realized where you’d gone, so I peered through the window and I saw you stabbing her. How- how could you?” he stutters.

I say nothing.

“Those poor women...” he trails off.

“Poor women?!” I shout, “those things are scum! I was doing society a service by cleaning the garbage off the streets.”

He shakes his head sadly, “You truly believe that don’t you? Please tell me you didn’t kill your mother too. I know she wasn’t a good parent, but she was still your mother.”

I can tell by his face that he already knows the answer. That face, I can bear it no longer.

“You don’t know anything about what it was like living with her. How can’t you see how filthy all of those whores are?” I say angrily.

How can he judge me. More infuriating, who is he to wear that face filled with pity. I lunge at him, dragging both of us to the ground.

“Thane, don’t do this. I don’t want to fight you,” he says, “just turn yourself in.”

My reply is the deliverance of a blow to his mouth, followed by a reign of punches to the rest of his face. Before I know what I am doing, I pull the knife from my pocket and stab him. He gasps as the blade pierces his chest and I freeze. What have I done? I stabbed the only person, whom I have ever loved. Even as he lay dying, he does not regard me with the slightest bit of hatred or blame. As he bleeds out, he regards me only with pity. Strangely, at that moment, my unfinished poem comes to mind. I finally catch the elusive words needed to finish the composition.

*Autumn leaves float to the ground  
They fall delicately, without a sound  
The last burst of colour, before everything dies  
You showed me love, before your untimely demise  
So I'll say goodbye, as your life fades  
The last leaf falls and nothing remains  
I feel the last of my compassion sapping, as winter begins  
When you die, the last of my humanity will unhinge*

Tobias, I realize was my only fragment of goodness. I touch my face and notice that it feels wet. As far back as I can recall, I cannot ever remember crying, but here I am, kneeling over my cousin with tears running down my cheeks.

Tobias dies and so does that last spark of humanity that had been pestering me for so long. After he took his last breathe, I became a true monster- completely devoid of remorse. I no longer wish to get caught and so I will devise a plan to ensure that I never will. After tonight, I will cease leaving the cadavers where they can be discovered. I will quit acting recklessly, killing only in secret, feeding my blood lust without anyone realizing murders are even taking place. A few missing prostitutes here and there will not be missed and so with the more conspicuous body disposal, everyone will presume me dead. With nothing holding me back, I will be able to kill as frequently as I desire.

## **Mission Anne-249**

**By: Emma Okumura (Gr. 10)**

Heather fiddled with the tiny screw on the right corner of the machine. All around her she could feel the comforting presence of the other refugees, and hear their quiet chatter. In the darkness of the room, she could almost imagine that it was just another drill, but the smell of smoke and decay brought her back to reality. The small radio in the corner crackled to life: “Just coming in now, a meteorite had hit Manhattan, the number of deaths and injuries has not yet been determined, but we will get back to you with the stats as soon as debris and the aftermath have been cleared and rescue teams gain access.” A collective gasp formed within the room. “We have no update on the earlier attempts to contact with the spacecraft that has been orbiting earth at very high speeds. We are unsure of the motive, but meteorite and space debris attacks have drastically increased in the last weeks, and rescue missions have been dispatched as of this afternoon.”

A murmur of excitement passed through the room at the thought and hope of a rescue mission coming their way, although nobody dared get their hopes up for one coming their way. “Code: Anne-249 estimated time of arrival is tomorrow afternoon. I repeat: code Anne-249 with ETA tomorrow afternoon.”

Heather heard the simultaneous rustle of all 52 people in the room check under their sleeves for the code tattooed in invisible ink, hardly believing what they were seeing. The whole room went dead silent for a few seconds before the first round of celebratory cheering broke out. “They’re coming for us!”

“Thank God!” There were many different reactions: people praying, crying, laughing, and hugging. Heather played with the wedding ring on her left hand and smiled to herself, knowing her husband, disguised as a member of the

The last drill had been three days before the spacecraft was spotted, which was about three weeks ago, from what little methods the survivors had left of keeping time. For the first week after the ship was spotted, no meteorites were sent from space by the aliens, but it was in the second week that things started to get bad.

On average, one meteorite hit earth every day, always taking out the bigger cities. The remained of the populations if these cities tended to assemble “refugee clusters” and waited for rescuing by the teams. Each city had been designated a code for rescue prior to the arrival, which also designated what building in the city they were to flee to if need be. The only fault in the rescue system was that there were invisible detectors from the spacecraft planted all around the deteriorating city. Thankfully, rescue teams were able to disable them thanks to recent technological breakthroughs.

