

SPECTRUM

No. 35

A publication of the Department of English
at California State University, Fresno

FRESNOSTATE

Discovery. Diversity. Distinction.

SPECIAL THANKS

California State University, Fresno
Office of the President
College of Arts and Humanities
William Saroyan Society
Department of English
Fresno Poets' Association
Henry Madden Library
Master of Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing
San Joaquin Literary Association
Fresno Area Council of English Teachers
Chicano Writers and Artists Association
Hmong American Writers' Circle
Dramatic Arts Association
Polly Brewer
A Book Barn

CONTENTS

Letter from the Dean	4
Letter from the Chair	5
Staff	6
Awards	7

POETRY

Angela Lopez: We All Knew About Steven, The Boy Whose Parents Hit Him, But No One Likes to Take Responsibility for These Kinds of Things	21
Katelyn Williams: Ode to the Pizza	30
Helen Brower: Lady Liberty Didn't Hold My Attention	32
Felicia Zhornitsky: Button's Mailbox	36
Alaura McGuire: Magic Kingdoms	37
Brian Chavez: El Niño de la Frontera	40
Alexis Barajas: Touchup	55
Miranda Adams: A Game Called War	72
Lauren Davis: An Old Green Chair	82
Haley Ruth Spencer: Empty Girl	92
Angela Lopez: Plucked	99
Felicia Zhornitsky: My Older Sister Brushes Her Teeth	102

DRAMATIC ARTS

Claire Gorham: The Shelter	56
-----------------------------------------	----

CONTENTS

FICTION

Helen Brower: One Point of View is Not Enough to Sum Up Mr. Oliver Coyne	13
Darlene Torres: Los 43	26
Alexandre Habib: Hell of a Time: Chapter II	43
Guadalupe Aguilar: No More Coconuts!	50
Maya Vannine: A Split Second	63
Haley Ruth Spencer: The Reflection of Persephone	65
Arriel Roberts: Icaros	76
Victoria B. Gonzales: Fear	83
Miriya Serrato: Obesity Anonymous	88

CREATIVE NONFICTION

Stephanie Tomes: Our Big Red Van	10
Samira Abed: All You Need Is Love—Emotional Detachment and a Responsible Plan with the Values of Each Participant Carefully Weighed	23
Helen Archer: When the Flowers Bloom	28
Baylee Cocagne: First Friend	33
Marisa Mata: Childhood	38
Gabriel Lamatina: Untitled	51
Maikhue Her: A Winter's Tale	53
Miriya Serrato: To Be Able to Walk Away	70
Maria Calderon: Broken Memories	73
Viviana Chavez: A Story Like Many Others	80
Samantha Pena: A Motto to Live By	94
Eliza Amstutz: Transformed	96

LETTER FROM THE DEAN

Dear Young Writers' Conference participants,

It is a real pleasure to welcome you to the 35th annual Young Writers' Conference. I am delighted to see so many of you take an active interest in the art of writing!

This annual conference offers a unique opportunity for the best and most highly motivated students of our region to work for an entire day with our outstanding Creative Writing faculty. By the end of the day you will have created an impressive range of poems and essays of which you can be proud and of which all of us can enjoy reading. Our faculty always welcomes the opportunity to share with you their best practices and strategies in creative writing.

We also appreciate and applaud your English teachers whose participation and involvement in the conference is critical to the success and development of this event.

The Young Writers Conference is one of Fresno State's prized partnerships with our region's secondary schools. It is a model of how university and high school faculty can collaborate to improve teaching and learning.

I wish every one of you a fun and exciting day full of learning and discovery. We are very pleased to have you with us and we look forward to your next visit in the very near future.

Enjoy your day with us!

José A. Díaz, D.M.A.
Interim Dean, College of Arts and Humanities
California State University, Fresno

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome, Student Writers, to our 35th Annual Young Writers' Conference.

As essayists, poets, playwrights, and short story writers, you may claim a place in a community of Central Valley authors. Today you will interact with some of the English Department's outstanding faculty members and most accomplished graduate students. Our faculty members routinely publish in some of America's finest journals, so I hope you will make the most of this chance to talk with them and imagine the way that you, too, will contribute to making Fresno a place with a continuing reputation for creativity and social engagement.

A special welcome as well to the dedicated and accomplished high school teachers joining us here today. Your energy and enthusiasm have been essential in developing and nurturing the talented young people we see here today. I and my fellow faculty members owe you special thanks for preparing these talented writers for their future careers, careers we hope will include their return to our University classrooms in years to come.

The Young Writers' Conference presents us all with a yearly reminder of how vibrant the diverse culture of our Central Valley can be. Welcome, then, to this celebration of what you have already accomplished. Seize the opportunity this day will afford you to challenge yourself and thereby develop your talents and your dreams.

Lisa M.C. Weston, Ph.D.
Chair, Department of English
California State University, Fresno

STAFF

COORDINATOR

Tanya Nichols

MFA PROGRAM STAFF

Jefferson Beavers

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH STAFF

Lisa Galvez

GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

J.J. Hernandez

Jake Lesinski

Tricia Savelli

UNDERGRADUATE ASSISTANT

Alicia Everett

EDITORIAL BOARD

POETRY

Remy Mason

Ronald Dzerigian

J.J. Hernandez

Glorianne Outlaw

FICTION

Kamilah Okafor

Monique Quintana

Jordy Dakin

Owen Torres

CREATIVE NONFICTION

J.J. Anselmi

Gillian Hensley

Emily Basilletti

Jacob Eckrich

Lisa Shepard

AWARDS

PRESIDENT'S AWARD

Stephanie Tomes, Mission Oak High School: Our Big Red Van

DEAN'S AWARD

Helen Brower, Mission Oak High School: One Point of View is Not Enough to Sum Up Mr. Oliver Coyne

DEAN'S COUNCIL AWARD

Angela Lopez, Hoover High School: We All Knew About Steven, The Boy Whose Parents Hit Him, But No One Likes to Take Responsibility for These Kinds of Things

WILD ABOUT BOOKS AWARD

Samira Abed, Edison High School: All You Need Is ~~Love~~ Emotional Detachment and a Responsible Plan with the Values of Each Participant Carefully Weighed

SAROYAN AWARD

Darlene Torres, Fresno High School: Los 43

CHAIR'S AWARD

Helen Archer, Mariposa County High School: When the Flowers Bloom

FRESNO POETS' ASSOCIATION AWARD

Katelyn Williams, Hoover High School: Ode to the Pizza

MADDEN LIBRARY AWARD

Helen Brower, Mission Oak High School: Lady Liberty Didn't Hold My Attention

AWARDS

THE NORMAL SCHOOL AWARD

Baylee Cocagne, Mission Oak High School: First Friend

LEVINE PRIZE AWARD

Felicia Zhornitsky, University High School: Button's Mailbox

FACET AWARDS

A Laura McGuire, Redwood High School: Magic Kingdoms

Marisa Mata, Edison High School: Childhood

MFA AWARD

Brian Chavez, King City High School: El Niño de la Frontera

SAN JOAQUIN LITERARY ASSOCIATION AWARD

Alexandre Habib, University High School: Hell of a Time: Chapter II

CHICANO WRITERS AND ARTISTS ASSOCIATION AWARDS

Guadalupe Aguilar, Mission Oak High School: No More Coconuts!

Gabriel Lamatina, Mission Oak High School: Untitled

HMONG AMERICAN WRITERS' CIRCLE AWARDS

Maikhue Her, Mariposa County High School: A Winter's Tale

Alexis Barajas, McLane High School: Touchup

DRAMATIC ARTS AWARD

Claire Gorham, Mariposa County High School: The Shelter.

AWARDS

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Maya Vannine, Edison High School: A Split Second

Haley Ruth Spencer, Tulare Union High School: The Reflection of Persephone

Miriya Serrato, Roosevelt High School: To be able to walk away

Miranda Adams, Mariposa County High School: A Game Called War

Maria Calderon, Riverdale High School: Broken Memories

Arriel Roberts, Riverdale High School: Icaros

Viviana Chavez, Riverdale High School: A Story Like Many Others

Lauren Davis, King City High School: “An Old Green Chair”

Victoria B. Gonzales, Redwood High School: Fear

Miriya Serrato, Roosevelt High School: Obesity Anonymous

Haley Ruth Spencer, Tulare Union High School: Empty Girl

Samantha Pena, Tulare Union High School: A Motto to Live By

Eliza Amstutz, Mariposa County High School: Transformed

Angela Lopez, Hoover High School: Plucked

Felicia Zhornitsky, University High School: My Older Sister Brushes Her Teeth

SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY WRITING PROJECT TEACHER AWARDS

Melissa Link, Redwood High School

Stephen Usher, Mission Oak High School

OUR BIG RED VAN

STEPHANIE TOMES

President's Award

One summer we bought a van. It was a big, lumbering, beautifully rouge Volkswagen van. Inspired by our summer's gallivant around Europe in a VW van my uncle had lent us, we came back to the States insistent upon having one of our own.

This van was like no other my three brothers and I had ever seen. It was complete with a protractible top that popped up into a tent, a table, which folded out from the side, a backseat bench that converted into a bed, a refrigerator under one of the backwards-facing seats, and curtains covering all the back seat windows. To amplify our unique choice in taste, my mom swiftly embellished all seats in cow print covers. We were ecstatic. From that point on, no hour-long trek to church, or 4,000-mile journey across the continental United States was the same. In this van, we saw national wonders, argued, rocked out to 'The Eagles' "Hotel California", howled with laughter, brought my fourth sibling and only little sister, home from the hospital, and played card game after card game on the pop-up table. It was the vehicle equivalent to the dining room table, allowing my siblings and I an unequivocal opportunity to bond and make lasting memories before growing up.

The reason for this soliloquy on our beloved van is that it allowed us to pass between two cultures and heritages that shaped us into who we are, and instilled three incredible lessons along the way.

My mom's parents escaped a communist Czechoslovakia in 1956, and soon thereafter sought new life in the United States. My grandfather was a stress engineer for Boeing. This job required him to move his family many times from one side of the country to another. They eventually settled in Southern California, where my grandmother still resides. My dad's parents are deeply rooted outside the rural town of Bowling Green, Kentucky. Up to seven generations have lived out humble and hard-working lives in the same county where my grandma and grandpa

were born and still live. My grandpa worked at Ford for 30 years before retiring to tend to his small ranch in the country.

My own parents met in 1985, were married in 1989 and upon having my oldest brother resolved that their children were going to grow up if at all possible knowing both sets of very diverse grandparents. However much they wanted this connection, they couldn't squeak around the fact that we lived in California, our other set of grandparents lived in Kentucky, and plane tickets for seven is a small, or actually rather large fortune. That's where our big, red van comes in.

Two or three times a year, we undertook the lengthy road trip to Kentucky to visit the set of grandparents we saw less often. This is where the first incredible lesson was implemented on my mind. Helping my parents load the van for these journeys required skill and patience and usually ended with us all standing around the bulging back of the van, telling my mom that we simply didn't think that last suitcase was going to fit, just to watch as her eyebrows furrowed in determination to prove us all wrong. She always did. I learned through these packing procedures that packing life was pretty much like packing the back of our van. You had to make the base layer the big suitcases, or things that were crucial such as faith, family and friends. You next stacked smaller duffel bags and backpacks that could easily mold around your suitcases. These are things like your career and school that should be able to maneuver around the faith, family, and friends of your life. By this time the back was pretty full, but you still had room for miscellaneous items to be shoved into the nooks and crannies. These are the small pleasures and hobbies of life that should not be taken out of the stack, because once you remove them, you realize that they were an important part of the structure, and your very own happiness.

After the van was sufficiently stuffed, or as my mom optimistically put it "perfect", and lesson one was well learned, we began our adventure. The second incredible lesson I learned from our frequent marches across state after state was that any pit stop along the way should be fully utilized. Like in life, you need to recognize an opportunity for relief and enjoyment at any moment, because they don't come too often. We all learned that at the trucker's rest stop; you could implement this lesson by racing each other around the brick restrooms, or having a speedy game of tag on the grassy patch beside the restroom. It definitely keeps life upbeat.

After finally reaching our destination, be it 72 hours later in Bowling Green Kentucky, or only 3 hours later in Agoura Hills, California, I learned the third incredible lesson. I learned that the seemingly clashing cultures of my two varied sets of grandparents had created my parents.

They are a couple who value flare in life and who bought a big red van in which they could expose their own children to the equally important influence of both grandparents. You see, we could have opted for a big white van, maybe a typical silver minivan, or even a black suburban, but we didn't. We chose the biggest, reddest, spunkiest van we could find. Because, if you are going to journey, why not do it with people you love, to see people you love in a big red van you love?

ONE POINT OF VIEW IS NOT ENOUGH TO SUM UP MR. OLIVER COYNE

HELEN BROWER

Dean's Award

The Recruit:

The door hinges snapped. The black shadows crammed through, tangling his body with their tentacles. He screamed as the wrist tag was jammed into his skin, nestling like a spider, its legs curling around his veins, like a chain. Her cries became distant hiccups, as grey chest patches blurred his view. The only thing constant in the roiling mass was the automated recording on loop.

“You are being drafted into the United States ARMY. Remain complacent or we shall use force... You are being drafted into the United States ARMY. Remain-”

He gasped for air. The dream dripping away from him like sludge. His skin glistened against the emergency lights. They pulsed a dull orange that ached behind his eyelids.

“Bad dream?”

“Yah,” he mumbled, running his hands through the prickly standard haircut.

“Don't think too hard on it. We only got a month to go.”

He watched Benny stand and stretch. His spine crackled under the pressure. He began to comb through his nonexistent hair.

“How were you drafted?”

The comb froze half way down his scalp, before continuing its constant lick over the prickly lawn of hair.

“Same as everyone else. I told you not to think too hard on it.”

“I know,” he sighed.

“One last mission.”

“One last mission.”

“Then we get to relax and be shipped home.”

“Ya. Home”

“Just think of that baby boy.”

“Yah. He’s gonna be ten months”

“Wow...did they let you get some vids of him when he was born?”

“No. I was out of credit”

“Well that’s bull-”

“Benny. It’s fine. I’m gonna see him in a month”

“Ya Ya. Let’s suit up.”

He grabbed the exoskeleton, grunting as it constricted around him. The helmet flicked down, obscuring his view. He blinked a couple times, as it flickered and adjusted, the Orange print lining his peripherals. He clicked the breathing apparatus on and took a gasp as filtered air flowed in.

“Let’s go.”

They leaned back, as the floor opened to swallow them. The free fall lasted 6.5 seconds. 6.5 seconds of your stomach up next to your heart, resting there, thudding together. The fans engaged from the exoskeleton, stilling his descent; till his weight was carried by the six fans, which whirred like huge horse flies.

The ocean growled 2,000 feet below him. If he took a deep breath he’d feel the acidic air burn his sinuses. The ship that deposited them, slipped silently through the cloud cover, like a great beast.

The static rippled through his ear as Benny reported the frequency.

“Okay. Quick, easy drop. You plug in the drive. Get the info. Kill Renata. I’ll be watching your back.”

“Got it”

“Okay. Let’s go home Will.”

He smiled as he flexed his fingers and the fans rotated. The polluted clouds whisped by as he controlled his fall. The decaying oil drill pierced through the valley of the clouds. It stood like a tower of rot, rearing its ugly head of the past. His landing was perfect, his feet skimming the rusted metal. The electrical box creaked open as he unconnected wires and plugged in the drive.

SECURITY BREACH. MINE FIELD ARMED

The fans kicked in right as the ground lit with hazardous bombs. He snatched the drive from the box, hovering a few feet above the mines.

“Benny do you read me?”

The hum of static stayed constant.

“Benny?”

“Hello Mr. Rivera”

He shot out of instinct. He realized the voice came from his ear piece.

“Drop the drive Will”

“I’m not that stupid.”

“Yes you are. How long can you hold your breath?”

“What’s that got to do with anything?!”

“It’s two minutes isn’t it? The ARMY trains you to hold your breath for two minutes”

“What does it matter Renata?”

“I’m just wondering how long Benny here, can survive if he can’t breathe.”

“Let him go!!!”

He yelled at the darkness, only phantom laughter answered in the crackling frequencies.

“Drop the drive Will.”

He felt the drive slip through his fingers. He wouldn’t see his baby for a little bit longer than expected.

