

**2024
OKCTE**

YWVA



GRADES 6-8

THE OKLAHOMA COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH



Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English

2024

**Young Writers Anthology
Grades 6-8**

By Students of Oklahoma



Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English

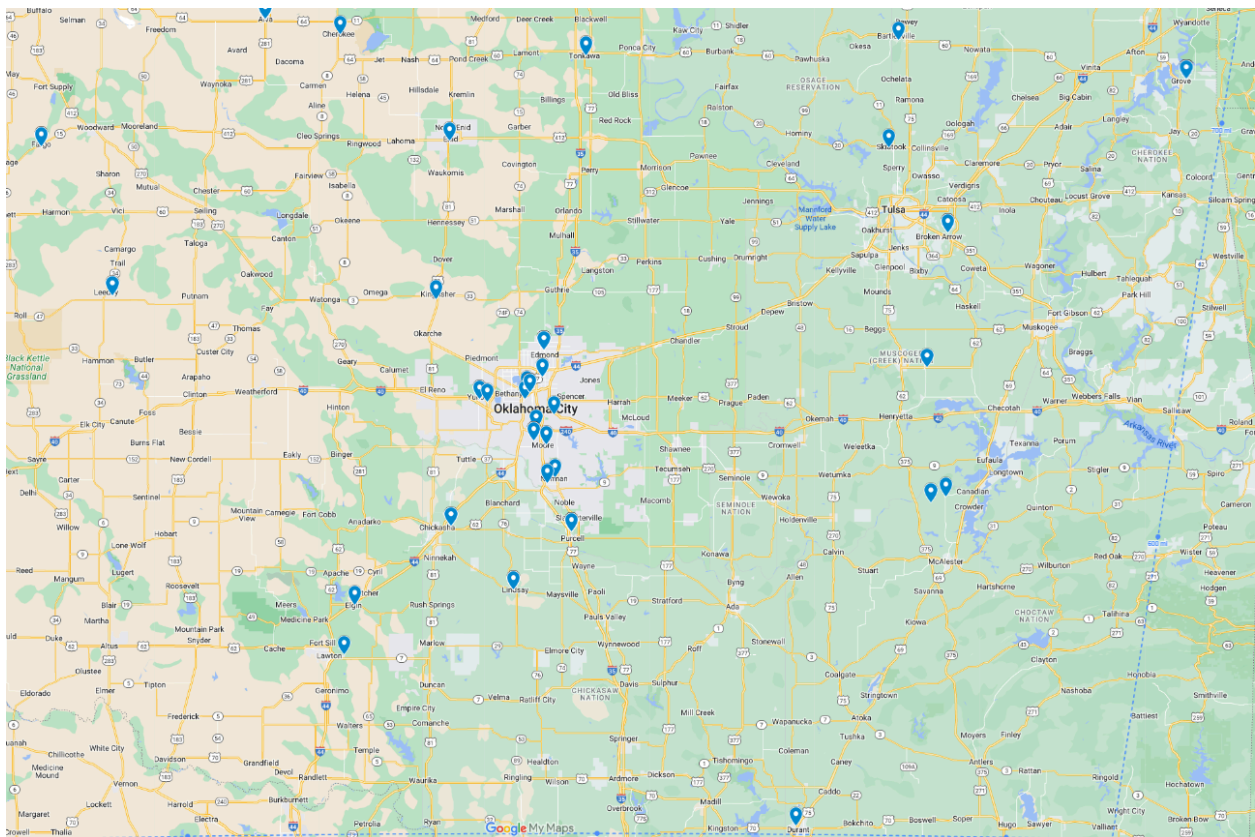
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The Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English

About the Anthology

This anthology contains the winning works submitted for the annual Oklahoma Young Writers Contest, sponsored by the Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English, the state affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English.

We received nearly 500 entries with the support of nearly 60 educators across the state of Oklahoma.



The winners, ranging from grades 6-8, submitted works for short story, personal narrative, comic, poetry, descriptive paragraph, and informational essay. To the writers included in this year's anthology, *Congratulations on this prestigious achievement!*

Submission Policy & Review Process

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The Young Writers Anthology welcomes submissions from any student grades 6-8 in Oklahoma between November and January via online submission form. Teachers submit work on behalf of the students verifying they have read the work, have parent permission to enter the work for publication, and that the work is original. What is submitted must be a "final" copy as we will not make requests for revisions. From January to March, the review board judges each entry using the same rubric developed by the Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English. Each piece is reviewed by multiple members of the review board. During March, the editorial and layout team work to copy edit and create the anthology. All writers are notified in late March through teacher contact as to the status of their entry. Anthology writers will receive a certificate of congratulations at the OKCTE April gathering.

Editorial Policy

The Young Writers Anthology editorial staff reserves the right to edit minor errors such as grammatical and spelling issues.

Special "Thank You" to YWC Coordinator: Sarah J. Donovan

OKCTE Board Member Anthology Reviewers

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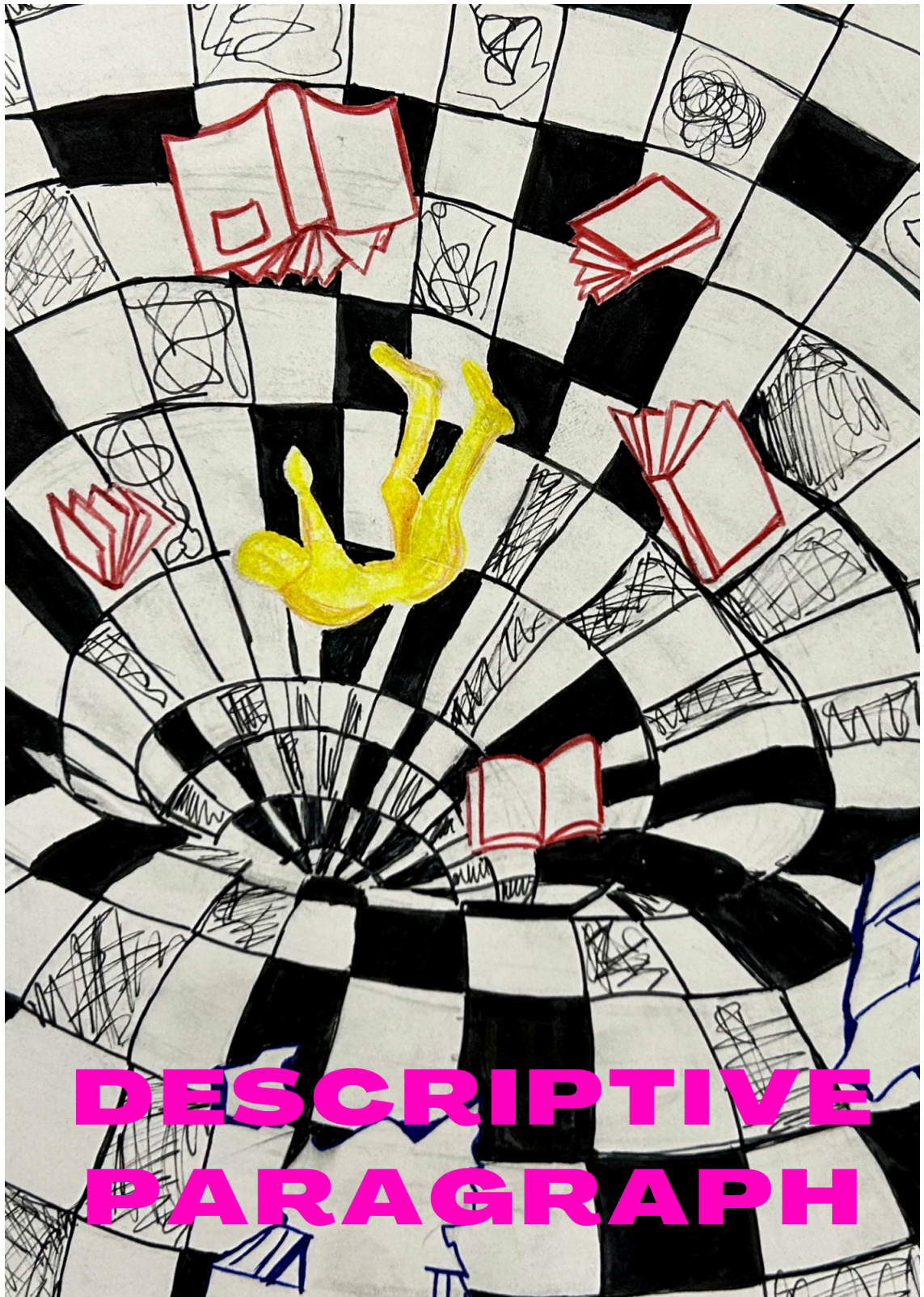
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Cycle

Noah McNett

A small flame sits on a large log, crackling and whistling, popping and shifting, charring the log, devouring it, leaving black ground-up remnants of a once strong and tall-standing stalwart birch tree. The white and black bark listing towards the night sky. A large cow skull, wide, robust, and sturdy, lays in the grass as the vegetation slowly takes over as Mother Nature attempts to recycle her art, ensuring that the cycle continues. A group of deer graze in the nearby fields. A brown doe steps from the crowd and watches the fire, hypnotized by its warm embrace. Its yellow eyes lit up in the night by the ever-burning inferno. A toad, minuscule in size, sets itself on a rock near the blaze, observing the flame while basking in its heat. In this clearing with small vegetation, the underbrush is far from sight, and the trees stand tall. This newly born flame flickers and flashes in the night. It reaches the peak of its blaze, scraping the sky, grabbing at the clouds, taking in air and life, as the log underneath its feet has nothing left to give. The once thriving inferno is hastily diminishing as its peak ends, and its spark is snuffed. As the toad and deer retreat to safety, the crickets resume their chirping. The forest goes back to its natural ways. All is well. The cycle is completed.

Brisk of Fall

Catherine Dang

After sliding on my bunny-soft winter coat, I walk out of my apartment room, gazing off the balcony's cold railing. The aroma of cinnamon grasps my nose of the golden morning sky, wisps of faint clouds brushing along the way. Rush of wind passes by, blowing strands of my hair in my face as I watch the dark ginger leaves swirl down from the empty maple branches. Brunette squirrels scurry across the open patches of white, crooked grass, looking for their berated acorns. Fall is here! I hurry down the creaking steps of the rotting wood and onto a crunch. I reach for a handful of leaves and gather them in a pile. Handful after handful, I pile leaves until my heap is now knee deep, and I jump in with glee, harsh crisps of crunch filling my ears. I close my eyes as the edges of the leaves brush against my skin. The air gets humid as I bury my face. Suddenly, I'm now aware of the freeze from the cold seeping into the palms of my pink hands. I brush off broken bits of crushed leaves and rush up the rotting stairs, exhausted as I trudge inside my apartment building, heat warming my frozen cheeks.

My Red Pickup

Kase Martin

My pickup was red and elegant, like a sunset through the clouds, the interior soft and cloth. I can faintly see my reflection through the glassy window as I open the door. As I sit down in the smooth seat and turn the key, I hear its engine rumble to life. The radio flashes on, playing on my favorite station. I adjust my seat to fit my body, and start driving. The smooth driving is amazing, and I roll down the window to let the warm summer air whip my hair around as I drive. The beautiful outdoors fly by while I make my way across the countryside. I hear the sirens, like a screaming banshee. I pull over, my pickup rumbling in the ditch. The officer walks up, smelling slightly of oil.

“Sir, may I please see your license and registration?”

The Horse's Back

Kodee Ohm

There is nothing else like it, when you are sitting on your horse there is no stopping you. As you run through the fields with the low breeze of a fall night through your hair the world stops. All you can hear are the thundering hooves and the breathing between the two of you. You feel free, in that moment you are thinking of nothing, it clears your mind from the whole world. As you sit on your one-thousand-pound beast that you have been trusting with your whole life, some people might think you are crazy but you can't see it, this horse is your whole world.

The bond between the two of you is unbeatable, no one else knows that horse more than you. As you reach down to give them a big pat on the neck you feel two things, their heartbeat, and the tiniest bit of sweat. You walk them back and take the saddle off, brush their mane and tail then head out for the pasture where they can rest for tomorrow. Of course, you are happy to see them with their friends but you can't help but want to be on their back again. Once you are done you are sad, you know why but don't want to admit it. You know that you have to return from paradise but that's where you want to be.

Thrill Ride

Carly Williams

I am waiting in line, fidgeting with my gloves, as fear bolts through me. My dad and three of my brothers are there to encourage me. I get closer to the gates—the gates I thought I’d never go through. As the line gets shorter, I dread more and more to sit in one of the seats with a dark red lap bar. Finally, my dad and I are next in line at the third column down the wooden aisle. The red cars return and the previous riders exit. I take my seat and almost start crying. I want to leave. The speakers announce to keep your hands and feet inside at all times. I pull my lap bar down, then off we go. CLANK, CLANK, CLANK! The chains pull me up, up, up the wooden structure. I enjoy the view for a few seconds before the near vertical descent. I can see leafless trees on hills at the horizon and the sun shining bright in the sky. The only thing left to do is brace myself, and SCREAM! Down the drop my stomach clenches. It feels as though I’m not even in my seat and that I am going to plummet to the ground. I open my mouth and let the air rush into it. The thrill ride goes through turns and twists plus a double corkscrew. My feelings are a mixture of excitement and uncertainty. Another turn and the breaks go on. I am breathing heavily as if I had just run half a mile. After a complete stop, the lap bars are released. I get up shaking and leave the car, proud of myself for conquering my fear of rollercoasters. Though that was scary, I think I am ready for the next one.