There was a flurry of action as everyone rushed to pack their belongings, although they had a little over 12 hours to do so. Although the room was bustling with activity, Heather suddenly felt the weight and exhaustion of the past few weeks, and so she slumped back down on her make-shift bed and drifting into a fitful sleep.

5 hours later she woke up to the anticipation of the rescue mission, due to arrive in little over 2 hours. The weather outside reflected the overall mood if the room: it was sunny and

the warmth if the sun was casting rays of hope to the survivors. Heather knew that she could easily guarantee the safety of this survivor group simply by opening the box and entering the code and scanning her eye. The catch was, once opened, the box could never be reopened therefore condemning the rest of the population to certain death.

\* \* \*

Soldier James Clyde was covered in mud from head to toe, although it had started to flake off as the sun rose higher and higher into the clear blue sky. Walking in the abandoned streets with his squad, he often felt as if they were the last humans left on earth. Rumor had it that there was a machine, a technology many years from the future, that would allow someone to ride the invisible intergalactic currents to the neighbouring galaxy. This rumour had derived from an ancient prophecy that also stated that this machine was guarded by a woman who was bestowed with this gift as a wedding present. This alone could save the human race.

The squad officer signalled to stop. The squad was slinking along the outer wall of the building. The brick wall- worn smooth from years of beating from the elements- was an orangey tanned colour as the first drops of rain started to fall from the sky. This castle, one of the only buildings in the area still intact, contained many alarm trigger points that would alert the spacecraft hovering above in the sky of their location. This was squad 249, scheduled to reach their rescue mission in a little less than 30 minutes. The challenge would be to get out of the area without letting any survivors trigger alarms. With the wave of his arm, the squad leader got the troop moving once again.

\* \* \*

Bang.

Heather sat up in her bed, where she had been resting while awaiting the anticipated arrival of the rescue crew. A jolt of shock went around the room at the sound. People, expecting their saviours, started grabbing their bags and moving towards the doors. A few seconds later, the first door swung open with a creak. Standing in the doorway was a creature resembling a human but with twice the eyes. A wave of fear went through the room as people got a glimpse of what stood behind the door. The crowd shoved backwards, fleeing the alien and pressing Heather against the back wall of the room which was decorated with a mural of a faded gray cartoon tornado.

Surrounded by terrified civilians, and overcome by a sense of fear for her life, Heather made a rushed decision to save herself and her fellow refugees. Although she would miss her husband dearly, she doubted he had survived the many incidents that had been a result of his job as squad soldier. With a shaky breath, she let go of all hope she had been holding onto that he had survived on the many rescue missions, and cast away her wedding ring to the floor. Hands trembling, she then proceeded to open the latch on the box and hold her eyes level to the scanner as it ran a light up and down her eye.

Swoosh.

The portal opened, and she urged everyone to get in. Knowing the famous legend of how the portal came to be, they cast amazed looks at Heather as she waved them through.

"Everyone this way! Hurry, leave everything we don't have time." She yelled, panicking as the aliens made slow, robotic steps in their direction, gun pointed at shoulder-level. The evacuation couldn't have taken more than 5 minutes, but to Heather it felt like an eternity. "Fifty, fifty one, fifty two." She counted the last people to run into the portal.

Whack, clunk.

With quick eyes she took one last look around the room, seeing the body of the alien fall to the floor, dead. Fearing the worst, she took a deep breath and stepped into the blue shimmering doorway that was the portal. With one last swish of her long red hair, Heather Clyde disappeared into the portal, and the box slammed shut, sealing the only path between the galaxies.

\* \* \*

The dead alien fell to the ground. Soldier James Clyde burst into the room and immediately scanned the room for any signs of human life. Scattered on the floor were mismatched makeshift beds and cans of food laying empty on the mattresses, but what caught his eye was the shimmering blue doorway, and a strand of bright red hair as it disappeared through the sea of blue. The lid of the heavy wooden box slammed shut as James Clyde's wife was lost to a different galaxy. As he crumpled to the ground in desperation, his eyes fell on the wedding ring glimmering on the ground before him.

