

## **RAMBLINGS 2017**

Glenbard East High School  
Lombard, Illinois

### **Co-Editors in Chief**

Tara Aggarwal  
Ariel Barbee

### **Editor**

Aisha Abdulkadir

### **Readers**

Aisha Abdulkadir  
Tara Aggarwal  
Ariel Barbee  
Cynthia Cabral  
Justin Nguyen

### **Advisor**

Mr. Bill Littell



**Alissa Petrole - *Herb***

## **Acknowledgements**

As always, a huge thanks goes to Ms. Wink and Mr. Cho for providing all the artwork for this edition of Ramblings. Additionally, Mr. Gancarz is our formatting guru and responsible for the crisp Ramblings look you are about to encounter. And

finally, a big thank you goes to Mrs.  
Burlage who puts up with us well  
after the school day is over so that  
we have a place to work our editing  
magic.

## WRITINGS

[Ariel Barbee - Valerie](#)

[Aisha Abdulkadir - Pinocchio](#)

[Tara Aggarwal - Je Suis Manque un Nom](#)

[Cynthia Cabral - Eyes and Mind Confined](#)

[Ariel Barbee - Having a Say](#)

[Aisha Abdulkadir - Faery Tale](#)

[Aisha Abdulkadir - The Demon Queen](#)

[Tara Aggarwal - Run Johanna Run](#)

[Tara Aggarwal - Villainous Woman](#)

[Jennifer Arizmendi Alquicira - "Let me tell you..."](#)

[Damari Amaya - Endless Kind of Love](#)

[Ariel Barbee - Reading is a Part of Me](#)

[Gerardo Beltran - We the People](#)

[Chrusfield, Jamia - These Walls](#)

[Alexa Doubek - Every Day of My Life](#)

[Mark Gale - Kaleidoscope Visions](#)

[Mark Gale - Sunbeams](#)

[Ajalia Gary - Old School Pictures](#)

[Ajalia Gary - Where I'm From](#)

[Nicole Howell - I Am From](#)

[Sierra Innis - What is Home](#)

[Nicholas Jeffries - Warrior](#)

[Valerie Luna - Colombiana](#)

[Justin Nguyen - Incompletion](#)

[Camari Robinson - Time Goes By](#)

[Megan Sabel - Others to be Picked](#)

[Savanah Salvino - Where I'm From](#)

[Kennedy Sawyer - As I Sleep](#)

[Ellie Shuert - Nobody Knows](#)

[Amber Siddiqui - A Little More](#)

[Amber Siddiqui - A Subway](#)

[Bathroom at Night](#)

[Amber Siddiqui - No Place Like](#)

[Home](#)

[Elizabeth Somodji - Green](#)

[Nicolette Valdez - I Am](#)

[Garrett Weatherly - Nothing Left to](#)

[Lose](#)

[Garrett Weatherly - The Child](#)

[Delaney Wozniak - Thirty Days](#)

## ARTWORK

[Mercedez Browne Snyder - -x-](#)

[Haley Jenkins - Emptiness](#)

[Jasmine Meza - Can't Always Hide](#)

[Behind the Mask](#)

[Caeden Cerventes - \*Untitled 3\*](#)

[Chris Latelle - \*Thoughts\*](#)

[Caeden Cerventes - \*Untitled 1\*](#)

[Rebecca Adkins - \*Untitled\*](#)

[Caeden Cerventes - \*Untitled 2\*](#)

[Thomas Ciszewski - \*Arriflex\*](#)

[Mark Gale - \*The Jungle\*](#)

[Allison Hamaker - \*White Tree\*](#)

[Ramona Klymiuk - \*Mixed Emotions\*](#)

[Emily Lenzen - \*Past Memories Brought Back\*](#)

[Jasmine Meza - \*Deserted Planet\*](#)

[Jasmine Meza - \*The Screaming\*](#)

[Face Within the Trees](#)

[Jasmine Meza - \*Untitled\*](#)

[DeShawn Murrell - \*Diamond Wing\*](#)

[Rebellion](#)

[Katelyn Quintana - \*Working\*](#)

[Ezekiel Ramos - \*Untitled 1\*](#)

[Ezekiel Ramos - \*Untitled 2\*](#)

[Berry Raven - \*Untitled\*](#)

[Grace Tu - \*Untitled\*](#)

[Vidhi Vaghani - \*Rams\*](#)

[Aly Walker - \*Life\*](#)

## **Valerie**

**By Ariel Barbee**

It was covered in ink, done so through leisurely doodles and furious words. Not a blank space was to be found on the notebook; it had been used so lovingly. The white knuckles that gripped the tattered object belonged to hands that had been delicately inked, with swirling designs which flowed up tan arms before disappearing under the sleeves of a robin's egg blue T-shirt. Long dark hair covered some of the tattoos as it tumbled down from the girl's head all the way to her waist.

The inked girl sat with her legs tucked under her in an old sagging chair, with her head leaned up against the wall of the waiting room behind her. Despite the awkward position, she appeared to have fallen asleep and was snoring slightly. A nurse walked out from behind the check in desk and called out "Valerie Jones?"

With a jerk of her head, Valerie's eyes snapped open and she immediately answered with a frantic "Yes? Is he awake? Can I go in?"

The nurse paused, carefully answering "No, there were some complications-"

Valerie's face turned white. "Oh God. Complications. Oh God. But... but he's all I have! He... he's getting me through college. He'd been working some double shifts lately and I always told him that he needed to rest b-but he ins-s-sisted. He s-said I needed more time to write..."

  X    
**By Mercedes Browne Snyder**



**[Click the image to see a larger version.](#)**

Valerie trailed off as tears crawled down her face.

“Miss, let me finish. He is in delicate condition after the surgery. There were some complications, but he is likely to make a recovery. You may not come in to visit right now. It’s one AM. Come back this afternoon and we’ll see how things are.”

“Oh God. Thank God. Thank you,” Valerie whispered in response. The nurse walked back into the ward, but Valerie remained in her chair. Shifting her feet out from under her, Valerie opened up her notebook and began to write

*Goals:*

*Get paying job*

*Finish book and sell*

*Make sure dad rests*

## ***Pinnocchio***

**By Aisha Abdulkadir**

I stood outside of my old orphanage, my suitcase packed and ready beside me. Icy needles of cold stabbed through my clothes and into my skin, adding to the growing frost I already felt inside of me. Gusts of wind whipped my wild red curls around my face, but I made no move to push them back.

A rusty red truck lumbered its way up the winding gravel driveway, the tires toiling to navigate through the ice and snow. I took a step back when it finally screeched to a stop in front of me. The door swung open and a small scrawny boy jumped out into the snow. He had a huge, dopey grin on his face and was quick to throw his arms around me. I hesitated before slowly hugging him back. He smelled oddly of wood, as if he'd spent all day in the forest.

"Hey, Scarlet!" the boy said excitedly, pulling away from me. Fat snowflakes fell into his tangled dark brown hair, and he brushed them out impatiently. His twelve-year-old grin grew persistent when he realized I wasn't going to return the greeting. "Aren't you glad you're finally gonna be able to leave this place? You're gonna live with us!"

I smiled weakly at him before glancing into the truck at the man sitting in the driver's seat. He beamed at me and gave a short wave. "Why don't you help her with her stuff, Kyle?" he called out.

Kyle rushed around me to grab my suitcase and waved off my help as he heaved it into the bed of the truck. I hesitated and took one last look back at the orphanage before climbing into the

## ***Emptiness***

**By Haley Jenkins**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**



truck. The drive back to Kyle's house was long, and the whole time I kept warding off the questions Kyle and his grandfather threw at me. Instead, I listened to the crackling words coming out of the radio. The announcer kept going back to kidnappings that had happened recently, six male children around the age of seven who had gone missing in the woods. It wasn't the first time it had happened; apparently over twenty boys had vanished into the woods since last month.

"Such a shame," Kyle's grandpa, who had told me to call him Gep, muttered to himself. Kyle shrugged.

"I don't think they should've been hanging out around the woods so late," he said. I ignored both of them and closed my eyes, only opening them when the truck came to a stop in front of a log cabin. The cabin was tiny and obviously decrepit; the tin roof was rusted and spotted in white, and big green splotches of mold painted the sides. Gep ushered me inside while Kyle stopped to get my stuff.

"Who's there?" A hoarse, crabby voice yelled from inside the cabin after Gep knocked.

"Just us, dear!" Gep called. "And our newcomer, Scarlet!"

A second later the door swung open, and a small, bony thing of a woman tugged us inside. "Hurry, Hurry!" she hissed. "You know how dangerous it is to be out in the open! Them wooden boys could be watching us!"

I stumbled through the threshold and gave her a confused glance. "What are you looking at?" she snapped. Her eyes had a wild kind of glow in them, and when she spoke it sounded as if she needed to cough something up. I looked away from her sagging skin that was

pulled down further by her scowl.

"I'll show you to your room, Scarlet," Gep said, scooting in front of me and leading the way down the hall. Along the way he pointed out the rooms that we passed, stopping at one door in particular and giving me a stern stare. "This is my workroom. No one goes in there, and there's no exceptions for you, alright?"

I nodded. He led me the rest of the way to my room, then left me to get settled. I collapsed on the bed and kicked off my shoes, relieved to be by myself. Like the way it'd been for the last four years. I didn't move when the door creaked open and Kyle slid inside with my small suitcase. He positioned it at the end of the bed then plopped down on the floor, silent.

"What are you doing?" I murmured.

"How'd you get into the orphanage, Scarlet?"

"What?" I turned my head. The smell of wood hit me like a truckload of bricks, and I turned over, coughing. When I was finished I rolled over again and stared up at the cracks in the ceiling, counting my breaths. "How about you tell me why you live with your grandparents. Then I'll tell you what happened to me."