“Turn off your equipment.”

“Hell no! I did what you asked! Let Benny go!”

“Benny’s dead. Turn off your equipment Mr. Rivera. Or we’ll pay your wife Alexis a visit.”

The fans went dead. The mine field glistened like stars. He swallowed the bile clogging his throat and shut his eyes.

* * *

The never ending night kept his eyelids taped shut, as the dubbed white noise bothered his ears. Slowly the black receded its grasp on him, as he tried to come too quicker, like consciousness was sprinting just ahead of him.

“Welcome back Mr. Rivera” a cool voice mused.

The room became focused around him, as he blinked slowly. He lay propped up in a bed of a hospital room. A man in a suit sat in a shadowed corner.

“Where am I? Who are you?”

“I’m here to recruit you.”

“I’m already recruited by the ARMY”

A tickling laugh escaped the man’s lips as he stood. He was slender with pale skin that seemed to change shades in the different lighting. His dark hair was trimmed to perfection. His lips curled in a thin smirk. It was his eyes though. His eyes drew goose bumps down his spine. They were a dull brown with a glint in them he couldn’t trust.

“The ARMY left you to die, Mr. Rivera. I saved you. If you were to return home in your condition, you’d be euthanized for your sacrifice.” He gestured to his leg.

Will craned his neck to see only one leg.

“No! No. I. I can’t die! I have a baby. I still need to meet him”

“I understand Mr. Rivera. That’s why I’m offering you this chance. We will pay you a large salary, we will accommodate you with a new prosthetic leg, and we’ll let you see your wife and baby”

“What do I have to do?”

“Anything we ask”

“And if I refuse your offer?”

The man smiled thinly, as if it felt strange sitting on his lips.

“You’re already technically dead. We would just make sure you stayed that way.”

“You’re not giving me much of a choice are you?”

“I’m giving you options on my terms.”

“Then I guess you’ll be seeing more of me Mr.?”

“Coyne,” He stretched his hand from the shadows to clasp his in the light. “Oliver Coyne.”

The Bandit:

His breath kept getting lodged in his throat, as he scrambled to grab the equations and blueprints that were scattered across the linoleum. The consistent beeping blared in time with the dozen red lights, that lined the walls like fire flies.

Sweat rippled down his forehead, as he began to sprint down the stairs. He crashed open the metal emergency exit doors, as the fire alarms began to screech. He tripped into the waiting car, clutching the crumpled papers to his chest.

“Drive! Drive!”

The car spit gravel, as it roared away from the United Medical Labs. He was just catching his breath, when the 7th floor of the UML building burst, as fire mushroomed between the metal supports and glass ricocheted into the surrounding buildings. The car lurched, the back window cracking from the shock wave. The driver craning to see the flames, his eyes flicked from the road for one second.

“Look out!”

He yanked the steering wheel, as there was a flash of silver. The car rammed into a fire hydrant. The metal crunching, as the car flipped into the alley, bashing against the unforgiving brick wall.

All noise was muted. He couldn’t hear his own gasping breath, as he pried loose his leg from under the twisted seat. The driver lay broken,

smashed into the windshield. Blood dripped past his lashes, stinging his eyes, as he tried to crawl through the shattered window. The bits of glass clung to the palms of his hands, as he forced himself halfway through the window. He gritted his teeth, as his swollen legs remained too twisted to yank through the window.

He heard the footsteps approaching, and began to struggle, jamming the papers into his pocket.

The cool fingers curled around his shirt collar. He shrieked as his body was forcibly ripped from the car. His legs cracked and his left ankle hung limply. He was tossed against the wall, as tears and snot bubbled down his face. Sobs ached in his throat, as he stared up at it.

Its eyes whirred, like a camera, as it focused on his torn up face.

HELLO PROFESSOR BOCETOS

Its blank face held no features. Just led lights that scrolled letters where its mouth should be. The sound came from the interior of its smooth metal head. A red oil stained bandana hung slightly over the led letters, like a bandit from a western film. The rubbery neck craned, cocking its head at a slight angle to convey interest.

“Please don’t hurt me.” He begged.

PROFESSOR BOCETOS YOU ARE ALREADY HURT. I CAN READ YOUR VITALS.

The robot stepped closer. It was an older model. At least five years old, the shine gone from its chrome.

“Your. You’re a medical bot?! You...can’t hurt me.”

FALSE PROFESSOR BOCETOS. MY FUNCTION IS TO HEAL. AND I PLAN TO HEAL. JUST AS DOCTORS HEALED TYLER.

“I’m not a doctor! I’m a pharmaceutical scientist! I make medicine. Please.”

SAME THING

The gun shot rang through the alley. The robot slid its gun into a holster on its back. It began to dig its fingers into the flesh, retrieving the bullet. It clutched the bullet tightly in its blood stained hand.

BURN THE CAR WITH THE BODIES INSIDE

“Yes Bandit.”

A man mumbled, motioning for the gang of thugs to grab the Professor's body.

“Sir, do you need this?” He asked, showing the bloodied crumpled papers that had been stuffed in the Professor's jacket pocket.

YES. YES I DO.

It took the papers, glancing at the list of names; names of every person who administered UML medical drugs to the public. Its mind saved every image of the papers.

HURRY. WE HAVE MORE PEOPLE TO FIND.

It let the flames lick up onto the papers. The papers deteriorated to ash and sifted through its metal fingers.

CALL MR. COYNE, TELL HIM HIS PLAN IS GOING ACCORDINGLY.

The Detective:

Detective Philip Tobbs Report of Oliver Coyne's Room at the address of 78920 Willems Street:

The door was locked and it took a sledgehammer to pop it open. We were shocked at its contents. He was a very meticulous man, but his room was somehow the opposite. It resembled a storage closet. We didn't even find a bed. His walls were lined with paper and pins. Some were complex blueprints of exceptional machinery; some were checklists and plans of future goals; but some were random sketches of the human eye or a detailed landscape. This was all done with the same type of ink pen. There was no order to the papers, many had huge red X's over them; some were plans he already succeeded in; many were just failed plans that never developed.

As we cleared the papers from the wall, gathering them in black trash bags, we discovered graffiti coating one wall. It took a couple days to translate, because it was in Latin and had many layers. It read, “*Eram quod es, eris quod sum.*” Translated, “*I was what you are, you will be what I am.*” It was repeated over and over at least 30 times.

The windows were covered in duct tape and the main light was shattered. We did find an entire plastic bin filled with spent tea light candles. One single lamp rested on the only real piece of furniture; a child sized desk with a regular rolling stool. It was completely bare on top. A tin pencil

box sat in the middle drawer; it held a note reading:

“Pens did not fit anymore, they are in bin 17G5A”

It took us nearly two hours to find that particular bin, considering none of the bins were labeled, and there were at least 150 bins lining the walls. The entire bin was filled with the same pen, which is used on anything that contains his handwriting.

The 3 drawers on the right side of the desk were jam packed with pictures. The bottom drawer held the oldest photos, the top drawer the newest. The bottom drawer contained the only pictures in existence that we know of, of Oliver Coyne as a child. All of the photos were accompanied by a girl that seemed his age. In the middle drawer, we saw a split of him and her to just her. This continued to the top drawer; many of the photos were taken without this mystery woman’s knowledge. The most recent photo taken was on June 9, 2008.

Strangely, the 3 drawers on the left side were completely empty. Not even dust coated the bottom. We brushed for prints and nothing showed.

Each of the stacked bins were filled entirely with a specific item. One was filled to the top with paper clips; another with saltine crackers. The reason behind each is still unknown.

Letter left on the door of Governor Smith’s home after his assassination two days prior:

“Dear Public,

You are being deceived; a flock led by wolves. Even as I write this, I know your malleable consumer minds will never see it. After all, what is the point of creating fear, unless you wish control? There is no greater influencer than fear. Fear keeps people in line and motivated to listen, but I won’t give you a lecture in the art you’ve perfected. This is more of a note to those who believe they are clever. You in power, who scrutinize the Common with a mirror on their faults, while hiding behind its back to keep a shadow on your own; I am writing to warn you of a mad man. He is of the type, that absconded his euthanasia date, and did not resurface on the grid till he was of an adult age. He has been linked to many of the bugs within your own firewalls, and the synchronized bombing of the UML buildings, that has swept across each state one by one. He is very precise, and you should worry about your own safety, especially those of you in power. This Mr. Coyne has a knack for exposing the worst sides of your government, and there are many sides that fall in that category. Consider yourself prepared now for what is to come, I do this all in good faith, that you’ll do something dreadfully reasonable in stopping this monster.

I wish you good luck,

O.C.”

WE ALL KNEW ABOUT STEVEN, THE BOY WHOSE PARENTS HIT HIM, BUT NO ONE LIKES TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THESE KINDS OF THINGS

ANGELA LOPEZ

Dean's Council Award

I think we all could tell. Just a little bit.

Symptoms of an abused child include:

I think we all could tell

from the very beginning

the sudden appearance of bruises or other injuries

beneath the gentleness with which

he held tight his sleeves

I think we all could tell

behind elbows that tucked

flinching away from touch

bent under his own slight weight

away from sight and

anti-social behavior or behavioral extremes

beneath every seemingly small *sorry*

that trembled forth from

a throat that always seemed dry

exhibiting withdrawal, fear, or anxiety about doing something wrong

and concealed by smiles

when we look back and realize

he never did show his teeth

I think we all could tell

frequent absences from school

I think we all had a sense of why or how

when a voice floated across

depression

overhead a soft fuzz of a voice
announcing his name and a
moment of hanging our heads

suicidal thoughts

in shame I think we all thought
of the times we could have
stopped and just asked for a second

If you believe a friend is being abused, talk to a teacher or school counselor.

Yes, we all knew.

ALL YOU NEED IS ~~LOVE~~ EMOTIONAL DETACHMENT AND A RESPONSIBLE PLAN WITH THE VALUES OF EACH PARTICIPANT CAREFULLY WEIGHED

SAMIRA ABED

Wild About Books Award

My father has been married multiple times. And yet he is a firm believer in the idea of true love.

He is an older Arabian man, in his mid-forties, with no great possession of wealth, a rather great possession of debt, and two kids, one of whom is myself and both of whom are still minors. Funnily enough, he perhaps is one of the greater embodiment of the flighty, western idealism of love triumphing over all. Indeed, he is well loved by many, and he loves as well, and perhaps that is the problem. Around two years previously, he married a younger, attractive Egyptian lady. Most probably in the hopes of repairing the mess that had been created with the fallout of his previous divorce. Regardless, He wished to be in love again. He craved it, as most humans do. And as most humans do, he did not think of the consequences of marrying despite financial instability.

I remember first seeing her in our house. She was sharply dressed and she obviously took great care in her appearance. Her name was Deena. Her fingernails were long and painted, and her heels were black and pointed. In all honesty, I did not like her because of this. She was too ... clean, too neat and pretty and gilded door knobs and expensive perfume for our paper plate and stained carpet lifestyle. This fit well with my sister however, who seemed to zealously pursue this type of high style living despite her young age. Theirs was an easy-functioning pair, they both liked expensive things, and my father was happy to supply them. He was happy to trade his remaining money for a beautiful, cheery wife and a loving daughter to have by his side, and would have gladly extended to me use of his debit card as well had it not been for my miserly

attitude in compensation. I did not enjoy spending money, I preferred keeping it, and I was growing increasingly concerned of how much we actually possessed. Constantly it seemed, my father would wave away my concerns as being of little matter and would claim no issue with our bank account depth. I personally disagreed, but was too nervous to allow a confrontation so I allowed the façade to continue to grow. However there was a glitch. My father was indeed, seriously broke and had little means to finance her very costly health food grocery runs, her own kid from her own previous marriage, and the frequent shopping trips my sister and her often engaged in to furnish their persons with the best of Fresnian luxury, all courtesy of my father's own quickly aching wallet.

Also of importance was our significant lack of change in regards to the general filthiness and griminess in the house. One of the hopes entertained by me was that with the marriage and the addition of another woman (this time an adult) perhaps our home would be less repulsive and trashy, perhaps the dishes would be washed more periodically and the carpets would be vacuumed. Unfortunately this was not the case, to a certain degree even, the addition of another person increased the amount of Klondike bar wrappers that ended up piled next to the garbage can and the lingering aroma of mildew and cigarette smoke, incased in every object in the house. Our home was on par to becoming similar to a dumping station.

Soon it became clear to me, that Deena was childishly ignorant of the give and take necessary for marriage. She had married out of the hopes of love, which had been sorely denied to her in her last marriage. She married a man who didn't have the capital to finance her luxurious dreams of splendor and grandeur. She married my father. My sweet, kind father, who had charmingly tricked her into believing his broken and dirty house was a palace and that he was a man whose check-book was large enough to afford the most meandering and unnecessary of her wishes. He was lonely and getting older and didn't want to be alone and found someone who was also alone too and thought they could be married and in love and happy. But he was wrong.

Increasingly it became apparent that Deena did not feel comfortable in her environment. She had previously lived with her well-paid, wealthy parents and before that, her well-paid wealthy husband. She had had a job, but when she married my father she had quit her job in the hopes of acquiring a closer one, in Fresno, which, with the job market at the time, was a tall order. She was stuck, and at the time, I must admit that I did not like her for breaking my routine and I did not pity her in the slightest. However, that is probably because I judged her as a fully functioning adult with the capabilities of distancing herself from her emotions, in

actuality, she was a young sad women who had fantastic dreams of gold and silver and love and was angry and sad that those dreams weren't realized even though she married the man she was supposed to. In all fairness to Deena, I have yet to meet an adult who can actually distance themselves from their emotions to the extent that I view as sufficient when it comes to matters of marriage.

Within six months to a year, they were divorced. Their marriage had fallen apart over the phone. Surprisingly enough (or perhaps even, unsurprisingly enough) Deena was the one to shoot the ailing horse. She was crying and sad and very emotional in her San Franciscan hotel room. Her poor, child dreams had been ruined for the second time, and she would probably recover or very probably not. I don't know. She called and the marriage was terminated and my father was upset but not seemingly very caught-off guard. I suspect he was aware, in some deep crevice of his mind that the relationship was unlikely to last, that it was under planned and unequal. But he was in love with the idea of being in love and he is unlikely to forget that.

He wants to marry again. He is permanently fixated on the idea of love as a cure-all when it is simply a bandage for much deeper, infected wound. Love may help a marriage, but it is not the only necessary component to a successful one. The wound must still be disinfected and cleansed, and if need be, cauterized. Emotion is of little use in marriage, but it can be allowable as long as values are drawn, responsibilities are given, and yes, money is measured. While it may seem harsh to say, a marriage like the one between my father and Deena may have been successfully avoided had values been given originally, a plan constructed, and love decided on as being of lesser importance. Indeed, my father has been married several times and is likely to try again in the hopes finding his next true love, and while I am uncertain of whether love is a real phenomenon or not that can be actually felt romantically by one human being for another, I must acquit that if he thinks love is real, then I hope at least he and others understand the importance of being financially stable and equal and having similar values as your partner when entering a marriage, and that he tries his hardest to not be upset if he fails anyway. In short, the value of marrying for convenience should be treated as one, a value, and not disregarded in the western dominated scheme of love over all.

LOS 43

DARLENE TORRES

Saroyan Award

Every night I have this reoccurring dream, it is powerful and it speaks to the darkest side of my heart. I see my mijo, Julio, walking towards me, from the other end of what seems to be a tunnel with no end. He is waving to me with one hand, once, a greeting, and then a rushed gesture to come to him. I begin to walk faster, but it is no use. All at once I begin to feel anxious, my feet do not seem to be moving, but I can feel the collaborative motion in my body, suggesting movement. I can feel everything. Several small drops of sweat race down my upper lip, in the form of a mustache, and in that moment I separated from the physical form of myself.

“Apudate, Mama!” he calls to me, with an innocent laugh, loud enough to wake this side of Mexico.

A sudden glow of red and blue illuminates behind his body, and I know this is the end of the tunnel. We were never meant to reach one another. A siren of the police car behind him screeches a thirsty growl, for blood. My poor mijo’s face goes from his warm, cocoa, to pale. He extends his arms and legs, ready to run for his life, but the beasts in uniform have already gone on the prowl to defend their leader. He is thrown to the floor, and forced to take repetitive blows from their clubs. Over and over, he is taken one step closer to the brink of death, but they cannot see this, because they are inhumane. La Parca, 6ft. and in uniform, devoted to death.

