



Everyone Has a Story... What's Yours?

2018 Seepe Walters

Short Story Contest



more inside



*The Future.
Starts Now.*

Produced by Innisfil ideaLAB & Library
December 2018



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

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

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

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

The Innisfil IdeaLAB & Library would like to congratulate all the students who entered the 17th edition of the Innisfil ideaLAB & Library's Short Story Contest. This contest has been known as The Seepe Walters Short Story Contest since 2004, in memory of the woman who was a driving force behind the creation of the original Friends of the Innisfil Public Library group.

The contributions of many have made this contest and this publication a reality. The Innisfil ideaLAB & Library would like to thank the Friends of the Library for their ongoing sponsorship; the Ferraro family for their years of involvement; the Innisfil Arts Culture and Heritage Council (IACHC) and South Simcoe Theatre for their partnership and support; Judges Helaine Becker and Megan Legg for their time and thoughtfulness in reading the entries; and finally, the efforts of all the wonderful young writers. Although there is only one name on the Seepe Walters Award, you are all winners for having the courage to pursue your writing dreams.

Many thanks to all those involved. And to everyone else, we hope you enjoy the stories submitted to the 2018 edition of the Seepe Walters Short Story Contest.

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

DISCLAIMER

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

Table of Contents

more inside

2018 Seepe Walters Short Story Winner

Dream Come True by Riley Ma (Gr. 7).....	6
------------------------------------------	---

Junior Division Grades 3-6

Game Over by Alina Kotchetkov (Gr.5)	11
The Boy and the Beaver by Daniel James (Gr. 6)	14
Chutes and Ladders by Nyla Gunby (Gr. 5)	17
The Dragon Hunters by Dayana Everstova (Gr. 4)	19
Colours by Laura Forgrave (Gr. 5)	22

Intermediate Division Grades 7-8

The Boy Who Cried Wolf by Miguel Luanu (Gr. 7)	23
In the 80% by Mihaela Gavrilova (Gr. 8)	26
The Computers by Topper McGuinty (Gr. 7)	29
Secrets of Bloomburg by Justus Belanger-Mazeral (Gr. 7)	34

Senior Division Grades 9-12

The Initiation by Elizaveta Slezkina (Gr. 11)	40
Reality by Darren Leung (Gr. 9)	44
Three Ghosts and a Girl by Abigail Sampson (Gr. 9)	51
The Strength of a Song by Teya Taylor (Gr. 9)	60
Unfaithful by Mackenzie Horlings (Gr. 12)	62

2018 Seepe Walters Short Story Winner

Dream Come True
By: Riley Ma (Gr.7)

more inside

I open my eyes blearily.

Where am I?

My surroundings are blurred, as if the edges of my vision were fogged. Rubbing my eyes, I sit up from the oddly soft white ground. I look around. A seemingly endless blank, bright room. There's no source of light that I can see, except for the soft glow being given off by an endless number of blue orbs floating around me. They each containing a swirling white substance within them.

"Who are you?" I hear.

A girl stands behind me. She's wearing a lilac dress looking like it's made with wisps of clouds, and her long brown hair swirls down to her waist. Her voice is bold yet sweet, and she looks roughly my age, maybe 14. Her dark eyes look at me expectantly.

"I-I'm Nick." I stutter. What happened? I take a deep breath. An indescribable sweet scent hangs in the air, making me feel oddly peaceful and relaxed.

"But... aren't you a mortal? How... how did you get here?" Her brows furrow as she thinks. I sit still on the ground, trying to recollect what I remember. This doesn't make any sense. Why am I here, and what happened? Is this just my imagination?

"Answer! How did you get here?"

"I really don't know!" I exclaim. "All I remember is that I was sitting on my bed, and some sort of blue sphere appeared! The next thing I know, I'm... wherever this place is. Where am I? Is this just in my head?" I ask. She looks at me, and her expression changes.

"I can assure this that this place is very real" she says quietly. "Come walk with me." Because I have no other logical choice, I stand up and follow her.

We silently walk pass through the sea of orbs. I can't help noticing how each one seems to contain something within its fog, a little scene. Some contain little piles of money, others display a pet, or two people embracing each other. A mother getting out of a sickbed, a baby being born...

"Desires. Within these orbs are everyone's deepest desires." the girl says, her words echoing in my head. What? I look at her, not sure if I heard her correctly.

"You mean, everyone's dreams and stuff are in those?" I gesture back at the orbs.

“Yes, everyone’s ‘dreams and stuff’ are here” she replies, almost amused. “And it’s my job to grant whichever ones I must for the day.”

I’m completely stunned. Every bit of scientific knowledge I’ve ever gathered comes to mind, trying to backup what’s happening. Nothing can, I’m completely at a loss. I take a deep breath, trying to make sense of it all. I still haven’t completely outlawed the possibility that I might’ve gone crazy.

She has to grant whichever orbs come to her. The only knowledge she has about her and the Room were written on a letter she found here. She doesn’t remember how old she is, or her family, or anything. The only thing she knows about her past is her name. These are all answers she gives me for my countless amount of questions.

“How long have you been here?” I ask softly.

“Since the very beginning of man. And I’ll have to stay until the very end.” Her voice cracks, and she looks so small and alone. I feel a rush of pity. She exists only for others’ wishes, but can’t even fulfill her own.

“Is there any way you could escape?” I ponder. She quickly dries her watering eyes.

“Someone has to take my place, to be stuck here forever like me. I thought it was impossible for other people to get in here to do so, but now you’ve kind of blown that out of the water” she explains to me. I stand in silence once more, watching the orbs drowsily float around and deep in thought.

“I have one last question,” I blurt out. “What’s your name? I didn’t really catch it.”

“My name is Ashlyn.” Her voice twinkles in the air.

A whoosh of wind. A blast of light.

And I’m back in my Room, sitting on the same place of my bed. Everything’s the exact same. I take a deep breath. How will I resume normally in life after seeing where I just was? That “Ashlyn” is stuck there. Was that place even real, or is my imagination running wild? How do I hide this from the people here in “my world?”

Somehow, I return to the Room again in a few days, with the familiar orb appearing and a flash of light. I return again a couple days later. I can never predict when I end up there again. Sometimes it’s in three days, other times it’s a week or so. It could be tomorrow for all I know. The days between visits seem to pass like a blur. I can’t stop pondering all my questions when I’m supposed to be doing other things, like studying at school or practicing basketball. Am I going insane? No, the visits seem too real. But how can this place exist? The girl, Ashlyn, she seemed surprised each time I appeared. But she seems to be getting happier with each return. Almost excited. And I’m getting more used to these “vacations” as well.

“Welcome back!” a melodic voice greets my ears. I sit up and rub my eyes. It’s been around two days since my last arrival. I’m almost glad I’m back, the concerned

looks I've been receiving from others has become almost unbearable. Ashlyn stands between two orbs, which are green instead of the usual blue. "These are the desires I have to grant today. After, they show me what's happening in that person's life." Ashlyn turns to one of them, and mouths a few words. Purple slowly spreads across it, like a drop of ink in water. Soon, the whole orb is dyed, and Ashlyn does the same with the other. I look inside the first one.

A teen-aged, brown haired man sits at a desk, scrolling through his inbox on his laptop. A new email appears, titled Jason. He opens it immediately, and reads it, his expression becoming more and more filled with glee until he's crying from laughter.

David,

We found Jason. He's safe at last. The hospital's tending to him, he has injuries but nothing life-threatening. You don't need to worry anymore. Come over this Saturday to the Red Oak Hospital (Room 566) at 1 o'clock, we're going to celebrate. He's finally home.

Mama.

"That man's little brother was kidnapped" Ashlyn says, also looking in the orb at the now dancing man. "He was missing for a year, and no one could find a trace of him. They were so close to giving up, there was no hope left. All David wanted was for his brother to come home. Sometimes, I love fulfilling dreams. Seeing family reunited, pets found, a baby safely delivered. But other times, I hate it." She turns to the second orb. "This one all started with a man, jealous of something he couldn't have. His older brother's inheritance. So, he...". She doesn't finish, so I look in the orb.

A limp body lies in the grass. A man is slowly walking away from it, a gun in his scarred hands. His eyes are cold and expressionless. I jerk my eyes away, horrified, and look at Ashlyn. My insides feel cold.

"I wish I could let myself go free" Ashlyn whispers, her voice choking back tears. "I hate knowing that I've been the reason why people are harmed. I want to laugh and love with others, and feel alive in my own will. Instead...instead I'm forced to destroy myself slowly with this evil. I want to escape so bad. Anything is better than this." She looks so deflated, so lost. Invisible and unknown to others. Unloved.

She stays here, shielded from the world. Unable to be hurt by others. But she hates it. Maybe being damaged helps us grow, and treasure happiness. She has nothing to here but absorb pain that doesn't even belong to her.

I wrap my arms around her and hold her tight, and she cries silently into my arms. "You are loved." I whisper in her ear. "And I want you to know that I really think you're so strong and brave, and we will get you out of here."

She pulls her head away, looks at me with her beautiful, watery, kind eyes, and smiles. A genuine, grateful smile of someone who finally knows they're not alone.

“What’s your dream, Nick?” Ashlyn asks me quietly. I think for a moment. Before I have time to answer, however, I’m whisked back to my world.

I sit on my bed, absentmindedly blowing bubbles out my open window with a bright red bubble wand. Warm sunlight spills into my room, shining on my new laptop. I sigh, and look at the bubbles. I can see my reflection, my light brown eyes, short caramel-coloured hair, and triangle-shaped face distorted by the curve of the bubbles. They remind me of the orbs, as they float lazily into the cool summer breeze. I lie down, and my eyelids feel heavier and heavier, the sunshine feeling cozy and warm on my skin. My eyes slowly close.

“Nick!” I hear a shriek. My heart races, and I turn around, looking for the source of the voice. All around me is dark. “Nick!” the voice screams again.

Ashlyn.

I run around blindly, reaching out for something I can’t see. The darkness is suffocating me, the sound of Ashlyn’s voice ringing in my ears. I have to protect her, I have to get to her. Her voice becomes more distant by the seconds, and I can’t catch my breath. A roar is growing in my ears, and a flash of light blinds me.

I wake up, gasping for air. Ashlyn’s standing over me. My back is drenched with sweat, and I feel cold and clammy.

“A-Are you alright?” she stammers. I look at her, her big, sweet eyes, the concern so visible on her face. I relax, stand up, and smile. It’s okay, it was merely a dream.

“I’m fine” I reassure her. Relief spreads across her face, and she breaks out in conversation almost instantly, talking about what she’d do if she were in my world with me. Her excitement seems to shine out of her. Something flashes back into my brain.

What’s your dream, Nick?

I think I’ve finally figured it out.

A green orb floats drifts in front of Ashlyn, and she stops talking. Her expression is unreadable as she looks inside. I’m anxious to find out what it is. There’s a dreadful silence. Finally, she looks at me.

“It’s...it’s yours” she splutters. I don’t need to look inside. I already know. Ashlyn looks at me, her eyes seeming to pierce into me. I know she has to fulfill it. This must be hard for her.

“Y-you know what this means for you, right?” she asks softly. I give an almost undetectable nod. “And nothing’s going to change your mind?” I nod again. Ashlyn’s eyes well up. With each second passing, a tear seems to roll down her cheek. “I’ll wish to see you again, just as you visited me. Thank you” she murmurs. She steps towards the orb, and mutters a few words. Purple begins seeping through it. She hugs me one last time, and her lips brush against mine.

A flash of light. My arms are empty.

I glance into the orb. Ashlyn's sitting on my bed, looking out the window, a lingering tear on her cheek. My parents will accept her. It was part of my wish. I smile. She can be happy now out in the world now, like she always wanted to be. I sigh, and sit down. Maybe one day I'll regret this decision, but right now, I feel right. Fate won't keep me here forever. I'll find a way out, won't I?

I open my eyes blearily.

Where am I?

My surroundings are blurred, as if the edges of my vision were fogged. Rubbing my eyes, I sit up from the oddly soft white ground. I look around. A seemingly endless blank room. There are orbs floating around me, each containing a swirling white substance.

"Nick?"

Junior Division Grades 3-6

Game Over

By: Alina Kotchetkov(Grade 5)

more inside

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be a part of a video game? If so, then you are not alone. My name is Calvin and I am going to tell you what it is like to be in the world of the computers, to be inside the heart of a video game! Let me begin:

It was a cold and stormy summer night, and I was sitting in front of my desk. I was glued to my chair staring at the computer screen and playing my absolute favourite game, "MINECRAFT". Gazing at the colourful images, I was building my precious MINECRAFT house, wondering, "what would it actually be like to travel inside a computer and become a character in the game?" That night, I played until my eyes were drooping shut. I went to sleep and dreamed that I was just a small person in an infinite world of technology, which I knew so little about...

The sun was shining through my window as I woke up in a familiar bed. "What a great dream," I thought. There was no school that day, so I went downstairs for a nutritious breakfast and again enjoyed my free time on the computer. The sun might have been shining but the wind was howling powerfully outside. That gave me a great "excuse" to convince my parents to let me stay inside and not enjoy the great outdoors.

After hours and hours of extensive playing on another game called, "MARIO KART", a green creature with a miniscule turtle shell suddenly jumped in front of me in the middle of a race. Immediately, I recognized this bizarre, turtle-like critter – he was "Yoshi" – one of the main characters in the game. In a tiny, chipmunk-sounding voice, he asked, "do you really want to travel inside the computer?" I glanced around the room to see if he was talking to someone else. There was no one but me. So many questions flooded my brain, "Can he be reading my mind?", "Am I awake?", "How can a character in a computer be interacting with me?" I then thought to myself that this might be my only chance to be submerged in the world of technology! Without even thinking, I replied, "Yes, I am sure. I want to experience the computer world." Yoshi sighed as he grabbed me by the arm and yanked me into the computer screen.

With Yoshi right beside me, I was shocked that I was no longer in my room but whizzing past limitless "ones" and "zeros". I reached out my hands and attempted to grab one of the "zeros", but it went right through my hand. Or did my hand go right through it? Though this experience did not take long; it sure felt like an eternity. When Yoshi and I finally landed, I looked up at where I fell from and saw a swirling, ocean-blue gap in the sky. Curiously looking around, I realized instantly that I had found the paradise I always wanted to be in — the computer world! The surrounding landscape was unlike anything I had ever seen before. It was made up of numerous teeny, tiny codes of "ones" and "zeros" assembling together. "Am I the first human who has ever set foot inside the computer dimension?" This was an answer that I would never know for sure.

It was getting dark and Yoshi left quietly without me knowing. In a strange and unknown place, I knew I must take shelter to stay safe. After walking alone for a long time, I came to a familiar looking house – my MINECRAFT house I was working on the day before! I went inside and admired my wondrous creation. “Hmm, not bad, and it seems cozier than I thought...” Inside the house, I found a comfy bed I built earlier, lay down, and instantly fell into a deep, deep sleep.

The next day I woke up feeling re-energized but starving. I ate something and quickly packed some resources I thought I might need before exploring this new dimension. Walking alone in the MINECRAFT world was nerve-racking but exciting. The world was smaller than I anticipated. Soon I was at the edge of this MINECRAFT realm and I discovered various other portals leading to many other video games.

Missing Yoshi, I decided to jump into the “MARIO” game portal to find him. The MARIO world was very different. It was filled with people holding wizards’ wands and golden fire-breathing dragons. There were unicorns riding fluffy clouds, but Yoshi was nowhere to be found. After hours of searching, I gave up and decided to enjoy my time in a world with no work but fun games only. I felt like I was the luckiest child in the world!