Silence. "Okay." Kyle sat up on his heels and looked at me from across the bed. "Grandpa Gep says that my parents were murdered when I was a baby."

I stiffened and sat up on the bed. "That must've been scary." Kyle shrugged and blinked at me expectantly. I sighed. "My parents died, too, but I don't know how. I lived with my grandma until I was eleven, and after she went missing I was taken in by the orphanage." Kyle opened his mouth, but a scream and a shatter from outside interrupted him. We both looked at each other before rushing out



toward the source of the noise.

Kyle's grandma stood in the middle of the living room, her bloody hands clutching a shattered glass hand mirror. She was alone, though it seemed as if she couldn't realize that.

"You and your stupid puppets, Geppetto!" she screamed, waving the mirror around wildly. "Why did you bring that girl here if you knew this would happen?! How do I know you didn't bring her here to harm us?!" Her savage eyes swung around the room, finally settling when they caught sight of me. "You," she hissed, taking a step toward me. Kyle shoved me aside.

"Grandma," he warned, his voice suddenly deadly cool. I froze in shock, watching this transformation overcome my overly bouncy, carefree friend. His grandma ignored him and continued toward me, the broken mirror clutched in her hand so that beads of blood welled up from beneath her cuts. "Grandma, please. You heard Grandpa. He needs her... I mean, he said you can't touch her."

Kyle pushed me further aside, causing me to stumble and fall. In the same moment that I hit the ground there was a loud cry, a cry of pain and outrage. And then there was a thud. I lifted my head from the floor, blinking away bright spots. Kyle stood over his grandma, both hands clamped over his mouth in shock. I frowned and looked down at his grandma. She wasn't moving. "I—" he stammered.

"Kyle," I whispered. "What have you done?"

Kyle's eyes snapped over to me. His hands had moved to his nose, and he groaned, clutching it tightly. "I didn't mean to," he finished. "I didn't."

"Is she..."

"Oh, God, Scarlet." Kyle tugged on his nose, hard, as it were going to come

off. "I didn't mean to. They'll come for me. Help me, Scarlet, oh God."

I scrambled to sit up and pushed myself against the wall. "Who's coming for you?" I breathed, too horror-struck to get up. Kyle collapsed to the floor beside me, yanking at his nose and sobbing.

"The puppets!" He cried. "The puppets, they're coming to take me back like they took my mom and my dad. They'll kill me, I know it, help me!"

"What?"

The ground beneath us began to rumble, and I grappled the wall for purchase. Kyle was still holding his nose and crying that it hurt, but his voice was just becoming a running background to the roar in my ears. "Kyle, where's Gep?" I gasped.

A loud clattering sound filled the room, like wooden bullets were raining down onto the floor. The cabin was still shaking, and the crash of a door opening down the hall startled me.

Clatter, rattle, click. Clatter, rattle, click.

It was the sound like that of wooden soldiers marching in a parade, though beyond this cacophony of wood against floorboards I could just make out the high-pitched giggles of little kids.

"Kyle." I swallowed down the taste of bile in my mouth. "What's happening?" When there was no answer I turned beside me to ask again, but what I saw made me gasp and scramble back.

Kyle was slumped unconscious on the floor, his head lolling against his shoulder. Except...from his face emerged a nose the size of a rolling pin, squeezed and deformed. The cartilage on his nose was stretched so far and thin it looked like you could see the nasal bone trying to jut out from underneath the tissue. Before I

could turn to the side and heave a great shadow filled the room, and I suddenly noticed that the clattering sounds had stopped. I slowly lifted my great weight of my head, only to be stopped short by the sight of what was before me.

Puppets. Hundreds and hundreds of puppets as tall as the ceiling towered over me like skyscrapers, all with great smiles carved into their wooden faces. Slowly, slowly, their hinged jaws lowered down until I could see straight into their mouths. And then they spoke.

“Pinocchio,” they said, their voices scraping like saw on wood. I glanced at Kyle, then back to the puppets. They weren’t looking at him. They were drilling their painted blue eyes into me. And, as one, their heads tilted to the side. “Will you turn me back into a real boy?”

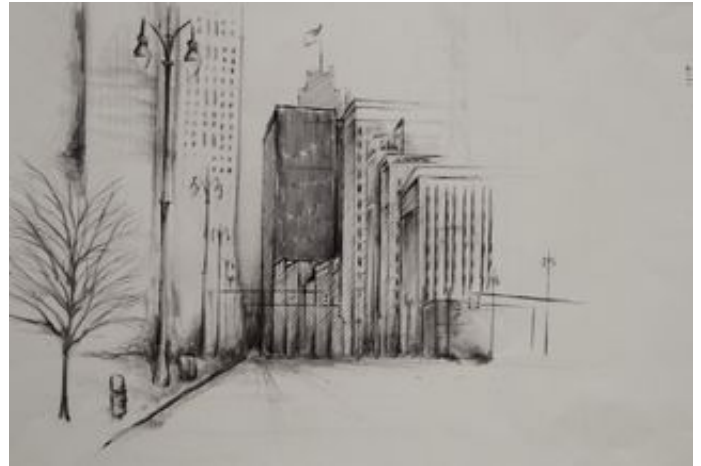
“Come now, my little Pinocchios.” I gasped and everything spun faster as Gep stepped out from behind the puppets. “We’ll have you turned back to real boys in no time.” He rolled up his sleeve, but where there should’ve been flesh, there was a shiny wooden arm. He stroked it and said, “After all, it’s the death of another who gives life to the wood, isn’t it?”

## ***Je Suis Manque Un Nom*** **By Tara Aggarwal**

Je suis sans nom  
Tu me vois chez moi  
À ma nouvelle maison -  
La rue.  
Mais ce n'est pas une maison  
Car j'ai peur.  
Et j'ai faim.  
Mais tu ne vois pas cela.  
Je suis juste une personne  
que tu croises dans la rue.  
Et tu ne vois pas mes yeux  
avec ses grande souffrance.  
Peut-être... mais non.  
Nos differences sont grandes maintenant.  
Mais, je ne suis pas fâché contre toi.  
Comment peux-je?  
À la fin, nos affaires sont differentes,  
pour je suis une SDF  
et dans ta vie.  
Je n'ai pas de nom.

*Translation:*  
*I am without a name.*  
*You see me at my home*  
*At my new home -*  
*The street.*  
*But it is not a home.*  
*For I have fear.*  
*And I have hunger.*  
*But you do not see this.*  
*I am just a person*  
*that you pass on the street.*  
*And you do not see my eyes*  
*with their grand suffering.*  
*Maybe... But no.*  
*Our differences are great now.*  
*But, I am not angry with you.*  
*How can I?*  
*In the end, our business is different.*  
*For I am homeless*

## ***Untitled 3*** **By Caeden Cerventes**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

*and in your life.*

*I'm without a name.*

## ***Eyes and Mind Confined***

**By Cynthia Cabral**

She walks through the halls, with her  
earbuds in.  
Her eyes half open, her mind half awake.  
While the people around her stir about,  
she notices one standing out.  
That kid with the look of an entangled  
dream, the one that she's out to see.  
He wears the same look she had, eyes  
half open, mind half awake.

He walks through the halls, with his  
earbuds in.  
His eyes cold, cutting like a knife, but the  
slashes are in the clouds.  
To her surprise, she grows fond.  
But she just keeps distance away.  
The face of a girl with the eyes half open,  
with the mind half awake.

But no one notices, she steals a glance  
at the one who differs from all the rest.  
After he's out of sight, but not out of mind,  
she returns to the indifferent girl.  
Her eyes half open, her mind half awake.

## ***Thoughts***

**By Chris Latelle**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**



## ***Having a Say***

**By Ariel Barbee**

"Arianwen Esme Hanniel!" I cringed and ducked farther down behind the bookcase, pulling the book up to cover my face. She was far enough away to pretend I hadn't heard her...

"ARIANWEN." My book was ripped out of my hands. Marisole, my new lady in waiting, towered over me.

*Damn. She found me.*

Resigning myself to the idea of attending the ball now that my evasive maneuvers had failed, I sighed and said, "All right. Take me up to get ready."

With an exasperated, "Thank you!" and a tight hold on my hand we raced through the castle and up to my room.

-----

I quickly washed up, leaving us with only an hour to dress and add the finishing touches. I helped Marisole as best I could, telling her which dress I wanted to wear and where my shoes were and what drawer my makeup was in. With a minute to spare, I reached the ballroom and paused before going in, putting my high heels on and making sure everything was still in place after my heart-racing sprint through the castle.

Tonight I had chosen a deep emerald green gown that contrasted nicely against my pale skin. Delicate black lace swirled up the sides, around my bodice, and created a sheer covering for my

## ***Untitled 1***

**By Caeden Cerventes**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

shoulders. A french braid beginning at one side of my parted chestnut brown hair progressed into a bun curled at the nape of my neck. A few stray hairs had purposefully been curled and arranged to frame my face.

Satisfied everything was in place, I raised my head, set my shoulders, and glided into the room exactly on time, making an entrance befitting the Crown Princess of Tidatia. Focusing on the empty throne on the right side of my father, I calmly walked across the ballroom, ignoring all the eyes focused on me. If only my mother was here, some of this attention would be taken away from me. Sadly, that was impossible. She had been dead for the past seventeen years, ever since I was born. I think my father had always resented me for this. And, that's fine because I've never much liked him either. I was raised by maids, ladies in waiting, and tutors. Father and I only come into contact at required social events.

The night dragged on and I smiled and I looked pretty and I danced, just as he wanted. At last, the call to dine came and I was grateful. I couldn't bear to entertain one more of my father's insipid guests. While King Marduk Hanniel talked business and made allies for Tidatia with other important dignitaries, I, Princess Arianwen Hanniel, was relegated to the other end of the table, "too delicate" to hear what the men had to discuss. I was so bored, I attempted to pass the time by counting how many bites I could take of each dish.