## Revenge in Paradise

By: Abigail Hariprashad (Gr. 9)

{Sequel to "4 friends in a bank robbery"}

*The buzzer rang through my ears indicating it was time to go back into my cell. The sun was shining down on everyone, making our bright orange suits even brighter. I got up and followed the line, passing an officer. He was short and plump and had brown hair sticking out from under his hat. He had a blank face. So did everyone else. It was quiet in the halls except for the clanging of chains and cell doors being slid open, then locked. When I got to my cell, I was shoved in, but there was something different. There was another bed and someone laying on it. I thought I was the only one in this cell. He lifted his head from the pillow and introduced himself.*

*"E'llo mate, my name's Jack." he said getting up and stretching his hand out for me to shake. He had brown, shaggy hair that came to his shoulders and an Australian accent. He was taller than me by a few inches and had tattoos going all around his neck and arms. He looked to be about in his mid-20s. He also had a scar running across his left cheek.*

*"I think we're cellmates now, mate." He gave me a toothy grin and shook my hand. He sat back down and looked at me with curious but cautious eyes.*

*"I'm Charlie." I said and sat down on my bed across from him. He folded his arms.*

*"So, why is such a young chap like you in a place like this?" he questioned. Young? I was only in my early 20s. I wasn't **that** young, well compared to a 16 year old who was in a few cells down from ours.*

*"I was trying to rob a bank? You?"*

*"I robbed a few banks myself, and a few other stuff."*

*"How long are you in here for mate?"*

*"9-10 weeks ..."*

*"Where did you come from?" I asked*

*"I got transferred from Florida."*

*"Why?"*

*"I broke myself and a few other people out."*

*Wow. He broke himself **and** a few other people out. Maybe my friend and I can get revenge on **her**. How could she not remember me? Anyways, I looked at Jack.*

*"How?"*

*He smiled and started to tell me our escape plan. Our revenge is gonna be sweet.*

### Julie's POV

Hi! It's me Julie again. So it's been a month after that *experience* with the bank robbery and Rachel, Jim, Bob and I are ready to go on our 2 week trip to the Bahamas! I'm so excited. Rachel and Jim got even closer, as did Bob and I. Right now I'm making sure I have everything packed and ready to go, so in the morning I can just get ready and we'll be off in Bob's car, to the airport.



### ***The next morning!***

Today's the day we go to the Bahamas! This is going to be so much fun, I can't wait! Bob and I are going to sit beside each other while Rachel and Jim are going to sit in front of us. I heard a honk in front of my house and looked out the window to see Bob's jeep. I raced down the stairs, said bye to my mom and left for the first time ever!

### ***Half an hour later...***

"We're almost out of gas" said Bob.

"There's a gas station coming up."

Bob pulled up at the gas station and got out of the car to start filling up the tank. We were at an Esso gas station. There wasn't any cars here except for a white Chevy at few gas tanks away from us. There was 2 guys outside. One was filling up the tank, the other was leaning on the car. The guy filling up the tank wore a grey t-shirt and some black jeans. The other guy was wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and black jeans also. They were talking to each other, and they both had sunglasses on. It wasn't that sunny out. I thought it was weird. Anyways, Jim's stomach growled making Rebecca and I laugh. Rebecca then offered to go and get some snacks, but I said I'll do it. So I got out of the car and waited until Bob was done so we could go in together. After he was done we went in. The 2 guys that were outside, went in a few seconds before us. I went straight to the snack aisle while Bob went to the drink aisle. The guy in the blue long-sleeve was in the snack aisle too. I saw him look at me for a few seconds at the corner of my eye. I grabbed a few chips bags from the rack. The long-sleeved guy kept inching his way next to me. Then he asked,

"Are you Julie? Julie Roberts?" I stood there completely freaked out at the fact that this complete stranger knew my name.

"I saw in the newspaper in Innisfil. How you called the cops at a bank robbery. That took guts to even run past armed criminals."

"Yeah, that was me." It made sense, they interviewed me shortly after the robbery and printed it in the newspaper.

"Julie? You ready?" Bob asked

"Yeah. Bye..."

"Patrick.", he said

"Bye Patrick." I waved and gave Patrick a quick smile and walked to the counter with Bob.

"Who was that?" Bob questioned

"Patrick. He said he saw me in the newspaper in Innisfil. You know, the one they interviewed us for after the robbery."

"Oh." was all he said before we went back into his jeep.

### ***1 hour later...***

"A jail break has occurred in the Toronto Central Prison at exactly 2:00am this morning. An officer said that 3 prisoners escaped. 1 of the prisoners just transferred here from Ohio, Florida. The other 2 prisoners were charged with 9-10 weeks in prison for a bank robbery that occurred in-"

Bob changed the news station on the radio to Z103.5 That sounded scary. The fact that

prisoners could break out of jail. That is the first time I have ever heard of that happening in Toronto.

"I wanted to listen to some music." Bob said

"Jim and Rebecca look so cute together!" I gushed.

They were sleeping, Rebecca's head was resting on Jim's shoulder while Jim's head was leaning on hers. Bob and I both know that they like each other, so we try to get them closer to each other.

"So... are you ready for the your first trip *ever* to the Bahamas?"