The Final Cross Country Meet

Ali Brady

Dreading every single second leading up to this moment, I stand ready on the line. Dark charcoal clouds begin to drizzle. My heart practically leaps out of my chest, and I fight to control my insane breathing pattern. I tremble as a tear runs down my cheek, and I shiver at the thought of this race. My mind is a circus, racing and jumbled. An inner voice tells me my expectations are too high, not to succeed. I finally locked in. I take a massive breath of the crisp October air into my tight lungs, touch my glistening diamond cross necklace, and tell myself I'm here to compete. I'm doing this. I think about the endless hours and the excruciating hard work I've put into this sport, all leading up to this exact moment. Suddenly, the gunshot fires, and we're off. I have an excellent start, and I can feel deep in my bones that I've got this race. With every opponent I pass, I feel a runners' high! I feel bushes slap and scrape my throbbing calves, but I push even harder through them picking up my pace. I fight through the excruciating pain aching through my entire body and chest. I finally see a crowd ahead. A runner gains on me, but I want this more than her. My strides lengthen. My hometown and family yell. One last push! I lay on the finish line looking at the gold medal reading "1ST PLACE JH ALL STAR XC MEET".

My Little Fantasy

PhuongThuy Nguyen

As my gaze drifted onto a painting of a fantastical medieval landscape, it felt as if I were suddenly sucked into a portal that led to a marvelous fictional fantasy that I had dreamed of for years. There were countless things to wonder about and admire, and my heart sped up in excitement while my eyes flew from one strangely wonderful thing to the next. A refreshing breeze rustles the leaves of gigantic trees, and flower petals float, dancing to an invisible melody in the wind. My hair flows with it, being wild and free like I'd always wanted to be. An ancient statue covered in lush and flowery moss smiles at me, holding out its hands as an invitation to stay here for a little bit longer. Pastel pink and gold fields gently sway as I hear birds sing lively melodies to their friends. I lay in the relaxing shade of an ancient, tranquil tree, vegetation gently hugging me like a warm, snuggly blanket. Because of the peacefulness and tranquility here, I feel at home and don't want to leave this place. Nevertheless, I feel a hand grab mine, immediately snapping back into my harsh and cold reality. All I can dare to hope for is that I'll be able to return to my whimsical wonderland once more, even if only for a moment.

Subway Songs

Cayden Satterlee

The frigid wind blew, filling my lungs with an unpleasant sensation. As I entered the gloomy subway station, I noticed a boy playing saxophone. I watched myself go into a trance as I listened to the harmonic song. Each note charmingly entered my ears, filling me with euphoria. The young boy had his black - leather case open, welcoming any tips. The silver and gold instrument seemed to shine under the lighting. Mesmerized by the sound, I am jolted back to reality by the train whistle blowing. After leaving a generous tip, I headed onto the train filled with satisfaction.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE



Fly

Makaylaa Ballardo

"Everybody is a ticking time bomb. Some people get to see their timer, some never see it running out." -unknown

Everything feels out of order. I hate the man who took you away. I hate the man who took them all away. I hate that the only thing I do now is stay in bed because I'm not strong enough ever to leave. I never was without you here. But now you're not.

Your voice, face, and smile are all nothing but a memory now. Why did it have to be you? Why did it have to be anyone? Why do all you get to be now is a memory in someone's head? Why am I no longer able to feel the embrace of your hand interlocked with mine? Why? I ask myself repeatedly. Why did I have to make it?

Your voice, smile, and face fade from my memory. Why do I have to lose you twice now? Can I even function without you here? Were you just a distraction from all the chaos I hid away? A box I never wanted to open, and you kept it closed? Were you the one holding all the pieces together of a broken mirror? Why did I have to make it?

Left with the guilt of you not being here. All I wish is for you to be here to hold my hand and tell me it's going to be okay. That you're not gone, but you can't because you are. You are gone.

A bird that has been able to fly away from the chaos of the world beneath you. I wish I could've flown away with you, too, as an escape. Away from everything. Away from the world. I wish it were me instead.

Am I alive to fit some purpose in this world- on this Earth? Am I supposed to fulfill some destiny...for you? Would what I did be for you? To think that it was all worth something. All the pain, every single bit of it. That you were not for nothing? That I can somehow fill the hole in my chest if I have a purpose for losing you?

I don't think that. I don't think I have a purpose or a destiny. I can't do anything... for you or myself. All I can do is stay in my bed and pretend that you're still here. I'll probably do that forever.

My Brother

Taylor King

Although this happened before I was born, this loss still affects my family today.

Matthew was his name. My brother.

I've been told he was born *broken*. Broken head, broken wrist. Unable to breathe. He fractured his skull because of the way they pulled him out during the birth. He was stuck, then he was here. Broken, but *here: alive*.

And one day at a time he was getting better. He was going to be autistic and he was going to be on a ventilator. My parents were ready so they bought a new ventilator and a new house.

They were told he would never be able to breathe on his own. At 2:00 am they heard the phone ringing and my dad answered: it was the hospital. The doctor said "he doesn't have that long so come say goodbye" but the time it got to my mom he took his last breath in her arms.

This moment was over sixteen years ago, but telling this story keeps the memory of my brother alive. A memory I didn't get to witness, but one I don't want to forget.

Picking Out the Perfect Rope

Breckin Willyard

Picking out the perfect rope is not as easy as it seems. It has to have a certain feel, sound, and all sorts of stuff to make it feel just right. First, the feel. The perfect feel for me is deep crowns, but not too deep, like some people like them. It also has to have lots of tip weight as well as lots of body to set up nicely across the horns or in front of the feet. Next, the sound. The perfect sound is not hard to find in a new rope, but for me, the sound it makes when you swing and feed it contributes to the perfection of the rope. Then, the strands. The strands in a rope matter a lot because they are what make the rope what it is.

Choosing a rope for team roping depends on whether you are heading or heeling. When you head, there are four and five-strand ropes and when you heel, most just use a four-strand rope or even a three-strand rope made out of nylon. A five-strand rope on the head side is most likely going to be a lighter, faster rope with quite a bit of tip weight to it and maybe less body and a four-strand is going to be a bit heavier and have body and tip weight. I, myself, prefer a four-strand, extra soft. That is my reason on how to pick a rope.

The Girl in the Mirror

Evan Ward

I was in 5th grade. I was growing, both mentally and physically. During 5th grade, My body started changing. One day, I was at recess with my friends. We were playing around and all of a sudden a boy came up to me and said, “You're chubby.” My heart dropped and I felt tears threatening to fall down my face. Then he said, “but that’s alright.. I like chubby girls.”

I felt disgusted and insecure about what he just said. Fortunately, My friend started to say to him, “never talk to her like that again!” The bell rang and we went to the next class. Those words were still ringing in my head.

The following summer, I was at my dad’s house in the bathroom. The house was old, so the bathroom was also old looking. It’s a typical turn of the century bathroom setup. There was a sink and a mirror above it. The shower was in the background when you looked in the mirror.

I was staring at the mirror and I saw “her.” “She” was staring right back at me. Seeing “her” made my stomach churn. The look “she” was giving me is permanently stuck in my head. It was a look of pure disgust. “She” looked like she was wanting to throw up just because “she” saw me and my body. I started to feel very ashamed of myself when “she” was looking at my body. “She” then did something that still hurts me to this day. “She” rolled her eyes and turned away.

I started to think these horrible things like, “Maybe I’m not good enough” or “I should stop eating to look better.” I then looked back at the mirror to see millions of judgemental stares. I started to get overwhelmed and then I broke down. I sank to my knees and I felt hot tears on my cheeks. I was begging for help. I needed help.

I tried to calm down, but it didn’t work. So I started to play happy memories in my head. Memories of when I was a child, and I didn’t need to worry about my body image. That calmed me down a lot. I stood and looked back in the mirror. I saw myself. I then realized that I was “her.” It

was me all along. I was the one hating my body. The one who was disgusted by my body.

So after that, I went to a therapist and she helped me a lot. She made me feel like I would like who I was. She made me feel like I can be comfortable in my own skin.

Then about three weeks later, I went to that same mirror and I saw “her.” But this time she is smiling at me. Not a creepy smile, not a judgemental smile, but a proud smile. “She” then gave me a thumbs up and left. After that, I felt awesome. I felt like I was not the girl in the mirror. I was Evan. Not “her.”

My Adoption Life

Ava Midkiff

When I woke up that morning it was a brand-new day. I was going to get adopted, but I didn't get that I was adopted a couple of months later. It was 2013, it was like any other day we got ready, went to school, and then went to daycare. Sometimes this lady would come to pick us up and we would see our biological parents. I don't remember what the lady or my bio parents looked like. There are some things I remember when we were with our biological parents. I remember me and my little brother Chance stayed the night with them and we slept on a palette on their bedroom floor. I was playing with this toy airplane and Chance wanted it but I was playing with it and I didn't want him to have it, so we started bickering over it. It got to the point where my bio mom took it away from us because they were tired of us bickering. I also remember the lady picking us up early from daycare and was taking us to McDonald's to see our bio parents. They bought us mini M&M's and we ate there and played on their playground.

We were in a foster home for a long time and we slowly stopped seeing our biological parents. It was getting close to the adoption day, but we had no clue yet. It already felt like I was in a real family! I'm glad that me and Chance didn't get separate foster homes because that could've happened.

It was kinda of mid-day, and we were getting ready to go to the courthouse. I was wearing a really pretty dress, my hair was curled, I was wearing brown sandals and a bow in my hair. Chance was wearing jeans and a nice T-shirt. When we got to the courthouse we had family arrive. The lady told us to sit down in two chairs so we did. She said to us "Here I got y'all a little teddy bear for y'all so y'all keep quiet." After the ceremony we went and took pictures and stuff and we all went home.

It's been a couple of months and I stopped seeing my bio parents and I gradually forgot what they looked like. My mom and dad adopted a baby girl when we were four and five and named her Sawyer. I finally figured out that I got adopted and that's why I stopped seeing my

biological parents. We have a big family now and we're all happy to be together.

Getting adopted started my life. I wouldn't be where I am if I didn't. I've learned and changed so much. I have a family and I got to stay with Chance and we don't have to be in different foster homes. The significance of my experience is being with a family that loves us more than anything and that can take care of us. I am so so grateful I have a family and I have nice things and get to be with the people who love me and who I love so very much.

The Finish Line

Camryn Newton

When I woke up at 6:30 on Thursday, August 31st, I was so tense for the day ahead of me. I looked at the weather app on my phone to see if there was a chance of that Oklahoma wind coming later, but luckily, it was just going to be an enjoyable sunny day. When I eventually got up out of bed, I put on my black and red cross-country jersey, black running shorts, and my dusty Brooks to run in. I had wrapped my knee due to an injury I have been recovering from, ate breakfast, filled up my huge water bottle, and did other essential things before I left for school.

When I finally got to my school, I went for the first hour, then second, then third, and lastly fourth hour, where we finally got to leave for the cross-country meet. The bus ride was only about 20 minutes, so we were there in no time. When I got off the bus, my nerves started to lash out at me. I saw all these girls, competitors; I did not know how fast they were, how fast their teammates were, or what their race time was. The race was going to be a mile and a half run, which was short and would only take me about eleven minutes to complete, at most. The younger girls raced first at 1:45, which I watched and cheered for them until I had to go and warmup for my race at 2:10. We did strides, stretched our quads, and our shins until it was time to line up.

As the four-wheeler came out, which was the pacer, so did the starter. He made sure all of us girls were lined up evenly and started counting down. My heart was beating 1,000 miles per hour, my stomach felt like there were butterflies playing tag inside of it, and my ears were waiting to hear the gun. Boom, we were off like a stampede of animals, leaving a dust cloud behind us. "Go, go, go," One mom shouted, "Open up your stride!" Even though I knew she was properly talking to her daughter, I used those words, too. I pushed my legs up the hill and back down into a bare field. I followed the white trail painted onto the grass, and the pacer throughout the run, I was in first. Soon, I entered the forestry part of the course. It was nice and shady, which was nice because

it was blazing hot outside. The trail was narrow but made it easy to stay lead since there was not much room to pass by.

Once out of the forest, I was met with an agonizing hill. Its structure was tall and wide, but I sped up and jolted myself up it. My legs were like jelly at this point, but I only had five hundred meters to go, which was going to be dreadful but worth it. Soon I heard footsteps, but I was not slowing down, she was speeding up. I pushed even harder, opened my stride even more, until we eventually got to the last three-hundred meters of the race, “Go! Do not let her beat you!” My coach was saying, but it was neck and neck now, and we were both tired. I sped up, used the last of my energy, and crossed the finish line. I stopped running, looked up, and walked over to the other girl to congratulate her for winning first place.

Adoption Story

Paxdon Stewart

It was April 12, 2015, when it all happened. We had been waiting for this for about 4 years, and it was the day. We got up that morning, and we put on our cute little adoption shirts. The girls had little cute bows, and then we headed down to Duncan with our grandma Linda. It was about a 30-minute drive. When we got there, we had to wait for a long time. Then our case worker came out and told us that the judge could not see us today. When he said that, I did not leave. Then, after about 5 minutes, another case worker came out and told my mom and dad that we needed to leave because their kids were being too loud. We still did not leave, and then my mom texted my first foster mom, Nichol, and said that she did not know what to do because they would not let us in. Then, when she got there, my mom asked our case worker again if he could ask the judge one more time if we could go in.

When he went back there to ask, my first foster mom was praying. When he came back, he said that the judge could see us. So we went back there, and the judge had to sign a couple of papers. My mom and dad had to sign a couple of papers, and then we got to leave. We headed to the restaurant; when we got there, we took a picture, and then we got to eat. Me, my brother, and my sister got a little food on our cute shirts. After that, we went home, and we hung out with Grandma Linda. Then she left. We ate pizza for dinner, and we watched a show. Then we went to bed.