On my 54th morsel of pheasant, I happened to look up and find a man staring at me from across the table. With

my fork halfway to my mouth, I paused and raised my eyebrow back at him. Sure that he now had my attention, he subtly moved his head to one side, pointing to an unoccupied hallway and looking back at me. Unsure what was going on, my eyebrows knit together as I stared questioningly at this peculiar man.

Quickly glancing around at the other guests before going back to eating, he avoided me the rest of the night until people began to disperse, the remaining guests lingering to have final conversations before departing. This time, he made direct eye contact with me and walked away toward the hallway he had looked at earlier. By now I was dying of curiosity and just had to know what this strange man wanted. It didn't even occur to me how much of a risk I was taking going off alone into a dark corridor with an unknown man.

Arriving at the end of the hallway he had directed me to, I found him waiting for me with his hands in his pockets, eyes constantly darting around to check our surroundings. Gesturing me towards a corner that would block us from possible passersby farther down the corridor, he began furiously whispering to me, "Princess, do you know who I am?"

"Um... No, I don't."

"I have an urgent message for you. Princess, do you know what your father was discussing tonight with all the dignitaries?"

"No. I'm never allowed to listen in."

At this, he nodded and mumbled to

himself, "Hmm, that's what I thought," before continuing by urgently clutching my hand with his cold and clammy one and whispering, "Princess, what I am about to tell you, what I am about to do, is treason. Please, just listen to what I have to say. Your father is not a just king. Tonight he made a trade deal with the kingdom of Armadare. Armadare just conquered the Lacrashia people of the desert, and they plan to take advantage of these Lacrashians. As of tonight, so does your father. Princess, your father just agreed to bring slaves into your kingdom. Tidatia is about to become dependent on the slave trade system. You have to do something to stop this. Please, Princess, please. We can not rip ourselves apart over this awful practice," and with that, the words ceased rushing out of his mouth and he just stared at me, fearfully waiting for my response.

My eyes widened and I froze, uncertain what to make of this unbelievable and overwhelming outburst. Who was this stranger and why was he telling me this? It couldn't be true... could it? I thought back to....

"Wha- huh? What do you mean? No, no my father wouldn't do that he- he couldn't," shocked at this sudden onslaught, I couldn't quite comprehend what this man was telling me. "How... Why do you know this? Why would you say such a thing to me?" I whispered as my hands began to shake uncontrollably.

"I see that you're going to need proof. It's okay Princess, I wouldn't believe me if I was in your position either. Just... just come to the library tonight. That's your

favorite place, yes? Come to the library and you'll find your evidence. I promise you, I wouldn't be asking unless you were our last resort. Not all of Tidatia wants slavery. Help us prevent it!" and at that, he turned and walked away, slyly slipping back into the ballroom and blending in, leaving me to gape at a blank wall.

-----

There was only one way to stop thinking about the man at the ball- I had to check the library. My curiosity overcame my danger instincts.

When the ball ended, I had returned to my chambers and changed out of my ball gown into more comfortable clothes. Pretending to be asleep when Marisole came to check in on me, I had leaped out of bed and flown to the library as soon as I knew she was gone, knowing where and when to avoid the guards still patrolling the castle.

Now inside the library, I slowly crept forward, listening carefully for anyone else that might still be awake. As I hurried down the aisles in the library, blood rushed to my head, my heart beating out an uneven, staccato rhythm as I tried not to make a sound. Even though it was pitch dark, I knew my way by heart around the shelves, practice from many a late night spent looking for new books to read instead of sleeping.

As I approached the back of the library where the oldest volumes could be found and was seldom visited except for the odd scholar here and there, I rounded a bookshelf so quickly I had no time to catch myself before tumbling over a lump

that had appeared in my path. The mysterious blob groaned and I let out a gasp. Scrambling away, I backed myself up against the bookcase and froze, not daring to make another noise. Short gasps raggedly cut through the silence, emanating from the same vicinity as the blob, and I realized the lump I had just tripped over was actually a person curled up in the fetal position on the ground. I waited for some sort of reaction, but when I got none, my racing heart began to slow.

"Hello?" I whispered, "Are... are you alright?" Slowly inching forward, I crouched and light as a feather, touched the person. They didn't respond. My hands trembled as I paused to listen one last time for anyone else who might be in the library before backtracking to a more frequented section to grab a lit torch.

My hand flew to my mouth as the yellow glow of the torch I had brought back revealed a young man, crumpled on the ground. Overlaid with rich purples and sickly yellows, his dark skin was flaked with dried blood. With only a ragged pair of loose pants to cover his lower half, he shivered on the bare stone floor of the library. Hesitantly, he turned his swollen eyes toward me. Unfurling an arm, he dragged it across the stone closer to where I stood. My eyes drawn from his face, I looked down at the movement and saw a thin string tied around his wrist. A note was attached, labeled Proof.

*No, I thought. No, this can't be it. No no no... I carefully untied the string, trying my best to be gentle. Filled with dread, I unfolded the note. This is the aftermath, the first of many slaves he plans to bring here to work. Do you believe me now?*



The words became blurry as tears streaked down my face. I didn't want to believe it. I had never loved him, but for my own father to condone this? I viciously crumpled the note and tucked it into my bodice, having no other place to hide it. *What do I do now? What do I do with this person? I can't just leave him here. Oh God, oh God, oh God...*

Taking a deep breath and roughly brushing my tears away, I pulled myself together, realizing that now I had a much more immediate problem right in front of me. I figured the only place I could take him that I would be able to constantly have watch over was my chambers. I don't know why, but I knew that I didn't want anyone else to find him. I knelt down and, gently as I could, took his hand.

"I'm so, so sorry. I want to help you... Can you understand me?" He didn't answer, but his face had turned toward mine and he was looking up at me through the slits in his puffed eyes. "I... I think the best thing to do right now is to take you to my chambers. We will have to get past the guards, and I don't think I can carry you. I'm so sorry. Do you think you can stand? You can lean on me. I'll try to take as much weight as I can." He didn't answer.

The boy was quite large, much larger than my own small frame, and I had no idea how I was going to get him out of the library. Knowing that time was of the essence, I didn't dare risk examining his injuries further, for fear of being discovered. My mind raced as I tried to think of a solution. I decided my best bet was to get him to my favorite niche. There was a ledge that I figured I could pull him up onto, and from there he could lean on

me to stand and I could take him out of the library.

He didn't respond after I tried speaking to him again. I didn't know what else to do, so I positioned myself behind him and rolled him onto his back. He let out a moan. Nervously, words began flowing out of my mouth as I tried to move him, "Shhhhhh. Shhhhhh. It's okay. I'm sorry, but I'm going to try and get you to stand up. Shhhhhh. Can you sit up? I'm going to try to get you to sit on this ledge over here. If we can do that then maybe you can stand. Can you do that for me? Can you help me out here? Shhhhhhhh..."

I placed my hands under his arms and began to pull. I think he realized what I was trying to do and he cooperated, trembling in his attempt to sit up for me. Hands still under his arms, I straightened up, firmly planted my feet and began to pull him again. As carefully as I could, I dragged him across the floor, continuing to murmur soothingly. "I'm so sorry I have to drag you. I know this must hurt a lot. Shhhhhh... I'm so sorry. But I can't carry you and I need to get you to this bench over there. Almost there... almost there... Shhhhhhhh..." When we reached the bench, I propped him up against the seat jutting out from the wall, giving us both a momentary rest.

I leaned down in front of him. "Are you doing okay? You're doing great so far. I'm going to try and lift you up onto this bench. From there we're going to stand. Then we'll have to sneak past the guard. That might be a little tricky. But I know we can do it. I know we can. Okay. I'm going to put my hands under your arms.

Normally I would not be doing this to a guy I just met. I'm rambling. But okay. Here we go... There you go! Now you're sitting on the bench! That wasn't so hard.

"Okay. Now I'm going to put your arm around my shoulders. Oh! Sorry! Sorry. Shhhh... Shhhh... I know, but now we have to be really quiet. The guards can not find us, or that would be bad. Really bad. But we can do this. On the count of three... One... Two... Three! There we go! You're standing!" and with that, we began to hobble along.

It felt like years before we made it to the door. Never had I thought having an enormous library would be such a bad thing. My legs burned, and I concentrated on steadying my breathing and not toppling over. Having completely lost track of time, we had to wait until the guard on duty passed by until we could leave, I had already memorized all of the library guards' rotations and knew that we would just barely have enough time to make it to my chambers farther down the hall once he passed. I thanked my lucky stars I had fought for a room next to the library. Any farther and we probably would not have made it without getting caught.

I quickly led us into my chambers, stumbling from his weight as I turned around and closed the door as quietly as I could, slowly nudging it shut with my foot. *Where can I put him? Where can I put him?* I paused for a moment, frantically trying to come up with a safe place to put the boy as my burning legs screamed at me to think faster.

I scanned my room, scrutinizing the oversized bed, my hearth, my closet off to

the right, the bath off to the left, all my books scattered around the room, overflowing from my wooden chest- MY CHEST! My book chest was "large enough to hold a human body"! Wasn't that what I had told the woodworker when I had commissioned the chest? I laughed at myself, relief flooding my system as I thanked my past self for her unwittingly perfect word choice.

But, as I stood there, with the boy still leaning heavily on me, I realized I had another problem: I had to take all of my books out of the chest before I could actually put him in it. That wasn't going to happen while he was still leaning on me. Not to mention I still needed to see how badly he was injured. Cursing under my breath, I glanced out my window. *I've got time*, I thought to myself when I saw that it was still pitch black outside, the bare branches of the tree next to the window barely visible.