"Yep. I can't wait. They have surfing, rock climbing, scuba diving and so much other stuff. "

"Are we almost there?" Jim mumbled in a sleepy voice. He started to wake up, but when he realized Rebecca's head was still resting on his shoulder, he started to blush.

"Yea, we only have half an hour left." Bob replied.

### ***Half an hour later...***

We were finally done driving to the airport and were sitting on the plane, waiting for all the passengers to get on board. I was sitting beside Bob, while Rebecca was sitting beside Jim. We were all so excited to be going on this trip. The flight would be 10-11 hours, so Bob and I made a movie list on what we wanted to watch until we get to our destination. We watched The Hobbit part 1 and 2, and we watched the Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring. Halfway through The Two Towers, I fell asleep on Bob's shoulder.

### ***One plane flight later...***

I woke up to someone shaking my shoulder.

"Wake up Julie,", Bob said.

"We're here.", Rebecca continued.

I opened my eyes to see Bob looking at me. My head was still on his shoulder. I quickly lifted it and got up. Almost everyone was gone. I saw Rebecca and Jim sleeping but this time, Jim's head was on Rebecca's shoulder and her head was on his. Bob took a photo of them and I woke them up. We then got our luggage and were ready to get to our hotel. Rebecca and I would be sharing a room while Bob and Jim would share one. It was around 8:00am so it would take an hour to get to our hotel. It was really hot outside when we left the airport. Luckily I wasn't wearing too much layers.

### ***One car ride later...***

After we finished unpacking and getting settled in our AWESOME hotel room, which had glass in the floor so we could look at the fish, we changed into our bathing suits so we could go swimming. We met up with Bob and jim at the elevator and we all went down to the beach.

"Oh no, I forgot my phone, I'll be right back.", I said, realizing I left it on my bed.

I went back to the resort and into the hotel. I had a feeling I was being watched so I looked around, but there was nobody looking at me. There were a lot of families and couples though. But when I was walking into the elevator, I still couldn't shake the feeling off. Anyways, I got back to my room, got my phone and headed back into the elevator. I was the only one in there and when it was about to close, a hand opened it back. It was Patrick!

"Patrick?! Hi, I didn't know you were going to the Bahamas too! That is so cool."

"Oh! Hey Julie, I didn't know you were either. Are you staying at this hotel too?"

"Yeah, my friends Rebecca, Jim, Bob and I are all staying here! That is such a coincidence."

"Hey, is it all right if my friends and I hang out with you and your friends? You know, to get to know each other better?"

"Yeah, sure. We're just hanging out at the beach."

"Ok, I'll text them."

So, I learned that the guy with the grey t-shirt was named Zach and there was another guy named Adam. Patrick recently moved to Innisfil with Zach and Adam who were helping him pay the bills. Bob looked kind of mad and suspicious when he saw Patrick and his friends arriving. He pulled me aside and told me he didn't trust them and to be careful. I told him that he has to get to know them more in order to trust them, that's why I said they could come. He got mad and walked back to where everyone was. Bob would glare at Patrick whenever he would sit beside me. Anyways, we hung out until it was time for dinner. We all went back to our rooms and got changed. Then we met back up in the lobby. We invited Patrick and his friends to dinner and they said yes, but Bob wasn't too happy. We ate and talked, and shared funny stories with each other. This trip was off to a great start!

It has been a couple of days into the trip and it has been amazing. The view was awesome, and we did so much activities and sightseeing. So far we have been hiking, ziplining and windsurfing. Today, we're going to an amusement/waterpark. We have been doing everything with Patrick, Zach and Adam. After the amusement/waterpark, we are going to Patrick, Zach and Adam's room to watch a movie because they have a mini home theatre, which is awesome!

So, after the amusement park, we all went back to our rooms to get changed. Bob and Jim decided that they were just going to go there and wait for Rebecca and I at Patrick's room.

"I can not **believe** we are here right now. Everything has been amazing! The view, the resort..."

"The food." Rebecca laughed.

"The weather has been amazing too and I still can't get over how soft these pillows are! They're so fluffy!"

Rebecca then threw a pillow at me and started to laugh. I threw one back. Then we started our own little pillow fight that soon ended when we looked at the clock. It was 8:00pm.

"I hope we didn't keep them waiting for too long." I laughed

"Me neither."

"C'mon let's go."

I grabbed my phone and the hotel room key while Rebecca grabbed her phone, and we were off to Patrick's room.

When we got there I knocked twice and Patrick opened the door and gave me a smile.

"Hey guys! Come on in!"

We went in and saw Bob and Jim lying on their stomachs with their hands tied back. Their warnings were muffled by the fabric tied around their mouths. Rebecca and I gasped in horror. I stood there shocked, paralyzed and afraid. Rebecca tried for the door but Patrick pulled out a gun and warned her not to open the door. This is not a good situation to be in.