The next day, we got out of bed and ate breakfast. Then we went to our church, and we had an adoption party. We had a bounce house, and lots of family and friends were there. Your aunt, April, painted a tree. We put our fingerprints on it, and then we put the name next to the person. After we did that, my brother and I got a blanket from this woman at our church. I got one with Sofia the First, and my brother got a Lightning McQueen blanket, and we still have it today. That day was the best day of my life because today I have loving and caring parents who take care of me. That day, I also got a new, loving, and sweet little sister named Rosie. I also got a loving and caring new big brother named Tyler and got to keep my other brother, Parker. This is my story.

Diabetes

Eli Owens

When I was one year old two weeks from my second birthday, I was diagnosed with diabetes. I have had it for twelve years. I am now thirteen. When I got home from the hospital it was hard for my parents and my whole family. To make it worse I had a grandma die and I can't remember her. I was in the hospital when she got sick and she still tried to visit me. When she was in the hospital she wasn't allowed to see me because when I got out a few days later she died. I can't remember anything about her. I can't see her again and I can't remember what she looks like. I spent my second and almost my third birthday in the hospital. It's hard for me because there are a lot of things I can't do.

I get treated differently. Some people think it's contagious. They think I'm gonna get them sick So I try my hardest to hide it. I hate when other people see it and they look at me differently. Some of my friends still don't know I have it. I don't want them to think of me differently. I've started to get more comfortable telling them what it is when they ask. I hate every day knowing I live like this. It's a struggle living how I live. I could have done many things and now it's limited. I can't do a lot like other people but I do what I can. People think I can just do anything. I get made fun of for being short. It's not like I can control it because diabetes stunts your growth.

They say I'm lucky because I can eat and drink in class but I'm not. When my sugar is high I feel like I'm going to throw up and my eyes hurt from the light from the sun or any light so I have to wear sunglasses. If my sugar gets too low I pass out a lot or I am too weak to eat or drink and I have to go to the hospital. It makes me hide my emotions and hide myself in my room for a long time. I play video games and that is what helps me escape reality and stops me from crying. That's why I play video games. They help me hide my emotions and keep them inside of me so I don't let them out on other people.

I don't like when I get stared at in public but people are just curious; they don't think I can see them but I do. It hurts me a lot but it's

just another day happening all over again every day it seems to me. Also Getting stared at and getting called lucky but I'm not, it sucks, and they don't know that.

When I was on my way to the hospital I died, and the doctors had to bring me back, so it's a miracle I'm here today. I miss a lot of my friends who are scared of me because of my diabetes. I miss the good times we had together. I know that they don't like me anymore but it's hard to trust people and how they would react when they see it. I think that's why I have a hard time making friends. So that's why I don't show it to people because they don't like me anymore because of it I get mad and all the bottled up anger I take it all out on people like my family and they don't deserve it. I can't count the times that I have just gone to my room and cried thinking I have to live my entire life with a disease that I can't stop or hide from everyone. I have had teachers that when I get to a new school and my teacher says we have a new student and he has diabetes I get weird looks and I'm just like another year of this.

If I wrote everything I wanted to I would have five thousand words about my life with diabetes. I have a hard life, but there are a lot more with an even worse life than me. I love to inspire other kids who have it so they can be more comfortable sharing their experiences like I am today. I know it's not easy.



POETRY

Sakura and I

Katie Tran

Whoosh,
the chilly wind blows.
Delicate pink petals drift,
Falling towards the nation's grounds.
The lively gathering of hamani;
A sign of Spring.

Standing next to the river,
"Would I get to see this forever?"
Petals dancing on the river's surface
Gracefully at ease on the water.
Soon being replaced by green
just like I was.

Soup

Abigail Walker

Soup, soup, soup,
Good, good, soup,
Steamy delicious soup,
How I yearn for thee,

Steam

 r
 i
 s
 e
 s

Bread cheese, and,
Potatoes - all things in my soup.
chicken , onions, and even carrots
Soup, soup, soup

Stir the pot,
 swish,
 swish,
 swish,

Soup, soup, soup
 yum

OKCTE 38

The Weekly Long Run

By Caleb Holcomb

So much depends upon
The weekly long run
Gliding across paved roads
Through the summer heat

Gentle Willow
David Summers

Gentle willow, do not weep,
winter's here it's time to sleep.
Sleep and dream, for summer's done –
gone the raindrops and the sun.
In the freezing winter night,
dream of daisies, warm and bright,
bluebells growing wild and free
by the river and sea.
Dream about the dragonflies
and how they sparkle in the sky.
Weeping willow, as you rest,
dream of all the happiest!

“Ode to the Author“

Brianna Blazek

In the notebook, words take flight.
A poet's tales, with beauty's shone light.
In the classes, a boring rhyme.
My dreams are dull in this slowed time.

New metaphors prance in my head.
With no time to write, I forget them again.
Lessons drag on, a grave straight line.
Class restarts, everyday, same time.

Literature flows from my jet black pen.
"The bell hasn't rung, just wait until then."
Lectures are dull, creativity's a crime.
My work is known, to none but my mind.

A high bell sounds, my heart now sings.
Now's the time to write great things.
Seven hours gone, a waste of my time.
My poems get lost in this school of grime.

One Sip

Brooke Harper

It started off as a sip
As if that was gonna be it
It felt so good to forget just
one more sip,
one more sip,
One, Two, Three, Four, then Five
That was it!
You are reckless
I started to wake up from my daydream
I felt so abused by you and your ways.
You took advantage of my age.
Only if, only if I had one wish
I would take back that very first sip.

Be Yourself

Lanna Fraire

“Be yourself.” They said,
But everything we do is “*weird*” or “*cringy*”.
“Be yourself.” They said,
But when we stand up for ourselves we’re “*back talking*” or “*rude*.”
If you like something, we’re “*obsessed*.”
If we're good at something, it's “*overrated*” and “*weird*.”
“Be yourself.” They said,
But don't be too funny, you're “*overdoing*” it.
Don't be confident, you're being a “*pick me*”.
“Be yourself.” They said,
But there is nothing left to be yourself when people are telling us what we have to be.
“Be yourself.” They said,
“But how?”

Sunsets Glowing

Belen Resendiz

The sun dunks low, in a fiery bow,
Painting the sky with its radiant glow.
Orange and pink, as far as eyes can see,
Day's final wink makes the heart sink.
Clouds catch fire, in this magic hour,
Day retires, under the night's power.
Stars emerge, as the shadows surge,
The Night's dirge begins its purge.
Sunset's grace, in its warm embrace,
That leaves a trace of its gentle pace.

It Never Entered my Mind

Wyatt Chapman

Out of the silence appears a crackle
An old vinyl record buzzing like fire
A fire warming the room
Warming the room on this cool autumn day

A soft minor piano begins to play
Building building building for something great
The brushes swoosh over the snare drum like wind,
and suddenly the blue notes of the sax jump and soothe the nerves in my
body

I start to remember memories of times I'd never seen
A date with someone I never knew
A break up with a friend I never had
A joy I never experienced

The music begins to speed up
Life flashes before my eyes,
And just as it faded in
It never entered my mind

Hope

Glory Adeosun

Something inside you like the lungs that help you breathe.

Something you want to hear like some relaxing music.

Something you want to feel like your mom's hands hugging you when you're sad.

Something you want to see like the ocean wave crashing on the beach.

Something you want to smell like your grandma's freshly baked cookies.

Something you want to taste like spring rain falling from the sky.

Something that you want to have no matter what.

Something that you want to share with people.

Something that you want to feel overwhelmed with.

Something that brings you joy that can be spread.

Something that can be with you through thick and thin.

Something like hope.

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80-HD

Adler Bates

Focus!

That's what they say.

Tap, Tap, Tap

Stop tapping your pencil!

Stop talking!

Why would you do that?

Stop making noises!

Stop moving!

Poke

Keep your hands to yourself!

Ohhh, Look at that.

Pay attention!

Whack!

WHY WOULD YOU DO THAT?

GO TO THE OFFICE!

Dancer

Lillian Baio

I am a dancer.
I dance to the music.
I have pain and fear,
I feel failure and defeat.
But at the same time, I'll never give up,
I keep going.
If I fall I make sure to get back up again,
I never stop practicing.
I have grace and beauty.
I don't dance because I'm happy,
I'm happy because I dance.
I don't dance for the glory and fame,
I dance because of how I feel inside.
I am strife, talent, determination, and beauty.
I take all the chances I receive.
When I dance it's like everything and all people on earth have
disappeared.
Even touching the hard shiny floors makes me feel like I'm at home.
That's how I feel as a dancer.

The Sirens' Song

by Makayla James

Their voice, sweeter than Aphrodite's beauty

Three and yet one, Their voices are desires

They sound beautiful but they equal eternal rest

Jagged rocks jut from every which way

The ship speeds toward it

The sailors are lost

Their yearnings meant nothing

Dismal depths as black as the pits of Tartarus

The sailors rest forever at the sea bed

broken in millions of pieces, The ship now sleeps in crooked rocks

All has been forgotten



Cutie Patootie

Carrington J. Keas

As the songbirds melodized during the aurora of dawn in the village of Pagosa Springs, the students in the little classroom turned their heads toward their muse. They face an awe-inspiring girl with the perfect amalgamation of beauty and brains- Ms. Ifeta Ruth. Ifeta exchanged a scintillating smile with her rosy cheeks and waved to her classmates. As she walked over to her desk, her ruffly floral dress flowed behind her like glorified angel wings. Her long, dark brunette hair swished side-to-side with every step she took elegantly.

Ifeta was the literal definition of perfect - from her silky, wavy hair and flawless, smooth caramel-toned skin to her almond-shaped eyes with long lashes that made her golden bronze eye color obtrude. To top it all off, she was exceedingly intelligent, too. Everything about her has invariably been perfect, making her the village's most popular girl. The townspeople even nicknamed her the "Angel's Child."

Today was not only the last day of school but also Ifeta's 16th birthday. At school, Ifeta received tons of gifts, including flowers, teddy bears, jewelry, and birthday cards. She was very thankful for these admirations. "Thank you so much, everyone!" Ifeta said in ebullience.

The rest of the day goes by sublimely for Ifeta. She adventured out at the creek with her friends and celebrated her birthday with her parents over supper. Then, Ifeta's parents set her in the living room for a conversation. "Ifeta, you are now sixteen. You are a perfect likeness to perfection. I know we tell you this a lot, but your father and I think you should bring your perfection to use." Ifeta's mother said. Ifeta felt perplexed about what they were hinting at. "We think you should do big things and go places. Places where you can get famous." Ifeta's dad said. Ifeta furrows her eyebrows in befuddlement. "So, we found an acting role for a show called Cutie Patootie- a Saturday night comedy about a girl named Cutie Patootie." Ifeta's mom says. "As your birthday present, we got you an audition." Ifeta's dad says with a light smile. "O-Oh..." Ifeta stutters. Silence permeated the room. "We thought that you'd be a little

more excited...” Ifeta’s mom said. “I just don’t want to move away from here if I get the role...” Ifeta said somberly. Ifeta’s mom speaks up again. “I know, but you will become the successful daughter you were born to be. Not just some author, like what you recalled.” Ifeta has told them that she longs to be an author, but her parents don’t believe she’ll get success from that. “You know, Ifeta, you should be a little more thankful. We’re giving you the present of potential everlasting success.” Ifeta’s dad said eloquently. Ifeta couldn’t quarrel, so she agreed. “Okay...thanks, Mom, thanks, Dad,” Ifeta said, forcing a smile. Ifeta’s parents gave a look and said they were pleased with her agreement.

Ifeta struggled to sleep that night.

After a week, Ifeta auditioned, and got the role. The judges loved her. She was natural at acting. They even offered to pay for a high-class apartment the Ruth family could stay in while filming the show. They saw a potential upcoming renaissance woman in Ifeta.

However, the Ruth family had to sign a contract for Ifeta to play the role of Cutie Patootie for two years. Ifeta’s parents did not hesitate to sign this contract. So, only a month after Ifeta’s birthday, they moved to the city- LA. Ifeta did not like the city. She missed the Springs- immeasurably.

Ifeta finished her first episode as Cutie Patootie a week after they moved, and the show was an instantaneous success. Everyone adored Ifeta as Cutie Patootie, although Ifeta shunned all the attention she was getting. It felt like too much for her.

Over time, Ifeta felt fatigued. Overworked.

Her beauty led her to modeling and even the cover of Vogue. She was also forced to follow a strict diet to stay “healthy.”

Ifeta felt sick.

During recent interviews, Ifeta confessed her actual thoughts. She would say, “I do not feel like myself anymore. Just Cutie Patootie. Which- in reality- will never change in the eyes of society.” Ifeta would describe how drained she feels and how she felt too young for this. She even

started to cry in one of her interviews. Fans started calling her “unappreciative” and “spoiled.”

A year later, it was Ifetas’ 17th birthday. She had just gotten home from a model runway show, dressed in a puffy pink short-length dress with knee-high black velvet boots from Valentino. She stands alone in her so-called “home,” which she interprets as her prison. She did not know where her parents were but didn’t care- they were rarely home.

Ifeta faces her large crystalline window, viewing the vast city. She notices a huge billboard with her crying face on it. There were words on top that said, “Cutie Patootie Breaks Down.”

Ifeta feels her throat dry out, her blood rushes to her face, leaving her skin tone to match her blush.

Ifeta hated that. She hated that she was now an embarrassment to society. She then fell to her knees, as she did not have the motivation to stand up. Ifeta felt like her head was drowning in discomfort as she shed a few tears with one slight blink of her eye.

Ifeta used to cry in the moonlight, but now the immense lofty buildings block it. She heard the city streets and couldn’t help but miss the symphony of songbirds.

As Ifeta thought of these sorrows more, her tears flowed unceasingly like a cascade. She sees her reflection in the mirror, but it is not her. She saw a dazzled-up gal wearing the outfit of a supermodel with pink face-painted hearts on her cheeks that were now smudged by her tears. Ifeta then rips off her fake eyelashes; she feels like they are too unnatural.