Turning to the boy, I said, "All right. You're going to be staying in my room now, at least until you heal. Right now I am going to take you into my washroom. I need to look over you and treat all of your injuries. All right? Come on." He still didn't give much of a response when I spoke to him, but when I began to drag him towards my bathroom, he followed as much as he could.

In my washroom, I pulled him up the stone steps and into my sizable bath. Making him sit on the edge of the tub, I helped him gradually ease down into it, putting a towel behind his head. Once he was properly settled, I walked back into my room and grabbed both my medicine bag and my water pitcher, which had

been left out for the upcoming morning. After I built up the smoldering remains of the earlier night's fire, I set the pitcher over it to boil and went back to check on the boy. I lit a lantern, preparing to inspect him, and grimaced as it shone down on him. The darkness of the castle had hidden the full extent of his injuries as I had helped him to my chambers. Now, as he was fully revealed by the light, I realized it was a miracle he was even semi-conscious. I had seen that he was bruised, yet up close it was more horrifying than I had remembered.

Although caked with dirt and grime, I could now see more clearly the yellow and purple bruises layered in a patchwork pattern over his skin, peppered with areas that had become swollen. Never, in all my time treating the infirm (a hobby I had begun years ago in order to feel I was somewhat useful in this castle where everyone but me had jobs), had I seen someone so severely abused. My lip trembled in sympathy, and I went out to get the now-warm pot of water. Bringing it back into the room, I dipped a cloth into the pot and rubbed a bit of soap into it. When I began to wipe him clean, he spoke for the first time in a weak whisper, "Thank you," before his eyes closed and he lost consciousness. As he rested, I could hear his short, painful breaths, and my heart broke to think of what he must have been through, how much it had even taken him to speak those two words of gratitude.

Sitting by the injured boy *my father* had tried to make a slave, I wondered, *How could our kingdom have come to this?* No longer could I sit by and let my father rule while I hid in a corner and read. I needed

to do something.

-----

As the first rays of sun streamed in through the windows of my bedroom, the boy was safely hidden away and sleeping in my room as I marched down to my father's council meeting and threw open the doors, demanding that I have a say in my future kingdom.



## ***Faery Tale***

### **By Aisha Abdulkadir**

The day the 50th President of the United States was assassinated, Washington D.C. burned.

I should've been blind with the thick black smoke hanging in the air, but my vision was clear as glass. I slipped through the door of a flaming townhouse to escape the shrieks of sirens and the blast of fire hoses tearing through the crumbling brick walls.

Ash fluttered from the caved-in ceiling but it froze in midair as I passed. Raging fires sputtered and cooled to let me walk through them, and large sections of the plastered walls paused in their plummeting descent when I appeared under them.

I limped towards the bashed-in hole in the back of the building, my wounded leg dragging in the dust. I didn't have to duck to get through it into the dark, tiny alleyway where my partner in crime waited. Nathan pushed off of the concrete wall, the flames that licked his fingers seeping into his skin and vanishing. He reached out a hand to help but withdrew when I straightened from my slump and began walking past him briskly, the limp gone from my step.

"Everyone's looking for you, Ash," he said as he followed behind me. His voice sharpened with frustration at my silence, so I decided to appease him while getting further on his nerves at the same time.

"Why?"

Just then one of the back windows of the store exploded, a furl of red-orange flame and shattered glass rippling inches from my face. Tiny tendrils sneaked from the blaze in my direction, seeking my presence. Nathan muttered something and the whole inferno blinked out of existence.

I kept walking to the end of the alley, both the skin and blood of my face boiling and my confidence wavering. When he'd said everyone was looking for me, he'd meant more than the entire capital. Nathan caught up and matched my stride, his growling words sending puffs of smoke into the freezing air. I could feel the invisible wall he'd put between us and the flaming convenience store, forcing the relentless heat back against the barrier.

"Why? My God, Ash, let us ponder why the the entire country would be desperately searching for the assassinated president's son on the night Washington D.C. went up in flames." He actually began rubbing his chin and murmuring, "Well, if assassin plus assassinated president equals assassinated president's son disappearing, then..."

His pondering was lost over the cacophony of a dozen 'explosions' somewhere far off on the other side of the city. When I tilted my head upwards a black cylindrical cloud was floating into the night sky, streaked white and blue by lightning bolts. The electricity spearing the smoke reminded me of what had happened two minutes to midnight that very morning. Static buzzed along the back of my neck, and I closed my eyes for

a second, shutting Nathan out before he grabbed my shoulder and dragged me to the mouth of the alley, grumbling about my slowness. My foot collided with one of the dumpsters, and I stumbled, pulling him to the ground with me.

“Are you serious, Asher? I can hear the sirens literally a block away!”

I laughed, then flinched when the skin on my arms sparked. “You shouldn’t have tried to rush me.”

“He most definitely should have,” it wasn’t Nathan who said this.

I lifted my head at the familiar feminine hiss, but Nathan had moved in front of me and blocked my view of everything but a tiny, grungy pair of wounded feet.

*“I saw everything, Ash.”*

*I  
backed up against the Oval Office’s windows, unable to control the bolts of electricity singing against my flesh. My head was spinning, and I felt nauseous, but...I’d never felt more alive. My father lay at a little girl’s bare feet, his pallid face turned so that it was facing the American flag. Dramatic much?*

*My ten-year-old sister knelt by his head, her bony knees digging into the red-soaked carpet and her pale curls gleaming white in the eerie moonlight. “We did it,” she whispered in awe. There was a sheet of paper in my hand, and I crumbled it while her small face was examining our father’s. “Where’s the list?” she finally asked after taking it in that he*

*no longer breathed. I didn't tell her it was on the ground in front me, lying in a pile of cinders. Her face was suddenly wary as she took in my stance by the exit.*

*"I thought we were on the same side, Ash." The lightbulbs in the room began to flicker on, one by one, until the lamp on the desk clarified the dark-haired boy standing outside the window, a ball of fire floating in the cup of his palms. I took one last good look at her, no longer able to remind myself of the sweet innocent she'd once been.*

*"So did I."*

*The window smashed into a thousand pieces as a sphere of raging fire flew straight through it and landed on the carpet where she stood. It lit up in seconds.*

"Get out of the way, Adira," Nathan growled.

My sister, who reached not even Nathan's shoulders, leaned around him and met my eyes with her big, furious hazel ones. "You tried to kill me," she whispered. "And you thought you could get away with it."

I couldn't meet her gaze of betrayal, but my heart churned with defiant anger. Killing our last parent had been my decision—but one I'd had to make because she'd messed with things she shouldn't have.

Or maybe it had all begun with the list.

The scream of sirens had us all going frozen.

“Adira,” I growled, finally lifting my head.  
“We don’t have time for this.”

Pops began sounding all around us. The air crackled with energy, and white-hot light enveloped me and Nathan, transporting us to where no one could ever find us.

## Charming

She followed them.

They hit the ground of the barn hard enough to shatter every single one of their bones. Nathan hadn’t even had the chance to take a breath when Adira flew to her feet and began attacking. Lightning shot from the palms of her hands, slamming towards Ash with horrifying speed. He lay on his back, dazed but conscious enough to throw up a sputtering barrier of electricity.

Nathan rolled over and raced towards Adira. He swung his fist at the back of her head, and she ducked, but not fast enough that she could escape the arm he hooked around her throat. They plummeted into the bales of hay behind them, and that was the only time Nathan had to wonder: what could actually be wrong with Ash that he’d teleport them to their friend’s abandoned barn all the way in Virginia?

“Where’s the list, Ash!” Adira struggled in Nathan’s grip, her small body flailing around wildly. “WHERE’S THE LIST?!”

List? The list Ash had told him his father had made? The one filled up with the names of the people who could do what they did?

She went still when he stared right into her eyes and said, "I burned it."

They felt the charge prickling in the air before it descended down on them like a clap of thunder. Nathan cried out and let go when she became so hot with energy she began to give him intense electric shocks. He was blinded by the white-hot light taking up the entire barn, but he could feel his surroundings fading. She was forcing him to get out of her way. Before he could raise his own hands, the barn disappeared.

## **Beast**

"Listen to me, Ash!" Adira stomped her foot in frustration, the straw-covered ground beginning to rumble violently beneath her feet. It made my bound legs vibrate pleasantly, and I couldn't help but laugh. She glared at me, her dark eyes a blazing mix of fire and ice. "You did this to us. You killed our parents, you burned our one chance of exposing the monsters they were, and you set fire to the city! Do you even know what you *did*?"

I said nothing. And even if I could speak past the metal liquid pooling in my mouth, I wouldn't have bothered because she was filled to the brim with just pure insanity. The wires were tight enough to begin cutting into my wrists, and I watched as a slow trickle of blood welled up underneath them, smearing my skin like red paint. A small smile twitched at my lips.

"I have every idea of what I've done."



An invisible force, like two hands were wrapping themselves around my throat, tugged at my neck and forced my head towards her. A white mouse scurried around her feet, but she ignored it and smiled back at me, her face the beginning of a thunderstorm. "I'm giving you to the count of ten," she gritted out from her teeth. "To tell me who you're working with." Her blonde hair seemed to frizz up at every word, indicating the fact that she was getting angry. Electricity coursed through every pale strand of hair, and I cocked my head, staring at her.

"I understand you're going to kill me?"

"I am going to *slaughter* you," the girl hissed. Above her the slanted roof of the barn creaked, and I glanced up in time to see a shadow blur across the ceiling.

"How about," I started, moving my eyes back to Adira, "I give you some advice."