"What is going on? Why are they tied up? This is a joke right?" I asked

Zach was standing near Jim and Patrick was standing near Bob.

"Revenge, Julie, sweet, sweet revenge." Patrick said, flashing me an evil grin

"Revenge on what? We've known each other for less than a week."

"How could you not remember? The robbery? When you put Kevin and I in jail?"

"Who's Kevin?"

"He's standing behind you, but you do remember me don't you?"

I remember. He was one of the robbers also.

"This here is Jack," he gestured to 'Zach'

"He helped Kev and I break out of jail."

"You were the 3 prisoners who broke out of jail?"

"That's right Rebecca. But, Julie don't you remember my name? It shouldn't be hard to remember. We've been through everything together, well, until high school."

"I'm sorry, but I don't remember you." I said still unsure of what is going on. I actually didn't remember anything before my first year of high school, but I didn't think much of it.

" You were in a car crash in 8th grade. Your head got hit severely so you couldn't remember anything before the crash. Not even me. I was at a Juvenile prison while you were in the hospital recovering. Why, you might ask? For stealing, vandalizing and other stuff."

"Who are you and how do you know this?"

"I'm Charlie. Charlie Roberts, your twin brother."

## The Peculiar

By: Sierrah Zawacki (Gr. 9)

### **Prologue:**

I start to feel a sharp burning pain deep beneath my chest, my legs feel limp and tired but I continue to run as fast and far as I can. I look back but my view just turns into a quick blur. My long hair keeps whipping around back and forth in front of my face. Right now I really wish I would've taken up the offer of the haircut from Elizabeth. "So much for admiring the architecture" I sigh to myself. I move my gaze to my feet for a moment heavy breathing I examine my sturdy black boots and frown. "Awe there's scuff marks on them what a shame" I love these boots. I look back up to the path in front of me and see an opening bridge not too far ahead. Taking a deep breath, trying to steady my heart rate I attempt to run a little faster. I begin to pick up speed as I feel the bridge moving beneath my feet. I want to look back but I can't at least not until I get past this bridge...or die trying to anyway it's about 10 feet open now still continuing to open I prep my feet I begin to reach the top and then.....

### ***Chapter 1: Endearment***

Its 10:00am in my small little bunk of a room, then again what else can you expect in a place like this. The room just has a little bunk and a desk in the corner that's it. But the room is no matter the agency is what I care about. For some reason I can't help but poke my nose in and creep around to know about these so called rumors that have been going around. Telling about how much enemy intelligence 'we' actually have. I'm really curious for knowledge of what's true and what's not. I haven't any trust anyone here; when the commanders say 'we' I swear they only really mean 'they' or 'them'. We're truly not included in any of this we're just 'their' worthless kind of pawns. They don't care who dies unless they need something from that person. They train us and work us but yet we're still not included in much.

"Zero..."

The deep voice of my commander rings at the door of the room. I quickly close the books shoving my papers in them and push them to the side. I then reply with a stoic expression and monotone voice as always. "Yes commander Elric" he opens the door and I salute as required. "At ease" he says with a swift hand motion as I drop my arms to my sides. I can't help but think this is little odd I couldn't have been found to do something wrong. Could I?... No, no way this must be for another purpose... but what? "Zero I'd like you to help with training the new rookies tomorrow." He states his command. I feel a breath of relief escape my lungs when I hear that escape his lips.

"Yes" I nod, commander Elric I don't find was like the others exactly. He respected my choice of not sharing my real name, he also didn't seem so... confidential as the system government. I mean, yes he didn't tell everyone or anyone a lot of things about himself or in general. But there's something that strikes me with him... he's... different. But not in a way I can really explain or completely understand just yet, I don't know it's weird. He gives me a nod back and turns towards the door and exits dragging the door close behind him. "It's not like they care if anyone dies" I mutter to myself thinking about the rookies and tomorrow. The door then stops, "oh no he heard me didn't he" I think to myself with a wincing face but he abruptly brings the door back to the frame with a click, I wonder if this happens to any of the other soldiers. I was looking forward to some special individual training tomorrow but now I have to take care of

rookies fun... well time passes as I continue reading with the light of a candle. It's been half an hour or so, so I think I should get some sleep. I close the books shoving the papers in them again and putting them in the bottom drawer of my desk. With that I make my way over to the small bathroom off to the side of the room, have a shower and get changed immediately crashing into slumber as I hit the bed.

.....I....I have to run faster....it's so dark...

*"I'm scared"* a little girl?