I am awoken by the marching of my people. Each foot, hitting the ground at once, left and then right. Every step lands with force, vibrating the roads ahead, and sending a message. Their marching plays in a rhythm similar to that of my heart, and the rest of the damaged hearts, down here in Mexico. In unison, our hearts beat. We are anxious for change, resentful of our government, and there is an endless hunger in the pit of our stomachs, for justice.

We paint on our bodies, which have been seen as worthless, but we have the knowledge that we are valuable. White paint covers our entire face, representing our purity, and we outline it in black, to show the imagery of the dark and evil that surround us and keeps us restrained. We use red paint to mimic injuries and blood, as representation of the wounds that the missing college students were given, and the corrupt treatment of our gang of police men. As I slide paint brushes across faces, I see my son in every one of them. I read the eyes of the people, and I see the fire within them. At times, my mind becomes carried away and I begin to hallucinate that I am back in my home, painting my mijos face for el dia de los muertos. He is five years old, with hope and happiness radiating, in my lap, and I no longer feel alone.

As we march, we yell, we scream, we cry out, for all who are listening. A faction of lloronas, crying for their lost children. We count together

“Uno... dos...tres...”

When we reach 43, we start over. It is a song, echoing through the city. Each number representing one of the young men murdered. Like Don Rosa, the elderly woman, who has been part of the catholic congregation for a total of 55 years at the Basilica de Guadalupe. Every Sunday morning she stands as close as possible to the golden shrine of La Virgen Maria, and belts out every prayer by memory, despite the Alzheimer’s disease, because her hope for revival guides her. We are like a two ton city bell ringing, to create an all natural alert system to the communities surrounding, open to taking precautions.

Though my son was beaten, mutilated, tortured, and burned until physical non existence, he lives on. I see him in the streets of countless ciudades and pueblos, along with the 42 other heroic young men. Their faces are carried on large posters through protests, on white crisp paper, leaving even protests that turned into riots, untouched, while the Mexican flag is burned and vandalized. Their faces are recreated over murals of useless tagging and pictures of gallos. Their faces gleam through the dark of night with candles, when we become too anxious to fight off our demons.

I know that the sacrifice made by these young men will make the end of the tunnel, where we the people meet with the government, reachable over time.

WHEN THE FLOWERS BLOOM

HELEN ARCHER

Chair's Award

Asclepius' center of dying hope and tear jerking miracles: the top cancer research center in this entire realm. A.K.A., the glorified waiting room where you either get diagnosed with sugar coated misery or the victory everyone prayed for.

What I knew of cancer: when I was a little duck, a boy's mom died of cancer. He was in love with me; he tried to impress me with his tether ball skills and gave me his caprisuns. I never met his mother, but after her journey into the cotton candy clouds, people said she was a lovely woman. The next time I saw the boy, I gave him my caprisun. He cried and threw the juice back at me, ruining my favorite blue dress. I told him he was a "meanie" and stormed off. I didn't know any better.

God must've been bored or maybe he was upset with me for not being sympathetic. He cursed me with the same fate as the puppy love infused boy. She was diagnosed when the flowers were just starting to bloom. The roses were draining her life to paint their own petals. Or maybe it was the sun—using her energy to power the solar system.

I didn't understand at first. They said she was sick, so I brought her tea and the disgusting colorful syrup that makes your head weary and knocks you into dreamland. She did this for me when my throat was clawed at by raspy monsters and my nose stuffed with germy ghouls. They said it would get worse before it got better. They were right. She spent her days in bed, reading and sleeping. I spent my days in bed with her. One day, while she was asleep, I combed my fingers through her once silky hair. It was as if someone had stuck it on with honey, so easily removed. I screamed when I saw the tangle of black in my hand because I thought I had hurt her. Three days later, she came home with a new head—one with a bald scalp seven shades paler than her face. I liked it, it was soft.

People sent their tangible sorrow. Friends and colleagues brought over casseroles filed with prayers and a sprinkle of wishful thinking. The secret ingredient: gratitude that it wasn't them making frequent visits to the hospital. Vases of flowers seemed to grow out of the tables and nightstands. She always loved flowers. As I lay in bed with her I think of hot gluing the blossoms to her bare scalp. Maybe the heat will melt the love and hope from the petals into her skin and through her skull. Maybe it will seep into her brain and blood and stop the fatal war going on inside her body. If I could, I would suck out the poison with a straw. It would be sickly sweet and burn my tongue.

I wish I could say that she was unbreakable through it all, that she never faltered, but I watched her start to crack like a sidewalk when a weed tries to sprout through the concrete. The sickness was thrashing at her, trying to break through and leave cracks in its wake. I watched her take pills and go through treatments that made her slip into the cruel dreamland for most of the day, only half promising a happy ending... maybe.

Eventually, she got her health back from the evil that stole it from her. As the lilies withered in their neglected vases, she flowered, life and light filling her veins. She was more beautiful than ever. The thing about cancer is it's a fight against yourself. It is a war between the stuff that makes up you and you. It's when rogue cells multiply, no matter how much it destroys you. Winning a war against yourself creates a triumph beyond comprehension. She wore the badge of victory in her soul. If you only looked in her eyes, you could see the strength radiating from her. My mother taught me about strength without even trying, without even knowing. She preached the importance of life with her own threatened one. She is strong. She is brave. She is a fighter. She is healthy.

ODE TO THE PIZZA

KATELYN WILLIAMS

Fresno Poets' Association Award

Oh, pizza,
how special
and iconic...
You harbinger of
childhood joy.
When you arrive,
the smell of cheese
and sauce
puts a smile
on everybody's face.
People recognize you instantly,
gaze excitedly at your
mozzarella-white face
freckled with
brilliant pepperonis,
and your fluffy hair
of golden stuffed crust.
Your admirers
wait anxiously
with wide eyes,
and drooling mouths
before tearing into you,
splitting you
into delicious triangles,
chomping down
on your once perfect,
circular form.
In an instant,
you're gone
in a bloodbath
of pulverized tomatoes,
and grease,

your juicy sauce
covering the mouths
of the satisfied partiers.
Oh, pizza,
you may be gone,
but someday,
you will return
in your
iconic cardboard box.

LADY LIBERTY DIDN'T HOLD MY ATTENTION

HELEN BROWER

Madden Library Award

Your freckles on a face wiped clean of makeup,
As you declared your own ugliness on this sacred isle.
My arm coiled around your shoulder, our chatter of one mind.
Lady Green stood in the background.

Your crinkled eyes and lips pinned up,
As we botched up our pristine smiles.
The throngs of people, as we tried to stand still.
The thick iron held the beams above.

The humidity hung thick, like a weight on their tongues,
But only your voice laughed in the breeze.

FIRST FRIEND

BAYLEE COCAGNE

The Normal School Award

The duration of my first real friendship lasted exactly nine months. We started off as roommates -- friends by force. Our living space was small with inefficient lighting, definitely feeling a little overwhelming at times, but it *was* a pretty cozy environment. I decided I could bear it for a while, especially after realizing how much I liked this new friend of mine.

After a few months, I noticed my friend's heart beat differently than mine. Mine pumped steadily; his was irregular and uneven. I thought it was a little strange; however, it didn't matter that my friend was different than me. He could have had two heads, for all I cared. He was the meatball to my spaghetti, the milk to my Oreo, the yin to my yang. I loved him for who he was, and that was that.

After nine long, joyous months, we had formed a bond that was impossible to break. I couldn't imagine the thought of leaving him, but I was feeling claustrophobic after being confined to that tiny little space for so long. I was getting antsy. I knew I had to move out soon, but I did not want to leave my one and only friend. Eventually, I convinced him to move out with me. I could tell right away that he was scared. He wouldn't budge. I thought that maybe if I took the initiative to leave, he would follow. So, I was the first to go through the circle of light and into the world.

At 2:45am, on April 26th, 1997, I was separated from my roommate for the first time. I had left our warm, dark, peaceful place and been thrown into a world full of bright lights, confusing, loud noises and strange smells. After figuring out I could breathe on my own, I began to cry. Only after being wrapped in a plush pink blanket and being rocked by a woman with a soft, soothing voice did I finally stop crying. Unfortunately, this comfort only lasted for a short time. Soon, I was taken from the woman and placed in a cold, rectangular box, with glass on all sides. I hated it. I wiggled my arms and my legs to see if that would

aide in my escape, but it was useless. I waited.

At 2:53am, my roommate came to join me.

I was very excited to see him, but as soon as we met, he was taken from me by big people in papery, foam-green clothes and blue masks. Suddenly, before I could even begin to cry for my friend, my insides were flooded with an overwhelming urge. I later discovered that this was hunger. I put my new lungs to use and cried once more until I was taken from the rectangular entrapment and fed.

Full and happy, I was now ready to see my friend, but all I could see were big people. I could not find him anywhere. Later, I found out they had taken him to a place called Valley Children's Hospital to try and fix his heart, as well many other abnormalities he had been born with, such as his intestines protruding outside of his body. They didn't succeed. Joseph Frances Cocagne's heart stopped at 9:03 AM on April 26th, 1997. He died of trisomy 18, also known as Edward's syndrome: a condition which is caused by an error in cell division.

Sometimes I wonder, what if I was the one to have gotten an 18th chromosome? Around 80 percent of those affected by Edward's disease are female, meaning I had the higher chance of being affected. But I didn't. What if my mom had to raise a boy instead of a girl, buying blue clothes instead of pink, attending football practices instead of dance lessons? What if my small, shriveled, newly-born body was in a casket buried deep into the ground instead?

One of my more often thoughts: What if we had both lived? I envy people who have a close bond with their siblings – especially twins. They have someone to share milestones with, someone to turn to when things get hard, someone who will be there for them when nobody else is. As an only child, I have none of these luxuries. Questions swarm through my head all the time: What's it like to have a brother, let alone a twin brother? Would we have been close, or would we have fought a lot? Would he have looked like me? Acted like me? Or been completely different from me?

Growing up, I was never really told that my twin brother died; I just always sort of knew. Every year on our birthday, my mom and I visit my brother in the Tulare Cemetery and give him flowers, teddy bears, toy trucks, and anything else we think he would have liked. She knows he will never play with the toys, but my mom likes to think he has a huge toy bin up in heaven – where he plays with something new every day.

I have a different view of my brother. In my mind, he's aged along with me, all the way up to seventeen. I've decided that he's tall, just like me.

Actually, taller. He's got my sandy blonde hair and my blue eyes. He slouches when he sits and he's got one hell of an imagination. And he spends his time here, with me. Watching. Waiting. Waiting for the day that I can finally join him, and be the yin to his yang once more.

BUTTON'S MAILBOX

FELICIA ZHORNITSKY

Levine Prize Award

In Pickford's "Button's Mailbox," fog fills the air
leaving a gentle glow on everything in sight.
The bashful sun peeks out from its hiding place,
a child playing hide-and-seek.
The road has reluctantly become a river
and the sky is covered with warm colors.
Branches with soft red leaves lie scattered,
toys cast aside by an energetic toddler.
A fallen tree rests on its lush green pillow
as the new-found river shimmers and looks up at it.
The mailbox for which this painting is named
stands tall and proud before the rising water
while a protective tree tilts toward it.
Shapes just outside the flowing mist hover
like impatient four-year-olds waiting for lunch
as the pastel sun slips out of the watercolor sky.

MAGIC KINGDOMS

ALaura MCGUIRE

FACET Award

Magic kingdoms built from the bottom up
with blankets and kitchen chairs.
Tales of two warriors ready for battle,
you and I fought side by side.
Years passed and as I surpassed
the days of mud pies and bruised elbows
I left you behind. Left you to fend for yourself
in that kingdom of treacherous beasts.
But you were still brave, you have always been brave.
Sticking up for me even when I did not do the same for you.
Looking up to me even when I did not deserve the admiration.
Then there were times when we would bicker,
antagonize, and tease. Just when we thought
the childish antics were through.
Oh dear brother, I was never meant to be the wiser.
Two alike and unlike minds stronger together, but
yet always at opposing sides.
Each turning towards our separate corners to find solace.
But still as I look back I do not regret
a single day spent with you. We cannot go back,
but forward is just as promising.
Take my hand, let us walk to that long forgotten kingdom.
Let us continue onward to battle, always together
side by side.

CHILDHOOD

MARISA MATA

FACET Award

I was walking home when I saw it. It was something so small, yet it had the power to catch my attention and bring back such vivid memories. There it was across the street, a single leaf. It looked the same as the others that have fallen from this tree every year when the weather gets colder—long and slender, a light shade of purple, brown around the ridges, a short, thin stem. Something came over me; I stopped and stared at the leaf as I was visited by memories of my childhood.

I was three years old, walking down this same street with my dad and my grandfather. It was the middle of autumn. The leaves had started to change from shades of green to orange and red. There were leaves gently falling to the ground from the trees lining the street. They were scattered across lawns, in the road, on top of cars and houses. Leaves were everywhere.

I ran and skipped and jumped through all the leaves as we went down the street. I could feel a warm breeze against my face, through my hair. A leaf flew in front of me. This leaf was different than the rest—it had a different shape, a different color. I looked around and saw that there were more of these leaves falling, but they fell from only one tree. I started walking through these purple leaves and heard them breaking under my feet. They crunched louder than all the others.

I started running back and forth in front of the one house that had these leaves. I pushed all the leaves together and ran across them, trying to see how loud I could make them crunch and crumble. My dad and grandfather saw what I was doing, and we decided to make a game out of it. We wanted to see who could make the leaves get the loudest. We took turns running across the leaves yelling, Leaf Cruncher! All we could see was each other, surrounded by purple. All we could hear were our laughs, our yells, the leaves beneath us.

Everyone was smiling. Everyone was happy. It stayed this way until the sun began to go down and we had to walk back home. For the rest of autumn though, we played this game every time we walked by that house—the house with the purple leaves. It was always so fun to run and jump through the leaves, to hear them crunching under our feet...

A gust of wind blows the leaf away and I return to the present. My grandpa is gone. My dad is busy working. I wipe some hair from my face and continue walking. I have to grow up now. I can no longer play in the leaves all day.

EL NIÑO DE LA FRONTERA

BRIAN CHAVEZ

MFA Award

Mientras el sol desaparece,
detrás de las colinas,
el hambre de los niños permanece en sus barrigas.
Triste es su realidad.

Su padre ya viejo
trabaja en sus tierras,
maíz y trigo son sus siembras.
El niño corre y ayuda a su padre.

Su madre en la cocina
con su hermana barriendo todo el día.
La tristeza e impotencia
son los gestos de todo el día.

Cuando la luna sale
y las estrellas brillan,
él piensa en lo que lograría.
El país del norte es su destino.

Llegó el momento,
su madre llora,
su padre con coraje mira su sombra.
El abrazo entre los hermanos simboliza su unidad.

El pobre niño de 12 años
Lleva un morral con fruta y un galón de agua.
Estas son sus armas para sobrevivir
en esta peligrosa experiencia.

La tristeza invade a la familia,
su papá, su mamá y su hermana
miran partir a un guerrero

que arriesga su vida por la de su familia.

El camino hacia los Estados Unidos,
fue muy desgastante y complicado.
Este guerrero peleó hasta el final,
Pero su meta no la pudo superar.

En las pupilas de sus ojos
el sol se reflejaba,
por sus mejillas lágrimas caían.
En su familia él pensaba.

El sol, la alimentación y la novatez
cobro la vida del guerrero.
El deseo de superación lucha
se fue con él.

En el medio del desierto su cuerpo permanecía.
Cosas como este existen todos los días.
Su papá, su mamá y su hermana
lo siguen esperando.

* * *

As the sun disappears,
behind the hills,
the hunger of children stay in their bellies.
Sad reality.

His father and older
working on their land,
Corn and wheat are their crops.
The boy runs and helps his father.

Your mother in the kitchen
with her sister sweeping all day.
The sadness and impotence
are the gestures of everyday.

When the moon rises
and the stars shine,
he thinks it would achieve.
The north country is your destination.

It's time,
his mother cries,
his father bravely looks at his shadow.
The embrace between the brothers symbolizes their unity.