In a trice, Ifeta felt a yearning urge to write. She got out a pen and paper and promptly started writing. Though her hand was shaky, it was her passion.

As my young soul pleads for clemency,

They still give no repentance.

I have become nothing but a mold.

A mold for them to fill their poison in,
until it overflows.

-Angels Child

Then, Ifeta falls to the ground.

Perhaps her sorrow was so grand, it killed her.

Carnage

Isabelle DeVaney

The night had assumed a melancholic ambiance as the gusting winds of the enigmatic winter night swept and bellowed against the debris of the demolished city buildings. Amidst the desolate terrain, a series of ominous noises reverberated in the distance resembling the deafening echoes of gunfire. The eerie sounds pierced through the silence sending shivers down their spines.

The haunting echoes seemed to emanate from the very depths of the barren wasteland as if beckoning forth an unknown terror lurking in the dauntless shadows. As the perilous blizzard raged on, a pair of pale figures cautiously traversed the terrain, their shape barely visible amidst the swirling snowdrifts. Dressed in garments chosen to withstand the relentless assault of the icy gales, they were enveloped in a multitude of layers, donning jackets, coats, and an array of protective gear tailored exclusively for the merciless frigidty that trifled them.

The duo had been traversing the desolate and bleak city, their purpose veiled in secrecy as they sought to penetrate the escape route of the tarnished city embedded in rubble. The taller of the pair, possessing an air of undeniable importance, parted his lips, his voice barely audible amidst the thick mist that enveloped them. He cautiously inquired of his companion; his words shrouded in uncertainty.

“Hey Casimir, have you readied our secondary equipment?” he asked. His voice resonated with a rough but timid undertone.

Casimir slowly pivoted his gaze meeting the towering man’s piercing gray eyes. Casimir viewed his comrade with a sinister gaze; his corneas glistened mirroring the crimson hue of his bloodshot eyes against the canvas of his pallid complexion. Amidst the deafening cacophony of clashing metal and the distant wails of an otherworldly entity, Casimir found himself frozen in terror; his very retinas throbbed threatening to burst from their swollen sockets.

The beast was getting closer.

No Rules in School

Ashley Rios

“Good afternoon students, I have a very big announcement! On Monday, there won't be any rules”, Miss Lee stated through the school's intercom. Most of the kids were cheering, others were jumping on the desks like some animals in a zoo. Manuel knew he wouldn't be happy on Monday. He didn't like most of the rules at his school, but with these kids, those rules were better than none.

“Hey Manuel, can you give me your math worksheet?” asked one of his so-called ‘friends’. Manuel doesn't know them that well; he just talks to them since he is well known at school.

“... sure”, replied Manuel.

“Hey Lexi are you-”, Manuel got interrupted by the bell.

“What was that, Manuel?” questioned Lexi.

“I was going to ask you if you're going to school on Monday?” asked Manuel, while packing his stuff.

“Yeah, why wouldn't I,” asked Lexi.

“Well... you know the whole ‘no rules’ thing?” questioned Manuel.

“I don't actually think that's true. They might just be messing with us”, replied Lexi.

“Mm. I guess you have a point”, stated Manuel.

“Anyways let's hurry before Katie and Sam think we're ditching them”, spoke Lexi. It's now Monday and all of the kids are crowding around the doors. Once the doors opened kids are pushing and shoving, like if it was black Friday at Target. Manuel's group decided to stay at their favorite teacher's room for the rest of the school day. They made it in one piece.

“Ok...I didn't actually believe they were serious”, spoked Lexi. Breaking the silence that fell upon the group.

“Yeah... wait, where's our teacher?,” questioned Sam, while looking around the room worried.

“He’s probably getting his 5th cup of coffee”, Manuel responded, reassuring Sam.

“Uh, Hello. I'm surprised you guys even came today”, stated the teacher.

“Well, we didn't think they were serious, ” spoked Katie, “and besides, who wouldn't like to stay in the Creative Writing class?”

“You’re only saying that because it's our last day before break here”, responded Manuel. Lexi nodded her head while Sam was in his thoughts.

“Hey Sam, what time is it?,” Manuel questioned.

“Huh. Oh, um, hold up. It's 10:56”, Sam responded. He was looking up at Manuel while holding up his phone at him. This made Manuel laugh.

“Why are you laughing? Is it because of my height?,” questioned Sam with an annoyed look on his face.

“Mm. Maybe. Who knows?” Manuel responded, shrugging his shoulders.

“You B word!,” responded Sam with an offended look on his face. This only made Manuel laugh even more. This vibe continued, ‘till the bell rang. This isn't just any bell; this bell meant that it was the freshmen’s lunch.

“Do we really need to go? Can’t we just order and then Mr. M can pick it up for us”, spoked Katie. Sam nodded his head in agreement while walking with Katie towards the door.

“No Katie, and besides we are not going to sacrifice our teacher just for some food”, replied Lexi. Mr. M just chuckled while going for his brown, soft, mushy banana. The whole group walked down towards the stairs to the lunchroom. They got to the cafeteria and didn’t expect to see the cafeteria so... clean.

“I’m going to be honest right now, I really thought that the cafeteria was going to be a mess”, said Manuel, while walking into the lunch line.

“Yeah, me too”, replied Sam. The whole group was in line waiting for their food, when all of a sudden a short, annoying, loud, obnoxious kid decided to cut.

“What the heck!,” stated Manuel, only he didn’t say heck.

“Deal with it!,” screamed the obnoxious little man.

“He’s so annoying”, whispered Katie.

“I know! He’s so pathetic”, whispered Sam. The group started to rant about the guys at their school while waiting in the lunch line. The minute that they sat at their table, food went flying between them. They looked at each other, and then at the direction where the food was thrown. The whole group was in shock as if they had seen a cat get run over. A lot of kids were running around, some were throwing food, and some were doing both. Soon enough a food fight started. Lexi started to throw food as well, while Katie was just recording everything. Kids screaming like some wild animals. The short, annoying, loud, obnoxious kid started to take off his shoes and started to throw them. His friends started to catch on and do the same thing, which later escalated to almost everyone.

“Let’s get out of here before it gets any worse!,” screamed Manuel through all of the loud noises.

“You’re right! But what do we do about the other two?!” Sam screamed back.

“We’ll drag them with us! We just need to get out of here”, screamed Manuel trying to avoid the flying shoes. Manuel grabbed Lexi’s arm and ran for it. Sam was trying to grab Katie but failed the first time. Manuel made it out okay with Lexi, but Sam managed to slip and Katie ended up dragging him out of the cafeteria. Once they were all together they sat down near the restrooms.

“Why did we leave?! I was having fun!,” spoked Lexi.

“WE didn’t want to get hit with crap”, replied Manuel.

“You always do this, I’m going to the Creative Writing class. Anyone coming with me!?,” spoked Lexi as she was getting up.

“I’ll go”, Katie whispered. Sam ended up staying with an angry Manuel. Manuel was so done with today. He honestly wished he hadn’t come to school. There was a loud silence between the two boys.

“Do you want to be alone or ditch today?,” questioned Sam while looking at his friend with a worried face.

“Ditch? You’re telling me YOU want to ditch school?,” asked Manuel with a cocky smirk.

“Do you want to or not?,” asked Sam, while trying to hide his smile.

“Sure, why not?” replied Manuel, “besides it’s hectic today.”

Hope Through All

By Jackson Wilkins

It was March 2004, Fallujah Iraq

I was 19 and in the US Marine Corps when the first assault on Fallujah –a city in Iraq– took place. I remember rolling up to the outskirts of the city while listening to rock in roll. Peering through my night vision goggles, I could see a place torn by war. Bodies littering the streets, cars burning as bright as the sun, remains of tanks after being blown up by Iraqi RPG's (Rocket Propelled Grenade). I was sitting there hoping that I wouldn't end up like that, that I'd make it through the war and then leave it behind me.

Later the next morning, we were busting down doors in every house in the city praying and hoping all of us would survive: some had families, others with enemy insurgents ready to grease a leatherneck – a nickname given to marines many years ago. On the first day, we had breached 60 houses, but only 23 of them had people, seven of those had insurgents and the other 30 were vacant. We had no casualties the first day, but the second day felt like the world was crumbling relentlessly at my feet, everywhere we went we got shot at, every building we breached there were insurgents. When we went down Sharie Almawt, later known as Death Street, machine gun fire erupted from a three- story building, killing two Marines to my right and our Navy corpsman to my left. Firing my M16 assault rifle, I ran out of the view of the gunner over to where my platoon had gathered. We were all hoping to make it through the day but then there was a loud “vroom” of the engine. We knew we were saved, a few seconds later a convoy with three hummers and two BFV's rolled down the street. The 25mm guns on the BFV's opened up on the top of the buildings, decimating the insurgents inside. We asked the convoy driver, “Can we hitch a ride back to base camp?”

When we returned to base, the funeral director gave a speech, a flag was put over the coffins, then we loaded up the boys on a plane and they were shipped back to the states in boxes. After a few moments of pity, I realized... *that could have been me. Why was I the lucky one?* After a

SHORT STORY

few hours they gave us to recuperate, we were back patrolling the city. Sitting in our hummers listening to some rock and roll and a lady in a black burka walked out with a bag in one of her hands, and there had been reports of suicide bombers-people walking up to vehicles and blowing themselves up-when she was about 30 yards from the vehicle she started to reach in her bag. Now we were putting up our hands and yelling, "Stop" we are raising up our weapons, and there were two things going through my head. *Either we have to shoot her or she's going to walk up to the vehicle and blow up.* So I raised my rifle and squeezed off a few rounds and that made everybody in the other vehicles open up. They opened up on her with 15ish weapons and as she fell her hand came out holding a white flag. I was stunned, this civilian was killed by my actions. Me and a few other Marines also got leave to Italy to take a break from the war for a while.

When I returned, it was my last day in country. We were back to clearing houses, busting in rooms, taking out insurgents, and finding hidden supply stashes. Knowing that at any moment I could be another teenager sent home in a box. One of the houses we breached the insurgents had trip-wired the house as soon as our breacher smashed down the door an explosion sent him flying back, the shrapnel killing him instantly and wood from the door splintering into a million pieces. Wounding another Marine. We charged into the house while our new corpsman tended to the wounded Marine. There were two insurgents with AKs. I pulled the trigger on my M16 taking them both down with ease. When we returned to base camp that night the Marine with the wood splinters was said to make a full recovery. The next morning at 1:05 A.M. I boarded the plane to go back to the states.

When I got home my mood began to change, I got angry easily. If someone would say or do something I would get mad and then go through an anxiety attack and start shaking. I didn't know what to do, suffering from depression and heavy ptsd. I had started to give up on life but I found something to give me hope. I started to pluck at a Bass guitar. I started a band called The Daybreak made up of four Marine vets that saw combat in Iraq, including myself and we all got to travel across the US

performing, most of our songs were about experiences before, during and after the war. About how we struggled internally with emotions and telling the stories of the brave men that didn't make it back, but we sing because throughout our time in the country, music had given us hope, and we wanted to share that hope with the world.

I didn't know where I'd go but music helped me from drowning in a bottle or lost in a medicine vile like my friend. Yet, you must always have hope through it all.

Time Void

By Bella Bostick

Lina's eyes darted around, terror filling her mind once again. *Please, Goddess, not this again...* She sniffed the air and gagged at the scent. Every time she closed her eyes and drifted away, she came to that void, that abyss.

Lina slowly got to her feet and glanced around. An endless void. Thick red liquid splashed at her toes. She didn't really know why, but she could always sense whose it was; hers and her brother, Darius's. However, this time it was different. She could sense another presence, though she couldn't tell who it was. Whoever it was, she could tell they were watching her.

She yelled, and an echo replied. She didn't know much about physics, but she didn't think there could be an echo without walls. *Dumb dreams, stupid sleep*, she thought.

Lina trudged through the thick red stuff until she stepped on something that wasn't void-floor. She yelped, falling over and clutching her foot, which was now bleeding. Grumbling, she sat up and reached inside the sludge, her hands reaching out for nothing until they finally grasped something solid. Pulling it out, she examined its sharp ridges and smooth surface. The diamond, with its crystalline sparkle and otherworldly glowing light, was her mother's most precious heirloom. *Mother...? Something to do with her, maybe?*

Lina eyed it, curious as to how it might end up there in the void. It was a place for weird, somehow prophetic stuff, not normal stuff. She picked up the diamond and stood up, still muttering her grumpy gibberish. Lina began to trudge through the void, careful to make sure she didn't drop the diamond, until she stepped on something else that was much more squishy than it. She eagerly picked it up, examining its dead, bloodstained petals. It was originally a white tulip. Her eyes widened. Tulips, specifically white ones, were her mother's favorite flower.

The blood began to rise, filling the void. Lina flailed around, stupidly trying to escape. She was going to wake up. *The diamond and the tulip. The diamond and the tulip.*

Lina opened her eyes, inhaling the ever-so-sweet air of her home. She was safe in her own room with its charcoal-colored sheets and triangle-shaped ceiling. Her little brother, Darius, was standing over her, shaking her awake. Lina watched for a moment as his fluffy blonde hair and half-elven ears bounced, his white, pupil-less eyes staring at nothing. It was an everyday occasion that the half-siblings would be used for all the household chores and money-making responsibilities now that their mother was infected with the Demon's Plague.

"I'm awake, I'm awake," Lina yawned, swatting Darius's hand away. "Can you give me a few minutes or something?"

"Lina," Darius choked. "Lina... it's mother!"