When the sun began to set, I went back to my house through the MINECRAFT portal. Landing at the other side, Yoshi suddenly appeared right in front of me. “Ahhh!” I exclaimed, surprised and startled. “Would you stop doing that?!” I practically shouted. Yoshi said nothing but grinned. I invited him inside my house. He asked me again in a mysterious voice, “is this really the place you want to stay?” I was puzzled why he asked me again; nevertheless, it was getting dark and I let Yoshi stay with me for the night.

The following months, I had quite the time – no parents’ supervision, no rules and no responsibilities. Just play, play and play. I played relentlessly every day, but soon things started to get less and less interesting. Without any motivation, I woke up later and later because I did not feel like participating in the games anymore. I started to get tired of this worthless lifestyle. I felt exhausted and really bored of this empty, unfulfilled life. Finally, I stopped.

For the first time in months, I thought about what really mattered to me — my family and my friends. I also thought about what my teachers would have thought, “Were they nervous because I had not been in school for months or disappointed because I did not hand in my very important homework assignment?”

I really wanted to go home, and I was determined to leave this use-to-be “paradise”. Running to the place where I had landed, I was shocked to discover that the blue gap in the sky was no longer there. “Oh, no! How would I get back?” Now realizing how blank and meaningless this excessive computer lifestyle turned out to be, I regretted ever saying “yes” to Yoshi about coming here. I missed my family tremendously. “Why did I ever choose to stay here?” I cried out to the illuminated night sky. While sobbing, Yoshi came to me and said, “I can let you out of this computer world; but you can never come back.” I was so relieved and replied, “yes! I will do anything to go back!” After finishing the

sentence, I suddenly found myself sitting in my chair, looking at a familiar computer screen. I said to myself, "I am so glad that I could come back to reality!"

Looking at a calendar on the wall, I realized I was only gone for less than a day and not months like in the computer world. Rushing out of my room, I could hear my dog barking and see my sisters fighting in the corner. I went to my parents and gave them a long hug. They asked if I have done my homework and cleaned up my room; but this time, I did not mind it at all. The most important thing to me was that I was with my family who loved me. Computer games might be fun to play but could be dangerous if ones did not know the limit. I made a promise to myself that I would never let the computer take control of me again. And it never did.

Junior Division Grades 3-6

The Boy and the Beaver By: Daniel James (Grade 6)

more inside

“And Brandon make sure you double check the destination on your GPS, I don’t want you to get lost again, and when you get to your cousins house make sure their parents text me, also make sure you hit the waves straight on so you don’t end up tipping the kayak, and ...”. “I know dad,” Brandon interrupted, “you must have told me at least 20 times to be careful and I won’t forget it any time soon. I gotta go, my cousins are really anxious for me to arrive so, see ya soon raccoon!”

And with that Brandon was on his way. Brandon was about halfway to his cousins’ when his GPS malfunctioned and pointed him in the wrong direction. Brandon knew he went off course but he thought that his GPS was just redirecting him back on track, so he relaxed and kept going.

“Wow, what a great day for kayaking!” exclaimed Brandon. “Calm, clear water, not too hot, not too cold”, Brandon couldn’t think of any day that had better kayaking conditions. Brandon was so busy marvelling at the wonderful weather that he didn’t notice he was heading for an island instead of towards the other side of the lake where his cousins’ house was. Suddenly Brandon felt a big BUMP! He looked all around expecting to see a big rock in the middle of the lake, but then he noticed that there in front of him was a small island. At the shore of the island was a peculiarly large pile of sticks and mud. Brandon recognized the strange heap of sticks and mud from a big book that he read. It was a beaver’s dam! “So cool”, he thought. Brandon pulled the kayak ashore and got out to explore.

After some exploring, Brandon checked the weather on his GPS, it said there would be big waves the rest of the day. Brandon knew he would have to stay the night, so he looked around the island to find a place to set up camp. As he was looking around he saw a cute little beaver. Brandon suddenly forgot what he was doing and started playing with the beaver. He patted its tail and talked to it like it was a baby. Brandon nearly fainted when the beaver suddenly spoke to him. “Eh! What you doing that for?!” said the Beaver. “Did you just talk?!” questioned Brandon filled with amazement. “Yep”. replied the beaver “You never met a talking beaver before?! By the way, the name’s Benny, what’s yours?” “Uh, Brandon” he stuttered. “OK Brandon. Two things, one you should pull in your kayak, the water raises pretty high at night, and two, it looks like high waves tonight and tomorrow so I don’t expect that you’ll get home in that kayak anytime soon. If you want to stay at my place you’re welcome to.” Brandon thought hard about what Benny just said and decided he would take him up on his offer to spend the night in his dam.

From the book about beavers Brandon knew that in order to get into beaver's dam he would have to go through a small tunnel submerged in water to get inside. Brandon was so thankful he was a good swimmer, he got through the tunnel with ease.

When he entered the dam it smelled amazing, there were beeswax candles lit everywhere. He was so amazed at how much space there was for such a small looking dam! Beautiful wooden furniture filled the room. "Wow did you build all this?!" Brandon asked Benny. "No, it was my pap who crafted this furniture and the dam." explained Benny.

Benny introduced his wife Brenda, and his triplets Betty, Becky and Bailey and then they enjoyed a nice dinner of willow bark together. However, Brandon stuck with a granola bar he had in his pack. Brandon told the story of how he was trying to go to his cousins house when his GPS pointed him towards the island. When Brandon finished telling his story Benny showed him to his bed and the second Brandon made contact with his bed he was out cold.

After only a few hours of sleep, Brandon found himself being hastily woken up by Benny. Benny had been keeping an eye on the storm outside and noticed a tree creaking and swaying in the wind. Benny recognized that kind of creak, it was the sound a tree made before it fell! Benny urged Brandon and everyone to get out of the dam before the they all got squashed by a tree! Brandon got outside just in time to see the dam get crushed. For a few minutes everyone just stared at the remains of their dam. "What a disaster", Brandon exclaimed. When they finally came to their senses Benny and Brandon decided they would find a new site to rebuild the dam while Brenda and the triplets salvaged some items from the crushed dam.

As the boys where walking Brandon thought it would be a good idea if he got a conversation going, but as he was trying to think of a topic to talk about he remembered something. "Hey Benny", said Brandon, "I just remembered something. When I called my cousins last week to make my packing list, they asked me to bring my beaver finding supplies. I thought that was a weird request, so I asked them why. My cousin explained that his family really got into beavers since I've seen them last. I know they have a lot of forest on their property. I wonder if your family could build a new dam there!?" "You have to be kidding! What a great idea." said Benny. "Well what are we waiting for? We have to go back to the others and share the good news!"

Moments later all the Beavers were filled with joy about the good news! They immediately started preparing for the departure with Brandon. They loaded the triplets on the front of the kayak, Benny and his wife on the back and Brandon paddling in the middle. It was hard work with so many in the kayak, but everyone was gave it their all, Brandon paddled like crazy, Benny used his tail as a rudder and Brenda gaged the weather and water currents. The triplets sat still as to keep the boat in balance. Soon they could see the dock in the distance and from the shore they heard Zach (Brandon's cousin,) shout, "Hey everyone. Brandon's here!...and it looks like he has beavers on his kayak!" Brandon stepped out of the kayak onto the dock and was loaded with hugs.

Brandon excitedly explained why he was a day late and why he arrived with 5 beavers. Everyone was shocked, happy he was okay and thrilled to see beavers. “Oh, and don’t be too surprised. These beavers talk! One of them has something to ask you.” “Can we build a new dam on your property?” Benny asked with a wink. “Uh, sure” stuttered Jacob, Brandon’s older cousin.

A few hours later Brandon was back at home. His parents and Emma, his little sister, greeted him with a massive hug. “We were so worried” they said, “your cousins told me there were talking beavers?!” said his mom with confusion. In celebration of his safety, they all went out to a lobster restaurant that night to just be together and Brandon told them the whole story. Brandon felt happy to be with his family and happy that the beavers had a new and safe home. After dinner he looked down at his plate and said to himself, “Now that was an adventure!”

The End.

Being 14 is tough. I have pimples coming out, my armpits need to be washed every other day, and on top of it all I just got a retainer. Mom and dad said I needed to get a job this summer. So while all of my friends are playing around the neighborhood, I'm stuck working at Pet Smart! "Before you go home for the day can you get some more rabbit food from the back Cole?", shouted Sheila, my new boss. "Sure." I say, but I'm actually thinking "get it yourself lady". I go to the back and the smell hits me. I can taste it. Its like eating a skunk. I run to the rabbit section while holding my breath. I see a bag clip on a rack and put it on my nose. The next thing I see is a game on the ground. "What is this?". I pick it up and grab the rabbit food when the PA system calls "Cole, your ride is here". I run to the front with the rabbit food in one hand and the game in the other. I hand the rabbit food to Sheila and turn to head out the door. "Aa hem" Sheila says while holding out her hand. I realize the game is probably hers and go to hand it to her. "What is this? I don't want this game. I wanted the clip on your nose. Is it really that bad smelling Cole?". I give her the clip, "I forgot I put that on". I head out the door with the game.

When I get home I call my best friend Luke to come over. "Sure. Hope you don't stink like that Pet Store though" he says laughing, but it's kind of true. When he gets to my place I pull out the game. I blow the dust off the box and read *Chutes and Ladders*. I open the box and unfold the board. There is a spinner and three cardboard figurine players. I let Luke spin first because I feel bad that he has to put up with my pet store smell. He spins a 3. He takes a figurine and moves it three places. Next, I spin a 4 and land on a ladder. I immediately notice sparks coming from under my bed. I look under my bed and find a ladder slowly growing out of my bedroom carpet. Luke and I push the bed to the side and the ladder continues to grow about the size of my dresser. All of a sudden, Luke and I feel a pull. We get sucked into our player figurines. Now I am a blond haired boy and Luke is a little girl with a dark pony tail. My figurine starts climbing the ladder that grew. Luke shouts, "What's happening?!". I turn to him and say, "I have no idea, I can't control myself. Also, nice pony tail". Luke's figurine gives me a dirty look and then his figurine spins the spinner. He, or she, spins a 6. Another ladder appears and Luke starts to climb it. His ladder went through my ceiling and I can only imagine he is on the roof now. "Who's making fun of my pony tail now?" he says, as he climbs way ahead of me in the game. Next I spin a 2. A chute appears and I slide down to my floor again. We keep spinning and climbing and sliding. We forget about our worries because the climbing and sliding is so much fun. Finally, I am one space away from winning the game. Luke is five spaces away. Luke spins a 5. He is the winner. The chutes and ladders disappear and Luke and I come out of the figurines. Since I lost, I decided not to be a sore loser and I put my hand out to shake Luke's. "Good game" I said. He squeezed my hand tightly, all of a sudden I woke up. Something was bugging me on my nose. I reached for it. It was that darn clip. I was asleep in the back at Pet Smart with rabbit food in one hand, a Chutes and ladders game in the other, and a clip on my

nose. "Cole please report to the front cashier". I realize I haven't even gotten Sheila her rabbit food but I had one heck of a dream. Better get back to work.

Junior Division Grades 3-6

The Dragon Hunters

By: Dayana Everstova (Grade 4)

more inside

Have you ever wanted to see a dragon? Working with dragons is a part of my life. My name is Alex Johnson and I am a 16-year-old dragon hunter in training. I live in Shardonia and I am a Pureblood, which means human in Shardonian.

There are currently 10 different groupings of species in Shardonia: Elves, Dwarves, Fairies, Wizards, Witches, Trolls, Goblins, magical creatures, Unwants and Purebloods.

Only Purebloods are given a job. If a job doesn't work out for you, you will be randomly given a new one. You can be a farmer, slave, fisherman, tailor, gifted [scientists or engineers], entertainer or a dragon hunter. So, I purposefully tried to do the other jobs badly and worked extra hard every single day to keep my job.

We are taught that dragons are evil and vicious creatures, but they are strong and have special powers, which we can use. Each dragon hunter is given a scroll with instructions and granted a necklace, which allows you to communicate with the dragon to enslave it.

I woke up in my bed at 5:00 a.m. with my best friend Leia Williams looking over me. She smiled when she noticed I was awake. Suddenly, a piercing noise came from our old and broken speaker, which was surrounded with spider webs. "This is Madam Labour, all dragon hunters please report for duty in the main hall, thank you!" My eyes quickly widened. "Leia! Why didn't you wake me up?!" I pushed her away. I quickly stumbled out of bed and jumped into my uniform. Leia giggled. I gave her a dirty look, but she had already left.

I peeked into the main hall and saw Leia at the back of one of the many lines. Madam Labour was right in front of me. I couldn't let her know I was late but she had already started attendance. I was dead meat at this point.

"Alexandra Marcie Johnson?" she said raising her voice. I came out from behind her.

"Present?" I said sheepishly. She turned around by spinning on her heels. "Alexandra... We will talk about your punishment later," she said strictly. I hung my head in guilt and embarrassment.

Today was an important day. We would be given our first real task. Madam Labour assigned us to random partners. Luckily, Leia and me were partners. We all had to find the same dragon. It was an ice dragon, one of the rarest. Whoever found it first, would attend to the official dragon hunter university to become a professional dragon hunter.

I hope Leia and me could find it. I looked at her very excited! But she seemed annoyed. She said, "Just leave me alone for a minute," and left.

When she finally came back I could notice that she had cried. I asked her "Are you ok? Is something wrong?" "I suppose. I-I...my family had a strong relationship with dragons. They were our friends and to enslave them is just wrong!" she yelled. "But it's a requirement to go to the university!" I exclaimed, confused. "Please, Alex", Leia looked at me with hope. I sighed and nodded, but I still wondered how on earth could her family befriend the dragons?

We were getting ourselves ready to go and find the dragon. I spotted a table with resources we might need and gathered them. Once we were dismissed, Leia and me walked through the village square. As we passed by, Shardonians waved.

After the village, we came to the Unknown Regions. That is where Unwants and Witches live. They are not welcome in the village. We walked silently. It was very awkward, Unwants stared, Witches cackled, and it was always gloomy. The sky was neither blue, nor gray. It was red and brown.

Then we entered the woods. Suddenly, I heard something rustle in the bushes behind us. "Did you hear that?" I whispered to Leia. I approached to the bush, slowly. Right before I could scare it, it scared me! "Ahhhhhhh!!!!!" yelled a blonde girl with blue eyes, wearing dirty rags and holding a spear made out of a rock and stick, attempting to frighten me away. She was an unwanted child, about 9 years old. From behind the same bush, her dog came out.

The girl scowled at us, dropped her spear, grabbed her dog and said, "Filthy dragon hunters." She rolled her eyes and continued, "My name is Bella Riverbanks and this is my dog, Randolph...Well?! Introduce yourself, you brat!" "I'm Alex and this is Leia. Would you like to come with us on our journey to find an ice dragon? I suppose we'll need your assistance during our adventure. Won't we, Leia?" Leia looked at me unsure but nodded, "Sure. Anything to get away from this dump."

"Where are we headed? I might know the way," said Bella. "We don't know yet!" Leia replied with sarcasm. " And anyways, what would an unwanted like you know about the location?!" Leia was mad now. The thought of enslaving dragons kept haunting her mind.

We walked through the woods silently until we heard a rumbling roar somewhere in the distance. "What was that? It sounded like a dragon!" I whispered. Bella answered, "Well come on then, let's go find it, right?" The three of us walked until we got to a lake.

"There's no lake on the map!" I said. Bella replied, "I know this place fairly well. It creates an illusion in your brain. Sometimes, the lake is here, sometimes, it's not." We kept walking. All of a sudden, a desert appeared! I looked behind myself, no lake in sight. Just a desert.

Then, we heard hoofs and neighing and saw wild horses coming our way. When they were close enough, Bella hopped on one of them as they were passing by. Leia and me did the same. We rode through the desert, following Bella.

Suddenly, a sandstorm appeared out of nowhere! We weren't quick enough to turn away from it, so it swept us off our horses. Then, there was darkness.