The poor child 12 years
Bring a backpack with fruit and a gallon of water.
These are your weapons to survive
in this dangerous experience.

The sadness invades family
his father, his mother and sister
From a warrior look
who risks his life for his family.

The road to the United States,
It was very tiring and complicated.
This warrior fought to the end,
But his goal could not overcome.

The pupils of his eyes
the sun was shining,
by her tears fell cheeks.
In his family he thought.

The sun, food and inexperience
charging the warrior's life.
The desire to excel fight
she went with him.

In the middle of the desert his body remained.
Things like this are everyday.
His dad, his mom and sister
I am still waiting.

HELL OF A TIME: CHAPTER II

ALEXANDRE HABIB

San Joaquin Literary Association Award

Among the rolling hills of the countryside, a lone coyote was having its feast. A clear, cold night, the new moon laid down as backdrop for its triumph. The coyote's maw was dripping red with the sweet nectar provided by the rabbit at its feet. It tore the last strips of flesh from bone and swallowed savagely, only minimally sating its hunger. Relishing in its meal, the coyote licked its teeth, and reached down to gnaw on the warm bones.

Its ears pricked up. Eyes wide open, it stood still as stone. Its hunger forgotten as it sniffed the night air, a strange smell penetrating its nostrils. The coyote snarled in trepidation, for what could be the source of such an unnatural, disturbing, hellish aroma? The animal slowly trekked to the peak of a nearby mound, leaving its prize behind. It was unfortunate enough to discover the source of its apprehension. Four creatures were wandering through the field, speaking to each other calmly, even laughing. Disgusting. The coyote knew not what to do, they looked like humans, young humans even, but felt unlike anything it had encountered before. For some reason, it wished for nothing more than to get away from these creatures. However, as the coyote turned to escape, it had become locked in one of the beast's gaze. It tried desperately to run away, yet its legs would not move. Why wasn't it running away?

"Logan, what are you doing?" one of the other beasts called out impatiently.

"I found a coyote."

"So?"

"I want to play with it." As he said this, the coyote found itself shuffling towards the beings. The not-human called Logan continued to stare into its mind. The coyote feebly attempted to look away. But there was nothing else to see. Those eyes filled its vision. They were everywhere,

they were everything. Those eyes were the only things that existed in the coyote's world, and now its entire world had dissolved into a single thought. Agony.

One of the other creatures, known as Samuel, walked over to Logan's side, where they both crouched, watching the animal with pleasure. Blind to the world, its forelimbs were being worn down to the bone between its teeth. Weeping mindlessly, the blood was frothing as it went down the coyote's gullet.

Samuel chuckled pleasantly. He reached out to touch the animal's course fur. "Good boy, who's a good boy?" he said sweetly.

"Or girl" Logan interjected.

"Whatever."

Samuel began stroking its coat, petting it gently. From his first touch, the coyote began to shed, and Samuel found himself touching cold flesh, in the process of blistering. The discolored sores oozed between his fingers, but he didn't mind.

"Are you two almost done?" came a call from behind them. Logan looked up at the other two boys. Lucas, the impatient one, stared at him, arms crossed, tapping his feet as though in some kind of hurry. Next to him, Darien stood, stone faced as always, looking bored.

"What's the hurry?" Logan replied. "You know I have a soft spot for animals, why can't I just play with it for a little while?"

"Something's coming, I can feel it. I have an idea, and I want to make sure it goes right." Lucas said simply, receiving curious looks from Logan and Darien.

Logan sighed, "Alright, I guess it's almost dead anyway, come on Samuel."

Samuel continued to scratch the animal behind the ears with one hand, the other was in the coyote's mouth. "One second, I want to finish taking its teeth out." A moment of silence passed, then he stood, wiping his hands on his pants, "Alright, I'm done. Let's go." As he released the coyote's ear, the pathetic creature was released from its spell. The eyes disappeared and it began to taste blood. At first the beast knew nothing. Then, as its senses returned, it new only pain.

The four boys continued their stroll through the grassland, the coyote's whimpering slowly fading into the background. Lucas continued to look forward, as the others wondered what exactly it was that he was

waiting for.

Lucas stopped suddenly. A brilliant flash of light had cast their shadows far ahead of them. Lucas let a small smile flit across his face before turning to greet their visitor. The others bore expressions of exasperation or annoyance, but Lucas's face remained blank. As the light faded, the visitor came into focus. Like Lucas and the others, the visitor assumed the form of a young man. He was clad simply, in garments of white, looking around at them all with contempt and loathing. His expression was regal, but Lucas knew him better than that. As much as the visitor might try to hide it, the fear he felt radiated from his very being. Lucas knew the truth. Their visitor was full of terror like he had never known before.

“Good evening Adynamel” Lucas said to him.

“You shouldn't be here” he snapped in return.

Lucas smiled, “Now what makes you say that? The Angels do not bear dominion over this realm. We are as free to roam it as you are. The inhabitants of this world may entertain whomever they choose to.”

“Entertain? You come into this realm without invitation and slaughter for your own amusement!” Adynamel responded furiously, however, he immediately regained his composure and calm demeanor. He glared at Lucas, a feeble attempt at intimidation. “You are nothing but a blight. If you were wise you would leave now and return to Hell.”

“Why should we?” Lucas took a step forward. “Why should we not enjoy our freedom? There is nowhere outside the gates of Heaven that we have any reason to stay away from. We have our own wills to do whatever we want. In that sense, dare I say it, we are more blessed than Angels.”

This infuriated Adynamel, “Don't you dare compare yourself to them! They are the only ones who may even enter the presence of God! You and your 'friends' are nothing but cruel, fiendish Demons!”

“But at least I am truly a Demon, not some outcaste wretch deemed unworthy of his rightful place. I am not beneath *my* sire, I am his equal. Can you say the same, little Nephilim?” Lucas smiled warmly and spoke with a practiced expression of compassion. “But you have no quarrel with us, so why are you here?”

“I... he sent me to...”

“I see, our dear uncle, he sent you to confront us on our actions, to drive

is back to hell.”

Adynamel paused for a moment, “... yes”, he answered finally.

“But you are hesitant, why?” Lucas asked.

Before the Nephilim could reply Darien spoke, his voice low, resonating in the night air. “He fears many things, such as your sire’s vengeance – my sire’s as well – should he harm us in any way.” Darien’s eyes had not left Adynamel since the moment he had arrived. He was easier to read than any tome, and far more entertaining to mock than any mortal. “He fears disappointing his sire. He fears us as we not only outnumber him but are true Demons, while he remains incapable of becoming an Angel. But mostly, he lives in constant shame because he believes that he has no ability to prove the meaning of his name untrue.”

Adynamel couldn’t look at Darien. He hated those damned eyes. Those dead, unblinking eyes! No matter where Adynamel set his gaze, he knew Darien was watching him. He could feel Darien’s power, studying every pore upon his body, tracking the glowing ichor in his veins, probing and extracting every single thought from his soul, eventually coming to know his specimen better than they dared to know themselves. Adynamel looked down at the blades of grass beneath his feet. He could hear Logan and Samuel muttering to each other, chuckling at him.

“Really? Is that it?” Lucas laughed heartily, “You needn’t worry, Lucifer wouldn’t avenge me. Even if somehow you vanquished us all, little – if any – punishment would befall you. Those who know God care nothing for beings lesser than themselves, including those of their own creation. No matter who among us falls,” Lucas gestured at the lot of them, “the killer need not fear any vengeance. Our sires care nothing for us.” He could see that Adynamel understood. Lucas was speaking not only of Demons, but the Angels as well.

“Even so,” the Nephilim whispered half-heartedly, “It is my duty to send you back, and that is what I’m going to do.”

“Why does it matter to you so much?” Lucas asked. “Is it because we’re ‘evil’, because we are damned, marked as your enemies by a God that you shall never see? Let me make you an offer. Let us show you how we see the world. We will return to Hell peacefully, but come with us, so that you may understand why we act the way we do, why we relish in our blasphemous natures, and why each and every one of us would rather be a lowly Demon hated by all as opposed to even the most glorified of Angels.”

After a few moments of utter silence, Adynamel lifted his gaze and

looked upon Lucas with newfound resolve. If he could understand his enemy, then he could destroy it, and he had to be prepared to do anything, go anywhere, to ensure that the damned remained in Hell. It may have been insane, but he was determined to prove himself worthy. And besides, he was borne of holy light, created by perhaps the greatest of the Archangels. What had he to fear? He would be fine. “If I go with you, first you must swear to me that no harm shall befall me. If you bind yourself with such an oath, then knowing you cannot break it, I shall follow you.”

Lucas could hardly resist letting a devilish grin slither across his face. He tried to contain his laughter as he spoke once more. “I’ll go even further than that dear cousin. I will swear directly to your creator, he would certainly not permit any betrayal from and unholy being such as I.” Adynamel’s eyes widened with surprise. Darien chuckled to himself and looked to the heavens, relieving Adynamel from his piercing gaze. Samuel and Logan looked at Lucas with reverence as he threw out his arms, locked his gaze upon the sky, his eyes aflame with ferocity, and called out to the Heavens, “Hear me Archangel Michael! I, first spawn of the first angel Lucifer, swear upon my own damnation that no harm shall befall the Nephilim Adynamel.”

Nothing happened.

Adynamel stared at the child of Lucifer with newfound apprehension. Few ever dared to speak to Michael for fear of destruction, but this devil-spawn merely smiled. As Lucas lowered his hands to his sides, Adynamel saw that the Demon had begun to steam profusely. A smoky vapor began to ebb from his pores, encompassing him in a strange mist, thickening until he was no longer visible. The last thing Adynamel saw of him before he was encased in that coffin of vapor were his eyes, staring back at him. He could have sworn that the Demon was smiling. Samuel and Logan backed away, sharing an uneasy glance, Darien stood his ground, but turned his face away. He tensed as the vapor began to waft by him, and shut his eyes tightly. Adynamel was so confused by this that at first he didn’t hear the sounds that punctured the night air. There was a light thud followed by a strange groaning within the smoke. The groaning began to develop into a low, guttural seething, some ancient leviathan had awoken and was struggling to remember how to breathe. The grass beneath them quickly began to shrivel and die, crunching as Adynamel reflexively backed away.

A cool breeze began to flow down towards them, pushing the smoke further away from the Nephilim. It was not until the wind curled around his flesh that he realized his entire body was covered in sweat, his heart pounding loudly within his chest.

The steam began to dissipate, and Lucas was visible once more. The Demon was now on his knees, head bowed low. His only movement was the faint rise and fall of his shoulders as he took each breath. Adynamel saw then that he looked – to put it simply – shriveled. His flesh pulled taught over his bones, his veins protruding, black streaks that coursed across his form. As Lucas raised his skull, Adynamel mistakenly caught his eye. Sunken into their sockets, a lifeless void gazed into Adynamel's spirit.

Lucas grinned.

As the son of Lucifer rose to his feet his flesh began to fill out. The sinews regrew on his bones and his eyes reformed in their sockets. He grunted as if stretching while the black veins sank back beneath his flesh. Soon, the mortal form he bore was healed. The other Demons stared at him, expressions blank. Adynamel considered backing away further, but knew that he needed to stand his ground. He would conquer these Demons. Even if he could never be an Angel, he would at least prove himself worthy of his place. He would never prove the meaning of his name to be true. Admittedly, he almost envied these four Demons for never having had their own names, taking temporary ones upon each entry into the realm of mortals.

“What was that?” he found himself asking.

“Michael has heard my oath.” Lucas could hardly resist grinning from ear to ear. He turned to his fellows, sneering at their unease. “What? You look at me as though you’ve never had your blood boiled before.”

Darien stared at him. “But you let him. Why?”

Lucas scoffed, “As though I had a choice. As the spawn of Pride. I have learned to be humble when necessary. Just as you know when you need not seek out bloodshed,” He then gestured to Logan and Samuel, “and as you are able to take pleasure in what you have and accept what you don’t. We are not nearly as grand as our sires, but that does not mean that we cannot supersede their faults.”

Having now silenced the others, he turned around to face the Nephilim once more. He extended his left arm out to Adynamel, offering up his palm. “Well? Are you ready?”

“Wait, where exactly are we going?” Adynamel struggled to remain calm, he had no idea what they planned to do with him. He had never been to Hell before, and it terrified him. If things turned against him, there would likely be no escape. But at this point he had no choice. It was his duty as a Nephilim to enforce the authority of Heaven. He had

holy power after all. Yes, surely only the most powerful of Demons could defeat him, they were damned for a reason after all. Yes, he would be fine, wouldn't he? Michael would never permit him to be slain, not only was there the Demon's oath, but surely the Angel would want to preserve his creation, correct? He mattered to the Angels, didn't he? He had to, they made the Nephilim after all. Yes he would be fine. Still, Adynamel wished he had not come alone, he should have brought at least one other Nephilim... No, this was his chance. If he could venture to Hell and back victorious... he would finally be worthy. He could be relieved of his burden, be bestowed a name that inspired awe in all those who heard it. Perhaps the Angels could even see that he was worthy of joining them in God's presence, they could make him an Angel. He could be pure. He could cease being the lowly Nephilim Adynamel, he could be a great Angel with a new name. No more being Adynamel, no more being the "Weakness of God".

Lucas didn't move. "We are going to show you Hell. I shall act as your guide and allow no harm to befall you, Nephilim. We shall show you the Demons' den, so that you may discover why it is that a third of the Angels abandoned Heaven, preferring to exist in eternal torment and suffering than to be suppliant before God. Now, if you are ready, ready to be not only the first Nephilim, but the first holy being since the initial fall of Angels to venture into Hell, then let's go."

Lucas stared at Adynamel, unblinking. Adynamel glared back, a mask of ferocity draped across his anxiety. He swung his arm forward and clasped it in Lucas's, the two of them tightly gripping each other's forearm. Behind the Demon, Darien, Logan, and Samuel dissolved into the night, ready to receive their guest across the gates of Hell.

The Nephilim had suddenly become numb to all emotion. "I'm ready." He managed to utter in a soft voice.

The nameless demon pulled him in close and – ever unblinking – contorted his face into a more sadistic, psychotic, cruel sneer than Adynamel could have possibly imagined. There were no words between them, the Demon's expression said it all. Adynamel could have collapsed then and there, weeping in fear of the soul he had just seen, but before he could do anything, they were encompassed by the void that had haunted Adynamel since his creation. The deed was done, when Adynamel awoke, he would wake in Hell.

A clear, cold night, all was still. There were no animals, no winds, no life to be found. In those fields of grassland, time itself seemed to stop, as if the heavens and the earth were holding their breath, waiting.

NO MORE COCONUTS!

GUADALUPE AGUILAR

Chicano Writers and Artists Association Award

Once upon a time in a faraway town called Deranged there lived a crazy old man who was coo-coo for coconuts. This old man was 1164 months old, his name was Savvy. Savvy was a nice old man, but there was something about him that was creepy. He had a weird obsession for coconuts like seriously Savvy was like no lie in love with coconuts two years ago he met a coconut named Monkey Face. Savvy and Monkey Face got married, unfortunately though Monkey Face decayed away after three weeks of marriage and ever since that Savvy never again got married. The weirdest thing though about Savvy is that he's been disappeared for five months already, no one knows where he's at, no one but me. You see there's something about me you don't know, let's start off by my name. My name is Ruffian and I like Savvy. He was an old man I just couldn't keep my eyes off him. At first when I told savvy what I felt for him, how I longed for him, how I desired him he thought I was crazy, when in reality we all know he's the crazy one. What can I say though I love him, so that's why I kidnapped him he's in my room, he's on my bed even though we can't do anything because of his high blood pressure, but I love him and he looks so beautiful. His droopy wrinkles reminded me of my Shar-pei I had when I was 7 and his smooth bald head reminded me of caillou. Oh savvy he is so perfect and he is all mine, well he was all mine until one day I couldn't stand his dumb obsession for coconuts so I stopped buying them. Savvy was very depressed until one day his heart was so heartbroken he eventually died and it was my fault. I'm in jail now and i write this to let the world know that coconuts are stupid and should be banned, coconuts should be illegal. So remember vote yes on proposition no more coconuts!