"...What?" Lina breathed. She wanted to think it was something else he meant. *Please, not mother*, she thought. *Please let this not be what the dream was trying to tell me!*

She glanced over past the open door of her bedroom, and sat up with a jolt, staring in horror at what she saw. A willow coffin on the floor. A man in a black robe walked into her room, looking at her and Darius with pity. Shock whipped Lina in the chest, and then anger, sorrow. She was fueled with emotions, screaming and howling in her heart.

The man with the black robe walked over to them, shuffling through a notebook. "Emmalina and Darius Cherish. I am sorry for your loss. I am here to organize your mother's will. My name is Kateik Leng."

"But..." Lina sniffled. "She was only on stage one of the plague."

Kateik Leng frowned. "Overdose of painkillers, I'm afraid."

Darius sobbed into Lina's shoulder. She tried to console him, but she was shaking. Leng pulled out his mother's diamond from his pocket, and her eyes widened with shock. "She wanted to leave this to the both of you."

“What is it?” Darius asked Lina.

“It’s her diamond,” She answered, her cheeks still wet. She didn’t want to look at the thing. After all, it was in the dream that foretold her mother’s doom.

Darius’s hueless eyes widened, and Lina cupped her hands. Leng promptly dropped the diamond, and Lina stared at it with tears in her eyes.

“I’ll wait for you outside,” Leng said with a torturous monotone, “you need to get ready for the funeral.”

Lina soon emerged from her home in her nicest black gown, glowing faeries clinging to the lace. She put her arms around Darius as she watched Leng and his men lowering the coffin into the ground. Lina only thought of three things; Darius, her mother, and the void.

After Leng’s men completely covered the coffin in dirt and read a long eulogy, Darius walked towards the tombstone, careful that he didn’t trip. He slowly reached down and placed a beautiful white tulip by the grave. He walked back to Lina, who was left in shock. The diamond and the tulip.

Three years later, Lina dreamed again. In the void, she noticed three things on the floor; a spellbook, a crown belonging to the queen Lina had sworn to fight, and a shadowy figure. Lina stared at it, until it opened its glowing eyes. She could see the silhouette of the figure, and it looked like—like *Darius*. He stared at her. “Darius?”

“I’m not your brother,” Darius’s voice rang out.

“Then who are you?”

“I am the one that allows you to enter this realm in your dreams. The ancient power that has been reborn once more, in the form of two siblings. I am you just as equally as I am Darius Cherish. You have a significant role to fulfill; your death shall unlock the abilities of the Savior, Darius Cherish, who shall be the one to free everyone from this world’s terrible fate.”

Lina felt her heart beat faster than ever. “I must help Darius. If this is the only way... so be it.”

“Very well. Emmalina Cherish, the Sacrifice is thanked.”

“Don’t Trust Aliens”

By Marlee Inman

After stopping for some hillside sandwiches, we stepped into the Dead Wood as the first humans to enter in hundreds of years, on a mission to reawaken the spirit of the forest.

Sound and color were sucked away. For a moment, as I stood in the thick blanket of silence, not a single thought crossed my mind. It was as if I had stepped through the trees right onto the ocean floor, where green had found its way into the blue and now sat suspended in time. Perfectly still. A canopy so dense the only light source was fractured through tiny pinpricks among the needles, where the verdure was the thinnest, arced high above our heads. I craned my neck to watch as they rustled in a breeze I could not feel, brushing against each other but making no noise. Darkness pooled at the bases of the trees, peeking between their roots. The ground sloped upwards, mottled with pine cones and rolling abruptly in grassy knolls.

This was unlike any forest I’d ever set foot in.

Bertie’s voice startled me, an anomaly in the lull of the woods.

“We should get going.” He talked in short, clipped sentences, his words curling oddly as if he was not used to speaking. A seven foot hunk of muscle, glossy black eyes that threatened to spill over in inky tears, a face that only bordered on human; he reminded me very much of an alien.

I tried to focus more on the pay of the job than the fact that my partner might not be human.

As we hiked, Bertie asked me questions about the legend of the spirit of the forests, gauging my understanding.

In ancient Latin, the name of this spirit is Custos of Palingenesis. Custodian or guardian of rebirth. It takes the form of the apex predator. A lion of pure gold, with a glistening mane and muscles that ripple under a tawny coat. Harsh green eyes that ruin the picture. This spirit went into

an intense hibernation, along with every creeping thing of the forest, because. . . because. . .

“Many do not know the true reason this spirit went to sleep.” Bertie said, when I couldn’t continue. “The Custos of Palingenesis saw destruction heading towards his home, a raging tempest of snow and ice. These woods had endured snow, rain, hail, lightning, but never a blizzard as angry as this one. So the guardian willed the forest to sleep, vanished the woodland critters and beasts to reside as lesser spirits in the safety of the trees.” He turned to me, an obsessive pitch taking over his voice. “I have long searched for one worthy of this mission, someone who wanted it to succeed badly enough. And, finally, here you stand.”

I laughed uneasily. I didn’t care one bit about reawakening the Dead Wood in comparison to the amount of money Bertie had promised.

As we neared the crest of the foothill, the air grew cold, biting at the back of my throat. The trees rustled in earnest, as if the forest knew it was close to being restored.

The moment I saw the grandly knotted tree, utterly out of place, its trunk and branches so thickly wrung together it was hard to tell where the start and end was, I knew we had reached the home of the guardian. It was a colossal semblance of a willow tree, twisting inward, tightly, before letting its leaves fan out in an explosive display of greenery dotted with reds and purples. Unlike the stiff, obstinate pine trees, this giant is topped with a flush of thick leaves rather than needles, their lime hue punctuated by vibrant clumps of berries. A faint circle of rain drilled down between the edge of the pines and the magnificent willow, lined with a golden tinge from a light that radiated deep within the tree. The fighting spirit of the Custos of Palingenesis, a burning ember from the very heart of the Dead Wood.

Before I could even say “wow”, a crushing blow landed across the back of my head. I crumpled instantly, a ragdoll as I collapsed against the rain splattered duff, the aureate glow of the guardian’s tree blinding me. He had hit me just right, at the exact pressure point needed to disable me. I couldn’t move my arms, or my legs, not even my neck.

I made out Bertie's hulking shoulders, his face cast clearly in the contrast of shadow and light, as if it was carved directly into a lifeless expression.

His mouth was moving, maybe giving an empty apology, or an explanation, or telling me I'd been wrong to trust him. I spluttered uselessly, blunders lost in the ringing in my ears, the drum of throbbing pain in my head, the rain slicing down from the now dark sky.

Bertie kneeled in the dirt next to me. "It is imperative that you understand how important you are to this mission. You will be forever famous among the former Dead Wood inhabitants for your sacrifice." It was a well-rehearsed speech, thoroughly combed over and over to make me believe I was a willing victim. He rocked forward, seizing my numb legs and beginning to drag me towards the big tree, still talking in his mechanical drone all the while.

The light was swelling like an approaching headlight. The last glimpse of light you see before the car crashes into you. The last glimpse before you're wiped from existence.

The golden glow reached an alarming whiteness, and even as hot tears cascaded from my scalding eyes I couldn't look away. It transformed before me, receding quickly into a mild sheen, and a great lion stepped out of its wake.

"We shall put your human capability to good use." Bertie said, and in his voice held something remorseful. "I am sorry. . ."

His words were drowned out as the lion stretched its mouth in a yawning roar that resounded in the clearing, ivory teeth bared. It was growing more solid, and I felt myself fading quickly, being sucked right from my body. For a moment, I was suspended in between space and time, nothing, nothing. Then I was a gentle breeze, a whisk of a furry tail before it disappeared from sight, a forest floor breaking the fall of dead leaves.

The roar was cut off. The rain stopped. Sunlight was casting soft rays through the trees, and everything glowed in a yellow shine.

I was suddenly upright, staring at Bertie as he stood over my body. I looked down, and horror rose like bile as I stared at the two golden paws below me. *I* was the lion, and *he* was me, infesting my body like a parasite takes over its host.

Something terrible, deep inside my comprehension, told me this was permanent. This was exactly why Bertie had needed me, why he had promised insurmountable numbers of money I should have known he didn't have.

I thought of my family, huddled in their grimy apartment, awaiting my return and the money that would guide us to a better life. I knew they would wait forever. And that thought alone was enough to send me lunging towards Bertie, seeing nothing but a spiraling red, as I desperately tried to tear, rip, draw blood -

Bang!

Shooting pain wracked my body, sending me reeling, driving me to the ground. A whining growl escaped me, and as I looked up I saw my own self, holding my own gun, controlled by a spirit that would stop at nothing to restore its home.

Life was pooling quickly from me, the pain dampening. The last words I heard, letting my eyes slip shut and succumbing to the bliss, echoed numbly,

“We thank you.”

Imagine

Naomi Madere

Spark's POV:

"Spark. That's what I'm called. My name is Sparky, but everyone just calls me Spark," the bright-eyed young man said, looking at the woman behind her desk. "Spark? Huh. You meet someone new everyday. Mr. Tennison will see you in a minute," she said with a hand waving towards the waiting room. Spark nods, walking over towards a chair and sitting down in it. He looked around at the spacious waiting room. A fine oval rug was plastered on the ground, a coffee table on top of it, a few magazines scattered on the countless sofas and chairs. He heard the dreadful ticking of the clock as he bent down to grab a magazine, flipping through it with no interest whatsoever.

"Spark?" The man's head perked up. "Mr. Tennison will see you now." the lady chirped, walking back to her desk. Spark straightened the collar of his shirt and walked up to the intimidating door with the letter T burned into it in cursive. Spark turned the doorknob and caught an unmistakable scent of pine. He was tempted to fall forward and almost did so. Remembering where he was, he walked in calmly. Mr. Tennison was definitely younger than most multi-millionaire company owners, but Spark was in no position to judge his hopefully soon-to-be boss. "Come in. Sit down Mr. Watts," Tennison said, gesturing to the plush chair he had on the opposite side of his desk. Spark did as he was asked, sitting into the uncomfortable chair. "I've read your resumé and I must say, I'm impressed. You have a lot of qualities that could prove useful to us. But the question is... Where do we put you?" Tennison asked, looking Spark in the eyes, his green ones looking dull but determined. "I'll take anywhere you put me, sir," Spark said anxiously, gulping, "Well then... How good are you with guns, Watts?" Tennison asked, his eyebrow arched a bit.

Spark paused. "I'm pretty good with them. I don't ever miss," he said honestly, looking back at Tennison. "Great! You're hired. You'll start in fifteen minutes. Get ready," Tennison said, adjusting the papers on his desk that Spark could only assume was work. "Oh, Mr. Tennison?" Spark

asked. Tennison looked up at Spark. "Call me Spark, please." he requested. Tennison nodded, "Call me Roy, Spark." Spark shifted in the chair, "Okay. Where do I go?" he asked. Roy pushed a file over to Spark, "Everything's in there. Have fun! Bye!" Roy said with a grin, waving Spark out.

- 12 minutes later -

Spark couldn't tell what was scaring him more: the fact he wasn't getting any information from anyone or the fact he had a gun that looked like it could obliterate an entire country. He'd read through Roy's file but all it had said was where to go, what to get, and that he better not miss. Spark didn't want to know what the consequence was if he missed, but a small rebellious part of him did. "Watts!" Spark's head snapped in the direction where he heard his name. He was pushed into a room before he figured out where the voice had come from.

Not long after the door in front of him opened, letting a cold breeze hit his face. The area in front of him was dimly lit, not giving Spark confidence at taking the job, "Fuck.. Lord save me," he mumbled walking forwards. The hard metal door closing behind him, he raised the gun. Hearing a little girl giggle in the distance made the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. "Hello?" he asked, his voice sounding faint even to his own ears. He heard shuffling in the darkness ahead of him and he froze. Whenever something brushed his leg, he inhaled sharply; the air dusty, he knew he'd sneeze soon. Spark held his breath and pointed the gun down, seeing nothing there. "What the hell..?" he muttered. Another round of giggles from the black abyss; he shivered. Everything sounded more distorted the more he heard the giggles. Spark's head began to pound, but he continued forwards, refusing to abandon his job. He heard distorted shuffling and looked down, mumbling another prayer. He pointed the gun up and pointed down. Seeing a small kid -she couldn't have been over ten or eleven- he took a mental note of her appearance: long, unkempt black hair, her face oval and pale just like her skin, ragged clothes, curious, wide purple-ish eyes staring at him. Spark sneezed, the air finally getting to him, and the girl giggled, making his head pound again, "Hello. You're the kiddo that makes me feel lightheaded. I'm Spark," he introduced, grinning.

SHORT STORY

Spark sat on the ground and the girl mimicked him, sitting down, “S... Sp..?” she asked, glancing up at him cautiously, “That’s it. Keep on trying,” Spark encouraged, taking a step forward. The girl scrambled backward, yelping as if he’d touched her with hot metal. Spark heard a scraping sound and was on his feet in a flash, gun in his hand, trying to find the source of the sound. He felt a brush on his leg and he whipped around, almost hitting the girl in the face with the barrel of the gun. She cocked her head and bit the barrel, a confused look on her face. Spark let out a sigh of relief. “Don’t bite that,” he ordered, pleading. The girl let go and stared at Spark. “Spp.. Sppaaaark..?” she asked, her eyes watchful as he smiled, nodding, “Yes. I’m Spark. What’s your name?” The girl looked down then looked back up. “Saaaggee?” she asked, confused. “Okay. Hi, Sage,” Spark said, grinning. Sage mimicked him, grinning widely. Spark froze, his face fixed on her teeth. He’d never seen a child like her before. She had extremely sharp teeth, almost canine-like.

Pearl Harbor

Harper Bays

BOOM! BOOM! Torpedoes crashed into the sides of the ship. “James!” I yelled, but he was nowhere in sight. “Richard, over here!” I crawled towards his voice and he yanked me up the ladder. In less than an hour the *USS Oklahoma* would sink, bringing down 429 sailors of the 2,402 who died on December 7, 1941.