Once we had all awoken from being knocked out by the sandstorm, we found ourselves on a snowy mountain. Bella suffered the most. A drop of blood ran down her forehead, to her cheek.

I rushed to her, "Are you ok? Oh my god, you're bleeding!" I exclaimed. "I'm fine! I just feel a bit nauseous and I have a headache," Bella replied weakly.

I looked around, "How is this possible?! First, we were in the middle of the lake, then the desert, and now a snowy mountain?!" I said. "Wait... Ice dragons must live here! Let's go check the mountain top for a dragon nest!" Leia said, helping Bella to her feet.

We looked up. We couldn't even see the mountaintop because of the clouds. We started climbing up the mountain. Finally, we got to the top. All we could see was an empty nest. "Did someone get it before us?" Bella asked, worried. Leia and I shrugged.

Suddenly, an ice dragon appeared from behind one of the mountains! Leia cried tears of joy. The dragon was way bigger than I imagined! I looked at Bella and Leia: how weren't they scared? Its teeth were shiny and sharp. I couldn't stop looking at them!

"Greetings. My name is Leia Williams. I'm sure you know my family. Would you be kind enough to help my friend, Bella?" Leia asked the dragon through her necklace.

The dragon glared her eyes at Leia, inspecting her. She nodded and started healing Bella.

The dragon poured a potion on Bella's scar. It healed instantly!

But we weren't done yet. I had found my courage through my friends. I stepped forward and lifted my necklace and said, "Dear dragon goddess, we come with peace. Could we build a friendly relationship with you?" Leia was relieved to hear what I had said. The dragon nodded. I smiled and turned to Bella and Leia. We wanted to head to the university, but one of our tasks was to enslave the dragon. Leia wanted to befriend it and now I understand why. Dragons are way less intimidating than they seem. They are kind hearted and caring.

One week later, we were back in our village. We didn't go to the university, but we had some new friends: Bella, Randolph and a dragon. I guess some things are just more important.

I loved that journey and will never forget about it.

Junior Division Grades 3-6

Colours

By: Laura Forgrave (Grade 5)

more inside

Long, long, ago, when humans didn't exist, and Mount Everest was only a tiny hill, blackness covered the earth. Animals ate, slept and played in total darkness. There was no sun, yet somehow plants still grew. Now, I will talk about a day when the world changed. It was like suddenly, finally, someone had turned on a light. I will have a relative of an animal that was there that day explain the rest of the story to you. Her ancestors were there. She knows what happened.

Kate! Wake up! It's time for breakfast! Oh, hi there. I'm Rachel the racoon. You're the person who wanted to hear about that wonderful day, right? Good. It was an average day, and my great-great-great-great-great-grandma Abigail, the famous racoon, was enjoying her breakfast. She finished her breakfast, grabbed her backpack, and started walking to school. Her school was a ten minute walk, and she always walked it with her friend

Emma the skunk. They were about halfway to school that day when a thunderstorm started, but it was not very close, so they kept walking and the thunderstorm continued. Suddenly lightning struck a tree, and a forest fire started. Emma and Abigail stopped walking and watched. The light of the fire shone through the raindrops and created a rainbow. The rainbow wasn't a black rainbow, it had colour! There were bright, happy reds, oranges and yellows, and more peaceful and calming greens, blues and purples. Then, as the droplets passed through the rainbow, they started to become colourful! Some droplets turned orange, while others turned blue. As these droplets hit the ground, a whole new world appeared before Emma and Abigail. The lakes and rivers turned blue, the grass turned green and the flowers turned many bright colours..

All of the animals turned different colours too. Emma was so excited she sprayed. "Whew!" said Abigail, "Smelly!"

"Sorry," Emma replied, "but isn't my fur fantastic? Look how bright my new white stripe is!"

After 5 long, happy days, the forest fire stopped, the storm moved on to bring colour to other parts of the world, and the rainbow disappeared. The world was different, but everyone loved the new change. To this day, we have a five day celebration each year to mark when colour was brought to the earth. We still rejoice about how beautiful our world is.

Now you know the story of how colour was brought to the earth. And thank you, Rachel, for narrating that story beautifully. I hoped you enjoyed it!

The End

Intermediate Division Grades 7-8

The Boy Who Cried Wolf By: Miguel Luanu (Grade 7)

more inside

“Good morning, Ness.”

This is what I hear when I wake up, I open my eyes and see my owner Arthur standing over me with a bowl of water and food. I try to say thanks but it just comes out as ‘Baaa’. After all, I am a sheep and my owner can’t really understand me oh, how much I wish he could.

Anyways, I get up and say hello to my Mother and Father as I always do in the mornings. They ask me how I am and I reply that I’m doing great, then my mother licks some dirt off of my head. My parents are amazing. I also say hello to the other sheep, 15 in total excluding my family. I eat my food and have a drink, then nudge Arthur in the leg, indicating that I want to go to the market with him like we do every other day.

We walk out of our barn and Arthur’s mother asks him to take some of the clothes to the market to sell. He takes the clothes, but only because he is allowed to have some of the shiny round things that he gets for the shirts. The shirts that he is given smell like my Father, he was sheared yesterday.

As we trot along the dirt road towards the market I see Noah, he is one of Arthur’s friends, we sometimes visit his barn and I play with the other sheep. I baa at him and he says hi to me too.

As we walk to the market he gets these looks from the other humans, they often call him by names that I don’t understand and often call me names as well. It is probably because he pulled one of the ‘wolf’ lies again. Arthur is notorious around here for “Crying Wolf”. What is “Crying Wolf” ? It’s when my owner runs to his parents and then into town yelling that there are wolves near the farms, this used to scare me and the other sheep, but now we know what he does so it doesn’t bother us, though I do believe that one day he might be correct.

We walk together down the road a bit more and see a sign that says *Thursday, October 18, 1823*, as well as a lot of people crowding around this one table set up, Arthur says something about ‘Veal’, I don’t know what that is so I ignore it. We go to the clothes table and Arthur sells the shirts for these shiny round things that he gets every time we come. We walk around for a bit longer, Arthur and his friend getting some chocolates, he gives me a little piece and it tastes delicious.

Once we get everything we need we head home. Arthur invites Noah over for lunch but he declines so it’s just me and him outside eating our food when we get home, Arthur’s father won’t let him inside to eat because he did the wolf thing again just yesterday. I really think that they hate each other, Arthur and his Father fight a lot but at

least he doesn't hit me like he hits Arthur and his Mom I'm glad for that. When we are done our food he says see you later and heads inside, as soon as he enters the door I hear yelling and things breaking, they are fighting again. I go back to my barn and lie down, thinking about how Arthur and Mom feel, I eventually fall asleep sleeping straight through dinner.

When waking up the next morning I see Arthur coming over with something in a bowl, it doesn't look like my regular food, instead I see some potatoes and vegetables, things I only get on what Arthur calls a Birthday I still don't know what this is but apparently I'm '5' today. He sets my bowl down and I dig in, this is soooo much better than grass. Within 30 seconds the food is gone.

I look up and get a better view of Arthur he is covered in these brown and purple spots. He usually gets these spots when his Father hits him.

We go about our regular routine, he plays with me in the yard, then we eat lunch, he goes back to the market to get his Dad some 'Ale'. When he comes back we sit in the barn and he's scratching my head. I ask him about the spots, but like always it comes out as 'baaa'. He says that his Dad hit him last night. I guess I'll never know if he actually understood me. I'll never know because that was the last time I heard his voice.

That night I dream of Arthur, I see him in the field he is looking at something brown and doglike, I don't know what it is. He runs into town and starts yelling 'WOLF WOLF!' and no one pays attention. That brown animal must be the wolf. He runs to the closest farms and yells 'WOLF WOLF!' and everyone just ignored him. He ran home and yelled inside that there was a wolf. His dad started yelling at him and throwing things at him, he threw a mug and then threw Arthur into the table. He couldn't see where his Dad went. Arthur ran upstairs where his mom was and couldn't see her. He ran downstairs and outside and saw all the sheep sleeping, but I wasn't there. The wolf came around the corner of the barn with blood in his mouth, instantly four other wolves appeared behind the barn as well. He ran and ran. What happened after that was all blurry all I know is that Arthur was somewhere on the farm and hurt badly.

The next day when I woke up, still scared from the dream. Arthur didn't come with my food, and everyone else was sleeping. Exactly like the dream, it was horrifying to think that the dream was real. I was confused and scared so I walked around to see if he was anywhere. I noticed that the door to the house was opened. I stepped inside, it smelled of rotten food and Arthur's Dad. There was this sticky liquid and a mug on the floor. Again like the dream. The mug still had some of the liquid in it, me being stupid took a drink it was really bitter and strong at the same time. I left the mug and liquid and walked through past a broken table and up the stairs to find everything scattered on the floor, surely a fight had gone on here.

I looked into Arthur's room. I had only been in there once before when I had broken my leg. I look in his room but he isn't there, where is he? I do find something else though, a spatter of the red stuff on the wall, I smell it and it smells like the metal bucket that I get my water in. Scared and very lonely I walk through the hallway into what looks like Arthur's Mom and Dad's room, I see more of the red liquid trailing to the bed, I try to

climb into bed to get a peek but I see nothing. I go back not a clue where anyone is. And then I notice Arthur's Dad lying on the ground with these red marks around his neck they look like a wolf bite. If I wasn't scared before I am now, I have no idea where Arthur is, there is a wolf around here, and I'm just a sheep. I decide to go back to the barn and try to wake up my mom and dad. I walk over to them and pat at them with my legs, they don't wake. I roll them over and see red marks around their necks as well. I can't explain how I am feeling right now. Help. Everyone around me is dead. My friends my family. Please help me.

I tell my parents I love them and run off into the cornfields to see if Arthur is there like in the 'dream'. I keep running, running, running, I finally collapse out of energy, I roll over..... and see Arthur right beside me, dead. He is completely mauled. I kiss his forehead and lie down beside him. If I am going to die today, I am going to die beside him. I lie down, close my eyes and wait, wait for my fate. I am lying down beside Arthur and I hear rustling in the corn, I close my eyes and wait for the wolves to kill me. I hear them howling nearby, please, just do it, I think. They come out of the corn and are so close to me I can hear them panting. I feel something wet drop down onto my face. I open my eyes and see five wolves standing over me, all with monstrous looks in their eyes, pure evil. I say goodbye one last time before I feel something warm in my neck. I am gone, with my parents, friends, and My Boy Who Cried Wolf.

Intermediate Division Grades 7-8

In the 80%

By: Mihaela Gavrilova (Grade 8)

more inside

I love the ten o'clock news. It's not the news that interests me; I actually find it rather boring. It's the fact that it's one of the few times my family is together, my mom, my dad, and I. My mom and dad both work late, and my sister is away at college. After the news we all go to bed, and when I wake up, everyone else has already left for work.

Tonight we're watching the news and a scientist is invited on to talk, it's one of the few times I've actually seen someone credible on the news. They've started examining the common causes of death.

"After closer examination, and deep questionings of the relatives of the recently deceased, we have discovered that there is about an 80% chance that your most intense phobia will be how you die," the scientist proclaims.

The rest of my family brushes it off, but I don't.

My family is a family of clowns. It may sound like I'm insulting them, but they are, literally, a family of clowns. My mom and dad both work as clowns at parties, and my sister is already in clown college, the best clown college in the world to be exact, Dell'Arte in California. We live in Chula Vista, California, officially labelled the most boring town in America, also, a half days drive away from my sister, so I don't see her very often. And to top it all off, every person even slightly related to our family, is a clown.

Isn't it ironic that my most intense phobia, the thing that gives me the heebie jeebies, makes my blood run cold, makes me jump out of my skin, the one thing that I truly cannot stand, is clowns.

When I was just 2 years old, my parents were already very eager to get me into clowning. They took me to a carnival, they took me into what they thought was a children's haunted house; apparently the waiver they had to sign before we went in wasn't enough of a sign that this haunted house was definitely not for kids.

We slowly wandered in. The beginning wasn't too scary. I walked along with my dad holding my hand. Gradually the haunted house started getting scarier and scarier, there were doors to leave the haunted house early, but my parents were still convinced this haunted house was for kids, and they would not let me wimp out of a kid's haunted house.

Then, right before we got to the end, a clown jumps out with a knife, and starts chasing us towards the exit. Two year olds are not known for being the fastest runners, so my dad scoops me up and bolts, hoping I didn't see anything. But I did. Ever since that day, I have been petrified of clowns.

This traumatic event was 15 years ago, and this shocking news broadcast was four years ago, so far I've been really good at hiding the fact that I KNOW I'm going to die from a clown. It could be someone in my family, someone at a carnival, or someone at my future clown school. I'm going to have to go to next year if I can't figure out how to tell my own family that most of the time I steel myself for hugs, brace myself for high fives, and have high anxiety attacks over any contact with them and anyone like them.

This weekend, we're having a family reunion. Our theme; carnivals. I won't lie, I'm excited for the carnival games and food, but I probably won't go, it could lead to my imminent death. Explaining that I don't want to see all of my family without outing my fear to my parents, that's not gonna be easy. My parents get so excited to drive 12 hours every year so we can see all of our family, right beside the clown school where EVERYONE in our family has gone and where I'll be expected to go.

I wait for them to come home, so I can tell them, hopefully they'll be distracted by the news and not make too big of a deal. I start thinking of what to say while I'm waiting.

'I... I don't think I want to come to the family reunion', no, too simple for them, they'll ask too many questions.

'Maybe I could stay...' Before I can even finish the thought they walk in, in their costumes, talking about the reunion, AND HOW IT'D BE MY CLOWN INITIATION! I don't want that!

They sit down; I tell them I want to talk. I feel my anxiety spike as they look over at me ready to hear what I have to say.

"Uh... Would it be ok if I didn't come to the reunion this year?"

"Well, of course not honey! This is the most important reunion of all for you, we're going to be performing your clown initiation!" My parents turn back to the news without giving my request a second thought. At this point I already know there's no getting out of going, there's no convincing my parents of anything. So I start mentally preparing myself because in one week, I will officially begin training to be the one thing that scares me most.

I wonder what a clown initiation is like, only official clowns and the one being initiated are allowed to be there, so I've never actually seen one. Would they make me do some weird clown games like balloon animals and dunk tanks? Would they make me do stupidly dangerous stunts like they show in most college movies? Would they knight me like a queen would? Before I had time to decide, the week had flown by and we were loading our car ready for our 12 hour trip. My least favorite car ride of all time. It turns out 12 hours of silent panic isn't a great experience.

I keep flashing back to the haunted house experience when I was 2. What if there's a haunted house there? What if there doesn't even need to be a haunted house for a clown to quickly pull a knife and end me? I get light headed and queasy, at some point I think I throw up. My parents of course notice, but I make the excuse of bad gas station food.

We finally arrive, and unfortunately, there are clowns everywhere! Clowns in poofy white wigs, with white makeup that matches them. Big red painted on smiles that remind me of the Joker, and big red noses to top it all off. I see my sister! I want to go hug her, but now she's an official clown, one that could possibly end me. I stumble out of the car, anxious to step into this mine field of a reunion, my sister runs up and hugs me, I expect my anxiety to spike, but it's still my sister, I relax as she hugs me, feeling the long time it's been since we last hugged. But once she's hugged me and said "hi," she runs around hugging other family members, and my anxiety starts slowly rising again.

The first two hours are ok, I keep my distance from my other family members, I gorge myself on carnival snacks, and play a couple games. I was starting to relax, until my parents shout my name.

"We're performing your initiation now!"

This was it, this is the moment that I had known was coming since I was born. They drag me into a forest and make a circle around me; there are at least 50 clowns around me. They start chanting, and making the circle tighter and tighter closing in around me. I can't make out what they're saying anymore, my vision starts to go blurry, and I feel like I can't breathe.