UNTITLED

GABRIEL LAMATINA

Chicano Writers and Artists Association Award

The wind brushed against my face as it lifted my kite into the Brazilian sky. It hung there, slowly dancing with the wind. When I was eight years old, I visited the country of my birth, Brazil, for the first time. Upon mingling with the other children, they were shocked that I did not know how to fly a kite. It is one of the most popular activities for children, and most began flying kites when they were around four years old. Therefore, they took it upon themselves to teach me this new hobby and guided me to the best location to fly a kite: up the hills and in the middle of a favela – a slum.

When I was just two years old, my family moved from Brazil to a small rural California town in search of economic stability. Sharing the story of my kite-flying experience with my peers back in California brought looks of bewilderment and awe. As an eight-year-old child, I did not understand their reactions. However, as I got older I realized that the favelas were an alien world to them, and my California classmates saw some essential difference between those children and themselves, namely that poverty made the residents of the favelas somehow dangerous and unapproachable.

Only years later, when I began to understand the labeling of third-world countries and the division between classes, did I realize that there was a reason these barriers had been invisible to me. My parents made the concerted effort to dismantle the prejudice that people use to divide themselves from others and instilled in me the idea that people were only worth as much as their character. Ethnicity, lifestyle, or wealth should never influence how I saw them.

The lessons from my parents and my experiences in the favela taught me that everyone deserves an equal opportunity for success. It is deeply troubling that the residents of these communities do not have an equal opportunity just because of their economic situation and where they live. When our family moved to the United States, I was given an opportunity

that the children in the favela will not have. I constantly remind myself that I am very lucky to be in the position that I am in today.

The reminder that my fate could have easily been the same as one of those kids inspires me to help make a difference for people who lack opportunity. I hope to pursue a major in economics because I aspire to help the economic development of emerging economies to provide aid to communities with socioeconomic problems, like the favelas in Brazil. Had I not met those children, I would not have learned about my own background, would not have experienced a different lifestyle, and would not have received firsthand instruction on how to fly a kite. I am grateful for the time I spent with the children in the favela and the lessons I learned from them.

A WINTER'S TALE

MAIKHUE HER

Hmong American Writers' Circle Award

I sit beside the frosted window, waiting to see if today is finally the day it will snow again. As I wait for the snow, I begin to think about the first time I saw snow. It was some kind of magical, I'll tell you that, but I can't say what kind. To tell about that day, I'd have to start at the very beginning of winter vacation. The day started out like any other day, but there was a different feel. For some reason, I just knew that something great was going to happen that day. And what can I say except that I was right? That was the day that I met *him*.

It was like I already knew him, we just clicked. He told the funniest jokes, had the brightest smile, and the most beautiful crystal blue eyes. In fact, I had always thought that his eyes reminded me of winter itself: a cool, blue-grey color. From that day on, we began to see each other more and more. At first, it was just coincidence, then...we grew fond of each other. The more we were together, the more I began to see him in a different light. There was a softness to his gaze that always told me everything would be okay even on the worst of days, and he always knew just what to say to make my day. During one of the last days of winter vacation, we decided to go to an outdoor ice-skating rink. We ended up staying there until it got dark, then we decided to take a walk in the park nearby. Somewhere along the way, we began to talk about the constellations in the sky and ended up sitting on a wooden bench in the middle of the park. We were just talking, laughing and joking as usual, then the unexpected happened.

He kissed my cheek.

It was a only subtle, feather-light peck, but my face quickly heated up and I was speechless. I looked at him, wide-eyed, and he rubbed the back of his neck with his hand, and gave me the smile I had always loved. I saw that he was just as flustered as I was, and began to laugh. And, like magic, it began to snow. Little tufts of snow began to fall

down. Little did I know that the next day, everything would fall apart.

I never knew that anything was wrong. All the while I was laughing at his jokes and silly stories; he was fading away—dying. He had a heart disease that caused him to have an irregular heart rhythm, and the night that it snowed, he began to lose the fight. I would sit by his hospital bed, looking out of the frosted window, just like now, hoping that he would wake up and look at me with the same sweet smile as before, but he never did. Just like the winter that brought him along into my life, he embedded himself into my memory, then faded away and disappeared.

TOUCHUP

ALEXIS BARAJAS

Hmong American Writers' Circle Award

She kept the table
with detached legs held
together by rubber bands
and glue from
all the times
it had been tossed over.
She threw out the broken frames,
keeping the pictures
because she
couldn't go a day
without seeing him.

She repainted the living
room, and hung
portraits of their wedding
to cover holes
punched in the wall,
the same way she
puts makeup on her face
to cover the bruises.

She called it repairing,
remodeling, renovation,
but the living room
will always be
just another battlefield
covered with portraits,
paint, and makeup
that she used to hide
the aftermath of
marriage.

THE SHELTER

CLAIRE GORHAM

Dramatic Arts Award

A poorly-lit room; five teenage boys sit on chairs UC facing audience.

(ENRIQUE sighs)

RICK: Why is it taking so long?

LUTHER: I don't know. Who knows? Nobody knows.

ENRIQUE: You guys think you have it bad; I've been here for *twelve hours*.

LUTHER: Dude, seriously? We could be here forever.

DUSTIN: I hate this room. I hate these nurses. I hate the way this place *smells*.

ARMANDO: Dude, chill out. It's better than the streets.

DUSTIN: Not really. I've heard about what they do to kids here. I hate this room!

ENRIQUE: I heard it depends. On what truck they put you in.

LUTHER *(Nods)*: Yeah, I heard if the truck's yellow, you're an okay fellow, if the truck is black, no more Jack. Jack. Black. Ha. I guess they think that's clever.

DUSTIN: I didn't hear about colored trucks. I heard about the dark, dark room and the—

(Other BOYS glare at him until he is silent)

DUSTIN: I mean, yeah. I heard about trucks. Black truck, you're good, yellow truck, you're out. *(Tries to laugh)*

LUTHER: No, no, that's backwards. I said that black is bad and yellow is good.

DUSTIN (*angry*): Well, I said that black is good and yellow is bad!

(*The two boys look ready to fight when ARMANDO steps between them.*)

ARMANDO: Whoa, whoa, whoa. You two really need to calm down. The color of the trucks doesn't matter, as long as there are trucks. Seriously.

RICK: Yeah. Armando's right.

ARMANDO: Say, how long do you think until they come for one of us?

ENRIQUE: I told you, it's not the same for everybody. Like I said, I been here for twelve hours. There was one kid who was in here for two minutes flat. One kid was here for a couple of *days* before they took him.

RICK: Well, that sucks.

DUSTIN: So, why are you guys here?

ENRIQUE: Well, last night these guys in black suits came to my house and said they needed to take my parents in for questioning. (*Sadly*) They brought me here, and took my parents away/

RICK: That happened to me, too. Except they didn't say anything about questioning, (*voice breaks*) they just grabbed my parents and took them away.

ARMANDO: I haven't lived with my parents for years. I've been on the streets. The guys in suits came and picked me up this morning.

LUTHER: What color was the truck?

ARMANDO: It wasn't a truck. It was a van. It was white.

LUTHER (*disappointed*): Oh. Well, I lived with my aunt in town. Then these ladies in black suits took her. (*Suddenly defensive*) But not like they took your parents. They took Cindy because they needed her. They said that.

DUSTIN: Well, good for you. I was like Armando; I've been living on the streets since I was eight or so; living doorway to doorway, trashcan to trashcan. (*Looks around appreciatively*) This place sure beats that. I'd take waiting in here for days over living on the streets for an hour.

RICK (*standing*): Why are we here? Does anybody know?

ENRIQUE: Well, I kind of know. When they came to take me, they told me it was because I had been abandoned. I didn't understand that, but they kept saying it over and over.

ARMANDO: I think it's for your protection; those of you who lived with your parents. They wanted you to be somewhere safe. But for Dustin and me, it's not good. We're, I don't know, public menaces or something.

DUSTIN: Hey. I wasn't a menace. I never did anything wrong. I worked for money to buy food. I had a solid place.

ARMANDO: Yeah, a bench in the park. Such a solid place.

DUSTIN: Better than under an abandoned pool table in an illegal bar.

RICK: Listen, you guys, that's great and everything, but we still don't know why we're here.

ENRIQUE: That would be good to-

Suddenly, enter BOY, running on from stage right.

BOY: Run! Get away! It's not safe!

BOY starts jerking in agony, a collar around his neck glowing blue. BOY collapses DC, still breathing. Enter ADULT 1.

ADULT: Sorry for the interruption. Please proceed.

ADULT exits, carrying BOY

ENRIQUE: That's... creepy.

LUTHER: Oh, my god. (*backing up*) Oh, my god. I don't like this. I can't stay here! I have to get out of here! Somebody let me out!

(LUTHER runs towards stage R, ARMANDO stops him)

ARMANDO: No, no, no. Calm down, Luther. Calm down, it's okay.

RICK: It's obviously not okay! Whatever's going on in there CANNOT BE GOOD. We need to get out of here while we can!

ENRIQUE: Quite honestly, I doubt we can.

RICK: You are most definitely NOT HELPING.

ARMANDO: Shut up, somebody's coming.

ENTER JESSICA and RUTH

JESSICA: Oh, hello. What are... you guys doing here?

ENRIQUE: We were brought here by these... people in suits. My name's Enrique. This is Rick, Luther, Dustin, and... I can never remember his name.

ARMANDO: It's Armando. I was taken here off the streets, like Dustin. The others got taken away from their parents. What about you?

JESSICA: My parents disappeared a few nights ago. I got picked up off the street yesterday. This is Ruth, she doesn't talk.

RICK: You mean she's quiet?

JESSICA: No, I mean she doesn't talk. She's mute.

RICK: Do either of you know why we're here?

RUTH AND JESSICA *exchange a glance.*

JESSICA: Uh, yeah, don't you?

DUSTIN: No, otherwise we wouldn't have asked you if you did.

JESSICA: This is a shelter, obviously.

RICK: That is not helping.

JESSICA: Oh, come on. Seriously? None of you know what a shelter is?

(Boys shake their heads)

JESSICA: Well, from what I've heard, it's a place where they take kids that have been abandoned, or that are considered menaces, or, like, strays. Then, the people in charge decide if the kids can be adopted, or if they should be killed.

DUSTIN: But they can't just kill humans like that. That has to be illegal, right?

JESSICA: We don't know. All we know is what we've heard from other kids who've been adopted and abandoned again.

ARMANDO: So... you said they would put kids up for adoption, or kill them. What's going to happen to us?

JESSICA: Well, that depends. Are you adoptable?

(Dustin is silent.)

ENRIQUE *(gravely)*: So, this place, it's like jail, right?

JESSICA: Almost, but much worse.

DUSTIN: Why are we just sitting here? We have to get out! *(Goes offstage R, comes back dragged in by ADULT 2)*

ADULT 2: Sorry for the interruption. Please do not try to escape, or I will take you to the Kill Room immediately. Thank you.

RICK: Not this again. Oh, god. Why this again? Is he dead?

ENRIQUE: Calm down; I don't think so. Remember that other kid? He was still alive.

(ENRIQUE kneels beside DUSTIN, puts his fingers on his neck)

ENRIQUE: Yeah, he's alive. Just unconscious. Hopefully, he wakes up soon. We should find a way out; we have to try something else. *(looks up)* There's a skylight, but I think it's locked.

(Suddenly, DUSTIN awakes)

DUSTIN: Oh, my gosh, my back hurts. What did I miss? Anything important?

ENRIQUE: Only that our other mode of escape is locked.

DUSTIN: Locked? That's it?

ENRIQUE: We don't know. We think so.

JESSICA: It's probably a really powerful lock. Maybe even the TurboLock3.0. *(embarrassed)* My dad was a tech engineer, before he went AWOL.

LUTHER: Well, that's no good, then.

ARMANDO: Why don't we just knock out the guards and take the doors?

JESSICA: I don't think that would work. The guards scan into a retina scanner to get in here.

DUSTIN: Well, then, there's only one way out. We have to capture a pair of adults.

ENRIQUE: Well, how do we do that, wise guy?

DUSTIN: Here's the plan: You three, Jessica, Rick, and Enrique, take one guard, and you three, Ruth, Luther, and Armando, take the other one.

ARMANDO: Hold on. What about you?

DUSTIN: I'm getting to that. See, to make this plan work, one of us has to try to escape.

RICK: But they said if one of us tried to escape, they'd send us to the Kill Room.

DUSTIN: I think they only meant the one that tried to escape. Which is why I have to do it.

ENRIQUE: No, man. I've been here the longest. Let me go.

DUSTIN: That isn't happening. You have a family out there, somewhere.

ENRIQUE: Uh. No, I don't, man. I think they're dead.

DUSTIN: Well, we have to hope. Me, I don't have anybody. I'm street garbage. My time has come, just let me do this. Please.

ARMANDO: I'm street garbage, too. Come on, Dustin.

DUSTIN: How old are you?

ARMANDO: Fifteen.

DUSTIN: I'm sixteen, so I'm doing it. You can't stop me, anyway.

ENRIQUE: Dustin, please. We could just wait.

DUSTIN: Wait for what? For those adults to pick us off one at a time? Nobody's going to want to adopt me, Enrique.

ARMANDO: Or me. We should do it together. Maybe we could take the adults ourselves.

DUSTIN: That wouldn't work. The guards are all, like, bodybuilders, or something. (*Lowers his voice, to ARMANDO.*) Honestly, I don't think all of us together could take one of them. (*To group*) Look, at least one of you has to get out. Everybody out there has to know what they're doing in here and find out what happened to our families.

LUTHER: Well, none of us are sentenced to death yet. We might all get adopted, and then we could tell the whole world about this... shelter.

JESSICA: That's another thing. This isn't the only shelter. There must be hundreds nationwide. Maybe even more. There could be more than that in this city, for all we know.

RICK: Well, I say we need to stop talking and start escaping. *(To DUSTIN)* I think your idea is the way to go. Who's with us?

(All but ENRIQUE raise their hands. Slowly, HE does, too.)

DUSTIN: Well, that's it, then. On three.

RICK: One, two... THREE!

CURTAIN

A SPLIT SECOND

MAYA VANNINE

Honorable Mention

She was running around in a hurry, trying to find her younger sister's shoe. Her sister was always very particular about these things, and would not change her mind once it was set. So the older sister ran around, searching the entire house for one pink, light-up, size 3 shoe. Frantically, she checked the clock. 7:43 it read. She was going to miss the bus at 8, she could just feel it. Already sleep deprived from the mass of schoolwork, she decided to forget the bus. She'd walk to school. Ear-splitting cries seeped downstairs, and she was reminded of why she was late in the first place. She skidded into the living room, her socks sliding across the hardwood floors. There, resting between the teeth of her dog, was the pink, light-up, size 3 shoe. She snatched it up and ran upstairs towards her sister, the younger girl's cries slowly dying at the sight of her beloved shoe. Happy to hear her cries stop, the older sister slung her backpack over her shoulder and ran out of the house. As she reached the end of the driveway, she remembered her homework sitting on the kitchen counter. Groaning, she jogged back inside, grabbed her homework and jogged back out. She then fast-walked down the road in the direction of the school. Halfway there, she heard her phone buzzing in her backpack. She flipped her backpack around so that it was in front of her, but did not stop walking. She searched the pockets of her backpack, finally grasping the cool metal of her phone in her hand.

She didn't see the boy until the impact.

He had woken up before his multiple alarms, a bounce in his step. He was determined to be on time today. He got dressed in reasonable time, and decided to skip breakfast, for that was usually what made him late. He kissed his mother goodbye and headed out the door. Checking his watch, he decided he had plenty of time to take the long way to school. He whistled a little tune, happily making his way along the street. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a flash of light, and abruptly turned his head to investigate. Hiding beneath some dirt was a penny! What luck, he

thought to himself. He scrubbed off the remaining dirt with his thumb until the old penny was spotless. He flicked it up in the air, and then cached it against his palm. Tails, heads, tails, heads. He flicked it up a fifth time, for a tie-breaker. But this time it went a little too far to the right. He dove for it, not wanting the dirt to absorb it once again.

It was right before he knocked her over that he saw her.

If she hadn't procrastinated, if he hadn't kissed his mother goodbye. If the sun didn't reflect off the penny, if the dog hadn't gotten a hold of the shoe. She could have walked slower, he could have woken up late. Or what if her sister wasn't so particular. Or if he had eaten breakfast. If she had put her homework in her back pack the night before, or if he hadn't taken the time to scrape the dirt off the penny.