“Hey Richard, do you think that we will be back for Christmas?”

“Probably not,” I replied.

“I just hope I can talk to Barbara.”

“Yeah, same with Mary.” James and I have been best friends since we could crawl. Going to Taloga High School, there weren't many options. We married our high school sweethearts, Mary and Barbara, and both got drafted. Though we went to different boot camps, we somehow became bunkmates and were stationed in the same spot. I looked at the clock, 7:53. I marked off 17 on my Short Timers. This is a paper with an illustration and numbers that you get when you are close to being stationed somewhere else or going home. We walked outside our room. “Away Fire and Rescue Party” was passed on by some sailors leaving the mess hall. We hurried up to the third floor. Soon after, “Abandon Ship” got to us. One hit, two. Suddenly, the lights went out. Scrambling up the ladder to the hatch, oil started pouring in.

On the second floor, the battle lights were on. Three hits, four hits, five.

“James! The ship is going to tip any second now! “We need to hurry!” Six hits, seven hits, eight. The strong scent of fuel filled my nose. I suddenly collapsed. I felt someone dragging me up a ladder. A strong slap woke me up. I jumped to my feet and heard the ship groan. Nine hits. The ship was going down. As we raced to the dimly lit ladder, James passed out. I slung him on my shoulder and climbed to the deck. As the ship

started turning, he gained consciousness. Once he realized what was happening, we leaped off the side into the oil filled water.

We watched in horror as the biggest and most advanced ship, the *USS Oklahoma*, slowly sank into the water. We started to shore with a few other soldiers. After what felt like an eternity, we finally made it to shore. Our arms and legs were burning from swimming the long distance. One of the sailors swimming with us had gotten a bullet through the shoulder and was bleeding all over the warm yellow sand. I quickly took off my undershirt and wrapped it around the gory wound. We ducked into the hospital and dropped the sailor off. We watched out the window as the planes started to slowly fall back. After getting the sailor to safety, we found out that his name was Robert. We hurried out to help carry the wounded into the hospital. We all knew that this meant war.

The *USS Arizona*, *USS Nevada*, *USS California*, *USS West Virginia*, *USS Cassin*, *USS Downes*, and the *USS Oglala* were also *lost that day*. “We aren’t going to go home anytime soon,” I thought aloud.

“Yeah, well hopefully we will get to tell Mary and Barbara we are okay,” James replied.

We slowly walked back to the headquarters and called Barbara and Mary when we were dismissed that night. They were relieved to hear the sound of our voices. They sounded like they had been crying. Once we assured our wives that we were alright, we walked back to the headquarters and fell asleep on the floor.

The Origin

Vivian England

I was halfway there, ready to end Amy's life, but the burning question lingered in my mind: Why did Amber desire her own mother's demise? Oh well, answers would come with payment.

Silently, I slipped through the window, my eyes scanning the dimly lit room that smelled of gunpowder until I found my target. The moonlight filtered through the curtains, casting eerie shadows on the furniture. The room smelled of old wood and lingering memories of horror, amplifying the tension as I approached Amy with silent steps. "I found you," I murmured, the tension obvious in the moonlit room.

"Hello, Amy. It's nice to meet you," I said, my tone chilling and controlled. The cold, metal dagger glinted ominously in the dim light as I held it against her delicate neck. Amy's panicked plea filled the room, irritating me.

"Please let me go! What do you want? I have money I can give you—1,000, 2,000, maybe even 5,000...?" Her voice quivered as desperation echoed in her words.

My annoyance turned to anger. "I don't care about your money, idiot." You're boring me. Buh-bye!" The room seemed to close in on us as I severed the lifeline with a swift, controlled slice to her throat. The metallic scent of blood lingered in the air, creating an eerie atmosphere.

"No, ple—"

I silenced her, leaving the room cloaked in an unsettling quiet. I waved to the lifeless body before walking away, shadows dancing on the walls.

With Amber, curiosity consumed me. "Is she really dead?"

"Yep! Swift and clean, exactly how you asked," I replied, my voice steady. The moonlight spilled into the room, creating a contrast between light and darkness.

"Thanks, I guess." The curiosity intensified; why did Amber want her own mother dead?

"Hey, uhm... Why?"

Amber turned, her face a mixture of puzzlement, anguish, and frustration. The room was dimly lit, and the shadows played on her face, revealing the complexity of her emotions. "Why... Why what?"

"Why did you have me kill your mom?" I asked, unable to suppress my curiosity. The air in the room hung heavy with the weight of dark unspoken secrets.

"It's really complicated," she replied, her voice tinged with sorrow. "My mom isn't the best person." The room seemed to echo with the history of their tumultuous relationship.

Intrigued, I pressed for more details. "But why go to such extreme measures? Why hire an assassin to kill your own mother?"

Amber took a deep breath, struggling to find the right words. "I had to. It was the only way to protect myself and other hybrids. My mom always thought it was abnormal to be a hybrid. She abused me since I was a little girl. She's involved in dangerous dealings, criminal activities that have put our lives at risk. I couldn't let her drag me down with her."

Understanding began to dawn on me. "So, you wanted to sever ties completely, to ensure your safety." The room held the weight of Amber's past, echoing with the pain she had endured.

Amber nodded, with tears trickling down her face. "It was a painful decision, but I had to prioritize my own well-being. I didn't want to end up like her, consumed by darkness, corruption and hatred."

Silence hung heavy as we absorbed the weight of Amber's confession. The room seemed to breathe with the weight of the truth. I reached out, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder. "I'm sorry you had to go through that. You must know that you're not alone." I told her gently. "I'll be here for you, no matter what."

Amber managed a faint smile, gratitude shining through her tears. "Thank you. It means more than you know." The room witnessed a moment of connection, a shared understanding in the midst of shadows.

As emotions swirled around us, I couldn't help but wonder about Amber's future. How would her life change now that her mother was gone? Could she find light amidst the darkness that had consumed her family? Only time would reveal the answers. The room stood witness to a newfound connection, a bond forged in the fires of shared secrets and shadows.

Odd Behavior Unexplained

By Ava Bowen

What happened to my sister? This question has bothered me for weeks. No one else sees it, but she seems meaner than normal. The behavior might be the most normal part though. She changed her look, speech, and her friends. I am not even let in her room anymore. So if anyone finds this, my name is Allie Webb, and this is my diary. I am keeping this log to explain the new changes in my sister. We will see at the end what happens.

Sawyer can play 984 instruments (including her angelic voice), and she is self-taught on over half of them. She never struggled too much with any instrument until she got to the harp. Not even the best teacher in the world could teach her. She kept trying, but the more she practiced, the worse she got.

“I hate this instrument,” she said one day. “I can’t learn how to play it! It is so frustrating!”

Our mother replied, “Look Sawyer, the harp takes time to play. Soon you will get it down, I promise. I can even help you if you need.”

“You’re right. I will get it someday. It just might not be as quick and easy as I have gotten with all the other instruments.” She went up to her room and immediately started to practice more and more. But the more she practiced, the worse she sounded. She finally admitted defeat and said that she needed a teacher. This was the first time since Sawyer was 10 that she needed a teacher on an instrument.

A few weeks later our mom finally found a good teacher for Sawyer. Although the teacher, Miss Z, was a little odd, Sawyer seemed to like her so I pushed it aside. But after a couple of days, those worried feelings started to come back. Sawyer was not acting her usual self, and it started to scare me. It also felt like it was affecting our friendship. Usually, she is kind and our relationship is good, but lately, that has not been the case.

She was being very rude to all of our teachers at school, and once she even ditched the day entirely! Come to find out, she was at Miss Z's studio practicing.

"Sawyer, you know that we can talk about whatever. What is going on? You haven't been acting like yourself lately," I asked her one day.

"Allie, I feel fine okay. No need to worry about me," she replied.

"It is just that you have been hanging out with Miss Z a lot lately, and I haven't seen you as yourself too much recently. It seems as though you are changing for someone's acceptance," I explained.

"Look, the only person that I am changing for is myself. So don't worry about me, I am fine," she said, but I could tell that more was going on than her just wanting self-acceptance.

I finally left it alone, but then she started to change more and more.

Usually, Sawyer dresses differently, but she has started to wear a lot of dark clothing in her wardrobe, even though she usually wears nicer, brighter clothing. This didn't bother me though, I mean, I have changed my style before. But then she started to do bold makeup when she had never worn makeup before. Then, and this is what drove me over the edge, she dyed and cut her hair. Sawyer and my hair is a pale blonde and waist length, but she dyed it black and cut it to a bob. It was disappointing to watch this change in her. Now everyone can tell us apart, and no one was able to before. The thing is though, it is not her fault. I still choose to believe that it is all Miss Z, but I still need proof. Nobody would believe me if I assumed.

I finally thought that enough was enough. I wanted the sister that I loved back and nothing was going to stand in my way. So, I decided to take matters into my own hands. I followed her to her harp practice to see what was happening there.

I got there and found a window that showed me everything. I could see the whole room, and the room was disturbing. It was filled with

gadgets and chemistry sets, and Miss Z was wearing a white coat and goggles. So, a mad scientist is what I am up against.

“Sit right here like normal,” Miss Z said to Sawyer. Sawyer did as she was told. “Up til now, we have just been working on the frightening look, rude speech, and cold attitude, but now we are going to be working on the angry emotions, foul actions, and the powers that come with it. This serum is still in the testing stage, so you might be severely injured by the end of this, but if all goes well you will be another pawn in my plan for world domination!” Miss Z ranted off to Sawyer.

“I am willing to do whatever it takes. I haven’t come this far for nothing. We should get done quickly though. Allie is becoming suspicious of me,” Sawyer explained.

“I never liked that sister of yours. She always gets in the way.” Miss Z expressed.

“She isn’t that bad. She is very nice and...” Sawyer was saying but was then cut off.

“We need to get this serum injected into you now! You are starting to get soft again!” Miss Z yelled at Sawyer.

I was there for a few minutes before I watched her take out a sharp needle and point it Sawyer’s way. I was trying to be as quiet as possible so I could watch what was happening, but that did not happen. I tried to crouch down more to get a better view when I slipped on a rock and hit my head.

Before I blacked out, I heard Miss Z’s raspy voice scream, “The serum worked!”

Centre de Correction Comportementale Haubourdin

Michael Alford

Jason Deenson was the type of person who was never told no when he was younger. This led to some less-than-preferable behavioral patterns (though his parents didn't notice; they were too busy bickering). In sixth grade, he smuggled a stolen ant farm into school to terrorize his Entomophobic teacher; in eighth grade, he posed as his deceased older brother to get into a liquor store to buy his first drink; and in tenth grade, he was expelled for beating up one of his few friends. Jason was a crooked-minded, self-absorbed person with all moral compasses pointing southward. That being said, you'd be surprised to see him working as one of the top legal advisers in the area.

His journey begins with being expelled. Jason beat up his friend so badly that he had to be fed through a tube for two months (though he did survive, unlike Sam). His parents were immediately informed of the happening and finally took notice of his less-than-preferable behavior. In response, they sent him to a boarding school in northern France: Centre de Correction Comportementale Haubourdin. He was given a dorm room with two other students: AJ (Alice Johnson), a skilled kleptomaniac, and King (Kingsley Carr), a sad excuse for a pyromaniac. He got his schedule at 5:50 on Sunday.

"First math, then behavioral reconstruction, then physical education, then lunch, then your elective, then impulse control, then reading at the end of the day. Dinner and Breakfast are optional but recommended. Light's out is at 7:30 pm. The bell rings at 6:00 in the morning to wake you for school. Lollygagging, goofing off, and joking around are not permitted. And yes, uniforms are required. Do you understand?" his dorm chief (Mr. Chuck) asked. Jason couldn't respond before Mr. Chuck sent him off to bed.

The following day, Jason awoke to a loud dong from the bell. He sleepily showered, dressed in his uniform, and headed to breakfast. He slipped and fell on the ground, which was muddy from heavy rain and stained his new uniform. AJ and King helped him up.

SHORT STORY

AJ said to Jason: “Breakfast never changes. It’s Cream of Mushroom, but everyone just calls it mush.”

King said to both of them: “Did you hear what happened last night? Henry and Sam were fighting, and Henry pushed Sam out of the window. He’s still alive, but he isn’t looking so good. He fell from floor five. He might have died if the ground wasn’t so soft from last night’s rain.”

AJ said to King: “I hope he gets well soon. I have to give him back his phone. I borrowed it to call my mother after mine was taken away.”

King said to AJ: “He said he lost his phone. Did you-”

AJ interrupted King and said, “Yes, I did, but I was planning to return it.”

After breakfast, Jason headed through his classes. After lunch, he was called to the headmaster’s office to decide his elective. He chose law classes because he had heard stories from his grandfather (a proficient lawyer) about his crazy clients. I guess he wanted to have some crazy stories of his own.

The school’s law teacher (Ms. Jay) was wonderful. Each of her students would agree that she was the best teacher in the school (Jason would eventually agree after two weeks of class with her). She understood what they were going through because she used to be a student at the school and knew how to get them interested in her lessons. Jason found himself paying attention to her class more than others. She, too, told many stories of crazy clients that made Jason’s grandfather’s stories sound like fairy tales. Jason was invested.

Over the next few weeks, several events took place. First, he realized how much he enjoyed his law classes compared to the other classes. His dorm chief found he had been behaving less rebellious over time. He had cried during the funeral of someone he had never met (which was odd).

Three years later, Jason passed school with an A in each class, excluding physical education (he had a B in that class for the last two years of his school term). His parents used to him getting Cs and Ds in

class, took notice of his accomplishments, and treated him with a chocolate and vanilla swirl ice cream sundae. Jason then went off to college to study to become a lawyer. He graduated with all as again and started a law firm with a friend of his: “Deenson and Allen, Attorneys at Law.”