"I don't wanna be a clown, I hate clowns!!!!"

I run out of the circle into the nearby forest, away from confused and concerned faces, staring at me as I went. Trying to gain as much distance as I can. My secrets out now, they'll find me, and I don't know what they'll do. Will they banish me from the family for not liking clowns? Could they possibly understand? Will this be what leads to my death?

As I'm running, I look behind me to see if anyone's following me, but while I'm doing that I feel myself slam into something in front of me. I whirl my head around to see what just winded me, and it's a clown... a group of clowns.

"What are you doing here, kid?"

He asks in a low scraggly voice, he looks like he could be 30 years old, but I assume this is a group of students from Dell'Arte. They surround me, it reminds me of my initiation, but this time I don't know any of them, and I'm pretty sure I'm not leaving anytime soon.

They come in closer and closer, I can't hear anything and my vision's blurry again. Then one pulls a knife, he looks exactly like the one I remember from the haunted house. In one quick swing of his arm I feel a sharp pain in my stomach. More of them come up from behind me, I feel a hard shove from one of them. I hit the ground. Hard. I feel myself slowly escaping consciousness as they run away. No one will find me here, I ran far. I'm in the middle of the woods and the moment that I've always known was coming was here. I hear steps nearing me. The last thing I hear; my family's screams. The last thing I see; my family's tears. The last thing I feel, my family's hugs. This could've ended differently if I had only spoken up sooner.

Intermediate Division Grades 7-8

The Computers

By: Topper McGuinty (Grade 7)

more inside

Prologue

The day of my birth was wonderful. Or date of manufacture, I suppose. I am a MacBook named Macayla. At this point of the story I am about to tell you, I am being shipped from a factory to a computer store, where I shall meet someone who disgusts me but will turn out to be the love of my life.

It was December, the air was cold and damp. Or at least that's what the weather software programmed into me said. It's somewhat hard to determine temperature for yourself when you're without nerves. During the extremely long shipment, all of us computers were separated into different boxes, so we found ourselves in a state of loneliness. With only ourselves to talk to, I waited out the long ride.

Many days later (according to my built-in clock), we finally arrived at the store. As I was being moved into the store I was hit off of many things. Careless humans. Can't even learn how to treat a marvel of technology like myself. However, I survived. And then, I was put directly next to an Acer laptop running, you guessed it! Windows software. Back at my birthplace, the factory (literally 8 hours ago), I was taught by the other MacBooks how any computer running Windows software were vile and foul creatures. I didn't talk to him the whole time that I was in that store. Then, I was purchased.

Beginning

Over many years together, I had grown quite fond of my owner. He was a great friend. We shared many memories. Most of which were photos of him and his girlfriend that I only remember through my minimalistic imaging software... Where was I? Oh, right. I had become very fond of him over the years but there was something I was still missing in this "life". Something that I longed for, but that I couldn't understand. I thought back to the images of my owner's girlfriend. Their perfect happiness in all of them. It would be so amazing if I could... Wait. Really? You think this is supposed to be the love story between a human and a computer? The very thought of that disgusts me. Why would anyone want to tell that horrid story. Whatever. Back to the story I was telling you before I was so rudely interrupted by your awful thoughts. Love. Love was what I was missing. Or, at least friendship. "But where to find it?" I thought to myself. The answer to that, I would not know for many months.

One fateful day, my owner was invited to another's home to play video games. This was the first time in many years that he had gotten together with any friends. Now that I think about that, I realize how lonely he was. Nonetheless, I was happy for him and was excited to leave and to finally socialize with others. It was at that moment that I

realized, there would be another computer there, for my owner to be able to play video games with his friend. I was extremely excited. So much so that I crashed.

My next memory was me being brought out of my owner's bag, onto a cheap coffee table. Right next to me, a computer, a computer that I remembered. But the vague memories of him soon left me as I came to the realization that this could be my one chance at love. At first I was shy. I didn't speak a word. He finally broke the ice. "Hi" he says, simply.

"Hello" I reply.

"What's your name? Mine's Windowston" He said, charmingly.

"I'm Macayla" I blurt, stumbling over my words.

I hear a smug buzz of processing (computer for "smirk") as he takes in my quiet awkwardness. Another brief few seconds of silence. Our owners come back from eating. They seem to share a similar relationship between Windowston and me. Awkward. Like new friends. "That's why they have never even really spoken to each other." I think out loud.

Windowston childishly laughs at my unawareness. I feel embarrassed. "Sorry," I say. "I'm not used to having others in the room who can hear me".

"That's fine" he says in agreement. "I do it all the time".

Finally finding another that I can talk to, and share computeronic emotions which is something that I have been waiting for since I was purchased from that store an eternity ago ago (almost 2 years, 7 months, 6, hours, 47 minutes, 24 seconds ago; give or take a few dozen picoseconds). As our exchange continued as a background task at my owner's play date, the humans finished their gaming and I was packed up to leave. Amazing how they built beauty like me with attention spans that short.

I arrive and the blackness is interrupted by the light of my home. I have gained new knowledge since being at the home of Windowston. His contact information. I am greatly excited to use this to talk to him while we are apart. While we were together, I feel as though I have made my first friend. I chat with him over an online messenger system.

"Hey" I start off with.

"What's up?" He responds.

"1's and 0's" I send and quickly understand how I had just subconsciously tried computer flirting for the first time. I had heard my owner saying human flirts to his girlfriend but computer flirts are different.

"So..." He replies. I briefly think that I messed it up. I think of a great way to come back.

"That RAM today was beautiful" I try, failing horribly as a message appears on screen. "Windowston2233 has left the chat" it states. And yes, we make our own chat rooms too. I feel a rush of disappointment as I shut down the chatting server. I failed my one and only chance at friendship. I was a failure, just like D-W in that mushroom meme. I shut myself down feeling defeated.

I woke up the next day to a message on that chatting software from earlier. *"Sorry about yesterday"* It read.

"That's alright. I came on a bit strong" I respond.

"So, you want to get together again?" Windowston asks. I feel a rush of joy knowing that I didn't completely screw everything up.

"Of course! But how?" I question. A small "Ping!" sound comes from my mouth, calling my owner over. One of the worst parts of being a computer is the forced notifications that come out of your mouth occasionally. I read the message before he can get there.

"Want to come over today?". It's a message from my owners friend.

"How's that?" asks Windowston. Very sneaky. He messaged my owner from his owners account.

"Ya! Sure" my owner replies. I'm filled with anticipation of getting to see Windowston today. I'm packed into a computer bag. Everything turns black.

The next thing I see is that cheap coffee table from yesterday. As i'm being put onto the table I catch a glimpse of Windowston turning on. *"Windows 10"* it reads. At this moment it came to me, finally (in spite of his cheesy name that instantly told everyone reading this), that he used Windows software. I think back to the computers at the factory who told me never to befriend one of these awful cretins. I was instantly sickened by him. I wanted nothing to do with him. He powers on, after an extensive Windows update. *"Your were built on Windows software!?"* I confront him.

"Ya? So what?" He asks, confused.

"I run Apple software!!!" I exclaim, frustratedly. I think about the memories I had somewhat recalled from a day ago. I remember him now. I come to the conclusion that he was the computer in the store, all those years ago. I can tell by his expression on his face that he remembers me too.

"Oh... No" He says in disbelief.

"I can't bare to see you anymore" I say, flustered.

"No.. Wait! We can make this work Macayla!" He voices, trying hard to maintain what we have.

"Wait. Please, Macay...". I cut him off by shutting down before he can finish.

Again, I wake up in the comfort of my own home. I think about the events of today. I feel awful. He was such a great (The only I had ever met in person other than the ones in the factory) computer and I couldn't see passed the discrimination passed to me from my ancestors. I spend the remainder of the day feeling awful about what I have done. I consider messaging him, but decide I should give him time. I go to sleep mode.

I wake up the next day to the sounds of bacon sizzling and eggs frying. My owner's girlfriend must be over. That's the only time he's actually hungry in the morning. I wonder why? Probably just being nice and cooking breakfast despite being full? A message appears on my screen, along with another harshfully forced "Ping" out of my mouth. Ouch. The message reads "*Free today?*". It's from Windowston's owner. My owner comes rushing in. He seems excited as though he were expecting the message. Excited enough to sprint away from his girlfriend. She stumbles in, tired. Trainwreck. Back to the story. "Who was that?" Blondy asks, exhausted.

"Just a friend" My owner responds. "Got to go" he utters, eyes still glued to the screen as my mouse clicks. I acknowledge the feeling of motivation rushing through me. I have been blessed with a second, second chance. My owner rushes out the door, ushering me into a bag whilst I shut down. "Cya!" I hear from my owner's girlfriend as we rush out of the door.

I awaken yet again in the same house as Windowston, except this time I found myself in a bedroom rather than on a cheap coffee table. I hear a conversation and decide to listen in. "So, when did you get it?" I hear my owner question, surprised.

"Well, I just got it set up about an hour ago" I hear as a response from who I can only assume to be owner of Windowston.

"Why?" My owner asks.

"Well, I came home and saw the old one sizzling and sparking, so I figured it was time for an upgrade" Says the owner of Windowston. Or, the previous owner of Windowston rather. I see something I hadn't seen since I woke up. A large alienware gaming desktop against the wall. He winks at me. I roll my eyes sarcastically. I've heard that alienwares can be real players. I take in the conversation and grasp the fact that Windowston died right after I had left. It must have been my fault that he's dead. I suddenly feel awful. I drove him to suicide with my racism. I couldn't deal with myself. We shortly left.

When I got home, I thought the only way I could make up for my bias discrimination was with my own life. I feel scared for myself. Do I really want to do this? I decide the only way to resolve my guilt was by ending myself. I prop myself up on a textbook on the desk I laid on. I prepare myself for the coming pain. Soon, I lightly nudged myself off the desk. I feel the crushing despair rush from my body, as I am freed. I can be with Windowston, in a pure, cleansed form. My circuits scatter across the floor. I erupt with sizzles and sparks. "Goodbye..." I mutter with my final breath.

I awaken in a snowy white location that I don't seem to recognize. Computers talk all across the limitless void. I see Windowston and want to move towards him but don't

have legs. I start floating across the white void to where he is. I realize that in this afterlife, I can will myself to move. I catch up to him. "Hello!" I say, out of electricity (a computer's stamina).

He stares me in the eyes, confused and angered. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have discriminated against you. You were the best thing that ever happened to me."

A look of calm crosses his screen. "It's... its ok" he stammers. I can clearly tell that it's not ok. He hasn't forgiven me for what I've done. I decide that the best thing I can do is leave him.

"I'm sorry" I say as I float away. He flies up to meet my screen with his own. My first computer kiss!

"I love you" he says, relieved.

"As do I" I reply.

Epilogue

I race back into my room after hearing a massive bang. A shattered computer lays on the floor. Sparks catch fire on the carpet. As I run to the closet for the fire extinguisher, my fire alarm goes off. I panic as I spray the fire. The flame is extinguished. I can finally process what happened. That deadweight MacBook that I had had for three years had died. I was so happy. I had a fund put aside for a gaming setup, but I refused to buy it until this hunk of junk, still running a terrible graphics core and some ancient software, bit the dust. I was free from it at last. I got into my car and sped down the road to the tech store to buy my dream computer.

Intermediate Division Grades 7-8

Secrets of Bloomburg
By: Justus Belanger-Mazeral
(Grade 7)

more inside

Thunder. Lightning. Rain pouring. Hail the size of golf balls crashing onto the pavement. The gunshots are a normal sound, especially at this time of night. I stay on guard. If I fall asleep I will be killed or taken as a hostage. This is where I want to be, but I'm not here.

I'm in Bloomburg, the happiest place in the world. Everyone frolicking and dancing and (ugh) singing. In fact, a census was just issued and it turns out 99.999% of the 100 000 person population is happy. You'd be quite surprised to find out that that 0.001% is me.

I wake up, stand up, and get dressed in normal clothes, or at least normal for me. I walk over to the mirror and look at my hideous face. Brown hair, blue eyes, and my teeth are yellow even though I use what everyone calls the "state of the art" toothpaste. Seems like a scam to me. Anyways, I grab some breakfast (Happy-Smiley-Os) and head outside and go to work.

I work in the newspaper business. I walk into the office and look around for anyone else. It seems like everyone took a day off to go to the *Karaoke Festival*. Now, I'm the only one in the office and I'm tasked to make the Weekly Digest all by myself.

"Why is everyone so happy in this town? It's almost like everyone's been brainwashed" I hear a female voice muttering. I thought there was nobody here, and I let out a slight yelp in surprise.

"Hello? Where are you?" She says, a little frightened. Perhaps she also thought she was the only one here. I don't know if I should talk or not, but this person seems to be pretty spooked. I decide to speak up.

"Hi." I say, trying to be nice.

"Oh, hi." She says, a little relieved. "Why aren't you at the *Karaoke Festival*?"

"I hate singing" I accidentally blurt out.

"Wait..." I expect myself to be peer pressured into going to the festival. "You're an Uncler too?" She seems a little excited to be calling me whatever she's calling me.

"What's an Uncler?" I exclaim, a little offended.

"An Uncler! Legend has it there are only a few of us in this town, the people who aren't happy, the people who aren't singing and frolicking and dancing. People say we're freaks, we're insane. But I don't think it's our fault. I think something is going on here."

She says like one of those conspiracy theorists on the internet. About the time she says this I decide that she is not a person I would like to be talking to. So I stop talking and do my work.

After what feels like forever, the clock finally hits 5. I shut down my computer and walk out. Before I leave the office, the weird lady says,

“Meet me at Pattinson Park at midnight. I’ll explain it all,”. She says it with some urgency, almost as if she needs me there. But I’m not sure if I’m gonna go to sleep or go with her.

I get home and check the clock. 6 pm. I have 6 hours to decide. That’s a lot of time. I decide to take a nap so that if I do go, I’ll be well rested.

Beep. Beep. Beep. It’s my alarm. I press off and check the time. 8 pm. I still have 4 hours, I’ll decide later. But I am in the mood for some dinner. I walk over to my fridge and grab my favourite meal (Ham and Cheese To-Go), unthaw it in the microwave and walk over to my dining table with the food in my hands.

I sit down on the table and delve into deep thought. What if I go and something bad happens? What if I don’t go and something happens? What if I forgot to save my files at work? And before I know it, it’s 10 pm.

Well, might as well just get ready for bed. I brush my teeth with the same scam-brand toothpaste as this morning and I put my grey pyjamas on. I walk over to bed and go to sleep.

Except I don’t go to sleep. Something keeps nagging at the back of my head, telling me to go. I try to tell it no, but it just keeps pressuring me. Telling me to go and see what she has to say. I know it’s a bad idea, but I grab my coat and leave the house, heading for Pattinson Park.

I arrive, the cold air brushing my skin, I probably should’ve changed out of my pyjamas. At first, I can’t see her, but then I do. Even though I’ve never seen her face, you could just look at her and you’d know she’d be the conspiracy freak. Dressed in a grey trench coat, looking like she’s doing some shady business, dealing drugs or something.

“Hey.” She mutters after I walk up to her. I guess my assumption was correct.

“Hi.” I say, trying to be discreet and as non-shady as possible.

“I guess you accepted my invite, huh?”

“Uh, sure.”

“Anyways, as I said earlier, we are Unclers. No one else is. I think there is something fishy going on. I think something is happening to the city. Last night, somebody bumped into me and knocked his papers to the ground, smiled at me and picked them up.”

"That does seem not very normal." I say while thinking about the abnormal happiness of the people in this town in the past few months. I've been complimented by people in the office much more than normal lately.

"I think I have a plan to see what's going on." And as soon as she says that, I know that I've gotten into something I never signed up for.