If these split seconds hadn't happened, who knows where they'd be.

* * *

After a collision like that, someone has to fall. And in this case, it was him. He fell, hard. The girl looked up, completely startled.

THE REFLECTION OF PERSEPHONE

HALEY RUTH SPENCER

Honorable Mention

The city streaks by, reduced to wisps of colored light by the speed of the hoverpod. The view is beautiful, in an abstract kind of way, all swirly and soft, but the girl in the window of the pod isn't looking at the light. Her face, mirrored in the crystal clear glass, is what entrances her.

Big, grass-green eyes fringed with long dark lashes, a long, slender, elegant nose, cheekbones that could slice glass, full, pouty lips, all framed by long, silky, pin-straight ebony hair and flawless, luminescent pale skin.

Persephone smirks, tearing her eyes away from the reflection of her face to study the band on her wrist. It looks just like a classic twenty-first century ladies' wristwatch except for the thing that sets it apart as a Matchface; the shining black face is completely blank. It has been since her twentieth birthday, when it arrived at her doorstep. It's plain styropack encasing did nothing to show how important the little gift from the government would mean for her future. Or, more precisely, for the future of the man whom the Matchface would bring her to. He would be ecstatic when he saw who he was getting to spend the rest of his life looking at.

She glanced at her cousin in the seat next to her, nervously rubbing her own watch. *Mara's* match wouldn't be as happy.

Mara's boring, slightly too-small gray-blue eyes glance up and meet Persephone's. She smiles, revealing her crooked bottom teeth.

Persephone tries not to grimace as she smiles back.

"I can't believe it's finally our turn to go to the Match Party! We've been talking about this since we were firsties! I still can't believe we're twenty already." Mara squeaks.

"I can't believe you're twenty." Persephone thinks, eyeing Mara's thin, curveless body sceptically. Outwardly, she smiles a small magnanimous smile and says, "I know. It's gone by so quickly."

Her cousin's hand flutters anxiously to her flat, dirty-blonde hair held back in a low bun. Like a librarian. "Ugh, I'm so nervous. Did you hear that last year, Lark Hayward's Matchface didn't go off? *Again?* That's the *sixth year* for her. What if mine never goes off? What if that's me?"

"Don't worry so much." Persephone responds non-committally, because she can't convincingly tell Mara it won't be. But there's some hope; at least Mara is slender. Lark Hayward is a whale. She offers the thin, tired advice given to non-matches: "Anyway, matches aren't the be-all-end-all. You can find someone on your own."

Mara shakes her head, laughing slightly. "Persephone. You know as well as I do no one does that. And anyway, even if I could, that would keep him from his own match. And I couldn't pass up the opportunity to give up looking for my own match. How could I give up the chance at finding the person that the most advanced computer in the world, that probably knows me more than I know myself, has picked as the person who I can love, and can love me, more than anyone?"

Persephone responds with a tight-lipped smile and shrugs, not wanting to tell Mara that any man the Console would pick for her would probably be hideous, or ancient, or at best, blind, and her romantic sensibilities wouldn't seem so sweet to her anymore.

"Well..." Mara whispers, more to herself than to Persephone. "If it doesn't go off this year, maybe he's just younger than me. That wouldn't be so bad."

Persephone does not hear. She's back to admiring her face in the window.

A few minutes later, the hoverpod stops abruptly, and its circular doors *smooosh* open. As the girls exit, Persephone can see the Match Palace, even grander and more beautiful than she imagined. Its exterior is a shining, mirrored obsidian, and as she gets closer, it reflects her shape and color, slightly blurry, like she's been drawn in pastels and smudged over by a giant thumb.

Even so, she is still startlingly gorgeous.

Mara walks pathetically fast, each step fluttery and nervous, like a scared little mouse. Her ankles wobble pathetically in high heels they are not used to.

Persephone favors dignity, herself.

She smooths her emerald-colored satin ball gown, and pushes her hair off her bare shoulders like an inky waterfall. Despite her own five-inch stilettos, she moves like liquid into the mansion.

She comes beside Mara, who is staring at the loud party with a dead-fish expression. The inside of the Match Palace is primarily one large room, softly lit, filled with people. They wander around, eyes glued to their Matchfaces, waiting for them to go off. Some already have, and they follow the number projected from it, waiting to see which direction makes the number count down. Persephone is reminded of a childhood game, Hot or Cold? where a player had to find a hidden object based off of the others directions: hot for close, cold for far.

Some matches have already found one another, and they sit in different places around the room, looking like the rest of the party doesn't exist to them.

A loud, frantic beeping near Persephone makes her jump, and her eyes dart to her Matchface. It is still quiet and blank. She looks around her in confusion before she remembers Mara. Her head whips to the side, and sure enough, Mara's Matchface is glowing red, a large 03 projected a few inches above it. Her eyes are huge, her cheeks flushed, but she does not move forward.

Persephone scans the crowd for someone ugly like Mara, but the only person *remotely* similar is only close in wearing the same thunderstruck expression as her cousin. He is very good-looking. Persephone smiles coyly at him, staring from underneath her thick eyelashes. She's used to men staring at her the way this boy is, and though he isn't her match, she may as well make him wish he was. The boy takes a hesitant step forward, and behind Persephone, there is another beep, and the Mara's projected number becomes 02.

It's then Persephone notices that the boy's own Matchface mirrors Mara's, and his eyes are not on *her*; they are focused slightly too the right, zeroed in on Mara. He rushes over to his match, and Persephone waits for him to get close enough to see Mara's face clearly, for the look of disgust and disappointment to bloom and replace his foolish joy and breathless excitement.

He stops in front of Mara, his eyes skirting up and down her face in a way that shocks Persephone to her core. His gaze is amazed, almost reverent, and he runs his fingertips gently over Mara's cheekbone like he's touching a masterpiece.

“Hi.” He breathes, and while the word is very small, it is immeasurable in that moment.

Persephone tears herself away, hurrying across the room, too confused and disturbed by the match to bear watching it any further. If the Console thinks opposites attract, what kind of *gorilla* is she going to be paired with?

She peers at her dead Matchface, and inadvertently catches a glimpse of her stunning face. Its soothing, steadfast beauty quiets her anxiety. It would be absolutely insane to pair her with anyone less than gorgeous.

And even if it did, she reminds herself hollowly, she didn't *have* to take them.

She wanders slowly around the edge of the party, her expression aloof. She is not anxious, even as time begins to tick by. There is not a doubt in her mind that at some point tonight, her Matchface will signal.

As she reaches the back wall, it does. Its beeps are quieter than Mara's, and it's color is less bright, because the number on hers is much larger, a 75, but it's there all the same.

She stares at the mass of people, looking for someone with an expression like Mara's match, her heartbeat racing in spite of herself.

No one is looking toward her. She takes a step back, toward the wall, her watch beeps down sluggishly to 73.

Hot or cold?

She turns around and notices a door, small and gray and unobtrusive, that she hadn't seen before. She pulls it open, and peers inside it. It leads to a long hallway, brightly lit, the floor carpeted with a thick red fabric.

She moves inside the hallway, the door swinging shut behind her, the music of the party fading to a quiet, slightly irritating bassline thump.

She glides down the hallway, her Matchface ticking down steadily every few steps. Her pulse quickens with excitement as she imagines how awestruck her matches' stunning face will be as he sees her. She forces herself not to run as her Matchface reaches 05, instead slowing her walk to a dignified, regal pace.

She comes to the end of the hall, where a stately, ornately carved gold door waits. She takes a deep breath and pushes open the door as her Matchface counts down to 00.

Hot or Cold?

The person staring back at her looks surprised, their beautiful, full mouth half-open, their green eyes, stunning and luminous, stare back at her in shock. Their clear, pale skin is slightly flushed from excitement, and their long, shining black hair falls softly.

Persephone's usually quick mind puts the picture together slowly, disjointedly. First, the fact that the other person is gorgeous, yes, but a *woman*. She had checked her preference as male, hadn't she? Yes, she is sure of it. Then her brain clicks the reality into place that the woman is wearing Persephone's dress.

And Persephone's face.

The woman is standing in a large silver frame.

Persephone's expression is vacant, her eyes wide and blank as she stares into the mirror her Matchface has brought her to.

Her frozen face does not change as she sinks to the cool marble floor, her voluminous skirt pooling around her like melted ice-cream, her elegant hands falling lifelessly at her sides.

Her reflection, the thing she can love the most, the thing that can love her most, looks on passively.

The sound of laughter carries from the main hall, foreign and distorted, like the last strains of a forgotten lullaby, and Persephone screams.

TO BE ABLE TO WALK AWAY

MIRIYA SERRATO

Honorable Mention

Sunlight. The first thing you saw out of the tunnel. The second was the beauty of Tiger lilies draping off the cliff as if to tell you there is more for you to see. You take a glance behind you just to see if you are being followed. The shadows are reaching out of the tunnel as if to try and pull you back into their domain. It has been months since you've seen the light. You've spent months traveling in that tunnel trying desperately to get out.

You weren't going to fall in there again.

You turn back to the cliff and take careful steps towards the Tiger Lilies to see what was underneath. A meadow full of different colored wildflowers awaits you. A warm summer breeze surrounds you from your bruised feet to your tangled hair, as if to welcome you to this sanctuary you have found.

You found a pathway outlined in Lilacs that you follow down to the meadow. Doves fly next to you to help lead you down the path. Once your feet hit meadow, the wild flowers seem to grow and heal the bruises from your long journey and another breeze flies through you to help detangle your hair.

As you come out your hair gently with your fingers you see the wood cabin in the distance that calls out to you to come and rest your aching body. You walk towards it; determination causing your blood to pump so you can sit down for once and take a long needed breathe in and out.

As you walk towards the cabin you hear the laughter, soft and innocent, near the home. You suddenly see two kids, one boy who looked about five, one girl who looked three, chasing each other in a game of tag. They looked like siblings and had a few features that reminded you of

yourself. You see through the window the one you are willing to give up your soul to protect them and to love them for the rest of your days, making a snack for what you realize is your kids.

And then you think to yourself.

You've won, you made it. You survived your depression.

A GAME CALLED WAR

MIRANDA ADAMS

Honorable Mention

One day after the fireworks
The power died

From my window I would watch the soldiers
Play laser tag

One of them said he'd rather use a bazooka
I would've asked for him to share his gum
But I couldn't find my shoes to go outside

Not before long, they learned how to play dead
They must've been good, because
The other soldiers called them dogs
I'm still waiting for them to wake up

But now the firecrackers are all gone
So the party must be over
And I wouldn't be so sad
If it weren't for my night light being out

I really wish the grownups would stop playing around...
War-ning

Because of the War,
The land will be saturated with blood and gore
The trees of next generation will blossom in shades of crimson
In a population thus infected, green camouflage will serve no mission
And all will meet danger with the full truth it implores

BROKEN MEMORIES

MARIA CALDERON

Honorable Mention

*Memories can't be outrun.
Sooner or later they'll catch up with you.
It's up to you if you embrace them or keep trying to run.*

Things seemed to have returned to normal. She was her usual self again. There were no signs of the creature that had temporarily taken her place at home. She had appeared a bit capricious lately, but I never expected the events that unfolded afterward.

It all began on a breezy autumn morning. I had just awoken to the noise of her shouts, being used to the abrupt awakening, but something seemed off that morning. I ignored the feeling of distress that nagged at me; I figured I was just being paranoid. I proceeded to get ready for school and was unsurprisingly running late. I was in such a rush to get to school on time that I didn't bother saying goodbye to her.

That afternoon, I discovered the reason of my uneasiness. I arrived home, got out of the car, and walked to the house entrance. I turned the door knob, but it was locked. That struck me as odd, but I disregarded it. When I opened the door, I was welcomed by the sight of utter destruction. The living room furniture was overturned and there were broken photo frames lying precariously on the shelves. A feeling of dread spread through me, making me feel lightheaded. I slowly walked to the door of my mother's room and opened the door. She sat there on the floor with bloodshot eyes and an expression that chilled me to the bones.

I had seen that expression before, that look of terror and unease. It meant she was no longer here anymore; she'd been replaced by that thing, that creature. I looked away, the memories flooding back into my mind. Images of blood everywhere and her sitting there looking lost in the midst of it all. It was difficult to grasp that the thing sitting before

me was my mother. There was no way that creature could possibly be my caring, loving mother.

I was tempted to simply close the door and leave the house again, but deep down I knew I couldn't. There was no point in running away. I'd have to return either way. I don't leave the house; instead I lock myself in my room. That may seem cowardly on my part, but I needed time to ponder what to do. Taking her to the hospital was out of the question. They would simply drug her and send her to a mental institution. They didn't understand that keeping her on medications wouldn't solve anything. It wouldn't silence the voices inside her head or bring my mother back. On the contrary, last time they gave her drugs, her personality ended up changing even more abruptly. One moment my mother was there with me, and the next that thing was in her place.

Sometimes I wondered how things ended up as they did, when it all began. I tried remembering but it was all a blur. Perhaps I couldn't remember when it began because I was too young at the time or maybe my mind had erased the memory for my own good.

For as long as I could remember, that creature had dwelled in the shadows waiting for a moment to reappear. One might think I'd grow accustomed to the random visits of that creature in my home, but that's not something that one ever gets used to. Every time it occurred, the sense of dread would pull me in. After all these years it was still difficult to witness the change that my mother underwent.

Months had passed since that incident, and life at home appeared to be calm for once. She still yelled and lost her temper at times, but I had grown so accustomed to it all that this did not bother me much.

The following week she had a relapse. I arrived home from school to find her laying on the couch in a fetal position taking a nap. The moment I saw her my stomach dropped. I'd learned to deal with her hostile moods but her depressive moods were a different issue. For an unknown reason, her depressive mood still affected me. After all these years the sight of her still paralyzed me, filling me with a sense of hopelessness. So many times I had falsely believed I'd overcome that trauma simply to discover that seeing her like that could tear down my inner strength.

I managed to quietly walk to my room, drop my backpack on the bed and go into the bathroom before I lost my composure. I sat there on the ground shaking, tears running down my face like drops of rain on a window. I wept in silence, trying to decipher how the sight of her could send me crashing to the floor. Many years had passed since this nightmare began, and yet here I was curled up and crying just like when

I was a little girl. It bothered me that I couldn't keep myself together.

At the moment I despised myself. I despised my weakness. I scolded myself out loud and laughed bitterly at the sight of myself in the mirror; I looked pathetic. Where was the strong young lady that everyone knew? Where was the person I had been hours ago?

I took a deep breath, wiped away the last of my tears, and stood up from the bathroom floor. Satisfied at having regained a grasp on my emotions, I smiled as I walked back into my bedroom. It was a triumph every time I managed to rise from the dark sea of memories that threatened to drown me. I dismissed my moment of weakness and sat down on my bed to read a book.

I was tempted to go check on my mother but knew she was better off left alone until my real mother returned. I had long ago stopped wishing things would be different. It was pointless. I'd learned to continue with my life, disregarding the fallbacks that arose at times. Slowly I had begun to accept my past and appreciate the lessons it had taught me. It was time to stop pitying myself and move on. I was determined to continue with my life and put my past aside.

*Scars are reminders of battles we have won and lost.
They are part of life. You can embrace them or ignore them.*

ICAROS

ARRIEL ROBERTS

Honorable Mention

I dangled my legs off the side of Pandora; watching the humans fret about going through their daily lives. Children smiling and skipping; parents trying to calm them. They didn't know the world that stood above them.

"Icaros!" I turned to my side seeing Raphael walking towards me, waving frantically.

"Hey Raph." I said turning back to look over the edge.

I saw another pair of legs dangling beside mine and started swaying back and forth. Raphael was at least three hundred years older than me, but when I was made we became best friends. Especially in training school.

"Gabriel said I would find you here." Raphael said leaning over the edge. I looked to my side seeing Raphael looking at me already. His brown locks came down his face past his ears and brushing his eyebrows; meeting his bright green eyes.

"Of course he would. He acts like daddy dearest." I said through gritted teeth. Gabriel always acted like my father. He was old enough to be, but I had no father or mother. I was created like a doll.

"You know he only cares about you and wants to protect you." I scoffed at that. All he wanted to do was to stop me from what I was basically made to do. Kill the ones that were meant to die in the first place.