She snorted. "After the stupid things you've done?" She reached behind her back and pulled out the gun she'd had tucked in the back of her sweater's hood. This time I had to break out laughing. One, what was a girl who could kill with her hands doing with a gun. And two, a hoodie was a stupid, stupid place to put a gun if you asked me. But no one did. "Ten seconds."

Pale light was slicing through the cracks in the building, indicating the arrival of dawn. I sat back in my chair, easing myself into the hard wooden back. "I want you to tell your little minions to

keep to themselves and stay out of my business.” A click of the gun’s safety. “And,” I added. “I’m sorry I offended you. I really should’ve let you kill Dad and stayed out of the way. Now, you asked who I work with?” At Adira’s nod I lifted my hands, the ropes sliding off them onto the floor. “Look up.”

Adira didn’t even have time to register the shock before the body suspended from the ceiling dropped down onto her head. The silver of a knife flashed through the air, and she gave one strange high-pitched shriek before the boy on top of her rammed it into her throat.

I stood from my chair and shook off the ropes wrapped around my legs. “Well,” I sighed, trying so hard to keep my heart from beating my voice shook, “she was annoying. Thanks, Jac.” Jac pulled his knife out of my sister’s slit throat and grinned at me in his little psychopathic way. I raised my voice and shouted, “Thanks, guys!”

The shadows along the barn walls moved into the light. Three teenagers looked toward me, happy grins on each of their faces. Azura nodded at me, an axe swinging from her fingertips.

“Nathan called us, so we came.” Kiera said, standing in front of Nathan, who stared towards Adira’s body with a strange look on his face.

I ran a hand through my dark hair and tried to ignore him. “Did you put up the symbol?”

Sapphire pointed behind her shoulder at the wall. An enormous six-pointed star took up half of the wall, blue spray paint

dripping off the edge of the wings surrounding it. Jac took his bloodied knife and went up to the wall, bending down to carve the words Faery Tale underneath the star.

Sapphire threw me my phone and I caught it, looking up at the symbol as I dialed 911. "Hello, 911?" I inquired politely. "Yes, I have a murder I'd like to report. My name? It's Beast. The guy you heard of from criminal reports on the TV?" The woman hung up. Jac stepped back from where he had carved all of our names into the wall: Beauty, Beast, Little Red, Pinocchio, Cinderella, and Charming.

"Time to go?" Kiera asked, dark hair catching the morning sun as she turned to me.

"Time to go."

## ***The Demon Queen*** **By Aisha Abdulkadir**

### **Planet Kasapantras**

“Earth is weak. Earth is defenseless. Earth has been repulsed with losses, not just from the Flood, but also the War.” The Mercurian President crossed her arms and glared around the Council room, her tanned, young face wrinkled with frown lines. I subtly rolled my eyes from where I sat in the back behind a long, rectangular table. Over my head the glass ceiling soared into a dome shape, filtering in dusty white streaks of sunshine that lit up the President’s short blonde hair so that it took on a silver sheen. “Earth is ridiculously behind in medicine and technology,” she continued, ignoring the way practically everyone the room stared her down with withering glares.

There was a sudden raucous coughing noise from the World Leader’s table at the front of the room. Everyone turned their heads to see Earth’s president taking a sip of water from his glass, then setting it down with a loud bang on the long glass table. “Just so we’re clear,” he began, shooting a white-toothed grin in the Mercurian president’s direction, “are going to get to the point anytime this century? Or do you have that much time on your

## ***Untitled*** **By Rebecca Adkins**



**Click the image to  
see a larger version**

hands, Ms. Amani? I know I don't."

President Amani narrowed her squinty grey eyes at him before continuing her lecture. "My point is that Earth has nothing. Sending these, these..." she looked sideways at the back of the room where I sat silently with a few other kids my age "...children to protect a planet run over by demons? It's blasphemy!" She wrinkled up her petite freckled nose and nodded once in confirmation before stalking back to the World Leader's table and taking her seat.

"Yeah? Well, you know what? *You're* blasphemy!" The Earthen President picked up his pen and threw it across the table at President Amani's head. His aim was perfect, and it ended up bouncing off her forehead and falling to the glass tabletop with a clatter. "Why don't you mind your own business and go tan some more?"

There was a brief moment of silence in which I could see the other World Leaders struggling to hold in their gasps. The boy next to me huffed out a long sigh, which resulted in a small flame crackling in the air next to my head.

"I got out of bed for this?" He blew out the flame and it went out, along with the welcoming heat. I turned to look at him and he stared back with half-lidded dark brown eyes filled with boredom.

“Tell me you’re not a morning person,” he said.

I turned away from him, forcing the oncoming smile from my face. I couldn't shake the anxiety nestled like a disease underneath my skin, burrowed far enough to claw at my bones. If any person found out who I was, it'd be the death of me, right here on the cold marble floor. When it came to demons, the Council didn't play, so when it came to *me*...

At the very front of the room, in front of the World Leader's table, was a large glass podium in the shape of a circle. A round white table sat atop of it with fifteen glass-backed chairs. In one of those chairs sat my dad, who was scribbling on the table with his pen. He caught my gaze and sent me a tired grin before dropping the pen and looking up.

“We are here to inform everyone about Earth's use for the children, right?” he asked, shattering the silence into a billion pieces. “Not to hear useless arguments from other planets.” He leveled a cool gaze in President Amani's direction, and she paled into a light yellow before sliding back into her seat. This was my second time seeing my dad at work as a Council member, yet it still shocked me at how much authority he showed outside the house. Normally he was all booming voice and contagious laughs, but inside the Council House he was all

booming voice and scary looks.

The Queen of Sorceria stood

u

p

slowly from her chair next to President Amani and turned toward the back of the room. Her light violet-colored eyes gazed at us calmly and the room fell silent once again as she pointed a slender finger in our direction. "How old are these children?" she asked, her quiet, silvery voice falling over everyone like a silk blanket.

"I'm ten." We all startled at the matter-of-fact voice at the far end of the table, and I leaned over Aden to see a girl tilting her chair back on two legs and quietly staring around the room. Her long black waves swung over the back of her chair and caught the early morning light in shining streaks. I frowned at her familiar face, but came up with nothing until I realized she looked exactly like the boy next to me. "I'm guessing that's how old everyone else here is." A second passed, and then she added, "I'm hungry."

Aden snorted and, once again, I could feel a rush of heat next to my face. "You're always hungry," he muttered.

Queen Taika gave the girl the scariest smile I'd ever seen. "These children are ten?"

Everyone froze. I could see my dad settling his head down in his hand in defeat.



“Um.” The Earthen President scooted back his chair and moved to stand. “Well, everybody. Nice talk, good time, I really have to get going.”

“These kids are TEN?!” President Amani shot to her feet so fast her chair flipped over onto the floor with a loud clatter. She stabbed a finger at the Earthen President, who turned a deathly white color and slowly sat back down. “You mean to tell us that you’re sending ten-year-olds to fight demons??” she yelled, her voice sounding like her lungs were being ripped to shreds. “Are you INSANE?! Are you STUPID?! Are you ILL?!”

The Earthen President, whose glass nameplate shimmered green with the name President Bumblebee, wiped at his forehead with a magically appeared handkerchief. “I am feeling quite ill now, yes,” he muttered.

Soon, every eye in the room was on us. I shifted in my seat uncomfortably, and even Aden began tapping on the tabletop nervously. I’d been indifferent to attending this meeting before, but now I just wanted to get back into my warm bed. I wasn’t a morning person. Murmurs started up at the center of the room, expanding out in ripples until the whole room was full of outraged remarks. The Head of the Council pounded his podium and all fell silent. Behind him,

through the massive glass windows taking up the wall, the Echani Lake glistened and sparkled as the white glow of Kasapantras's rising sun hit it. I could make out other enchanter, most probably my age, as they set up homemade hover boats to race across the lake. I got so caught up wishing I'd brought my own boat --best and biggest out of all of them, I bet-- that I almost missed the Council Head's next words.

"Listen, everyone," the big, broad man said, his voice ringing loud and clear around the room, "I understand how most of you must be..." his eyes rested on President Amani, who had somewhere in the middle of the chaos gotten up on her chair and started pumping her fist in the air "...*confused*, but these children aren't just any ten-year-olds we've plucked out to compensate Kaspantras' war debt to Earth. We've handpicked them specially, based off their current grades in school, skills, and abilities. The powers they possess are beyond extraordinary, beyond what any enchanter or enchantress can do, as I'm sure they'll be able to prove to you once they've fully developed. They are prodigies of our planet, and the powers they possess are irreplaceable." He looked as if he was about to say more, then wisely thought against it. "Any questions?"

Aden stopped tapping the table. "What does compensate

mean?" he asked, though no one heard him. He looked at me and I shrugged.

The Sorcerian Queen folded her hands on the table. "Prodigies?" She scoffed. "What exactly is it that an enchanter can do that a sorcerer cannot?" She lifted a finger, but at the collective "Don't!" she sighed and put it back down. "Fine. I guess we'll be seeing how *extraordinary* these children really are once they've been put to work. Is that all? I have more pressing matters to deal with back on Sorceria."

The Head of the Council

n  
o  
dded once. "We will see to it that the children and their families are deported to Earth as soon as possible." I saw my dad flinch from the corner of my eye, but when I turned to him he was back to taking rapid notes. "They will be trained and will take up the task of defending Earth from the demons that have escaped Kasapantras. In return, they and their families will be given the foremost education and ideal shelter. You are dismissed."

The scraping of chairs against the marble began, as did the rising of voices. Aden extended out a hand to me, and I stared at it before glancing up at him. His night-black waves fell across his temple and matted to his cheeks with sweat from the heat of the room. I wiped my own forehead. It

had been freezing cold when I'd first entered the room, but it was only after Aden had walked in that it had begun to heat up like a furnace. I glanced down at his hanging hand, then back up at him.