I’m sure you are wondering how I came to know this story. To put it into simpler terms, I lived this story. My name is Jason Deenson.

The Storm that Swept Us Away

Harper Williams

“Rattle Rattle!” The curtains shook on the wall as the west wind picked up. The fence poles leaned soon after. *What was happening?* I thought. That's when Pa came home early.

“Phyllis, will you please help me clean the dishes?”

Ma called from outside. The oak wood floor creaked under me as I was walking to the porch. Ma was kneeling on the dirt by the edge of the wheat field. I rushed over to get the rag out of the water pail. Ma and I were scrubbing the final dishes when my little sister Shirley toddled out. She was holding a worn-out toy bunny and was rubbing her right eye.

“Mama, I sweepy,” She whined. Ma stepped up and took her inside. After I finished the dishes I looked out over the fields into the sunset. I loved the sunset, especially when I was here. I have lived in Morton County my whole life. My Pa grew up here too and works for the railroad company now. I go to Morton Schoolhouse, and I am in the 5th grade.

It was a Tuesday morning and I was putting on my dark blue dress and my white shoes. I grabbed my school bag and told Ma and Pa goodbye. As I was walking to the schoolhouse I noticed the breeze was blowing from the west. But I paid little attention to it. *What was a little breeze?* I thought. School had been normal. My friend Clarice and I played marbles on the playground and I won both times. Once school was out and I was walking home again I noticed the wind had picked up. *Huh. That is strange.*

When I got home Ma and Pa were rocking in the chairs on the porch. They seemed uncomfortable. “What’s wrong?” I asked, apparently unaware of the situation.

“Well we’ve heard a few things about some of the crops failing,” Pa announced.

“The farmers think it has something to do with the soil. But we don’t know for sure,” He noted.

“Oh well, I hope it gets better,” I told them.

But they glanced at each other worriedly, then Ma put on a fake smile. “Yeah.” That was all she said. So I went inside and set my school bag down. Then I walked back outside with Shirley and we played behind the house before sundown. After dinner I slipped on my nightgown and dozed off.

The next morning I woke up to the sound of the curtains rattling. I looked around and the whole house seemed to shake. I went to check outside, and when I opened the door it tried to come off the hinges! The wind was whipping so hard the fence posts were knocked down. But bits of dust were flying around, almost like a tornado.

“Phyllis close that door!” Ma yelled. I slammed the door shut and turned around.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

“Just a bad storm is all. But there is no school today,” She explained in a normal voice.

The wind just got worse and worse. So did the dust. Pa came home early saying that the railroads would be down until further notice. It wasn’t until then that we saw it. A huge cloud speeding towards the house. It towered over the land like a wall. But it wasn’t white like the clouds above. This was dark and brown. The house rattled, the roof shook, and the floor beneath our feet creaked. Pa stepped outside to take a look. Then it all happened so fast. It went pitch black. We all huddled around each other in fear. That’s when we heard Shirley cough. She started and couldn’t stop. We all coughed, but Shirley had it the worst. Once the darkness started to fade, we could all see why it got so dark. Dust covered every inch of the house. The furniture was covered too. But it wasn’t as bad as outside.

Dust, dust, and more dust. Everywhere we looked was covered in at least three feet of topsoil. The wind had blown pieces of wood, doors,

fencing, parts of houses and automobiles, and anything else in its way. Mr. and Mrs. Lowrey were standing on their dust covered porch as well. Nothing looked right. The crops were gone, and the dust swirled around us, suffocating our lungs. We hurried back inside and sat down.

The dust kept on coming as the years passed. Ma and Pa were low on work most of the time, so we didn't have food most days. Shirley and I wore feed sacks on our nose and mouth, and kept our eyes down. Six years. It took six years for the dust to finally end and things to get close to normal. I just pray it never happens again.

Lost

Emma Keller

In January 1933, I was in a crowd waiting for Adolf Hitler, the leader of the Nazis to come around the corner to welcome everyone to his new role as chancellor of Germany. As soon as people saw him, they started to cheer and raise their arms and shout “Hiel Hitler!” I didn’t want Hitler to think something was wrong with me so I went along with it. My family and I have had enough trouble along with financial problems so I didn’t want to add to the mix. I knew right off the bat that something was wrong with the whole situation but I didn’t tell Julia, my older sister, about it.

“Julie!” a voice called out from the crowd.

“Coming!” I shouted.

I walked through the crowd and saw Hitler talking to his men, I didn’t know it at the time but those Uniforms would haunt my dreams. I saw the Automobile in front of me and immediately ran towards Julia wanting to get out of here. The whole car ride was about how great everyone thought Hitler was. I just looked down and thinned my lips as she went on. Once I could smell the soap coming from Momma’s wash house, I knew we were home. Momma owned a laundry business to make 1 Euro per hour, while Julia and I helped with serving people in the soup kitchen. I walked inside with Julia tailing behind me, I strutted over to my unkempt bed to set my books down.

“Dinner’s not ready yet, but how did it go?” Momma asked as she stirred the clothes around.

“It was okay,” I said looking up from my book. “I think there’s something going on with the Chancellor.”

I could tell that Julia and Momma were getting tired of my conspiracy theories but this one I was for sure about. I told Momma that I wasn’t hungry so I didn’t have to listen to her stories about grandma in the United States. I slipped off my day clothes, pulled on my pajamas,

and tucked myself in bed. The next morning I woke up not hearing the usual sloshing noise in the wash house. I pulled on my clothes and started to look around the house for Momma and Julia, careful not to make a sound.

I looked in the wash room only to see the laundry basin on the floor with soapy water spilling out. *What is going on? I thought.* I looked all around the house only to find it empty except for a badge on the floor. I walked closer to the badge cautiously taking every step as I picked it up to take a closer look. As I looked around the room to see if anyone was watching, it hit me, this was a Nazi pin. At that moment I realized that the Nazis had taken Momma and Julia and that I needed to get out of there. I looked both ways before sprinting across the street to make sure the soldiers weren't watching me. The streets littered with Nazis on every corner, shifting their guns to each side of them and watching people intently. I noticed that one soldier was stationed in front of Ms. Walker's school house looking at me closely. The soldier looked about 16 with dark hair and green eyes, the only difference between me and him was that he had chosen the wrong side. He came toward me and I noticed that he didn't have a badge.

"Hey, don't go waving that around" he said, snatching the pin. "Sargent Smith would have killed me"

"Who?" I said backing away from him.

"Sargent Smith, my commanding officer," he told me. "By the way, the name's Will"

I didn't want Will to take this the wrong way but I started backing away until I bumped up against the wall. He took several steps forward until he was an inch away from my face, he looked down and extended his hand waiting for me to shake it.

"You don't make many friends as a soldier, all I'm asking is for you to be my friend" he said looking me in the eyes.

I moved my hand ready to shake his and ready to be his friend but then I thought of Momma and Julia. This soldier is working for the evil party that took my family. I shook my head violently, I shouted no as tears started to roll down my face. Just immediately Will looked around and shoved me into a dark alley with the smell of sewage coming from the underground tunnel underneath us. He pressed his finger against his lips warning me to be quiet and looked down at the tunnel. I was going to shove past him but as more Nazi soldiers appeared with their guns pointed straight at Will and me, I quickly forgot about it.

Will looked behind him and instantly started to lift the lid to the tunnel, he grabbed my hand and started to climb down into the mine. Once we were down there, I wanted to slap him silly for dragging me into this mess with him, but just as I opened my mouth to yell at him he told me to be quiet and pointed where we had come from.

He sighed in relief before he said, “Look I know you’re mad at me but-”

I hated him for talking about it casually, “I just lost my family and you’re worried about me being mad at you?” I interrupted.

He shook his head so hard that his rich, chestnut brown hair looked like a porcupine. He grabbed me by the shoulders and turned me around, I was so shocked I might have fallen over.

“Momma?”



INFORMATIONAL ESSAY

A Small Drop in a Big Cycle

Ayden Cox

I was once a small water droplet, flowing in a vast ocean. It was warm and comfortable, but I felt a sense of adventure and wondered where my journey would take me in the big world though I thought I might not go far because I was just a small water droplet in a big world. One day, a ray of sunlight caught me, and I began to evaporate slowly. I rose high into the sky, leaving the ocean behind. I felt light and airy carried by the air current. I enjoyed the feeling of freedom as I floated higher and higher.

As I rose higher, the temperature started to cool more and more, and I began to condense into a cloud. I felt a sense of community surrounded by other water droplets. We floated, changing shapes, and enjoying the beautiful view of the world below not knowing what is to come next of us.

The wind picked up, and our cloud began to move across the sky like a special force was carrying us. As we floated, the temperature dropped even further, and I felt myself freeze into a tiny ice crystal. I marveled at my new form and enjoyed the feeling of being a part of something bigger.

As we floated over the mountain the wind began to push us up and over the peak I felt the warmth of the sun on my face as I started to melt down I dripped down the mountain following the path of a small stream the water was cool and refreshing, and I loved the feeling of being a part of something bigger like the natural world.

The stream grew wider and joined a river and I flowed along with it past fields, forests and cities. I saw people fishing, swimming and enjoying the river's beauty. I felt a sense of purpose knowing that I was providing water for so many people and creatures around the world.

Finally, the river followed into a large body of water, and I rejoined the ocean. I remembered my journey and marveled at the beauty and the power of the water cycle. I realized that I was a small part of something much larger than I ever would have imagined even though I was a small water droplet, and I was a small part in the water cycle. All the water in the world was connected in a never ending cycle of transformation.

The Cause and Effect of Photosynthesis

Dante McGee

Introduction

Photosynthesis is the process in which plants use to create food and energy as well as releasing oxygen and glucose. Photosynthesis is used by many plants, algae, and bacteria in different forms. It also processes light energy into chemical energy and converts water and carbon dioxide into oxygen and other materials. For energy, glucose comes as a sort of fuel for the plant cell's energy and needs. On the other hand, there is fixed carbon from carbon dioxide which is associated into organic molecules.

What is the effect of photosynthesis?

First, photosynthesis plays an important role in powering up many ecosystems and giving life to many animals, plants and humans. Therefore, we would not be here without the process of photosynthesis. Photosynthesis has been around for over 3 billion years, and it forever changed life on Earth. For photosynthesis to occur, a plant must have leaves, so it can produce oxygen from an important leaf tissue called mesophyll. It is also where the chloroplast is, and photosynthesis takes place within the chloroplast.

For plants on land, water is a huge factor for plant growth, especially in photosynthesis. Large amounts of water are transpired from the leaves, water then evaporates from the leaves or the stomata which is a small opening through the outer skin of the leaf. More carbon dioxide enters through the stomata, so more photosynthesis can happen if there is more supply of water. Minerals also play a key part in photosynthesis since they are required for healthy plant growth. With different kinds of plants comes different ways of adapting to their environment. As a result plant cells adjust their enzymes to maintain a balance in the photosynthetic process.

Photosynthesis cannot occur at night, so plants are inactive in the dark. In the Calvin-Benson Cycle, which is when carbon is recycled and used for sugar in a cycle; this is converted to the chloroplast. Chlorophyll is the most important and common model for photosynthesis, so that is why most leaves in different species of plants have its green color. So then chlorophyll has a role in making a reaction between carbon dioxide and water by absorbing the light energy it gets from the sun. A little fun fact about glucose, glucose is a larger molecule than sugar and carbon dioxide, therefore it has a balanced chemical equation of six molecules of carbon dioxide plus 6 molecules of water to create one molecule of glucose plus six molecules of oxygen.

The effect of what photosynthesis does to help plants live and grow is amazing, but there are more forms of photosynthesis out there. Such as the Calvin cycle, and light dependent reactions. The overall complete chemical reaction of photosynthesis is $6 \text{ CO}_2 + 6 \text{ H}_2\text{O} + \text{light} \rightarrow \text{C}_6\text{H}_{12}\text{O}_6 + 6 \text{ O}_2$, Carbon Dioxide + Water + Light yields Glucose + Oxygen. Plants are not the only organisms that use photosynthesis for food and energy, other organisms such as bacteria, cyanobacteria, protists, and algae are large producers of photosynthesis as well. Photosynthesis does slow down in production in plants while the seasons change over time.

What Causes Photosynthesis?

Simple answer, the sun causes photosynthesis. Energy from sunlight is a chemical reaction that then breaks down the carbon dioxide and water molecules to make glucose. As well as oxygen to aid animals and humans for survival on Earth. Photosynthesis may seem like a long process, but in fact, photosynthesis takes less than 2 seconds to process. By the process of photosynthesis, it is the main reason while our Earth is fresh, green, and stable to live in with oxygen to breathe in.

What if We Did Not Have Photosynthesis?

Photosynthesis is impossible to imagine without it. There would be little to no food with no photosynthesis; many organisms would go

extinct or disappear. The Earth's atmosphere would be a toxic environment with gaseous oxygen filling the air. Microorganisms like bacteria would still be alive without photosynthesis. Photosynthesis was responsible for the fossil fuels created and carried out by plants. During the last few centuries, we have been using lots of photosynthetic material that has been processed for millions of years that carbon dioxide is being returned to the atmosphere at an alarming rate. This is predicted to have major consequences to Earth's climate in the near future.

Photosynthesis is important in many different ways. It is a great example of a cause and effect relationship between us and the process of photosynthesis. We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for photosynthesis, that's why it is so important to all organisms living on Earth. Due to photosynthesis, we now have plenty of oxygen to breathe in and we have fresh air that we can live in. If it wasn't for photosynthesis Earth would not be a habitable place to live in, it would not be green. That is why photosynthesis is so important and many of us don't even realize it.