They only cause trouble in our world and theirs.

"All he wants me to do is to get the big guy to stop me from doing my-" I heard a scream and snapped my head to the world below. In an alley stood the man that I've been looking for all day.

Marcus Wester. He was supposed to have died on January 1st. Today is

January 23, and he's already committed multiple crimes that cannot be forgiven. Rape, theft, and murder ... the list goes on.

I transformed out of my normal clothes into my true form and grabbed my engraved double-bladed long sword and smiled, "Speaking of my job." I pushed myself off of the edge and spiraled down while turning invisible.

This was my element, to become invisible to the humans and Angels alike, and kill them when they have done wrong.

I landed on Earth's floor in a crouch and stood up slowly behind him. He was trying to rape a woman - a young woman, maybe 16. I made myself visible and pulled my blade out of its sheath. The woman looked at me in awe and was stunned for a moment.

"You finally figured out that you aren't going to win," he said.

I glared angrily at him and grabbed him by the back of his neck, "No you aren't going to win." I said in his ear right before I plunged my blade into his back.

"Marcus Wester, committed ten rapes, four robberies, six murders, and four disappearances. You were supposed to have died January 1st at 6:21 in a car crash, but you swerved at the right time. Today you will be punished for these acts and the death records will be set straight." I set my blade aflame and watched him burn from the inside out. Once he became all ashes, he washed away with the wind into a spiral and was sucked into the underground for Satan to deal with.

"Good for nothing scum." I kicked the ground he once stood on and ran my hand through my blonde hair. The woman was curled up against the wall with her arms wrapped around her knees.

I walked cautiously towards her and she flinched back, so I stopped, "I'm not going to hurt you. I just need to talk to you."

She nodded, so I walked over to her and crouched down.

"I'm going to put my hand on your forehead okay? Then I need you to close your eyes and not open them until I tell you to." She nodded but looked hesitant as I grabbed her forehead. She shut her eyes tightly and I began filtering her memories.

I didn't remove the memories but hid them away. No one can fully remove a memory except the big guy.

I let go of her head and she opened her eyes to show that they were still

golden. “You came here to see if a kitten had been hurt, but it was just a plastic bag. Now you are going to go home to your mom and tell her about the cat you thought you’d heard.”

She nodded and stood up, walking out of the alleyway. She shook her head and said, “Stupid bag, sounding like a cat. I wanted a kitty.” Then she continued to walk.

I walked down the alley to remove any memory of Marcus.

The air shifted around me, telling me that someone was materializing there. I whipped around so my scythe was pointed directly at the neck of the person materializing.

“Icaros, I don’t think I want to die today.”

I took my blade away from his throat and made it disappear.

“Sorry, Raph. What are you doing here? You’re finally leaving the house?”

“I know, I don’t like the sun,” he said while squinting. “The big man up-stairs wants to see you.”

“Did I do something wrong?” I asked him. The big man usually only wants to see me when I’ve messed up.

“No. He said he has a job for you.” I groaned and let out my wings.

“Let’s get this over with.” I said as I took off.

* * *

“You’re going where?” Raph yelled as we walked the boundaries of Pandora.

“I have to go to Jail,” I said simply. If the big man wanted me to do something, I really couldn’t argue.

“What do you mean Jail! People die in there!”

“It’s not really jail; it’s a campus that has closed in gates with barbed wire and according to my fake transcripts I have to wear a bracelet that will electrocute me if I do something wrong.”

“Why are you so calm about this? You could die!” Raph yelled.

I gave him the ‘really’ look, “Do you really think some humans can kill me?”

“Well, no, but why can’t I go with you?”

“You know why. I wouldn’t be able to do my job because you wouldn’t let me.”

At first when I started controlling the list Raphael would come with me, and I wouldn’t get any work done because he would move me away from the person if I were trying to get the kill shot.

So when I first started it would take me forever to kill my target.

“But Reese!”

“No you can’t go, Raph, and that’s final.”

He huffed and sat down while crossing his legs.

“Now come on. I leave tomorrow. You can stay with me today.” He looked up at me from the marble floor of the Grand Hall and smiled. I’m pretty sure I haven’t seen him get up so fast in my life. He quickly opened his wings and lifted off.

I opened my wings and followed after him to my personal house. It wasn’t anything big. Just one story with two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a kitchen, a living room, a dining room, and an office.

We landed on my front step and the smell of Gabriel infiltrated my nose.

I groaned and looked at Raph.

“You were going to see him sooner or later,” he said, shrugging. He pushed open my door and I trudged through.

Here comes the ‘you aren’t ready for this’ and the ‘you’re too young to be killing people.’

I walked through the house following Gabriel’s scent and found him in the kitchen.

Once I sat down he immediately started, “Icaros, what are you thinking? You’re too young to be killing! You could get hurt! You aren’t ready to do this!”

“Gabe, this is my job. This is what I was created for.”

A STORY LIKE MANY OTHERS

VIVIANA CHAVEZ

Honorable Mention

It was a morning like any other; the sun wasn't out yet, and I could feel the breeze hitting my skin. There I was, this five-year-old girl, milking the cows, feeding the chickens, giving water to the horses, then going home and getting ready for school. At school I was a "popular" kid I guess you could say. A lot of people would talk to me and would want to hang out with me. This might make you think my childhood was great, but it wasn't. I didn't meet my dad until I was almost four years old because he had come to the U.S. a few months after I was born to try and give my mom and me a better life.

My grandfather, my dad's dad, didn't like either my mom or me. He was always being mean to us in any way possible. We got to the point where we couldn't even be at our house because he would come over and tell us that we weren't the family he wanted for my dad. One day, my mom got tired of all that, so we moved to a nearby town where my mom's parents lived. A few months later, my dad finally came back, but then he left again. Finally, after many years, we decided to come to the U.S.

The night before we left, I was scared. I was going to leave 11 years of my life behind and start a new life in a new place, a place I had never seen before, a place brand new to me. The next day we headed out to the airport to fly to Tijuana. We stayed there for one day, and then we were going to join a lady who was going to take us to Santa Ana. That night I was scared; what if something went wrong? What would happen to us? As we were crossing I was so scared that I wanted to cry. But I had to be strong. I had to do this. I had to do it not just for me but also for my family. The next thing I knew, we were in the U.S. Everything seemed very different. There were so many tall buildings, so many cars. It was a whole new world to us, but we were ready to start a new life, in a new place, with new people. The thought of being able to be with my dad again made me feel happy. I wanted to see him already. The moment when I saw my dad I didn't know what to do. I just ran and hugged him;

I was so happy to be with him again. We were finally together, happy, as a family.

My first day of school, I was scared. Everything was new - new people, and a new language that I had to learn. As I was walking into class, everyone was looking at me strangely, as if I were a different creature. I thought maybe it was because of my skin color. Everyone was American with much lighter skin than mine. Learning a new language was very difficult for me. I would get really frustrated with myself to the point where I wouldn't eat for days, just studying and trying to learn what was to me the most difficult language in the entire world. But thanks to all that hard work, I learned English in one year. It wasn't easy, but I had to do it, not just for me but to prove to everyone who made fun of me that I could do it, that I was capable of doing that and much more.

Time passed, and I've lived here for almost five years already. I've learned a lot over those years. My English is much better now, but I'm still learning. I am not stopping here. I'm not going to stop until I show everyone what I can do. I'm not stopping until all my dreams come true. I will show everyone that I can take on any challenge that comes to me, show people that I can do big things in life. But I'm also doing it for me. I want to prove to my own self that I can do whatever I want and that I am capable of doing what other people are doing, and beyond.

AN OLD GREEN CHAIR

LAUREN DAVIS

Honorable Mention

In my noni's house
there is an old green chair
now musty
empty

that chair
we read each other's smiles
I saw your eyes gleam
heard tenderness in your voice

next to my bed
your picture
a schoolboy
blue shirt
gray tie
a crooked smile

too young
to know
to be taught
to realize

strangers tell me
about you
they know you better than I

your wisdom
your teaching
makes me think
and wonder why

FEAR

VICTORIA B. GONZALES

Honorable Mention

I was little, what my family liked to label as “fun sized”. I held the hand of a beautiful woman whose face I just couldn’t see, no matter how hard I tried. We walked along a countryside road and she hummed the most serene song I’d ever heard. It took me away from the desolate area I was walking in and put into a realm that held warmth. But then the humming stopped and the cold absence of the woman’s hand was painful. I looked around, panicked, but all I could see was the empty road.

I jolted upright in bed and gasped. My breathing was loud and harsh as sweat beaded down my forehead. I looked around the room and absorbed the fact that I was in my bedroom, nothing was wrong. I was safe. My clammy hands came up to press themselves against my hot face. I tried to steady myself with a few deep breaths as I shook away the dream. My room was dark and I looked over at the clock to see it was only three in the morning. I groaned and fell back onto my pillow, knowing I wouldn’t be going back to sleep.

This dream, I had it constantly. It was almost frequent enough to be daily. The single memory haunted me every night. At the time I was only six, but now here I was eleven years later and it still horrified me. The past truly was something you couldn’t run from.

Quickly, I sped through the city and towards where I usually went on these summer days. The sun shined brightly and I slowly picked up speed on my bike. The exercise had me sweating slightly as I rushed down and turned onto the next street. My soft brown hair flowed behind me as I passed all of the stores on Main Street and rapidly approached the large building. People didn’t pay me much mind as I came to an abrupt stop and leaped off my bike. The area was surprisingly quiet as I chained my bike up and turned to face the hospital. The air that surrounded the hospital was a bit thick and yet subtly refreshing. I was used to breathing this in, it was like a second home. I reached into the basket of my bike

and pulled out the small plastic blue box. With a light smile I kept my chin up as I marched into the building.

“Good afternoon, Eden,” Mrs. Peterson greeted me from the front desk. She looked up from her computer and smiled the warm smile she gave me every day.

“Hello, Mrs. Peterson,” I grinned in return, giving her a wave. She returned to her computer and began typing rather quickly. I enjoyed our brief yet warm greetings shared every afternoon. She was a nice woman with blonde hair that was slowly going gray and kind brown eyes. She had grown quite used to my visits and always took notice when I entered the hospital. I enjoyed the familiarity between the two of us, it was warmth.

I tapped my foot along to the elevator music as I waited for my floor to come. I wondered how things would be for today. Would they be the usual schedule or would something different occur today? I was someone who enjoyed both a regular and irregular schedule. But lately my schedule seemed more average than not. I wished something new would follow up from the long string of normality. Finally the elevator pinged to a stop and I stepped out. The air was stale and smelled of latex. It amazed me that I could still smell it. Usually one would grow used to a scent and hardly realize it was surrounding them. I just shrugged off the thought and found the desk on this floor.

“Hi there,” I smiled as I approached the new desk attendant Mr. Stance. He just started last week and was still getting used to the work. “How are things today?”

“They’re good, nice to see such a refreshed and giddy face. You’re in luck, Ms. Larkin is ready for you,” Mr. Stance responded with a light smile, but I could tell he was rushing with his knees deep in paper work. Instead of small talk I just gave a quick nod and walked back down the hallway. My eyes skimmed over the room numbers and finally I found the one I needed.

Taking a deep breath and clutching the blue box to my chest I slowly opened the door. The tenant of the room sat up in her bed looking up at the television watching old 90s shows. Her hair was blonde and messy as it stuck out from all sides. Such unruly hair, I wished so desperately to be able to brush it out and make it the long beautiful style it could be. Her skin was pale, her limbs were thin and she looked like she could use a large steak dinner. She turned her weary gray eyes towards me and I could see the dark circles that rested under them. She jumped and pushed to the opposite side of her bed, farther from me.

“Who are you!? What do you want!? Stay away from me!” she was quick to snap. I closed the door behind me so no one else would hear her and made sure to keep a gentle smile on my face. I slowly walked over to her bedside and she watched me with deranged, alert eyes.

“Good afternoon. My name is Eden. Don’t worry I’m not here to harm you or cause you any trouble. I just came to spend time with you and bring you this,” I grinned. I set down the blue box and opened it to reveal a single blueberry muffin sitting inside. Gingerly, I removed it from the box and placed it on her bedside table. She still shook slightly as I pulled the chair next to her bedside table over and closer to her bed. Mistrust was plain on her face as she shied away.

“What business do you have here!? You’re here to kill me aren’t you!? Or maybe you want to torture me for sick fun!” she hollered at me. I kept a calm face as I leaned over to rearrange the flowers that sat next to the lone muffin. When I didn’t respond she got angry with me and moved quickly to swat the glass vase containing the flowers from the table. The glass shattered to the floor at my feet and my clothes were wet from the water. I looked up at her as she looked at me, scared that she had gone too far. She looked like I was going to beat her. My heart ached slightly, but I still kept a smile on my face.

“That’s no way to behave,” I said softly. I stood and went to get a towel from next to the sink in her room. Ms. Larkin was a permanent resident here at the hospital so her room was more like a home than others. She’d been here for ten years and would continue to stay here, at least until the amnesia or something wore off. I kneeled down and pat at the ground with the towel, absorbing all of the water. She never took her eyes off me as I began to gather the glass and stick it on the towel. When I was finished up I took the towel over to the trash can and dumped the glass in before tossing the towel in the sink. “Did you already eat breakfast?”

“Why do you want to know!?” she asked. But it wasn’t a demand, her voice was heavy with worry and concern. She behaved as if she hadn’t eaten I would scream at her. She was so fearful and all I wanted was to make her comfortable. But I could hardly convince her of this. I took the seat beside her again and crossed my ankles.

“Please, understand that I’m not here to hurt you. I’m only here to make sure you’re okay. So why don’t you just relax and enjoy the muffin I brought you?” I assured, still keeping my smile.

“No, I can’t trust that thing! It could be poisoned! You’re trying to poison me! I knew it!” she screeched. She snatched the muffin up and threw it at me. I felt the blow as it hit my face and then crumbled onto

my lap. I looked down at the ruined, sad looking muffin and sighed. I let my smile fade slightly, but still tried to keep upbeat. “That’s what I think of your damn muffin!”

I gathered up the dead muffin in my hands and threw it down in the garbage along with the glass. This time I had peek inside and saw a whole bunch of miserable, smashed up muffins at the bottom.

“They really need to take your trash out. This looks almost a week old. Don’t worry I’ll talk to the staff for you,” I sighed as I moved the trashcan towards the door to remind me.

“Who are you going to talk to!? Is staff some kind of evil!? What are you going to do to me!?” she snapped. The rest of the visiting session went this way. I continued to sit by her side for another hour and a half. The whole time she acted suspicious and frightened of me. Every time I offered a kind gesture she’d accuse me of something and then cover away. By the end of the session she was almost falling off the bed trying to get far away from me. I mostly just looked over at her from time to time and sat watching old shows that aired before I could remember anything. Finally I picked up my blue box and began to walk towards the door.

“Yeah!” she hollered behind me. “Walk away! Don’t show your face around here again! Just stay away from me and don’t think I’ll forget your face! I’ll remember you, evil girl!”

I closed the door behind me and sighed.

“No, no you won’t,” I sighed finally letting my face fall. I made my way to the elevator and waited for my floor once again. Once I got there Mrs. Peterson was standing from her chair talking with a couple of nurses. One look over the nurse’s shoulder and she saw me exiting the elevator. She excused the nurses before walking towards me.

“How was she honey?” she asked sympathetically. I shrugged and forced myself to smile at her.

“She reset again I guess is all I can really say. It’s the same as what usually happens when I go there. Like the doctors say, it’s rare for her to remember anything from the day before.” I replied.

“Just hang in there. I’m sure if she could remember she’d be so thankful that she had an angel like you visiting her every day,” she comforted. Her smile grew slightly as she ran her fingers down my cheek. I was instantly filled with serenity and hope. Nodding I took a deep breath. Normally I didn’t like people touching me, but I always made an

exception for Mrs. Peterson.

“Just please, if there is any kind of change in my mom’s condition promise you’ll call me first thing,” I begged. Mrs. Peterson pushed a lock of hair behind my ear.

“Of course,” she assured.