"Who was that?!" I scream

*"I'm so scared"* there it is again. But turning around in circles I can't see anything...anything but darkness. It's cold too...

*"I'm scared"* turning around several times again to find nothing changes. I run towards the source of the noise....however it just gets darker....and colder with each movement.

*"It's so scary here"* I fall to my knees. Why do I feel so limp...Weak...and useless?

"Where am I!?" I scream in confusion as tears begin to form at the bridges of my eyes. I can't take this... What is this?? I'm so confused!? I feel so lost. I don't know what to do anymore! I slowly look around again observing the never ending darkness. I stare straight ahead seeing a little speck of light and start crawling towards it gently.

*"I'm scared"*

I ignore the little girls' voice this time. I reach out towards the speck of light.. And suddenly.. It's gone.

\*BAM\* "HHIISSSSSSSSS"

My eyes widen in fear and I can't move... I want to run so badly but my legs won't move... why can't I move!? It's coming towards me at a rapid speed! I...!..I..!

"Huh" I sharply wake up pushing myself to a sitting position. Inhaling and exhaling heavily. I drag a hand through my messy loose bangs "that nightmare of a dream again." I moan to myself. Leaning forwards I look at the clock on the wall. 6:00am on the dot. I take a few more big breaths to calm myself down and get my heart rate back to normal speed. Suddenly my door opens quickly almost giving me a heart attack, but instead makes me jump in surprise. Then I soften my face taking in the setting, "oh phew" I sigh "it's just you Elizabeth."

"Sorry zero, commander Elric wanted me to remind you about training the rookies" she said with a concerned expression.

I reply with a straight face "at 6:00 in the morning...?" a hint of annoyance in my voice.

"Well, I had some work I had to do this morning and bumped into commander on the way. He told me to remind you so I decided to come and write a note so I wouldn't forget and have to worry about it later." She explained. Elizabeth was very kind and caring. She had short dark red hair and brown eyes with a tall height at that. She was taken seriously in the moments of combat but could always make someone smile easily with a stupid joke. She's also one of the people I can get along with which is a bonus, I admire her.

"Well, thanks anyway" I yawned

"Sorry if I woke you"

"Don't worry I was already awake" classic Elizabeth being unselfish it would be a shame if I ever lost her, to friendship fights or death.

"Well I'll see you later zero" she did a little wave guiding herself out the door closing it behind her with a small click. I stare at the door with another yawn, there's no point in going back to

sleep now I would just have to pull myself back out of bed in half an hour or so anyway. I slowly get off the bed and make my way over to the washroom. I then have a shower and get dressed into my military uniform. This consists of anything really; you just need the custom jacket with the emblem on the front pocket and the back. Also a packaged belt with whatever you desire to put in it. There are other recommendations with the uniform, although you don't have to follow it to every little detail always. I find I just wear black with the uniform outline and special weapons of mine in the belt compartments plus a knife strapped in my boot. After I'm ready I start heading towards the rookies training area, grabbing an apple from the dining hall on the way. I arrive at the training ground with the apple in my hand. My eyes meet with commander Elric. He acknowledges I am here and introduces me to the group of rookies. I slowly walk towards the group.

"Everyone this is zero. She will be helping you with your training today also." He states in an informing style. Some of the rookies have questioning looks on their face as they hear my code name. Along with that I hear some mutters of confusion and some mutters of "omg the real zero! She's amazing in battle!" and stuff like that.

"This is going to be a long day" I say aloud and it was. By the end of the day there were 4 soldiers crying, 3 soldiers injured, and 6 soldiers that were full of complaints. Not a lot of them had any secure stances, any good fighting skills, or defense moves. They were going to need some work. My stomach then makes an unearthly noise by that indicating, I'm hungry. I start to put all the training gear away when I hear muffled sounds. I ignore it but still fill with curiosity. I finish putting away the gear in the shed then hear the noises again begin. So I start heading towards the sound carefully. I follow it to the back of the shed, whoever it is must be beyond this wall having a conversation because it seems fairly clear even though they are trying to lower their voice for some reason.

"I don't know about this general, what if someone gets suspicious?" a male timid voice says "Get a hold of yourself, no one will find out. If anyone even gets curious they won't be able to find out a thing unless they're in a top rank" a stronger male voice replies in return.

"I-I suppose your right" the other stuttered. I lean a little closer, it sounds like they're moving. I can't hear them as well anymore. Suddenly I find myself tripping over a piece of equipment and try to catch myself. If this makes a large noise I'm for sure going to be questioned. I save myself with grabbing the ledge of the wall. It was wood and not very stable but did the trick. I let out a breath of relief quietly. I gently plant my feet on the floor and decide it would be a good time to leave. So I turn towards the door coming face to face with...To be continued...