The Native American Rites Of Passage

Brenda Resendiz Rojo

There are many types of Native American rites of passage for females and males reaching adulthood. One is Kinaaldá. It is about a Navajo girl ritual when she dresses up in a purple, multicolored camp skirt and moccasins, with her long black hair tied into a ponytail, and they do their ritual (Meza.) "The Medicine Bag" and "The Apache Girl Rite of Passage" accompany the rituals of Native American tribes. These traditions have similarities and differences, including the tribe's rituals and the emotions of those going through the ceremony.

The Medicine Bag is a short story by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve. It is about the Lakota men's ritual and tradition of the medicine bag. The ritual is personal and of the Siouz heritage. The only ones present during the passing of the bag are the current holder of the bag and the receiver, the oldest male member of the family. Moreover, the passing of the bag takes place when the holder of the bag feels the time is right, they have passed away, is about to pass away, or when it feels right for him to do it. Further, the men of the Lakota tribe display no emotions as part of their culture. Different from his grandfather, Martin shows all his emotions regarding the passing down of the bag.

Unlike the short story "The Medicine Bag," "The Apache Girl Rite of Passage" is a documentary about the Apache tribe girls' coming-of-age ritual. They plan their rituals differently from the Lakota tribe. Although the passing down of the medicine bag is essential, it has no set date, whereas the Apache Girl's rite of passage happens on the Fourth of July of the year a girl turns thirteen. Therefore, the ritual is a well thought out, planned celebration with support. Similar to the Lakota tribe, the Apache tribe does not show emotions while doing the ritual. As it says in the documentary "The Apache Girl Rite of Passage, "they show no emotions, and they get help from people and family (Apache Girl's Rite of Passage.) Thus, rituals have a lot of similarities and differences.

There are many coming-of-age rite passages depending on the culture. Whether it is the Lakota and Apache rituals or rituals of other cultures, you will find many similarities and differences.



COMIC

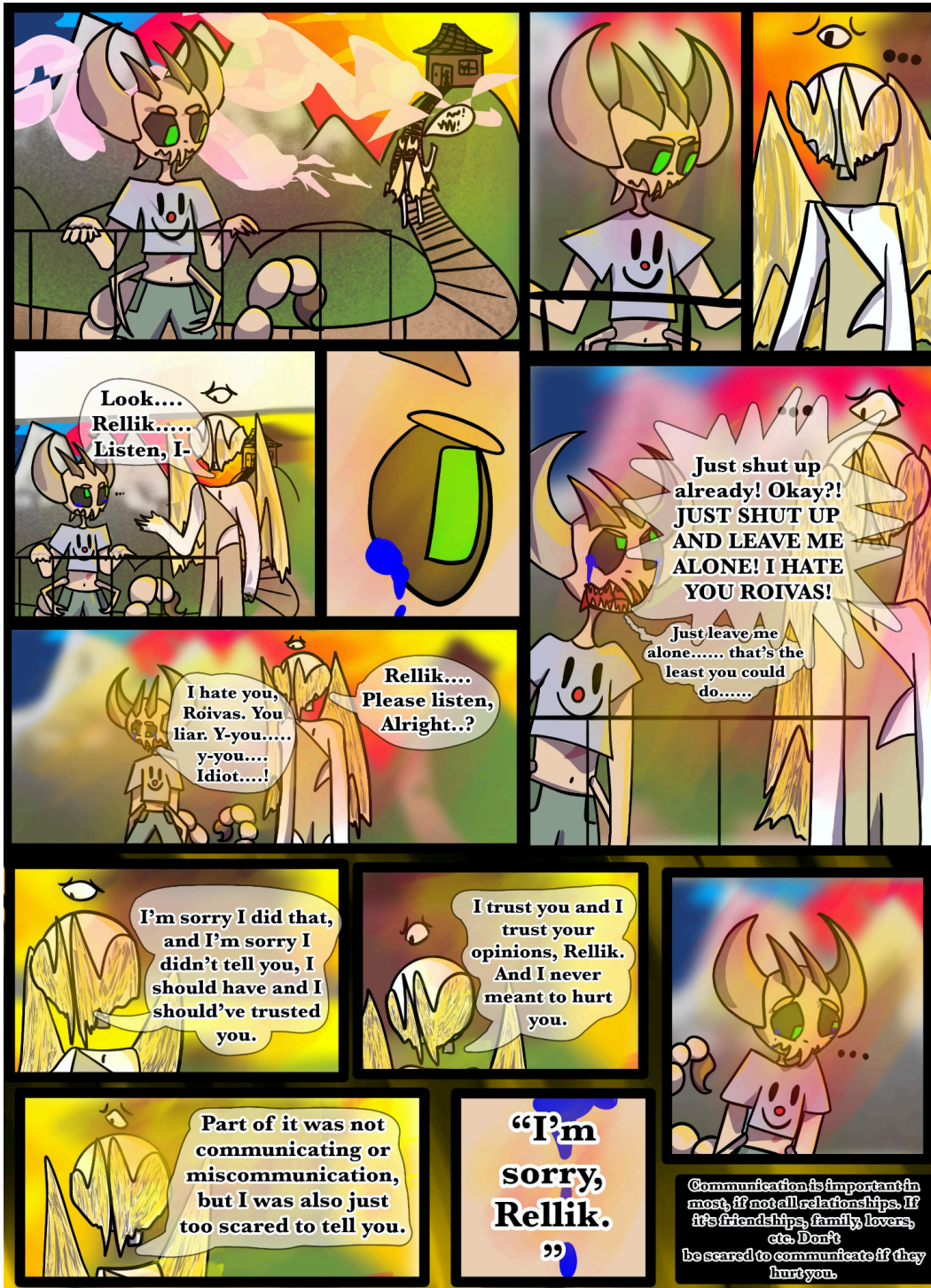
COLLETTE BERGERON

BLACK PLAGUE



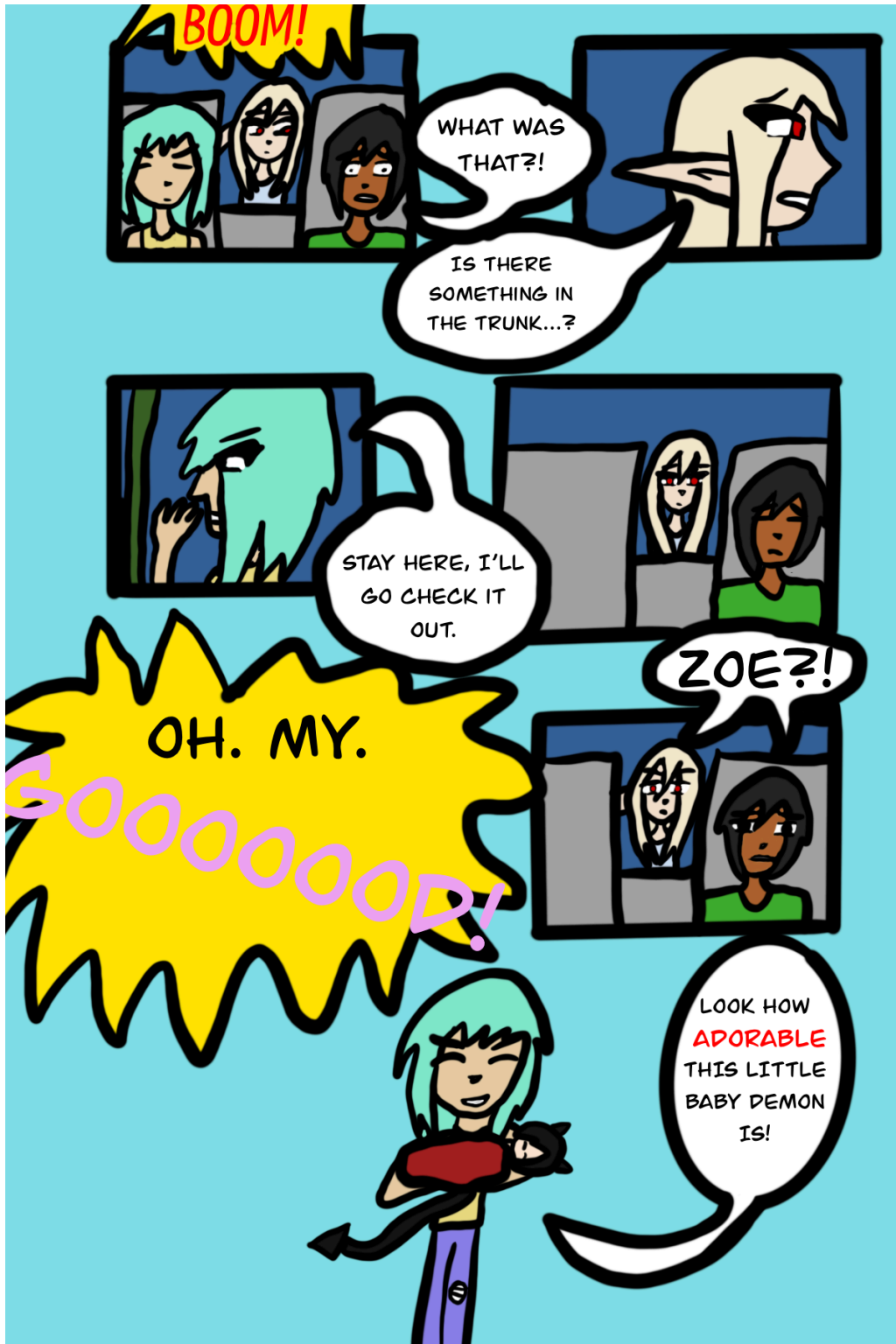
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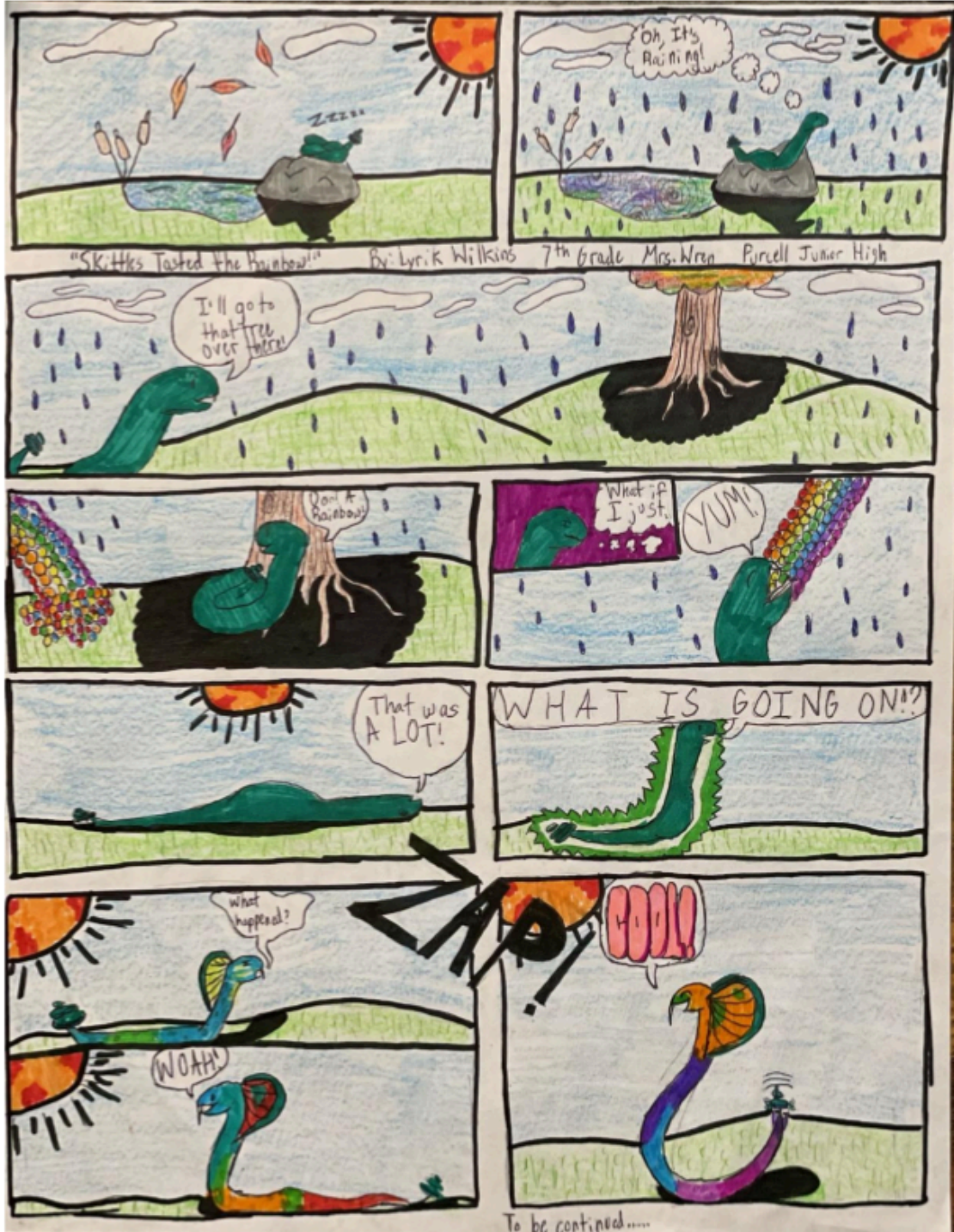
ALL BABIES ARE ADORABLE

BELLA BOSTICK



SKITTLES TASTED THE RAINBOW

LYRIK WILKINS





Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English

In gratitude...

A very special thank you to all the teachers who nurture the hearts and minds of writers so that they can be, now and in the future, our scholars, activists, storytellers, and poets.

The writings in this book are winners in the 2024 Young Writers Contest for Oklahoma students, sponsored by the Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English (OKCTE). This year there were over 500 entries from 58 teachers. The contest is a way for OKCTE to encourage teachers and students to extend their classroom writing to public spaces and by doing so give voice to the lives of Oklahoma youth.

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