OBESITY ANONYMOUS

MIRIYA SERRATO

Honorable Mention

“Hello! And Welcome to the 7th meeting of Obesity Anonymous!” The spokesperson cheered with a fake smile. “I’m happy that despite it being spring since we’ve started the program in January, You few individuals have kept fighting against this demon and has the determination to lose these last couple of pounds!” she said tapping her fake nails together, she pushed the extensions in her hair out of her face as she sat down in the small circle of 15 we we’re in. “now, who would like to go first?” she asked looking from side to side.

No one spoke, because no one wanted to be here.

In this time and place, we must all look the same, we must all act the same, we must all like the same music, and speak the same, if you didn’t, you were automatically enrolled in these ‘support groups’ the government called them. They had support groups for everything; no one realized what their plan was because back then, they had it for the serious stuff, Cutters Anonymous, Anorexia’s Anonymous, Anxiety Anonymous, Suicidal Anonymous. Reasonable stuff that needed support groups to get rid of. Because of the beginning support groups, suicide rates went down completely too little to none a year, every once in awhile there would be one, but it was very rare at this time.

Then someone got the bright idea, Why not use it to make everyone the same? Rewire people’s brains through support groups that their broken, and they can be fixed. More support groups showed up.

Videogames Anonymous to cut down the people who liked video games to quit causing gaming companies to go bankrupt, Geek Anonymous to make the ones who loved certain things think they were freaks for liking a certain book series to much or a band and cut down their love to a mild like, Special Anonymous for the ones who couldn’t learn as fast, they were required to pick up their learning pace even if they had

special needs or not, And Intelligence Anonymous for the know it alls to feel bad that they love to learn.

Everything that was not considered normal to our dictators was considered wrong and was correct through mind control support groups that were run by the fakest people alive. Even the stories that I heard every two weeks weren't a good enough 'excuse' for them.

"I guess I'll go then" a girl, no older than me stood up. She looked as if she was a very healthy weight, not too fat and not thin enough to be in the Anorexia's Anonymous. her blond hair flowed down as if waterfalls that dripped gold instead of water, her green eyes brighter than any emerald I've seen, but full of sadness, but not sad enough to be sent to Depression Anonymous. "Hi, my name is Analise" she stated gently tucking a gold lock behind her ear.

"Hi Analise" we all spoke in a monotone voice.

"and I am 50 pounds overweight" she said gently putting a hand on her stomach, as if she had the strength to shove the fat into somewhere less noticeable like her thighs. "I've tried seven diets, a new one after each meeting. and diets are not working."

"Have you stuck to it completely? no snacking in between like grapes and low fat chips?" the spokesperson cut in immediately to make Analise feel as if she was the smallest person in the world.

"Yes, I've only eaten the food on each diet list to eat, in the exact order, gave up every drink, soda, coffee, tea, and I have only drank water"

"every drink? even juice? flavored water? and the alcoholic beverages?" the spokesperson interrupted her again.

Analise nodded. "everything, I don't even eat any apples, oranges, or any fruit that gives off a juice." she explained, the spokesperson remained silent, for now. "I've exercised every day"

"maybe you're not exercising enough? how long do you exercise?" the spokesperson again cut in.

"an half hour warm up, an half hour of sit ups, pushups, an hour on the treadmill, an hour of jumping jacks, an hour back on the treadmill, and one last hour of cool downs" Analise spoke with a sense of accomplishment and proudness in her voice. "my mother said that it might be genetic, that's why I haven't lost these last 50 pounds." she explained.

"well save up money, do the surgery to cut off the rest of that fat on

your belly and you won't look like you're pregnant in that shirt" the spokesperson hissed with a smile. she didn't see anything wrong with what she said, but I saw in Analise's eyes the glow fade as she was hit with the reality that she wasn't perfect yet in the eyes of the government.

Analise nodded softly as if she would get hit if she nodded too quickly or too sharply, and sat down quietly.

"who's next?" the spokesperson called with a clap of her hand as she gazed across the room looking at the faces to grim to speak.

That's when I spoke up.

"hello!" I cheered imitating the excitement the spokesperson had, who was now giving me a glare. "my name is Rosa!"

"Hello Rosa" the group said in a monotone voice, minus one for Analise was thinking over how much money it would take to get a producer done that she didn't need.

"Hello" I repeated. "And I am, about 200 pounds overweight." People gasped at my statement. "I have been this fat since I was about 15 yrs old, and since I joined this group 3 yrs ago, I have stayed the same." I said proudly.

"Rosa sit down" the spokesperson growled, her fake claws, clawing at a clean pair of jeans.

"No, and the reason isn't because I haven't found a diet I like, or I don't exercise enough" I explained. "It's because I'm perfect just like this." I stated loud and proud, people all around me gasped.

"But, that can't be healthy for you!" Killini yelled.

I remembered her story well; she was also a part of intelligence Anonymous. She loved to read, and her family had one of the only libraries that still had books about everything, instead of the normal small fact books we were forced to read in schools now. She was probably the smartest person in this room, and definitely less ignorant than the leaders. She was 1 or 2 pounds overweight depending on what book she had with her when she was weighed on the scale, even now I could see her hiding an old worn copy of Julius Caesar in her jacket pocket.

"If you stay this overweight, you can suffer from heart failure from a clogged artery in your heart, or develop type 1 diabetes and die that way-" she stopped when she noticed the way everyone looked at her except for me, a blank confused look "I mean, it's not good for you Rosa, you could die." She simply stated, remembering her brain washing

in her intelligence support group.

“My grandfather lived way into his eighties and nineties with only a small part of his heart pumping. And my uncle was even heavier than me and almost touched 45 yrs old before he was murdered.”

“No one gets murdered Rosa. Everyone follows the rules Rosa” the spokesperson growled.

“He was taken away by government officials when he stubbornly stood up, that we don’t have to all look the same or act the same! People can read Shakespeare if their hearts want to! Or listen to heavy metal music! You can be obsessed with a movie series if you want or even play video games for a living!”

“That is enough Rosa!!” The spokesperson screeched as she stood up. “You may leave if you won’t help contribute!”

“These support groups are stupid!! You make people feel like outcasts for liking something or doing something differently, or even not having enough money to pay for a procedure that is not needed!!” I yelled back.

“Sit Down Or Walk Away Rosa. Last chance!” The spokesperson growled warningly.

I huffed and decided to walk away.

I walked heavily making sure to stomp my feet on the way to the door just to make more of a scene. I prayed my words at least made Killini and Analise think more about how they were spending their Saturday afternoons.

And then I saw the men in black suits, with the initials F.B.I sewed onto their sleeves. They stood their next to my car.

“Rosa Rosewolf?” They asked me as I took my last few steps forward.

“Yeah?” I asked trying to look through the sunglasses they had on.

“You are under arrest for defying the government for three years, and trying to cause uproar in the residents of this town. We advise you come with us quietly, or we will use force.”

EMPTY GIRL

HALEY RUTH SPENCER

Honorable Mention

She is a
patchwork
of
contrary
fabrics.

Different opinions
different friends
different lies
in every
colorful
square.

Her many
faces
don't like each other,
pretend the
Others
aren't
there.

Layers upon
layers
of
personalities, ideals
suffocate her
skin.

The contradicting
caricatures
living inside
stretch her
so
thin.

And underneath
the
paint,
peeling back
layer by
layer,

beneath the
wild one,
past the
artsy one,
the one who believes
in
prayer,

under all her
armor,
there is
no one

there.

A MOTTO TO LIVE BY

SAMANTHA PENA

Honorable Mention

"It doesn't matter where you coming from. All that matters is where you are going."

-Brian Tracy

I have lived by this quote for nine years because it reminds me constantly that no matter how challenging my life is, no matter how poor I am, no matter all the horrible things I had to go through in life, they all do not matter because in the end, they can not determine the person I will become. My challenging life cannot determine the kind of future I will have. I have the power to use my life as a motivation to persevere or to use my life as an excuse to not try to aim for better. Everyone has this power, but not all choose to use it and some people are not even aware they have it. That is why I love this quote because it reminds me that I do not have to use my challenging life as an excuse to not try to aim for better, but instead to use my life as motivation to succeed.

I realized in my later years that just because my father is an alcoholic and my mother is a single parent of four children does not mean that I will be exactly like them. It does not mean that I will have the same life as them. I used to think because of the life I was given, I could never have high expectations, goals, or dreams. I used to think dreams were only for rich kids and not for kids like me. I used to think attending college was out of the question and that I would just end up with a low paying job like my mother. I used to think that I would amount to nothing because even my own family members did not believe in me, but it was my faith in God that gave me the hope for a better life. It is because of God I have the hopes and dreams I do today and I truly believe I can accomplish them because I have God on my side.

I love this quote because it reminds me that my challenging life can not determine my future, only I can. But I only use this quote as a reminder because my real power comes from Jesus Christ. He is the one who gives

me strength to persevere when all I really want to do is give up. He is the one who picks me up when I fall down and He is the only one I give credit to for allowing my dreams and goals to come true. But it is okay to use quotes and mottoes to remind ourselves of important things that we should never forget, which is why I favor this quote very much. Because in the end, it does not matter where I come from, but it only matters where I plan to go in life.

TRANSFORMED

ELIZA AMSTUTZ

Honorable Mention

I can still remember slipping on the pleated navyblue skirt and freshly ironed white shirt. My mom braiding my thin hair and finishing with a red ribbon on each braid. This was the standard uniform for Kendrya Vidyalaya schools in Bangalore, India. My stomach churning, out the door I walked onto the cracked sidewalk. Even the sweet smell of the sky jasmine tree that sprinkled tiny white flowers onto the pavement did not take off the edge of my unease.

The school lay thirty minutes across the bustling metropolis of Bangalore. My dad and sister stood on the sidewalk, arms waving, yelling, “Auto! Auto!” as women in colorful saris rushed by on their way to work and stray dogs meandered, looking for leftovers on the streets. Finally, the little yellow, three-wheel automobile pulled over and my dad began to negotiate a price. Bargaining is something he had mastered over many years of traveling in Asia. “20 rupees?” my dad offered. “I am sorry but there is no way. You see this ride is very good quality. Special for you only”, justified the driver. Finally, they agreed upon 25 rupees and with a loud ‘tut’ ‘tut’ of the engine, we pulled into the early morning bustle.

We sped past our favorite Masala Dosa restaurant, catching the mouth watering aroma of curried potatoes and chai. I noticed a family using a small bucket to bathe in a dirty alley as we raced by and wished I could do something for them...anything. But my attention was quickly caught by the fruit and flower market, the fragrance of the bright orange marigolds being organized into garlands that people bought as offerings for temple visits.

Approaching an intersection, we were caught in traffic transformed the road into a parking lot. Just the perfect opportunity for the beggars to close in. Seeing our white skin, they would swarm over like flies, putting on their best pitiful faces to beg for our money. My heart began to sympathize with them, and I begged my Dad to give them even just

a coin, but he is too experienced with this kind of act. The beggars know what they are doing, too. Putting a limp hand to their mouth then back down toward you, and speaking in what little English they know is enough to make anyone pity them. Instead of the desired rupee, my Dad pulled out an orange to offer but receives a confused look and the back of a head. He was right. They just wanted our money.

The engine of the rickshaw started up again. Looming in the middle of the intersection stood a huge cow blocking traffic as she slowly chewed her cud while vehicles struggled to carefully veer around her, giving as much space as she needed. “All this for a cow?” I wondered, and my Dad explained to me the sacred place that cows occupy in the Hindu religion. It definitely took time to understand their unique ways.

To contrast dramatically with the respectful attitude toward the cow, we suddenly entered the Muslim part of town where raw slabs of meat hung in the butcher shops, and whole skinned goats were put out on display. I felt disgusted and averted my eyes.

“Almost there” my Dad chimed cheerfully, but my heart sank deeper and deeper into the pit of my stomach. I remember that morning, begging my parents not to make me go to school. It was as if they were throwing me to the lions. This, believe it or not, was one of the most terrifying moments of my life. I frantically prayed for more traffic and diversions, because every turn of the wheel brought me closer to a huge all-Indian school of 2,400 strangers. I knew no one, and four times more students were enrolled in this school than the population of my hometown. I prayed that I would be able to understand their English.

When the rickshaw driver dropped us off at the school’s entrance and pulled away, kicking up a cloud of dust, we were instantly swarmed on all sides. Suddenly hundreds of curious brown hands were reaching for my hair, my face... “Oh so soft,” they chimed “Just like Barbie. May I please have your autograph, Miss?”. I had never seen anything like it. I should have embraced my chance to feel like a celebrity, but the butterflies swarming in my stomach wouldn’t let me. As a very shy fourth grader, being singled out as dramatically different seemed impossible to deal with. Every student thought my sister and I were the cutest and would grab our cheeks and pinch them to show their affection. My heart was pounding all day long, and when the bell rang for school to be dismissed, I ran to my Dad’s classroom, wanting to go home and never return to this school.

As my parents assured would happen, each day continued to improve and I became more and more comfortable with my class and teachers. Every student and teacher was hungry to accept me and learn about

my culture. Our differences and exoticism dissipated each day as I discovered that the students and I had so much in common. We forgot that we were from two drastically contrasting backgrounds and became simply children, eager to learn and have fun. I will never forget how much I worried for that first day, and how everything turned out fine. In fact, leaving the school and India four months later was heart-wrenching. Would I ever have guessed four months earlier that my dad would be prying me out of the arms of friends made at that school?

PLUCKED

ANGELA LOPEZ

Honorable Mention

As a child, my momma would
often tell me of
the wild,
some mythical place in the world
for bad children such as myself.

Before I could even close my eyes
my momma would tell me that out in
the wild,
ain't no one to kiss my forehead
and tuck me into bed at night.

She'd pet my hair to calm me when
I awoke in a sweat
and tell me that out in
the wild,
ain't no one to hold me when I wake up
afraid from a nightmare.

She'd pick me up and spin me in the air,
laughing like a thousand small bells
and tell me that out in
the wild,
ain't no time to play cause beasts will hear me
and eat me up for dinner.

She'd pluck small yellow flowers from the grass,
their honey fragrance sticking to her fingertips,
and tell me that some things, out in
the wild,
are good and pure and necessary
so as to balance out the evil.

My momma was good.
I knew it when she misted me with
a shimmering shower of her favorite perfume.
I knew it when she brushed my hair
with nimble fingers fit to play an angel's harp.
I knew it when she warmed me
in winter when the cold nipped at my nose
with little tea cups and a belly plump with corn bread.

My momma was good.
I knew it even when her own tongue began to fail her
words tumbled at her feet
her face twisted in confusion
her mind becoming puzzle pieces that no longer fit
frustrated at the sight of my face.

My momma was good and I knew it
even when trembling words
clawed from her throat
frightening me.
I knew it when she cried out for me
piercing the dark with shrieks
begging for me to stay.
I knew it when she shook with sobs
searching desperately for words just out of reach.

My momma was good
and I knew it
even if she could no longer remember,
could no longer tell me stories of
the far off wild.

When I was a child,
She'd tell me that sometimes,
good and pure things
are plucked from our world
to be put in
the wild,
just the way we pluck
the prettiest flowers,
and that they are necessary to balance
out the evil
even if it ain't seem fair.

Nothing seemed fair.
Not the cocktails of chemicals
Not the cables connecting to flesh
Not the constant cleaning and smell of soap
Replacing her honey perfume.

And when I cried and cried and cried and it seemed I could not stop
I looked up at the sky
and remembered the last she spoke of
the wild.

When I was a child
She told me
that some day
I'd understand
that even bad mommas
need good children out in
the wild
and that I was just
too good.

MY OLDER SISTER BRUSHES HER TEETH

FELICIA ZHORNITSKY

Honorable Mention

My older sister picks up her toothbrush and gazes at it as if it is a beautiful flower that has just bloomed before her sparkling green eyes. She squeezes the toothpaste for much too long, but doesn't seem to notice that her brush remains pristine and unaffected. She lifts it up towards her chestnut locks, just barely missing her mouth, and stares at her reflection as if for the first time. She closes her eyes and sighs deeply, a dreamy smile unfurling across her clear face. At last, she opens them like Snow White awakened by her prince's kiss and sees me hovering in the doorway. She blushes as she discovers her unemployed toothbrush suspended by the side of her rosy cheek. *I'm almost done, I promise,* she tells me with a faraway grin I've never seen her wear before. As I walk away from the bathroom, I can hear her light voice humming a melody softly, her toothbrush still undoubtedly hanging unused from the palm of her hand.