## The First Time

**By: Grace Hill (Gr. 10)**

The first time I did it, I was exhilarated. I remember doing it for the first time when I was only fifteen the youngest person and the only girl. We never traveled on the ground only on the tops of roofs, we were the jumpers. The civil war began after the teens of the country rebelled against the new laws of our government. We all divide into separate groups for the most affective attack plan. There were the runners, they took the head on ground battles I always thought of them as warriors. The swimmers, there were plenty of streams and lakes that flood in after the damn broke. And of course as I mentioned before the jumpers, they ran around the roof tops. After the civil war ended and the teens won, the adults all of them, cleared out. The years went by and we started our own government and a whole new generation of people. It's been two years since my first time jumping the roofs and I can still remember the mixed feelings of fear and adrenaline. I've never seen girls out on the battle field besides myself because they're usually making food or watching the little ones or cleaning, usually they're running the businesses like the little stores and stuff. After our daily scout out of the grounds, my patrol and I decide to go run up to the top of the highest building. I often went up there by myself to think, and the guys went up there to mess around.

"Hey what do you think would happen if I just" Kyle walked over to John and pretended to push him.

"Come on don't do that"

"Well why not?"

John gave him a blank look and the four of us laughed. Kyle was my brother: 5'11, brown hair, green eyes, I heard most girls thought of him as the definition of tall, dark, and handsome. John was a guy that was in the patrol with my brother when I started, he was a nice guy, more like a second brother. And there was Joseph, not much taller than me, a deep set brown eyes. He was two years older, the same age as my brother.

"Okay, okay, okay, Polaris," I looked at Kyle, we were all asking questions just for fun. "When was the last time you had a boyfriend?" He throws his cigarette bud off the side of the building.

"Well, I..." I went red.

"You've never actually been in a relationship" He laughed. "Okay so who do you like?"

"Why would I tell you?" trying not to look at Joseph.

"I'm your brother, that's why," he smiles. I shrugged, and everyone smiles and Kyle looks at John, nodding towards him as if to ask the same question.

"Me, there's this girl who works at the bakery. Blond hair, blue eyes, cute little thing. What about Joe?" we all nod and look at Joseph.

"Me, well I uh, there's a girl, a nice girl, she's really cute."



He was being really blunt and we all just kind of looked at each other and shrugged. We decide to head back, we climbed down. My hands gripping each piece of metal it felt so natural, like it always had. We got low enough to jump to the next building down, so I pushed off the wall and jumped. The ground hitting my feet and then I tucked and rolled. I kept running and jumped to the next building. In midair I felt weightless as if I was flying, so close to freedom yet so far. We finally landed on our building and the guys ran into the stair well, but I stopped on the top and leaned against the railing. I looked out at all the other buildings and wonder what would happen if I just kept on going. I also wondered what the world would have been like if the war never happened, like would my mom and dad still be alive. I remember what it looked like when there house blew up in front of my face, I was mixed with horror and somehow relief. It was the last thing tying me to that side of the war then there was nothing stopping me from completely joining the rebellious side. A seven year old shouldn't have to make that chose but it was where my brother was going and I didn't want to be left alone, he was the last thing I had.

"Hey," Kyle walked over to me "thinking about mom and dad again?" I nodded. He put his arm around me with one are and the other on the railing. "Don't worry about it. It's fine now, we're alright." Sometimes I don't think he seems to understand how much I miss them, I was much closer to them than he was, but I shrugged because I understood. We walked down stairs where all the guys were and sat down at our table, the food was already on the table. I really wasn't that hungry to begin with so I took a few bites and was done. I went to my room and sat down at my guitar and started to play. After the city was abandoned each group took went into their won buildings, we took one down town. I started to play a song my mom had taught me, "Great job" she would tell me even though I would always mess up. Sometimes well playing it I got sad and didn't want to anymore, so I laid down and fell asleep. I woke up to banging on my door, I check my clock 10:00 pm, I fell asleep early. I opened it to see Joseph in front of me, he was smiling.

"Hey, we're having a party down at your brother's place. I wanted to know if you wanted to come."

"I'll sit this one out but thanks for asking," I smiled at him.

I walked towards the window and look at the sun going down, I liked the view from here. Joseph walked over and wrapped his arms around me, I flinched a little because this was what he did often but it usually ended with me on the ground but this time I didn't. He just kind of held me and look out the window, he put his head next to my ear.