"My new Earth name is Aden," he said, taking my hand and shaking it for us. "Guess we'll be murdering demons together." A reflection of a flame flared up in his dark irises, and I jerked back in surprise from both that and the heat radiating off his hand.

"Wow. Um."

Nice to meet you, friend. My name is Demon Queen. You'll be dead in a few years because of me, but who cares?

I flinched away from the voice in my head, hoping it was nothing but that irritating little whisper, and replied, a little shakily, "I guess we'll be living on Earth, so just call me Kaia. Nice to meet you, too?"

## **Planet Mercury**

Alex rocked back and forth on his heels, dying for a chance at escape. He glanced over at Arika, who gave him a thumbs up. He sighed and looked back at the handsome, blond young man who was talking over a mile a minute and expecting Alex to understand his every word.

"Andthanandthenandthenyouneedto

like go in and make sure they like you know trust you and stuff and then and the nand then make sure you kill them like al I got it?" The man looked up from his phone. "Hurry it up, man, I like, have work to do."

"Um, yes?" Did he say kill? If he did, there was no way Alex was doing any work for this guy. Ever.

"Good. Now get outta here."

"Mr. Snotface?" In reality, his name wasn't actually Mr. Snotface, but after being called that so long, the company executive didn't even bat an eyelash at it. Instead, he stayed silent while everyone waited.

"Did you, uh, forget to tell him something?" Arika asked after a minute.

"Oh, yeah. Don't get caught." He waved his hand in a circle. "I mean, seriously, why do I have to tell him that, anyway? He knows that. It'd be, like, stupid to get caught." Mr. Snotface rolled his eyes and looked back at his game. "The Guild thinks you're a scholar from Mercury, coming to observe and learn from them. Don't screw it up, it's already such a terrible alibi."

Alex and Arika walked out the door, leaving Mr. Snotface to his 'work'. The hallway blinded Alex with its fluorescent lighting, and he blinked away the dots while Arika chattered on about as much as Mr. Snotface had.

"I couldn't be happier for you, Alex," she gushed, already typing messages about the news to her friends. "A hunter at sixteen, I mean I'm just...I'm just...so emotional that you'll be the first generation bringing the humans and enchanter to justice."

He stared back up at the lights and replied flatly, "You said this had nothing to do with killing."

"What are you pouting for?" she said, suddenly sounding annoyed. "Isn't this what I busted my butt preparing you for? It pays better than for a doctor!" In a quick change of attitude she clutched his hand like he was three again and rubbed it reassuringly. "Okay, now really, what's the face mean? Are you tired or...just as overwhelmed as I am...?"

Alex wrenched his hand away. "It means that I don't want to do this."

Arika's eyes widened with hurt like he'd just shot her in the chest. He could hear her processing his rejection by the way she stared off into space and ground her teeth.

He stumbled when she then gripped his ear and yanked him around the corner into the near-empty waiting room. There was one girl with thick black curls whispering heatedly into her Trak, but the both of them promptly dismissed her.

“Ow,” he hissed, trying to duck out of her death grip.

“If this hurts, you can imagine what will if you pass up this job!”

Alex crossed his arms as haughtily as he could in his humiliating position. “I’m too old for a spanking, Arika,” he sniped, purposefully dropping the designated ‘Auntie’. “And it won’t be my problem when I disappoint everyone, because I specifically told you I want—need— to save lives! Especially after, well...” he trailed off, but he didn’t need to finish.

A hint of desperation entered Arika’s next plea. “You will be saving lives!”

“Is killing the same thing as saving to you??!” His voice had shot up an octave, and the girl on the phone fell silent. “You can’t make me do this,” he whispered fiercely. “I’d rather be scrubbing the toilets at the gas station.” His body recoiled at his own suggestion.

“They’ll arrest you for treason if you don’t.” She said it so matter-of-factly that at first he didn’t understand. He would’ve dismissed it as a joke if he couldn’t tell when people were lying to him.

And besides, having grown up on Mercury, he shouldn’t have been surprised in the slightest.



He stepped closer, forcing the back of Arika's knees into a side table so that a vase of fake flowers toppled onto its side.

"Treason?" he repeated quietly.

He knew Mercury wanted Earth to be overtaken with demons. He knew they'd been sending an overwhelming flux of them to the weaker blue planet, but were they really so desperate that they'd insist on wiping out the Guild trying to save the humans?

She nodded. "Go to Earth, find the Demon Queen." She lifted her head and planted her finger on his chest to shove him away from her. "And take out her heart. And when you're done with that, take down the rest of the Earth guild." She tilted her head and gave a sweet smile that made him sick to his stomach. "Unless you want help?"

Alex could just imagine what 'help' implied. It would be big, bloodthirsty Mercurian hunters armed to the gums with knives and guns and axes, prepared to murder entire Earthen cities if in the mood that day. No question.

"When do I leave?"

At least if he went on his own he'd be in control.

## ***Run Johanna Run***

**By Tara Aggarwal**

Johanna Sterling clenched her teeth, hard. Fists tightened at her sides, she kept glancing behind her. Every time that she turned around, she felt choked by fear. *Just a little further... please help me God.* Johanna felt like she was a good girl. She went to church; she volunteered in the community; she always got top grades; and she was completely family-orientated. Why would she punished like this?

*Keep going,* she screamed internally at her feet which felt more like lead with every step she took. Everytime she turned around, she was only marginally awarded with the sight of no one following her. Well, not yet. Yet, Johanna dared not hope; hope would make her slow down and slowing down would get her killed. *Killed... I don't want to die, please help me God.*

The sight of her blue Corvette sent a streak of hope through her. In one of her fists she held her car key tight - so tight - that she could smell her metallic blood mixing with the air. It dripped down her finger and splashed on the pavement. It was all that she could do to snatch the key from the purse she abandoned at the sports center. There was no time to grab anything else.

Johanna almost stilled when she tasted metal in her mouth. For a moment, she feared that she was dying but the blood was from biting her lip. Perhaps she may bleed out before she caught up to her. It would be better considering. *Keep*

---

*going... Keep going.*

Breaking out the foliage of the green park, Johanna allowed herself a deep breath as she almost ran to the car. *Don't run, she'll hear.* Why had she let Claudia convince her to wear so much gear? *Poor Claudia... the blood... Don't think about it! Keep going.*

It was like a dream when Johanna was able to unlock the car quickly and slip inside. Glancing back to where she was walking from, she found no figure breaking from the foliage. Never had she wanted her cell phone too much but even typing 911 seemed like it would take too much time. Johanna started the car and heard the squeal of her tires as she backed out. *Almost there... Keep going.*

Almost spinning the car, Johanna pulled her car out of the park's parking lot, feeling her tires go over the edge of the curb as she pulled onto the road. She finally took a breath, able to hope again. But then hope was a bright blinding light in front of her. Hope was roar someone speeding their car towards her. Hope was the sound of a crash crushing her ears and then her body afterward, sending blinding pain everywhere. Hope was rough hands pulling her from the wreckage and dumping her body before *her.*

She could only hope for a quick end.

## ***Character Sketch: Villainous Woman***

**By Tara Aggarwal**

Tap, tap, tap...

"Enlighten me, Mr. Mason," a cool smile graced her blood-red lips. A picture of poise and elegance, propped up in her throne of leather. Slowly, her ice blue eyes slid to Mr. Mason, cutting into him. "In what circumstances does a little girl, a human, get away from a devious beast like you?"

It was perfectly clear she was mocking him, playing with his mind. Tap, tap, tap... her long, polished fingernail met the dark oak of her desk. She was the picture of perfection down to every single detail. It was a picture that would force an onlooker to look away or stare in a trance - both due to the royal demanding presence she possessed.

Mr. Mason would have spoken, would have defended himself, but he was silenced by the cold amusement glinting in her eyes. *Tap, tap, tap...* She wanted him to squirm. "The last time we met, you assured me you could handle this... situation. Were you lying Mr. Mason?" Something cold in her revealed as panic flooded the demon's eyes. Pathetic things really- all show, no real value. Mr. Mason, stuck in his weak form of submission, fiddled with idle hands. He knew it was a trick question. Neither answer would please her. Apparently, his hesitation did not please either. "An answer, Mr. Mason." The woman's royal voice dropped any connotation of playfulness - her tone was as chilling as her eyes.

## ***Untitled 2***

**By Caeden Cerventes**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

"Miss, it was my b-best intentions...." Mr. Mason stuttered. He'd never stuttered before.

"Speak properly," she said coldly, interrupting him.

Taking a deep breath, Mr. Mason tried again. "I kept watch. I led her to the club, *Lux*. I had her in the room, Miss," he desperately explained. "But someone interfered... Saved her, Miss."

There was no forgiveness in the ice. "Then perhaps I should apologize, Mr. Mason, for assuming a demon like you," her voice dripped with disdain, "could withstand measly interruptions and interferences."

Mr. Mason would have fled for his life right then and there. He had failed, and he knew the consequence. Slowly, the elegant woman stood. Silence fell over the room, already seeming to choke him. No, he was choking, unable to breathe precious air. Shock, panic, anger, many emotions ran through his weak body but there was no chance to act upon them. Mr. Mason managed to move his body forward - either an attempt on the murderous woman's life or just the chance to run. The woman did not move her icy gaze away, which contrasted, albeit beautifully, with the cold, amused smile that once again took hold of her lips. And just like that, Mr. Mason was nothing but a snapped neck on the floor.

*Tap, tap, tap...*

"Safe travels home Mr. Mason."

## ***"Let me tell you..."***

**By Jennifer Arizmendi Alquicira**

I come from the best place on earth,  
Where people speak a beautiful language  
and cook the most delicious food.  
A Place where you don't need much to be  
happy,  
Just need twelve pesos for the best taco  
in your life.  
I come from the best place on earth.