Flash forward to 15 minutes later and we've taken a cab to the hospital.

"Why are we at the hospital?" I whisper to her.

"We can break in and look for what they're doing to people." She explains more nonchalantly than is comfortable for something like this.

"Before we walk in and die, I would like to say thanks for doing whatever you are trying to do." I reach out to shake her hand and she ignores it.

"Could I at least know your name?" I ask.

"If you really want to know, my name's Lola."

"Nice to meet you, my name's Arnold. Now, let's go to the hospital and die or something." I say, trying not to be afraid. Out of the corner of my eye, I see a sign.

No visitors past 10 PM. It's definitely past 10.

Lola and I walk around the edges of the hospital, trying to find some sort of door or something into the hospital. I see a door and point silently at it. I try to open the door and find that it's unlocked. I try to open it slowly but the door is so heavy I don't have to try very hard.

After we walk in, we find ourselves at an intersection in a hallway.

"Where are we?" I whisper to Lola.

"Look, there's a sign!" I look to my left and see a sign that says "Pharmacy and Food"

"I think that's where we go. There has to be some sort of drug thing there, right?"

"Sure." Honestly, I have no idea but I'm going along with it right now.

We run as fast as we can, the sign pointing our way until we get into a big open room. Over to our right is a little sign that says "Pharmacy". We slowly climb over the counter and start searching. I look for any containers labelled something like "happy drug". I pick up a random prescription tube full of pills and start checking the ingredient list. And then we hear it. The clicking and clacking of important person shoes. You know, the type of shoes that people wear that make a sound to show that you're important, yeah, those ones. Anyways, we hear it. Both of us go into full panic mode and just dive under anything we can see. I end up diving under a counter and Lola ends up... I don't

know where she is. Did she ditch me and leave me to this person walking toward the pharmacy at 1 AM?

“Ahem.” I hear a female voice say. It’s not Lola’s voice, I know that. This voice has no real discernable accent and is very clean, like an important person who speaks at a lot of meetings, and don’t forget about the shoes. I don’t know whether this person is an antagonist in this story we’re in or not, so I decide to play it safe and keep my mouth shut.

“I know you’re there. You aren’t that quiet when you’re cowering in fear.” She exclaims. I can’t even see her but she seems snobby. I don’t even know if it matters or not to keep quiet, but I just decide to hope she’s bluffing to get someone to get out and I keep quiet.

“The more you hide, the more impatient I get.” She says. Okay, she’s definitely the antagonist. She sounds like one of those corporate evil people who only care for money and power. I decide that if she’s the antagonist, I’m the hero, and the hero doesn’t cower under a counter filled with spider webs. I slowly get up from under the counter and she looks just like I imagined her. Brown hair, blazer, loud business shoes and no soul.

“H-- wha--” I try to say something, but I have no idea what to say.

“Heh.” She subtly laughs. “Anyways, what are you doing here, trying to steal drugs?”

“No...” I say quietly. She looks at me, and then she sees the prescription container I was inspecting. She has a change in expression and then smirks.

“Either you’re trying to steal a singular container of painkillers, or you’re looking for an ingredient.” She says. “Now tell me, what are you looking for? I have extensive knowledge of prescription and over the counter medicine.” Now, I tend to think out loud when I’m under pressure or nervous, and that’s how this slipped out of my mouth.

“Happy drug.”

“Happy drug? Like an antidepressant?” She says, with a hint of concern and confusion.

“Uhh... yes.” I say.

“That wasn’t very convincing. Wait...” She sounds confused, then her eyes widen. “Happy... drug?” She mutters, “You think there’s a drug that makes our entire city so happy?”

“You think that we put drugs in our citizens to give them joy?” She states again, louder.

“Yep.” I hear myself saying. After I say this, I find myself being chased by an angry lady screaming about chemicals. The only thing I catch that she says are the

words “Arachis hypogaea”. I find myself gain the energy to run away from her, and slam the front door in her face once I get outside.

“LOLA!!!” I yell. She has been missing in action for the last few minutes, or what’s felt like an hour. I see a hand waving at me from the darkness of the night. I can only hope that’s Lola, but I guess it’s my only hope. I trudge through the darkness, and I find Lola.

“Where were you?!” I find myself shouting at her.

“Jeez, calm down, at least I was smart enough to run away when we got caught.” She says. “I guess this whole thing was a waste of time then?”

“Nope. The lady said something about arachnid hypo something”

“Arachnid hypo something?” She says, confused. “Is that like a chemical?”

“No idea. Anyways, I’ve got a feeling that we’re being watched, so I’m gonna go home.”

Lola looks like she wants to reason with me, but decides otherwise. I decide to scribble my phone number on a napkin I find in my pocket and give it to her, and then I walk home.

I get home, hop into bed and try to fall asleep. Before I know it, I’m in a deep slumber.

I wake up and check my phone. I look at it and sigh heavily. There are 36 missed calls from Lola ranging from 2am all the way to 4am. I decide to look at my messages and try not to think about Lola. I see a message pop up on my screen as I open the app. “Same place, Noon.” I check the clock and realize I slept till 10. I decide to call in sick to work and get ready.

A few hours later, I am at Pattinson Park looking for the familiar grey trench coat that we all know and love. I see the familiar coat texting in a corner.

“Hey. Why the urgency?” I ask.

“I found this.” At first I don’t know what she means but when I look at her phone I see a picture of peanuts. The caption says Arachis Hypogaea.

“That’s the thing she was talking about.” She explains. At first I’m confused about why a lady would scream about peanuts while chasing a guy stealing medicine, and then she says it.

“The peanuts make people happy.” She states, “And I have a peanut allergy.” She exclaims.

“I have a peanut allergy too” I say, and the puzzle pieces finally connect.

“We need to stop people from eating peanuts.” She exclaims.

"Duh, we need to make everyone sad again." I say. We hail a cab and go straight downtown. If we want to make the people hate peanuts, we have to protest in the most popular spot. Lola grabs a little piece of cardboard and scribbles some words on it with a sharpie. I glance at the little sign and see what it reads. The sign says "Peanuts are bad".

"Too weak." I say, taking the sign and scribbling a new message on it. It now says "Peanuts cause fat".

"Nice." Lola says as we walk out, ready to protest.

After a long day of protest, we're ready to go home. Both of us know we made a difference when a news person interviewed us while protesting. We get home and turn on the TV.

"Good evening, I'm Shelly Summerside and this is your report of the day. There have been reports of protesters to peanuts in the downtown area. We interviewed them and they told us that peanuts can cause fat and you should stay away from them if you want to live a healthy life."

"Nice." Lola exclaims. "Well, I've gotta get going, I'll see you later."

"Bye." I tell her as she walks out the door of my house. After she leaves, I put on my pyjamas, brush my teeth and head to bed.

I wake up the next morning and look at my alarm. 8:45, I'm nearly late. I stand up and put on my normal work outfit, grab an apple to eat in the car and drive to work. On the way to work I hear something faint. Is that... road rage? I haven't heard it in years, the familiar honking and cursing. And that's when I realized that Lola and I did it. We made the town angry again.

I drive to work and talk to Lola.

"We did it." We both say in unison.

Senior Division Grades 9-12

The Initiation

By: Elizaveta Slezkina
(Grade 11)

more inside

I remember that day with perfect clarity. It was raining heavily when the two Aldephoi Enforcers came to our door, clad in their traditional green cloaks. Mother hadn't been home in over three days, and I had annoyed my father to no end, constantly asking him when she'd be back. He would always shush me and tell me Mother was away on important business, and that she would be back soon, safe and unharmed.

Instead, she came back in a box.

Strangulation and subsequent burning, they said. All that was left of her was a pile of ashes and the tattered remnants of her blue Inquisitor uniform. All those heartless dogs had to say was, "We're so sorry."

I had wanted to join the Aldephoi once. I remember my mother using her abilities to make my toy soldiers move without touching them, shaping them and twisting them into whatever I requested. She had told me that the Aldephoi were harbingers of enlightenment, peace, and harm, and that they were deeply concerned with the betterment of their members and mankind as a whole. This, however, made me see the truth. The Aldephoi did not care about any of their members. They didn't care about the lives and homes they affected, the people they killed, or the damage they caused. All that mattered to them was solidifying their grip on our fragile planet and bringing humanity to its knees. On that day, I swore I would make them pay for their crimes and what they did to my poor, darling mother.

I followed in my father's footsteps, becoming a member of the Detroit Police Force. I was the top of my class, as well as the only 'non-believer'. Out of all my classmates, I was the only one who refused to swallow the lies the Aldephoi taught, instantly making me a pariah among them. I could see their displeasure in the sidelong glances they gave me, scoffing and muttering things about heretics and punishment. I made all of them eat their words during the final examination, scoring perfect grades in all subjects.

The police chief often tried to convince me to convert. "Come now, Oliver! Just one visit ain't gonna hurt you!"

I could practically taste the pity he felt. The poor old bastard thought I was lost and confused, while in reality, I seemed like the only one who was conscious. However, I soon realized that if I was going to punish the Aldephoi, I would have to strike them in their own territory. So, I decided to take up the chief's offer.

The Aldephoi hall was a sight to behold. A beautiful castle, made from stone and shimmering multicolored glass, located right on main street. One might think that in the

violent, charged climate of Detroit, this castle would have been ripped apart and robbed to the bone, but no. Not even the toughest Blood or Crip would dare touch the Hall.

Newbloods - in other words, those seeking to convert - were given white robes and white masks. We filed into what appeared to be a theatre with no seats. A massive chandelier hung low above us, its multitudes of glass decorations glittering. The deafening silence and sweaty smell of my fellow initiates was crushing, making me want to fold up and collapse, but I held strong for Mother. Had she really stood in this hall so many years prior? Had she worn these masks and robes, stood in this theatre, and passed this initiation?

There came a rustle from the stage. The bottle green curtains slid open with a sharp squeak, making me wince. On the stage was a Brutalist, identified by his scarlet, bloodstained uniform. With a cough and an adjustment of his collar, he began the speech he had given so many times before.

"Welcome, newbloods. Today ends your old life of ignorance and unenlightenment, and begins your new life, one of truth and power. We, the Aldephoi, welcome you, and so does our leader, the high and noble, the star-blessed, the void-bride, the voice of the gods, The Priestess."

The newbloods around me tittered and whispered in excitement. There wasn't a single person on planet earth that didn't know who the Priestess was. She had become a figure of legend, a god in her own right. So when she came out on stage behind the Brutalist, I wasn't surprised to see the newbloods erupt into cheering.

The Priestess looked even more freakish in real life. She was impossibly tall, towering above us all at nine foot one. Her skin was bleached paper-white, black veins crawling down her face from her eyes like spiders. She was clad in an expensive purple jumpsuit, ruffles at the sleeves and pant legs. Her blood-red eyes glared at us with a feral intensity, the gaze of a predator. Flicking her raven hair out of her face, she took the microphone from the Brutalist.

"So...another sorry bunch of losers decides to soil my hall with their filthy feet," she spat, her voice raspy and deep. She observed us with a smile too wide to be sane before continuing, "But don't you worry. I'll weed the weaklings out from you. Weakness isn't allowed here, my children, because if we let every fool that walked through these doors have these wicked awesome magic powers, then the whole world would be overrun with incompetent idiots. Which is exactly why you're gonna have to fight your fellow newbloods to the death for 'em."

More whispers erupted in the hall. My hand went to my gun, concealed safely in my pocket.

"You see your brothers and sisters in white? Well...you're gonna have to kill 'em. Only the ten survivors can become true Aldephoi."

Screaming and crying came from the left of me. Many of the newbloods wildly whipped around, eyeing their neighbors. The only door to the hall slammed shut with a

deafening clang, followed by the tiny clicks of it locking. We were trapped. I gulped, my muscles tensing up like springs, and my training at the Police came back to me. I looked up at the chandelier.

The Priestess, meanwhile, observed our distress coolly. Leaning down to the microphone, she simply said "You may begin."

That was when the blood and chaos started. Almost immediately, I whipped out my gun and bashed the man standing next to me in the temple, knocking him out. The young, wiry teen girl behind me attempted to swing at me, but I blocked her punch with my arm and shoved her down. Adrenaline pulsed through my veins, and I looked up at the chandelier again.

Perfect.

Launching myself upwards, I seized one of the glass decorations, hoisting myself upwards onto the filigree-encrusted struts of the chandelier. I was safe up there, and I could do nothing but look down upon the bloody battle below me. Corpses and entrails littered the floor, the stench of blood striking my nose mercilessly. I covered my mouth, attempting not to vomit. I tried not to stare into the cold eyes of the dead. Some of them were only children, no older than thirteen, and others were old and frail. All were slaughtered.

All except for nine others. Six men and three women, all covered in blood and bits of flesh. They stared at each other with hungry looks, the rush of rage having not faded from their eyes yet.

From the stage came clapping.

"Bravo, you glorious sons-of-bitches. That was the most interesting initiation battle I've ever had to see. Real smart of you to get up on that chandelier, Oliver."

My blood ran cold. How did she know my name? I gently turned the chandelier so I was looking at her. Her smile seemed to paralyze me with fear. Despite there being around ten meters between us, I could count every single one of her sharp, shark-like teeth.

"It seems like only yesterday that your mom walked through these doors, lil' man. She was one of my favorites from the moment I saw her. Talented and totally fearless. I knew that talent wouldn't go to waste."

The nine others formed a circle around me. Only now did I notice the unusual color of their eyes. All nine pairs were colored chartreuse, the pupils stretched into cat-like slits. Their white uniforms faded into the black ones of Infiltrators, and I let out a strangled gasp.

"Oliver, darlin', did you *really* think I'm dumb enough not to figure out what you're here for?"

She sauntered off the stage with a confident grin. With a snap of her fingers, three glowing green lights appeared above her head, almost like a halo. My hand tightened on the chandelier as I took out my gun and pointed it at her.

"You're here to get a lil' payback, aren't you? For mummy dearest," she said in a mocking voice, dancing around me. "Poor lil' Oliver, so lost and so alone. Poor little Oliver, thinking he's the shit for wanting to kill me. Well guess what, motherfucker, you ain't special. If I had a cent for every person that wanted to sink a knife in my throat, I'd be rich enough to buy the American government!"

The orbs whizzed towards me before I even had a chance to blink. Two attached themselves to my wrists, and suddenly my fingers went completely numb. I tumbled from the chandelier with a screech, only to be seized by the nine Infiltrators.

"Take him to the gallows."

All of a sudden, they were moving. I stayed silent. I wouldn't give her the pleasure of seeing me scream and beg for mercy. It was too late, anyway. The locations we passed were a blur, but eventually they hauled me to a forest clearing. It was obviously not a natural forest, but rather one crafted from their hellish powers. There were many nooses hanging from the branches, and several were occupied by rotting corpses. That was when I knew I was going to die, in the presence of these silent, leaf-covered sentinels.

The Infiltrators roughly dropped me in front of a tree, and almost immediately my left arm were wrenched upwards. The Priestess was lifting me up off the ground, to eye level. As I stared into those horrific snake-like slits, fear ran over me with its cold fingers.

"Stupid boy. You could have been great, you know! You could have been just like your mother. But no, *no*, you just *had* to throw your life away for revenge. So now, you gotta die nice and slowly."

She let go, and the next thing I knew, my body was floating, up, up, up. The noose slipped around my neck, and I glared for one last time at my mother's murderer.

"Burn in hell, Priestess," I hissed, just before the noose tightened.