"There's a girl, a nice girl, she's really cute," he hugged me tighter. I turned my head to looked at him in the eyes, I cocked an eye brow and he smiled, my eyes went wide. He lead in and was about to kiss me when I hear the buzzing of my alarm clock go off and I woke up, I stared at my roof and checked my clock 7:20. I had to get up and get ready for patrol, I rolled out of bed still in my clothes from yesterday. I grab my sweat pants and a black teen shirt dragged my feet to the washroom, pulled my hair back and brushed my teeth. I didn't have much time to make eat so I grabbed an apple and ran to the meeting spot. We met on the roof of the building, I opened up the door to the roof a cold breeze had hit me, the air slipping into my lungs as a breath in. I looked around to find my patrol, there were five patrols mine took the west side of the town. I found the guys and started towards them with every step my feet got lighter now that the air is entering my lungs. I took the last bite of my apple and threw it off the edge followed by my brother's cigarette bud remembering that day when I first joined the group.

It was two years ago I was curious as to where my brother was going he would always tell me he'd be back later but that's all he said. So one day I followed him up to the roof top to find out where he was going. I watched him walk out the door where I bent down to see out of the crack of the door. He walked over to the guys so I followed and hid behind a generator and listen to them discussing their route for the day. I wasn't able to hear after a while because they started to walk away from ear shot so I kept on leaning in towards them until I fell over. I was then lying face down in the gravel as I heard three sets of footsteps crowding around me followed by a familiar sight. I rolled over looking up at a laughing Kyle, a familiar smirk coming from John, and somewhat familiar Joseph. Considering me and Kyle kept our lives very sparse up until that point in our lives we didn't know each other's friends.

"Alright you caught me, I'm part of the patrols, you happy? You know where I go every week," Kyle said try to breath after laughing so hard. He and John helped me up and I brushed myself off, I could feel myself going red. My brother sighed again shook his head and looked at me, I heard a whistle blow and watched everyone jump off on the buildings in their direction.

"Do you want to come with us?" Kyle said still watching the other people, then slowly turning back towards me.

I nodded and with that the guys ran towards the west side and jumped. I wasn't really sure what I was doing but I went with it, my brother wasn't really an 'I'll teach you person' more like just do what I do and hope for the best. I ran toward the edge of the building and pushed off, I was weightless and for a moment was flying. I hit the other building hard with my feet but bent my knees and kept on running to ensure I stayed with them, no matter how much the pain of the first jump shocked through my body. All the buildings were moderately close and the same size so it was easy to get from building to building. I enjoyed the feeling of the air hitting me, with each jump I was more exhilarated and my adrenaline ran high. I wasn't paying attention so when the guys stopped I didn't notice so I ran right into Joseph, opening my eyes to be face to face with him. I watched his cheeks go red and I could feel mine doing the same as I pushed myself up and offered him my hand pulling him up. My brother rolled his eyes and tugged me.

"How was that?"

"Great! Why did we stop?" then I noticed there were no more intact buildings.

"See that," he said pointing into the distance, "we don't go out there because it brings us to where the war zone once was, and if you go far enough that way you'll find what was once considered our enemy's."

I nodding remembering listening to the gun shots ringing through the streets before Kyle took me to the base after the house blew up. We headed back to the building and when back to our rooms, and I realized how lucky I now was in this recreated world. We did our normal lap, went out to the end and came back. I went into the plaza to get out for once and decide to go get some groceries. Grabbing everything I needed for the next week I walked up to the counter and put the items on the check out.

"Polaris? Is that you?"

I look to see an old face that had only been in my memories, the memories of two young girls playing in a sand box. Her I glistened the same old brown they always had, and her black hair hung shoulder length. Looking at her was like a dream, that somehow felt more fake than real. "Lucy?"

"Yeah, how are you where have you been?"

"I live over in the jumpers' base, with my brother."

"I with the runners, with well everyone else who ever went to our school before, well you know," I nodded. "After your parents' house, umm you know, no one ever heard from you again, we all thought you guys picked up and left. Why I haven't I seen you around at all?"

"I don't leave the house much, I'm out once a day on patrol though," she nodded. She finished packing up my food and bagged it, then came out from behind the counter and wrapped her arms around me.

"I miss you, we should get together sometime," I agreed to go see her one day, we said our goodbyes and I left.

That night I played my guitar and made it through the song without getting upset then went to bed. In the morning same routine, got all my stuff and went to the roof. I walked over to the guys and we went on our normal excretion. We made it to the edge of the city and everything looked good or so we thought. I was about to go back but then I turned around, they were coming. The adults were coming and they had lots of equipment, so I assumed they sent the army. I can't let them start this again, I won't. I breathe heavily with the crispy air slipping into my lungs.

"We better report this now!" Joseph said panicked.

I replied looking at them "I don't want this to happen again, but if it's a war they want, it's a war they're going to get."