My name isn't unique but I am,  
I grew up in two places.  
I love one more.  
I speak Spanish better than English,  
But I don't give up on learning.  
People make fun of me -  
How I pronounce words,  
But at least I'm trying.

Just because I don't like dresses,  
doesn't make me less of a girl.  
I prefer sweatpants and a hoodie,  
because they make me comfortable.

I'm in this country - almost alone,  
missing my mom more everyday.  
I'm about to graduate,  
and she can't be here.

I consider myself a calm person,  
But I'm scared of spiders and  
cockroaches.  
And while sometimes I like being alone,  
I still like to go out with my few friends.

My family are my world.  
My parents taught me great values.  
My siblings taught me to share, to care for  
others.  
They are my motivation to never give up

I also have "family" members - talking  
about me  
like a reporter from the news.  
They are always talking things about me  
that aren't even true.  
I think they are envious of my style of life,  
Because they prefer talking about me,  
than taking care of their life.

And I have very few friends but they are  
the best.  
Almost eighteen and still can't get my life  
straight.  
But I come from the best place on earth,  
You should visit the State of Mexico one  
day.



## ***Endless Kind of Love***

**By Damari Amaya**

I want that deepest kind of love.  
That fall in love with you all over again  
when I see you kind of love  
The love where we meet at a party  
because my friend tells me to go sit with  
her and I see you and fall for you kind of  
love.

I want that love that no matter what  
happens it will always be there kind of  
love.  
That love where my heart beat so fast  
from nerves and I felt butterflies in my  
stomach.  
That love that can bring a smile to my  
face when getting a text message from  
you.  
That love that jumps up and down in my  
heart like if I was playing jump rope.  
That build each other and be successful  
together kind of love.

I want that love that you can argue and  
say you're done but you know you're not  
because you would die for that person  
kind of love.

This love is the kind of love that will  
always be shown endlessly, when I marry  
that special someone.

## ***Arriflex***

**By Thomas Ciszewski**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

## ***Reading is a Part of Me***

**By Ariel Barbee**

I made my voice low and gravelly as I imitated the evil Activities Director of *Camp Half-Blood*. He was telling Percy that chariot races weren't dangerous at all, even though they had led to many deaths. Pausing for a breath, I put my book down and reached for a bottle of water on the car door.

My little sister, sitting next to me, saw what I was doing and turned to look out the window. Rushing past us, the green grass of springtime Pennsylvania could be seen as we made our way to Gettysburg on a family road trip. We were all excited to see the famous Civil War battlefield, but driving from Illinois to Pennsylvania was no short trip. To keep Anna and myself entertained, I had offered to read aloud to her from one of my favorite books, *The Sea of Monsters*, by Rick Riordan.

After a minute of relative quiet within the car, I suddenly heard a "Well?" from the front seat.

"Uh, yeah?" I answered.

"Well, what happens next?" my dad asked.

"Is Percy going to be in a chariot race?" Uncle Bob chimed in.

"Well give me a second and then you'll find out!" I laughed, delighted that even the two grown ups in the front seat were invested in the story.

My love of reading is a fundamental part

of who I am, and has changed me for the better. I have been able to explore different parts of the world and meet new people without ever having to hop on an airplane. Initially I was only escaping my ordinary life, but through these different stories I began to learn about humans and how we think. I imagined myself in a different world, which let me learn about other people and develop empathy, leading to my own growth.

I began reading Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* in fourth grade when I really didn't have much contact with people outside of my immediate family. Yet, in my hands were the lives of Percy, Annabeth, Grover and their struggle to be good and live as joyously as possible. I was as frustrated as Percy when his dyslexia prevented him from understanding simple labels and signs. I was as determined as Annabeth to follow her architect dreams when no one believed she could. I felt as excluded as Grover when his fellow satyrs rejected him from their community. I learned to persevere and reach my goals, let in newcomers, take pride in who I am, let others know what I think, and fight for what I believe in. Through characters' life experiences I learned along with them; their knowledge being passed on to me.

In the world today, it is important to have an open mind and be aware of each other's differences so we can solve problems together. Even though I haven't often left my suburban town, in no way are my opinions limited to those that can be found here. My empathy gained through books is a powerful tool for me to navigate the world today.

By reading books, I was able to feed my curiosity of the world. By connecting with characters and seeing their points of view, I furthered my own knowledge of humankind. As a college student, this is important. I am excited to learn and open my mind to the new ideas that will be presented to me. Whether I'm reading a book to my family or debating with classmates about the cause of Tess D'Urberville's early demise, sharing knowledge and excitement with others over literature and education is a part of who I am integrally. Without literature, I would not be the empathetic, open minded, bibliophilic person I am today.

## ***We the People*** **By Gerardo Beltran**

Mentality shackled by the grip of his  
cackles  
Controlling our lives,  
Throwing rocks at us with the force of a  
tackle.

But we the people can break out of the  
cage,  
Set up the stage for the age to take place.  
No discrimination against the race that we  
share,  
No labels on the same skin we all bare.

Cause at the end of all this the same  
people he tears  
Are in the same world we all share.

## ***The Jungle*** **By Mark Gale**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

## ***These Walls***

### **By Jamia Chrusfield**

If these walls could talk  
They'd tell you the stories of their cracks  
Suppressed anger and secret laughs and  
The stories of the "family" they attempt to harbor  
With clutters of scattered lives  
Oh the stories they have to tell  
Emotions not only built up in their hearts, but in the walls as well  
The sudden crack and tear  
It's the foundation that left things shaky  
They'd tell you about the consistent confusion and frustration that made its heart swell  
And the feet that crept and peaked after 12  
Frozen body, worried mind  
They'd tell you how she loved when there was peace  
bc chaos was commonly felt  
It calmed the 743 things buzzing around in her mind  
And what you're always  
s around gradually becomes a part of you  
The sting of reality shooting up to your chest leaving you wondering why you can't  
breathe  
You see  
They would stress their struggle of always having to start over and sustaining  
arguments, breaking wholes, having to constantly be painted over, masking bad  
memories of hand to face, fist to chest, foot to ribcage  
Breathtaking moments mixed with anxiety  
Quiet cries covered by an angelic smile and an ugly laugh  
Walls being poorly pasted together again  
And for what? Only to be broken again by the next who has troubled situations that  
they have no choice but to be bystander and witness  
Putting more stitches over its heart  
More and more heavy it gets  
Until it's ready to fall apart  
Crumbled ..into pieces and dust  
Left in an abandoned lot that when people walk past they think nothing of  
Or being torn down and replaced because it no longer "looks the part"

There lies the joy, pain, memories and lies  
If these walls could talk  
They would tell you about the danger in family ties.



## ***Everyday Of My Life*** **By Alexa Doubek**

Words burn like a fire  
    bringing down the sturdiest house  
        leaving scars and marks

Everyday Of My Life becomes  
    a living nightmare  
girls give glares thinking she's fat  
    and I can't walk away from the  
fact  
                    they're right

darkness crowds around  
    leaving me alone with tears  
more and more stares appear  
    making me go further into  
        the darkness

Everyday Of My Life I wear  
fake smiles  
I try to stay strong  
    for those who look up to me  
until the Fire burns me  
    Down To My Core

## ***White Tree*** **By Allison Hamaker**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**



## ***Kaleidoscope Visions***

**By Mark Gale**

Day slid to warm night in happy laughter,  
Cackles of strange familiar joy rose as  
He, the tired sun, fell into his old  
Hiding place. We drank in turns, clumsily.

Cool rough concrete and ink-black metal  
swirl  
And mingle, like a song in a dream. Cool  
Propel squirts into our mouth; Open wide!  
It tastes just like the breeze swirling  
around.

But I see through a fly's eyes, soap  
bubbles,  
A kaleidoscope blurring at the edge  
Fractured so no one can really trust it.  
Even happiness and laughter can lie.

I really should be blind now, honestly.  
But I am shocked and delighted to see.

## ***Mixed Emotions***

**By Ramona Klymiuk**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

## ***Sunbeams*** **By Mark Gale**

I wake to find the  
curtains undrawn.  
The sunlight streams  
gently through, and alights  
upon the floor.  
It hurts my eyes a bit,  
but I can't look away.  
I see something in the light,  
some dust caught in the air,  
and suddenly,  
I see something familiar through it.

Now there are small shelves,  
filled with card stacks and cases.  
Small children's books and teaching tools.  
Beyond them, windows.  
A field of green with a damp warm smell,  
grass as soft as a pillow.  
Cold monkeybars. Tall trees.  
Dark familiar hiding places.

It comes in a rushing flood,  
flushing my face, sending  
shivers down my neck.  
Calmness and sadness come unbidden,  
yet strangely welcome.  
I can't go back there anymore,  
not really, but  
the sunbeams bring it to me.

## ***Past Memories Brought Back*** **By Emily Lenzen**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

## ***Old School Pictures***

**By Ajalia Gary**

I am from my childhood home, from cooking and cleaning.

I am from the strict rules.

I am from the kitchen, the dirty dishes.

I am from the forks and knives being just right and different, from mother and father and Moore.

I am from the disorientated and different.

From come in when the street light come on and being told right from wrong.

I am from the Christianity that I've been told but rarely go to church.

I'm from Mississippi, deer meat, and pig feet.

From the free land, the bug mosquitoes, and the wild animals.

I am from the old school pictures to the new members of my family.

## ***Where I'm From*** **By Ajalia Gary**

I am from my childhood home  
    from cooking and cleaning  
I am from the kitchen, the dirty dishes  
    from the forks and knives being just  
right and different  
I am from the strict rules  
    from mother and father and more  
I am from the disorientated and different  
From "Come in when the street lights  
come on" and being told right from wrong  
I am from the Christianity that I've been  
told but rarely go to church  
I'm from Mississippi, deer meat, and pig  
feet  
From the free land, the bug mosquitoes,  
and the wild animals  
I am from the old school pictures  
    to the new members of my family.