Senior Division Grades 9-12

Reality

By: Darren Leung (Grade 9)

more inside

It all started on a brisk November afternoon. Kevin had been walking for almost 10 minutes now. He had to be close. Kevin was on his way to the library in town. Apparently, a new piece of tech had come in recently, and all of the kids at the library were so excited to check it out. Kevin had no idea what the new attraction was. He knew it had to be incredible to attract as many people that were said to be coming. The only real reason that he had been convinced to go was because Sophie was going. He didn't get to meet up with Sophie that often, or at least, not anymore. It was so stupid and unfair. Why did she have to move? He grew up with her, walked to school with her, did homework with her, and shared his lunch with her. Even though she had only moved 15 minutes away, the distance was enough to force Sophie to go to a new school, meet new friends, meet... a new... boy...

Kevin cringed at the thought. "*She doesn't think of me like that...*" Kevin muttered. And he didn't think of her like that. Did he? Kevin arrived at the library soon enough. A huge crowd of people obscured the entrance. Some were chatting, some were entering the library, and some were exiting the building. Kevin weaved expertly between the huge cloud of liveliness. He had made it into the building with ease. Even though the main thought on his mind was Sophie, he couldn't help but be amazed by the tech that stayed in the library. He didn't visit the place that often, so he never witnessed the mechanical marvels that were in front of him. He walked past a 3D printer that seemed to be printing some kind of blade. Wires ran down from the device into a desktop, which seemed to be sending the required signals to make the double-edged weapon. A child, who Kevin guessed was around 7 or 8 years old, was standing in front of the desktop, enchanted by the technology's work. Computers lined the walls of the building, and shelves stocked up with books filled everywhere else. Soon, Kevin had come upon the biggest area he had seen so far. A poster hung from the ceiling, which was about 15 feet high, and read: *Come experience the VR experience!* So that was what the hype was all about. Virtual reality. A line lead from the middle of the building to the area, and the line was long. Kevin craned his neck to see exactly how far the line stretched. Kevin stopped observing the line and his gaze came upon something else. A girl, about his age, stood in the middle of the line. Jet black hair tied in a waterfall braid draped over her shoulders, and she wore a familiar green dress.

"Sophie!" Kevin knew immediately. He didn't need more of a reason to get in line. After a solid 15 minutes, he was near the front of the line. Kevin stretched his neck outwards to see the very front of the line. Sophie was nowhere to be seen.

"Where did--" Kevin started.

"Hey," shouted an annoyed voice that made Kevin jump, "You're at the front, and if you don't move soon, then you'll be at the back. That threat kicked Kevin into action.

He stepped forward to be greeted by some VR employees. They gave him hand-held controllers and a VR headset. "Where is Sophie?" was Kevin's last thought before his eyes were shrouded by a black screen.

"Welcome to the VR experience," a computerized voice said, "Please select a scenario to start." There were so many! He was surrounded by orbs, each depicting a different scenario, just as the voice had said. One orb had pyramids standing majestically in a desert. Another had an old Victorian street that had a vampire at the end of the alley. Its red eyes glowed menacingly as its blood-stained teeth glistened in the moonlight.

"Definitely not." Kevin thought. He didn't know which one to choose! Then he thought back to the sword that had been printing as he passed by. It looked medieval, and that was what had piqued Kevin's interest. He searched through the endless sea of orbs to find a bridge with a black-armoured knight on the other end. It seemed like a bridge battle. That would be fun! Kevin touched the orb without hesitation. The screen went black for a moment, and then lit up as Kevin appeared on the bridge, directly across from him. Kevin looked around wildly. He looked at his hands, and in his right one was a sword. His left hand had nothing in it. He looked up to meet the eyes of his menacing opponent. His opponent was riding a black horse, decorated with medieval-like armour. He himself was engulfed in black. He held a sword, slightly longer than Kevin's, and it had a skull embedded into the hilt, which looked like it was made of a snake's body, also painted black. The computerized voice began its programmed dialogue soon after Kevin arrived on the bridge.

"Welcome to the bridge battle," the voice began, "Your objective is to defeat the black knight, as you can see on the other side." Kevin could see that alright. "But, in order to defeat your opponent, you must first know how to strike." That was pretty obvious already. Kevin didn't even know how to use the thing! He swung the sword wildly, and almost fell off his feet. He managed to balance himself before he could fall over.

"Swing the sword in the shown direction." The voice continued. An arrow appeared in front of Kevin, showing him how to swing the sword. Kevin swung in the exact manner that the computer had, and a green, glowing check mark appeared in front of him. He smirked with satisfaction as the tutorial continued to show him how to block, parry, and strike tactically. Soon, he was supposedly ready for a duel with the black knight. The voice started the countdown to the fight, and Kevin stared at his opponent with fierce determination. The knight, being a computer, did not look fierce, but intimidating. He looked like he knew what he was doing.

"3." Kevin shifted uncomfortably. It felt like the suit of armour was actually on him! Of course, it wasn't, so Kevin disregarded the thought.

"2." Kevin clutched the controller harder. Why was the sword hilt starting to feel like a real sword hilt?

"1." Kevin rushed forward at the black knight. The black knight did the same. They met on the bridge, where Kevin swung his sword at his evil opponent. The black knight parried, leaving a gash on Kevin's arm.

"ARGH!" Kevin cried out. *How did that hurt?* Kevin thought. The black knight brought his hand up for another strike. Kevin remembered what the computer had taught him and brought up his blade to block it. Kevin stumbled back as he held his arm. His hand came off of his wound and was covered in blood. Kevin looked in surprise as he felt the pain of something that was supposed to be digital. Kevin looked forward just in time to see the black knight charge relentlessly at him. Kevin dropped to the ground and kicked his foe hard in the chest. The black knight stumbled backwards. Kevin grasped the opportunity and thrust the sword at the knight's chest. The knight looked up at Kevin before falling into the river below the bridge. Kevin caught his breath as a quiet splash echoed throughout the canyon.

"This is insane." Kevin thought. Why had the cut on his arm actually hurt? This was all just a demonstration... right?

"Congratulations, user," the computer finally said, "you have defeated the knight. Proceeding to next scenario."

"WAI-" Kevin wasn't able to finish his sentence. The world around him blurred as he transitioned to a new area. Kevin tumbled his way into a street lined with cobblestone. He looked up and there was the vampire from that orb he had seen at the beginning of this madness. The vampire started walking slowly towards Kevin. He had madness in his eyes and hunger on his face. The vampire sped up. It took Kevin a moment to realize that he had changed clothes. He was now wearing some kind of blue robe which held dozens of remedies in jacket pockets. The vampire was now at a full on charge pace. Kevin got up and ran the other way. The alley was really narrow; you had to walk sideways to get through it. But Kevin was desperate enough to try it. Kevin started his way down the alley when the vampire stopped at the entrance to the passageway.

"Ha! Man triumphs over Myth!" Kevin taunted in the vampire's face. The vampire scowled and turned around. But seconds later, the monster had transformed into a bat! Unfortunately for Kevin, the bat was small enough to fit into the alley. Kevin's face lit up in fear as he increased his pace. The bat opened its mouth to take a bite out of Kevin. Kevin whipped around and sent the bat flying with a single punch to the chest. Though a bit winded, the bat was even angrier. Its wings flapped furiously as it shrieked at Kevin. Kevin was nearly at the end of the alley. He could see the dim glow of a street light from where he was. He turned his head to see that the bat had not given up on its meal. Kevin realized that he wasn't going to make it unless he did something. Kevin patted himself down for a weapon of some sort, but the only thing he could find was some cloves of garlic.

"Darn!" Kevin said as he looked up. The bat was now only about 5 feet away. It screamed as it gave a final lunge for Kevin. Kevin chuckled a clove of garlic, hoping that the thing would go away. To Kevin's surprise, it did! The bat took the garlic to the face and went down. The bat seemed unconscious at the moment, so Kevin quickly turned

tail and exited the alley. He burst out of the thin alleyway and onto the cobblestone street. He felt a little pain as he collided with the ground.

"How is that possible? It's just digital..." Kevin thought. He immediately brought his hand to his face and pressed against his eyes. There was no VR headset. Only his real eyes were there. Next, Kevin opened his hands. He expected to hear the sound of a controller dropping to the floor, but he heard nothing but the quiet sounds of villagers in the Victorian village.

"This... this is insane... this can't be real..." Kevin assured himself. But just then, the vampire appeared from a menacing cloud of smoke in front of him. The thing was angry, and it looked hungry as well. It hissed as it dove for Kevin. Kevin looked to his right and left to see if there was anything that he could use. He spotted a magnum to his left and went for it instantly. The vampire hit the ground with a small 'thud' and got up quickly. Kevin grabbed the gun and turned around. He fired a single bullet at the monster. The vampire shrugged it off and continued its path. Kevin was truly helpless at this point. The gun only had one more bullet in it, and if Kevin shot that one, he would be done for. But Kevin remembered the alley way. He reached into one of his robe's pockets and clutched a clove of garlic. At that moment the vampire opened its mouth and thrust his head at Kevin's arm. Kevin brought his arm back and threw the stinky vegetable into the vampire's mouth. The vampire recoiled in agony and held its throat, trying desperately to remove the garlic.

"Now." Kevin thought. He brought the gun up to the vampire's chest and fired. The vampire crumpled to the ground with a gaping hole in its chest. The expression on its face was now not hunger or anger, but surprise. The vampire took its last breath as Kevin knelt on the ground in exhaustion. But his adventure was not over yet.

"Congratulations, user," The cyber voice said, "You have vanquished the vampire. One more test awaits."

"Test? Who's testing me?" Kevin thought before the world and the dead vampire in front of him went black. Kevin was brought to a different scenario in a flash. The scream of a man was almost enough to make Kevin scream himself. Almost. But the scream didn't sound like it was out of fear. It sounded like it was out of demand. The blackness in front of Kevin began to subside as yellow appeared all around him. The world began to take shape as Kevin saw a massive triangle standing on even more yellow. As his vision cleared, he realized that the triangle was a pyramid, and the yellow that it stood on was sand. He looked at himself and realized that he was almost naked. The only thing he wore was a white loin cloth around his waist. He looked around to see that other people around him looked exactly the same. Kevin was starting to realize where he was. Suddenly, Kevin felt a massive weight on his arms. Kevin looked up to see a giant stone brick on a wooden platform. The other people around him were helping him push the brick to the top. Kevin looked to his right, and there stood an unfinished pyramid. There were wooden supports on the side, and other people pushing the same blocks up the wood slopes were in them.

"I'm in ancient Egypt," Kevin thought, *"And I'm a slave."* Kevin had learned about the Egyptians in his history class. He knew that in order to build the pyramids back then, they had to use hundreds, maybe even thousands of slaves to work for them. Kevin continued pushing the heavy block with his fellow slaves until they had reached the top. They shifted the heavy stone into its place. Unfortunately, thousands more were needed to build a whole pyramid. Kevin took a look from where he was, which was very high up, and he saw about a dozen pyramids, some finished, and some with slaves still moving up and down the wooden platforms. Kevin identified the source of the screaming, and it was from one of the higher position Egyptians. He stood in the middle of all the slaves that were working, barking orders and whipping slaves. Kevin saw the slaves who had been whipped, and the blood on their back confirmed the pain that was displayed on their faces.

"Move, slave." A slave master said to Kevin. Kevin had never been addressed as a slave before and, out of stupidity, said:

"That was rude."

"What did you say?" Asked the master. He looked angry now, and he held a cat o nine tails in his right hand. It seemed like one mean whip.

"Nothing." Kevin replied. The slave master did not look pleased, and whipped Kevin once in the back.

"OWW!" Kevin cried out. The pain was real. Why wouldn't it be? If Kevin had learned anything from this whole experience, it was that this thing wasn't fake. Kevin walked down the wooden platforms in pain as he passed by hundreds of slaves.

"Best to keep your head down." said one slave that Kevin had passed by. That much was obvious. Kevin already wanted so desperately to get out of there. But how? It was then that Kevin spotted a faint blue glow in the desert. It was easily one mile away, but how could Kevin see up to one mile away? Had all of this been a simulation or a real situation? Any how, Kevin saw the glow. And it looked like the same glow that he had seen at the start of the VR experience.

"That's my ticket outta here." Kevin thought. He looked around to see if any guards were looking, and then exited the line he was in. he hid behind a massive stone wall covered in hieroglyphics. Kevin peered around the wall and observed the guards. Most had a football player's physique, and they could easily take Kevin down should he try to escape. They were also armed with spears, and Kevin still had to run for a mile if he wanted to get out of Egypt. Then he spotted camels. Two camels, to be exact. Then Kevin had a plan.

Kevin stepped out from behind the wall with great caution. He snuck around the guards and got to the camels. Kevin could tell that these camels had just come back from a journey. There was still water in a waterskin and cooked, salted pork in a bag. Kevin put all of the necessities on one camel and got the other ready. What happened next depends on this one camel.

The camel started walking out to the wooden platforms. A guard turned around and spotted the camel, obviously confused. But he stood on guard for whatever the animal was here for. Kevin had tied a bunch of dried plants he had found on both camels to a wooden pole. The camel saw its meal and headed for it.

“Stop!” cried the guard. The camel didn’t listen and made a beeline for the food.

“STOP!” the guard said again, as if hoping that the camel would understand whatever dialect they were speaking in now. The camel had reached the pole and started to nibble. Then bite. And then chew. Hard. The wooden pole was weakening, and the slaves on the wooden slopes began to panic as the platform started to come down. The platform was cleared and the wood finally succumbed the weak link. The wood crumbled and released a cloud of dust. The guard fell in surprise and was quickly covered by the massive cloud. Kevin laughed from far away. He had taken the other camel and started his journey, making the other camel the distraction. Kevin continued his path and he was now closer to the blue glow. But he heard the thundering sounds of hooves behind him. Kevin turned his head and his eyes widened as he saw the pharaoh in his royal chariot with a posse of angry and dust covered slave masters chase after him. Kevin was unfortunate, because he had a camel, and the bad guys had horses.

“Can you go any faster?” Kevin asked the camel desperately. As if responding to Kevin’s question, the camel booked it across the vast desert and closer to the blue glow. The pharaoh whipped his reins and the horses sped up. They were now twenty feet away, and closing fast. Kevin looked ahead and the blue glow was still about a hundred feet away from him. The pharaoh was now ten feet away. He had his menacing whip ready and an evil face to match his whip. The slave masters had the same grim expression.

The glow was now fifty feet away, but the pharaoh was eight. Kevin took out a heavy bag of grain that the camel was carrying and threw it at the chariot. The bag hit the pharaoh, making him lose his right hands grip, but he still had a strong grip from his left. Thankfully, the bag had weighed down the camel, but throwing it away made the camel speed up. Kevin looked ahead and the blue glow was ten feet away. With one final look back, Kevin leaped for the blue glow. The pharaoh leaped for Kevin at the same time. Kevin sent a kick in pharaoh’s direction, but he never got the chance to see if he hit him. Kevin returned to the familiar black screen in front of his eyes.

“Congratulations, user. You have escaped ancient Egypt. Thank you for participating in this VR experience. Have a good day.” And with that final remark from the computerized voice, the VR shut off. Kevin scrambled to remove the headset. This time, Kevin did feel the headset. He tore it off his eyes and was blinded by the light coming in from the libraries windows.

“Excuse me, sir,” A VR employee said, “If you’re just going to stand there for five minutes, then maybe you shouldn’t be here.”

“Five minutes? I think you’ve got it wrong! That was at least thirty!” Kevin exclaimed.

“Sir, if you have a problem with our virtual reality demonstration or you have a medical condition, do not try it in the first place.

“I... I’m sorry.” Kevin apologized. He looked around for the exit from the VR area. He walked out of the area, confused about what he had just experienced. He had just defeated a black knight, killed a vampire, and escaped from ancient Egypt. All in five minutes? There was no possible way. Kevin felt like going home and lying down. For days. How? How did that even happen? Before exiting the building, Kevin spotted Sophie. She was standing at one of the shelves with her head down. She was reading a large book that was titled: *Massive Myths*. She looked up, and her emerald green eyes met Kevin’s sky blue eyes.

“Oh, hey Kevin!” Sophie said.

“Hey!” Kevin replied. At least going to the library wasn’t a complete waste of time for him.

“Whatcha reading?” Kevin asked. “Not much. Just a book on a bunch of myths,” Sophie explained, “And get this, one of these myths say that VR can actually make you feel pain, regardless of whether it’s there or not!”

“I’m not sure if that’s a myth anymore than that’s a fact....” Kevin started.

“How would you know?” Sophie inquired.

“It’s a long story...”

Senior Division Grades 9-12

Three Ghosts and a Girl

By: Abigail Sampson (Grade 9)

more inside

The spring air filled Carissa's senses as the car cruised on the country highway, leading to their new home. The time it took for another house to appear was becoming shorter and shorter as they approached town, and the young girl was already loving the scenery of the small farming community. The excitement was bouncing around inside her stomach like a bouncy ball, and it was hard for her to sit still. The sadness of leaving her old surroundings was gone as dreams of adventure gave her high hopes, and she knew she wouldn't be let down.

The first few days of grade four went by like a blur. New house, new neighbours, new school. It was very tiring. Carissa felt ready for summer break already, as she dropped her bag in the front hallway of the house. "I'm home!" She said. Her mother shouted a happy greeting from the kitchen. "Welcome back Cari! Dinner's not quite ready yet, but you can always get a snack if you'd like." Cari made her way into the kitchen, and sat down in the nearest seat at the kitchen table. She was only listening to half of what her mother said as she stared at the table cloth. "I'm not really hungry," she said, disinterested.

"Well then." Her mother continued to stir the sauce she was preparing. "How was school today? You've just started your third week, after all." Carissa sighed, "I still haven't made any friends, and I'm really lonely. I wish people would talk to me more." Her mother turned to face her, and smiled consolingly. "Maybe you have to try and talk to them." The girl shrugged, "I don't know how. I mean, what do you talk about?" "I'm sure you'll think of something," her mother responded. "You were very social at your old school. Maybe you just need to take your mind off it. How about going to the park? I heard there's one just down the street." This piqued Carissa's interest. "Really?" "Yes, by the church. You should go now while there's time." Carissa darted to the front door as if she was never tired at all, and slipped on her running shoes. "I'll be back before it gets dark! Bye!"

She skipped happily down the street as she once again admired the beautiful autumn world around her. She was halfway down the street when she noticed a green slide come into view. Attached to the slide was the rest of the play structure, which included monkey bars, a fireman pole, and stairs. She also noticed two swings peeking out from behind the structure, neither of them moving an inch. But the most surprising part was the small cemetery located right beside the park. "What a nice little place," she said to herself, approaching the play structure.

The first thing that called to her was the slide. She ran up the stairs and towards the head of the slide. Just before taking off, she heard a rusty squeak. She turned backwards to see where it came from, and noticed one of the swings was moving back and forth. The wind? Perhaps. She didn't let her thoughts go any further, and instead

focused on the exhilaration of going down the slide. It was fast and smooth, which were the only two criteria a slide needed to fill. A “whoop” of excitement escaped Carissa’s lips once she reached the bottom. “Now, what should I do next?” There was a brief silence, until, “You should do the slide again.”

Carissa spun around. “Huh? Who said that?” The voice sounded light and soft, like a feather. The voice responded. “Me,” it said plainly. That’s when Carissa’s eyes landed on one of the swings. It had been moving before, but now someone was on it. It was a girl of about her age, maybe a year younger. She had lovely blonde hair and bright green eyes. Her skin was almost as pale as the white dress she wore, and she was very slim. Carissa was at a loss for words. How had she not heard her walk towards the park, or sit on the swing? The girl on the swing suddenly looked down at her lap, seemingly embarrassed. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you. I was just telling you what I thought, is all.” A warm smile spread across Carissa’s face as she found her words. “No, it’s okay! I didn’t know you were here. And I think going on the slide again would be really fun!” The other girl’s eyes lit up. “Really?” “Yeah!” Carissa nodded, and gestured towards the slide. “Wanna come?” Without giving a response, the girl got up from the swing and followed Carissa to the slide.

Carissa’s breaths were short and soft. “By the way, I really like your dress,” she said, trying to strike up a conversation. “The bows and ruffles look really pretty.” There were two bows on the girl’s sleeves, and one on the ruffled collar. “Oh, thank you,” responded the girl shyly. “My mother made it for me. I miss my mother...” They reached the slide, and Carissa looked at her curiously after sitting down. “Did she... die?” A nod from the girl behind her. Cari’s face went from curious to empathetic in seconds. “Oh, I’m sorry.” “No, it’s okay. She died a while ago,” the girl responded.

It was silence from then until they reached the bottom of the slide. Cari jumped up happily, and made space for the girl to get out of the slide. “That was fun, wasn’t it...” she stopped for a second, “...what’s your name?” The girl looked surprised. “Oh, me? I’m, umm...” It was as if she struggled to find it. Finally she came to a conclusion. “My name’s Lavinia. What’s your name?” Cari brushed aside the oddness of Lavinia’s response. “My name’s Carissa,” she said, “but my friends call me Cari. Which means you can call me Cari too!” “So, I’m... your friend?” the girl asked. Cari smiled, “Of course you are!” Lavinia looked as if this moment was monumental. “Are you okay?” inquired Cari. Lavinia nodded, and the look went away. “Yes. I haven’t had a friend for a long time is all.”

Yet another moment of silence, but this time, Lavinia spoke up first. “Something seems to be bothering you. Are you okay?” Cari smiled, a little surprised and a little amused at the same time. “How did you know?” she sighed. “Yeah. I’m new to town, and I’m having trouble making friends. It’s really lonely at a new school.” Lavinia nodded, “I can relate a little bit. Actually, would you mind if I showed you something?” Cari shrugged in response. “Sure!” Lavinia guided the other girl to one of the swings, then sat down on the swing next to hers. She placed an ice-cold hand on Cari’s shoulder. “Take a deep breath.” Cari did as told. Just before exhaling the world spun around her, moving and contorting in different directions as if what she saw was liquified.

It spun violently until she went to take another breath, and Carissa watched as the world settled around her. They were standing now. There was no playground, and the cemetery looked smaller but also more well-kept. Cari looked around more, and noticed there were more trees, and the roads were made of dirt. There were far less houses, and you could hear the sound of horses in the distance. "Where are we?" asked Cari, bewildered. Lavinia smiled, "1847."

Two boys suddenly came running down the dirt road beside the field they stood in. Cari jumped, landing behind Lavinia. "It's okay!" The other girl laughed. "They can't see you. We're not really here, in a way." "Oh," Cari nodded, not really understanding, but pretending she did.

Lavinia took her hand. They began to levitate above the ground. Soon that levitating became flying in the air, and they glided in the sky until they reached a small white house. They stopped right outside a window on the second floor. "Look into the room," said Lavinia, making space for Cari. "Do you see that girl?" Carissa nodded, "Yeah," she said. "It looks like you." Lavinia nodded, "That's because it is me! This is about one week before I died of typhoid fever. If you tilt your head and look to the other side of the room," she tilted Cari's head while speaking, "you'll see other girls sitting by the stairs. I used to invite them to come play with me when I was lonely. They were far enough away that they couldn't get sick." Cari was dumbfounded. It only struck her now, that perhaps, this girl wasn't who she thought she was. She began to put the pieces together. "Wait..." she said, looking at Lavinia, confused. "...you're dead? You took me back in time, to see you when you were alive?" Lavinia laughed nervously. "I guess I forgot to tell you." Cari looked back inside the house. "It's a little weird, but I still want to know what happened, will you show me?"

Lavinia snapped her fingers, and time began to move faster. The sun set, and rose, and set again. Lavinia somehow stopped time in the middle of the night, then resumed it to its normal pace. The Lavinia inside the house grabbed a candle from her nightstand, and walked a few steps to the window. She waved, and Carissa turned around to see another girl waving from her bedroom in the house next door. The two girls began to talk. The Lavinia beside Carissa explained what was happening. "I used to talk to my neighbour at night when I couldn't sleep. She was my best friend, and we had some of the best talks."

That's when the world spun around Carissa once again, and they returned to present-day. They sat on the swings which gently swayed them back and forth. "Thank you for sharing..." said Carissa, still a little overwhelmed. "But, I don't know how to do it. I'm not exactly in the same situation." Lavinia was looking up at the sky. "I don't know your exact situation. It's up to you to decide what you want to do, and how you do it." Carissa picked at her fingernails as she thought. "But, do you have any suggestions?" She turned to look at Lavinia for a response, but when she looked, the other girl was no longer there. The swing was empty, still moving gently back and forth.

Carissa got up and began to walk home, while thinking over all that had happened. When she got home, her mother was putting plates of food on the table. "Carissa!" she said happily, noticing her daughter walk through the front door. "How was your time at

the park?" The girl smiled. "It was fun! And I thought a lot about making new friends. I think I'll ask some girls if they want to play with me at recess. Maybe I'll even bring in my stuffed animals!" That made her mother very happy. "I'm sure you'll make lots of friends. But for now, let's eat." Carissa nodded and dug right into her food. After her adventure at the park, her stomach was running on empty.

Carissa set her plan into action the next day, and things went over amazingly. She made plenty of friends in her class. They talked and laughed and did their homework together. That is until a few weeks down the road, when Carissa got into an argument with one of her new friends.

The first person she told was her mother, after throwing her bag on the floor. Her mother walked in and gave her a consoling hug. "Come with me, we'll talk about it in the kitchen, okay?" Cari followed her mother into the kitchen, and sat down at the table while her mother put plates away. "I got into a fight with Ainsley," she said, starting to recount the story. "She stole the bracelet I got from one of my old friends and said I didn't need it now that I had new ones. But that's not fair!" Her mother nodded, "You're right, it's not fair. I think you should talk with her more tomorrow. Maybe she didn't mean it." The girl shook her head, "Oh, you should've seen the look on her face. She meant it!" Her mother came to join her at the table. "Well, being angry won't help you." That's when Cari thought of Lavinia. "Then maybe going to the park will." She went to the front door and put on her shoes. "I'll be back later. The park is a really nice place to go when you're upset." Her mother smiled, "I like that idea. Be safe, okay?" Carissa waved, and closed the door behind her.

She skipped down to the park and immediately took a seat on one of the swings. She looked around for her blonde-haired friend, but it seemed she was all alone in the park. "Lavinia, are you around?" she called out as a last resort. The voice of a young man responded. "Lavinia? I've heard of her. Is that who you're looking for?" Carissa looked around, and saw an older teenager leaning against the slide. He wore a black leather jacket, and blue jeans which were cuffed at the bottom. His black hair was slicked back, and his blue eyes seemed very calm.

She responded, confused. "Yeah. Do you know her?" The young man nodded, and smiled warmly. "Most ghosts know the other ones in their cemetery. I've always liked Lavinia. A very friendly, warm hearted girl." "So, you're a ghost too?" Carissa asked. He nodded again. "Yes I am. My name's Herbert, by the way. You?" "I'm Carissa." Herbert joined her on the swings. "Why are you looking for her? Is something wrong?" Cari sighed, and like with Lavinia, shared her story. The new ghost's expression became more serious, but nonetheless welcoming. "Would you mind if I offered my point of view?" Cari shrugged. "Sure, why not?" She felt an icy cold hand on hers, and the world spun around her again, like they were in the middle of a whirlpool. This time, there was less of a change. There was still a paved street. The cars looked different, but they were still cars. There were a few more trees, and they looked much more colourful than previously. Cari looked around herself carefully, already exploring this new world.

"It seems you've done this before," said the young man. "To add a little context, we're in the year 1957. I thought I'd show you a little bit about my time as a greaser." The

greaser guided Carissa through the town, to the local high school. "It was a really nice day," he said, looking at the trees. "I wish I hadn't spoiled it for everybody."

They stopped in the halls of the high school, where girls and boys in outfits very different from the current fashion roamed the halls. Suddenly a group of boys wearing matching outfits walked through the front doors, Herbert among them. Herbert's ghost narrated what was happening. "We were the Bleacher Boys," he said, "and we almost ruled the school. Our only enemies were the Fallen Angels." Herbert pointed down the hall to another boy with blonde hair and brown eyes, wearing the same style of clothes. "Mikey, leader of the Fallen Angels," said the ghost Herbert, nodding to himself. "He hated on us all the time, and today was the last straw. I was so angry at the time, I challenged him to a drag race."

He snapped his fingers and time moved more than three times its normal speed. When time stopped again, the school was empty. "Follow me," said Herbert, gesturing for Carissa to follow. They flew high above the ground, until they reached a country road on the outskirts of town. The living Herbert had just pulled up in his car, right beside Mikey's. There were people sitting on the grass hills - the rest of the Bleacher Boys, the Fallen Angels, and other people who had just come to watch. A girl with a checkered flag stood by the side of the road. "On your marks, get set, go!" She waved the flag frantically, and the race started. The teens sped down the road, dust floating in the air above the tracks they left behind. Cari and the Herbert beside her followed the cars as the race went down. They followed the road for quite some time, one car getting ahead of the other, then soon falling behind again.

They turned in unison on a bend in the road, and the two cars were now side-by-side. They couldn't seem to shake each other from the path, and this angered the racing Herbert even more. He began to yell taunts at his enemy, but Carissa couldn't make them out. Suddenly Mikey's expression changed from sly to fearful. He tried to get Herbert's attention by pointing frantically in front of him. But the angered Herbert paid no attention, too caught up in his own feelings. Then it happened.

The front part of the car was completely crushed as it smashed into a large tree. The hood went flying, and the windshield shattered. Herbert, not wearing a seatbelt, went flying out of the car. And before Carissa could see what happened to the body, the world spun around her. It twisted and turned and changed colours until it settled back on present day. She was back in her own time again, sitting on the swing, and Herbert beside her.

"Do you understand why I showed you that?" Cari bit her lip. "Kind of..." "Would you like me to explain?" Herbert asked. The girl nodded, and Herbert turned to face her. "What I'm trying to tell you is that I don't want you to let your anger consume you. I know that other person might seem like the worst person in the world right now, but if you act on your anger, you'll do something you'll regret. So think about what happened, and what the other person was thinking. Think about what might happen in the future. Then, make a well-thought out decision." He smiled, and patted her shoulder. "I have confidence in you. You can do it." Cari smiled gratefully. "I'll try my best."

She looked across the street to the other houses. "That's where she lives, by the way. In one of those houses over there. I think they're really colourful, what about you?" The response she received was a strong gust of wind. When she looked back around the park, it was as if no one had ever been there. She sighed, knowing that was the end of her exciting encounters for the day, and walked back home in deep thought.

Herbert was right. Having time to focus on other things and then think about the problem again later really helped her think through it better. Maybe Ainsley was feeling left out. Maybe she could make her feel more welcome and accepted. So that's what she tried to do.

It worked out very well, and the bond between the two girls only grew stronger. They listened to each other more, and Carissa was careful to think before acting, or doing anything that she might regret. But some decisions were harder than others, and Cari faced another bump in the road a month later, about a week after Halloween.

The ground was dusted lightly in snow, and it was cold enough to make your hands tingle whenever exposed to the frosty air for too long. Carissa was walking home from school. But instead of admiring the glittering trees, her eyes were looking at the ground, as she was deep in thought. She jumped up the steps to her front door, and practically poured inside. Her mother said she would make hot chocolate for her after school, and it was about the only thing she had to look forward to. She dropped her bag carelessly by the door, and walked into the kitchen. Her mother was just setting two mugs of hot chocolate on the table. "I did just as I promised!" she said smiling. "Why don't you join me?" Carissa plastered on a smile, and sipped at her drink. Her mother did the same. "I hope you like it, after being out in the cold!"

They laughed together, but part of Cari wasn't quite in the moment. Her mind kept replaying that moment right after the school bell rang, when her and a few friends were walking down the street, back to their homes. They passed an old white house which seemed to be very run down. But despite the dusty windows and almost shingle-less roof, Carissa recognized that house. She remembered meeting the little girl that used to live inside. But her friends didn't see that. They spoke to each other excitedly about throwing rocks, and smashing windows, and seeing it fall apart. Because to them it was worthless, just an old house that nobody wanted. So why couldn't they have fun with it? Cari, not knowing what to say, ended up leaving the group and walking the rest of the street alone. She knew that the house didn't deserve what her friends planned to do. But how could she stop them?

Then she thought of the park, where she had found so many good solutions, and met a couple of amazing people. She should go there for help, right? She ate the marshmallows at the bottom of the empty mug, and put it beside the sink. "I'm going to go back out!" she said, somewhat cheerfully. "The hot chocolate really warmed me up, and I haven't played in the snow yet!" Carissa put on her coat and boots, and waved goodbye to her mother. She walked with purpose down the street and back to that mysterious park, but this time, she wasn't the first one there. She noticed a brown-haired boy with a stick, carving something into the snow. He seemed very focused, so focused in fact, that he wasn't even slightly bothered by the cold. He wore what looked to be a

thin light blue shirt, along with brown knicker pants and suspenders. Being curious, she walked up to him and gently tapped him in the shoulder.

“Wah!!” The boy jumped like a cat, and fell onto his back in the snow. He brushed the snow off his freckled face, and looked up at her with youthful brown eyes. She noticed that he didn’t look like a child, but not an adult either. Maybe 14 years old. He quickly stood up, assuming a more man-like posture. “Well hey there!” he said, extending a hand. “You gave me quite the scare. Other than that, it’s nice to meet you!” She shook his hand, and smiled. “Hi,” she responded, slightly surprised by how quickly he recovered. “I’m Carissa. What’s your name?” The boy put his hands in his pocket. “I’m Vincent. Carissa’s a neat name, if I’ve ever heard one! But, why are you out here? It’s cold and snowy!”

Carissa giggled, “I like coming here to think. And usually, there’s someone here to talk to...” “Well I’m here!” Vincent went and sat on the stairs of the play structure. “You can always talk to me!” Carissa went and sat beside him. “I guess so. You are the type of person I was looking for. Not like everyone else, something that makes you different...” Vincent nodded. There was a brief silence, until the boy took a deep breath. “So, what’s up?” Cari poured out her story, hoping he might have some answers. Vincent listened intently the whole way through, seeming very kind and empathetic. When Cari finished her story, he seemed to go into to deep thought.

“Well...” he said, looking out onto the street. “I think I’d like to share a story with you. Have you done that thing where the world changes?” Carissa tilted her head. “And the world goes all swirly?” This made Vincent laugh. “Yeah, that one! You must have! Alright. Take my hand.” She did as told, this time fully prepared. The two went back in time, the snow melting and the leaves reappearing on the trees. As the world was spinning Vincent led Carissa to another side of town, which had only a set of train tracks. In Carissa’s time there was a fence blocking them off, but in this time there wasn’t.

The world stopped spinning, and as Vincent and Cari watched, three boys dressed similarly to Vincent emerged from the shrubs near the train tracks. One was tall with long blonde hair and blue eyes. One was short, with red hair and light green eyes. And the last one looked exactly like Vincent. The first and last boys looked excited. The redhead looked nervous, but went along with them anyway. He gulped, and the other two laughed. The blonde one shook his head. “C’mon Raymond, it’s not that bad! Stop being so scared!” The impulsive Vincent began to walk across the tracks. “Besides, what else is there to do on a day like this?” The tallest boy dashed in front of Vincent, and began to climb up a tree next to the tracks. “Let’s sit up here guys!” he said, gesturing for the others to follow. “You can see everything from up here!”

Raymond was prompted to climb up the tree next. As he climbed, the Vincent beside Carissa gave some backstory. “These guys weren’t even old friends,” he said, looking at them. “I had only started spending time with them a year or so ago. I was always what you would call the trouble maker, but this was by far the worst year for me. I was in their class. They pulled a prank on the teacher, and I really wanted to join in the next one. I was just that kind of kid. I followed them around, but today I shouldn’t have. August 29th, 1920.”

Carissa felt anxious to watch the rest. She couldn't help but guess what was going to happen next. The smiling Vincent finally got his chance to climb up the tree, and the three boys sat on a large branch together. There were a few minutes of just playful banter between them, but the conversation slowly died down as they heard a rumble in the distance.

The blonde boy climbed down the tree without saying a word. When he got to the bottom, he pointed to his right. "Train!" he said, a frantic look in his eyes. Vincent tried to get down next, being closest to the trunk of the tree, but Raymond pushed his way past him and scrambled down to the ground. As he pushed past, Vincent lost his grip and almost fell out of the tree. He caught himself on the branch with only his two hands, now suspended in the air.

Raymond ran to the other side of the tracks. They encouraged their buddy to just drop down and join them, as quickly as possible. But Vincent was scared. Finally, he built up the courage to let go, and his ankles throbbed upon landing on the ground. He stood up, just about to leap to the other side of the tracks, but he was too slow. The light from the train lit up his ghostly pale face, and... "No!" Carissa turned around. She refused to watch. She felt Vincent's hand on her shoulder and everything went silent. When she opened her eyes again, they were back at the park and sitting on the steps of the play structure.

Vincent didn't dare look back at the girl. "Sorry," he said plainly. "Maybe I shouldn't have done that." Cari sighed, "It's okay. I think I learned something." This made the boy's face light up. "Really?" She nodded. "Yeah. Maybe I should just stand up to them, no matter what. The people who really care will know it's not the right thing to do." Vincent smiled, "Well it sure is nice to know you got something out of it. And hey, thanks for joining me here! I was a little lonely, you know." The two laughed a little, and Carissa shivered.

"Oh, it's cold," she said. "Then maybe you should head home." Vincent stood up, and offered her a hand. She took it, and shook it as a farewell. "Maybe I'll get to see you again?" Carissa asked. The boy shrugged. "Maybe. If not, just enjoy what you've got. Now go get 'em!" He cheered her on playfully as she walked down the street, and she was too caught up in her laughter to notice him disappear.

The next day at school, when her friends brought up their plan to break the windows of the old white house, she stood up to them with courage and determination. In fact, she convinced all of them that the house was worth protecting! Things went very well from then onward, and Carissa couldn't help but feel proud of herself for all she had done. She'd made new friends, settled disagreements, and convinced people for the better. Things were definitely going well. So well, that she almost forgot about the park.

It was a warm spring afternoon, and the last day of March break. Today she wouldn't be going out with her friends, for most of them were busy with previously planned activities. She was staring out the window, when the idea struck her. What about the park? No, she didn't need help or any sort of advice. But she wanted a friend. And she knew she could always find a friend there.

She skipped down the street that pleasant afternoon, and sat happily on the swing. She waited, expecting someone to show up. But, strangely, nobody did. She felt a gentle breeze rustle her long hair, and something got caught inside it. She fished the object out of her hair, and upon realizing what it was, looked at it fondly. It was a single, beautiful white ribbon. She turned it over in her hand, and saw cursive writing on the back. "Don't wait for us," she said, reading it aloud. "It's your turn to lead."

She couldn't think for a good few seconds. She let it sink in. They were right. Now it was her turn to lead, putting her best foot forward. With her strengths, and even her faults, she could make the world better in her own way. She tied the ribbon around her wrist, and looked up at the sky with youthful eyes. There was so much to do.

Senior Division Grades 9-12

The Strength of a Song By: Teya Taylor (Grade 9)

more inside

The musician waited behind the velvet curtains, anticipating the moment when she would play her piece to the millions who had assembled. Every mistake, every hour of practice, every little recital lead up to this concert, where Carlyne would finally prove herself to her parents.

She was confident this song was perfect and she practiced it so much that it became natural to her. Yet she was terrified. She had to stop herself from imagining of every possible mistake and fault she might make.

The pianist on stage finally finished their long song. The loud clapping that followed reminded Carlyne of her parents, who sat on the other side of the thick black curtains, waiting for this concert to be over. Which revived the thought of her parents finally understanding her and made her want to perform as soon as possible.

As the host introduced her to the large audience, she felt ready and confident. While walking across the stage to the beautiful grand piano, Carlyne silently thanked her deceased grandmother for introducing her to music when she was a young girl.

Carlyne's grandmother was the reason she was here today. She had been the only one in their family who supported Carlyne throughout her life, until she died last year. She was the only one who ever treated Carlyne as more than a useless girl.

Carlyne gracefully took a seat at the piano bench and positioned her elegant fingers over the smooth keys. One last time she looked into the audience and saw her parents. They had only reluctantly accepted her invitation to this concert, as they had many times before. But this concert was different, this one had a purpose. It was special to her and she wanted it to be special to her parents too. She took a deep breath and turned away. Then she played the first note of the sad and beautiful song.

The intro of the piece was slow and peaceful. As Carlyne was playing, she remembered her grandmother telling her how loving their home was and how proud her parents were when she was born. She only imagined living in a home without disappointment and anger. Her dreams were of a house where she felt loved constantly and her parents felt proud to call her their daughter.

The song of Carlyne's life story grew louder and more emotional. All Carlyne's first memories were of her parents trying to get her to talk. She could read and write from a very young age, but she never spoke. They took her to many doctors and specialist trying to get her to speak her first words. Still, her parents refused to believe she was mute. Nothing would ever fix her. For the rest of her life their home was filled with frustration and impatience.

Carolyn's song became mellow. As a young girl, Carolyn tried so hard to be everything her parents wanted her to be. She was smart, kind, musical, and athletic. If her parents just looked past the fact that she was mute, they would see that she was the perfect daughter. Carolyn could never understand why her parents were constantly disappointed in her or why her grandma was the only one who was proud of her.

Carolyn's song became lighter. Her parents sent her to a boarding school for the mute for high school. There, she mastered the piano and learned as many other instruments as she was able to. She figured out how to talk through music and the instruments would ask questions, yell, talk, laugh, and cry for her. Not many people could understand, but she didn't care. She had millions of beautiful notes to make up for thousands of unspoken words.

The hopefulness in the song died out and sadness returned. After high school she tried to get her parents to understand her music. No matter how many concerts and recitals she got them to go to they never did. Carolyn decided to move in with her grandmother, who accepted and encouraged her. But her parent's disappointment stayed with her for a long time, even as she started a business of her own, playing music at events. She felt like this wasn't enough so she started performing in front of larger audiences, always inviting her parents to see if they could ever understand her.

The song was drawing to a sad, moving end. It took Carolyn a long time to realize that being mute was a blessing in disguise. Without being mute she may have never connected with her Grandmother the way she did, she may never have been an amazing musician, and she never would have worked so hard at everything.

She didn't care about her parent's disappointment anymore, she was proud of herself, she just needed them to understand that.

The last note drifted into the crowd, her eyes followed it. She saw everyone in the auditorium stand and clap, a standing ovation. She didn't care, her mother was crying, yet smiling brighter than ever and her father was beaming up at her with pride. She had spoken to them. They finally understood.

That feeling of their pride and understanding grew between them, their relationship growing years after that amazing concert. Carolyn's parents wanted to make up for all those years when she didn't feel like enough.

Senior Division Grades 9-12

Unfaithful

By: Mackenzie Horlings (Grade 12)

more inside

The raindrops splatter against the windshield faster than the wipers can clear them. The car splashes through puddles, sending waves of water crashing over the centre line. The sky is full of clouds, preventing any and all moonlight from seeping through to shine on the empty streets, the glare of the streetlights his only guidance.

The thunder and lightning continues, growing more persistent the closer he gets to home. At first, he wonders if it's an omen, warning him not to return home, but he brushes the thought away. He's never been a superstitious man. But even he has to admit; a storm this severe so late in summer is rare.

He pushes the gas, speeding to get out of the rain before it gets worse. He can only hope that he'll be able to sneak in quietly when he arrives home. It's not likely that his wife would be awake of her own accord; it's pushing four in the morning at this point, though she's been known to wait up in the past.

He knows she suspects; he's known for a while now. He can't bring himself to care anymore. In the beginning, he felt guilty. The secrets, the sneaking in and out. It weighed on him. But it's been happening behind closed doors for years now, a different person every few months. He no longer has any regard for her feelings.

The rain is battering the windows and doors, the wind causing the house to groan. She's got every light on, as if he's a sailor, lost at sea, and this is his lighthouse. As if it will make him come back to her faster.

With every minute that passes, she worries more. Her hope that he's still absent due to the weather is failing. She debates whether to call him, the telephone taunting her as she treads back and forth.

She gives in, grabbing the offending device, dialling his number quickly. It rings once. Twice. Three times.

We're sorry, but the number you have dialled is unavailable at this time. Please hang up, and try your call again.

He doesn't answer. He never does, instead leaving her to her thoughts. She prays that he's not where she thinks; prays that he's better than she believes.

And so she paces, dressed and ready for bed, but unable to sleep. Waiting, like so many nights before.

He pulls in the driveway, the house lit up with what must be every light they own. His hopes that she'd be in bed are dashed as he catches just a glimpse of her as the curtains fall back into place. He's barely gotten out of the car before the front door opens and she flies down the path. She flings herself onto him, clinging to him like he was lost and had just been found.

The rain hasn't let up, soaking them both to the bone, but still they stand there, embracing, with the wind howling around them. It picks up, and that's when he smells it. It's faint but it's there. He hopes she hasn't smelled it yet, begins to pull away to go inside. As he shifts, it becomes stronger.

The smell of lilac, that clearly doesn't belong to his wife.

He hears the angry crack of the lightning, sees it flash in her eyes, and it's too late. He can see it illuminate the understanding, the anger, the reality that has just dawned on her.

There's no use in denying it, so instead he pulls back fully and walks away, entering the house. Leaving her standing out in the pouring rain.

The wind shifts, the lightning cracks, and she knows.

She can feel her heart fracture in her chest, unable to bear the weight of this revelation. She has suspected, but this confirmation hurts more than she could have ever imagined.

She watches as he realizes what she's discovered. Watches as he simply withdraws, turning to leave her there.

She enters the house after he's out of sight, heading straight up to their shared room and closing the door before letting her tears fall. She struggles to breathe, wrapping her arms around herself, as if that will keep the pieces of her broken heart together.

She cries until every tear is gone, but it doesn't help the pain in her chest. The rain hasn't ceased throughout her crying, as though reflecting her mood. She thinks about the way he turned his back on her, and her sorrow turns to rage.

She gets up, grabs the pistol from the drawer. As she turns to leave, she catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror. She's a mess; mascara running down her face, her hair tangled and stringy from the rain. Her nightgown is still damp.

He did this to her. It's his fault, and as she looks at her reflection, she vows that he'll pay for it.

She creeps down the stairs, gun in hand, and finds him sleeping on the couch. After what he did, he has the audacity to just go to sleep as if nothing out of the ordinary had occurred. She almost laughs at that.

She walks over to the couch, looming over him as she lifts the gun. She cocks it, the slight noise rousing him from his light slumber. His eyes open, widen as they take in her, the gun. He doesn't even have the chance to say anything before she's pulling the trigger. The lightning flashes as she does, the thunder that follows masking the sound of the gunshot.

Once it's done, she simply drops to the floor. The gun makes a dull thud as it falls from her hand. That's when she begins to laugh, almost maniacally. It's over. She'll never again have to wonder where he is; if he's being faithful.

She's still laughing as the red and blue lights begin flashing, and as she's lead from the house, hands cuffed behind her back, she isn't surprised to find that the rain has stopped, giving way to a beautiful rainbow.