## ***Can't Always Hide Behind the Mask*** **By Jasmine Meza**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

## ***I am From*** **By Nicole Howell**

I am from god  
From his angels and his touch  
I am from his creation  
I am from my original home  
From God's plan  
I am from his son Jesus  
From his resurrection I was created  
From his hanging on the cross he gave  
me life  
I am from my creator  
From up there, I am now here  
From being here, I was secondly from my  
mother and father  
I am from them, them for a reason  
From that reason I am here for a purpose  
I am from the second home I call winter  
but choose to be summer  
From summer I choose to live on a beach  
forever  
From sinking in the sand from the rain  
From running barefoot burning the soles  
of my feet  
I am from the ocean waves  
From big ones, or small ones  
From painful ones, or soft gentle ones  
I am from the seashells that lay all similar,  
all different  
From picking up a couple good ones to  
picking up a few broken  
Whichever condition of the shell, I still  
pocket it.

## ***Deserted Planet*** **By Jasmine Meza**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**



## ***What is Home***

**By Sierra Innis**

What is home?

A strong, sturdy structure brimming with history.

Protecting from cold, sheltering from rain.  
In coveted walls hide mem'ries and mystery.

Beloved and cherished; a sacred domain.

What is home?

No place can compare. If you wander astray;

Click your heels, and you're back with your family around.

You may grow, you may leave and move far far away

Yet you cannot escape for in blood you are bound.

What is home?

It is where your heart lies.

It is the people you meet. It is what you pride.

It mirrors your soul through (some say) your eyes.

It cannot be conquered, as it's only inside.

What is home?

A building! A family! A heart! They reply.  
This should be quite simple; why don't they agree.

Definition debated. Verdict: can't clarify.

So how can I know what home means to me.

What is home?

Vent's warmth caught in blankets. Waking up to blue skies.

Pine guards hide greyed castle. Sleds sail pools of rain.

Gleaming smile built by secrets. Cobalt

## ***Screaming Face Within the Trees***

**By Jasmine Meza**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

gaze life made wise.

Shingled perch in wind's caress, an  
escape through window pane.

What is home?

I see places and faces, but which home is  
true?

In defining what's real who we are is the  
key,

Perhaps home's foundation depends on  
that too.

Home is whatever you need it to be.

I am home.



## ***Warrior***

**By Nicholas Jeffries**

Ah, that warmth - how it does comfort me  
so.

Visions of cursed souls follow it - brought  
by a heat unknown.

Imagining sunlight, resting still as a stone.  
It brings hope as I grow more hollow by  
each death drawn onto thy name.

For I await the same cruel end as my  
fellow ashen warriors.

Only to be brought back unwillingly to  
finish my duty.

For I am only a cursed soul in hell, striving  
to find the light.

I have been stuck in this old church for so  
long.

I only bear a set of rusty armor, a sturdy  
shield, and a trusty sword.

Alas, I know this fire well, for it reminds  
me of my own perseverance.

I gather the poor souls of ones who suffer  
like I do.

They are merely empty husks, left  
unchecked,

Growing more and more insane until they  
are only hollow.

However I am not like them.

I have always come back, despite the  
odds always against my favor.

What other choice do I have?

Any alternative would be ludicrous.

To go mad as time moves on and lose a  
grip of myself - like countless times  
before.

But no need to fret,

For I know that I will become strong and  
complete my quest,

So I may be freed from this fearful curse.

I have met other sublime companions  
through my journey,  
Like a warrior of a tribe called Catarina.  
Ah yes, the sun, a symbol of hope in  
which we are honored to follow.  
For without its radiant light, I would surely  
turn hollow.  
For now, I must continue my journey,  
For this bonfire has taken its course,  
But before I leave, I will leave a note for  
another cursed soul.  
*"Praise the sun, with determination!"*

## ***Colombiana*** **By Valerie Luna**

My life is like a book,  
Where I've learned how to survive - no  
matter the obstacles.  
And I will never forget all the memories I  
took,  
That will be in my mind and my soul - like  
magazines articles

I grew up in a beautiful country  
Where the green grass is as clean and  
nice as my clothes out of the laundry,  
Where I learned how to respect and  
appreciate what I have,  
Where I smile even if the worst thing is  
coming up.

In Colombia, I was the strongest and the  
smartest  
I grew up in a beautiful family  
Where love was everywhere.  
A family full of motivation and support  
towards everyone.

One day, I moved.  
I left my country.  
I started a new life  
I had to learn a new language in order to  
survive.  
I cried.  
I was weak.  
I missed my people and my home.

People would mock how I pronounced  
some words, just because I was  
Columbian.  
People would ask me if I had drugs, just  
because I was Colombian  
People would ask me if I knew Pablo  
Escobar, just because I was Colombian  
But I learned that those people do not

## ***Untitled*** **By Jasmine Meza**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

describe who I am.

I am the one with the power of building  
my identity.

I am the one with the power of being  
strong, to prove people who I am.

I am the one that remembers all the  
hardships I've been through that make me  
strong as a rock.

I am the one that defines myself because  
no one else can.

In the United States, people thought I was  
weak.

They thought I couldn't do anything.  
They thought that I wasn't going to be  
able to survive this beautiful country,  
But I did.

I picked myself up.  
I became stronger.  
I didn't let anyone hurt me with their words,  
Because words couldn't bring me down.

I started to achieve my goals,  
Even if people doubted my capability.  
I proved to them that even if I had to  
change my life,  
I created another one, in such an amazing  
way.

Yes I am foreign.  
Yes I have an accent.  
Yes I do not know how to pronounce  
some words.  
But neither of these things make me less  
or more than anyone.  
I know how to fight life and I know who I  
am.  
Because I became stronger.

# ***Incompletion***

## **By Justin Nguyen**

Often shadowed by its sibling, Completion,  
Its identity is frequently lost,  
A fool's fate is forgetting that Incompletion  
is

## ***Time Goes By*** **By Camari Robinson**

I was 5 when I seen an old lady with gray  
short nappy hair with red and black  
glasses  
always had on a red dashiki

Short but with a big heart and open arms

You see I was 7 years-old when I found  
out that my granny had problems

She used to laugh and smile but it didn't  
stop her from being her  
she has four kids and one sister

I Was 9 years old when I ran away from  
her; it was hard but I was mad, my mind  
wasn't right, and I had to prove to her that  
I didn't need her as much

I was 11 when I found out I couldn't do it  
without her; she was the key to the world;  
she knew what I had to do and what I  
need to

I Was 13 when we had "The Talk"... She  
told me about everything; I Just looked  
and laughed, she said "To Keep A  
Girlfriend, Mari You Must Show Her That  
You Care, Always Have Her Side And Be  
There When She Needs You The Most."

I Was 15 When I found out that my  
grandma was an animal... a party  
animal... she walked in dancing loved  
music; she danced with or without it. I  
paid no mind was all locked in on sports

I Was 16 When my mom told me the  
news got in the car cried didn't know what  
to do; When I seen her she didn't look the

## ***Diamond Wing Rebellion*** **By DeShawn Murrell**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

same; ran back out, cried, told my mom I  
wasn't ready yet

I'm Still 16 and I still think about her...  
always feel like she somewhere watching  
at all times

You See I'm still 16 and she's still on my  
mind; I lay down at night, sink into my bed  
wondering if I had danced with her would  
she still be here... thinking to myself how I  
hate myself for her hearing my last words  
to her, "Not now Granny I gotta learn  
these plays before the big game soon  
maybe next time" I kissed her and walks  
away

I'm still 16 and I feel unwelcome; I have  
dreams wondering if I would have danced  
with her would it have been different

I'm still 16 and I wake up from that dream  
getting ready for school and remember I  
have to live with it

I'm only 16.



## ***Others to be Picked***

### **By Megan Sabel**

I'm from the Queen and AC/DC music that  
my family played

The 80s and 90s classical rock

I'm from the long, quiet road trips in the  
back of a small car  
Seeing new places like Mount Rushmore  
and Yellowstone Park every year with my  
family

I'm from the animals that I'm surround by

The gray, the black, the brown, and the  
blonde dogs

I'm from the morals that say treat others  
the way you want to be treated  
kindness, playfulness, happiness

I'm from the weekends that I spend with  
family

My mother, my father, my brother

I'm from a family tree

A big fruit tree that is in mid-bloom waiting  
for some fruit to ripen, and others to be  
picked.

## ***Where I'm From*** **By Savannah Salvino**

I am from family,  
From sports and shopping  
From the screaming and yelling, constant  
noise and complaining that will never  
leave my head,  
I am from love and motivation.

I am from sports,  
And from my parents constantly pushing  
to do them  
From gymnastics, softball, basketball, and  
my favorite of them all, cheerleading  
Tumbling and twisting, being thrown high  
in the air  
From competing and loving it, hearing the  
crowds loud screams  
I am from motivation, to do the best, work  
the hardest, and love it.

I am from shopping  
From going out with my Aunt and going  
out with my mother, or with both,  
Shopping days and night, heavy bags and  
tired feet  
From a quick breakfast to a long,  
delicious dinner,  
so we could have a much time as we  
would like  
To the next day out with my loving family  
again.

Making quick plans and running around  
everywhere with choosing and deciding,  
never stopping,  
either active or out  
From the love and motivation  
Always remembering  
I am from family.

## ***Working*** **By Katelyn Quintana**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

## ***As I Sleep***

### **By Kennedy Sawyer**

I am from shades of black and blue  
and the pictures that watch me as I sleep.

I am from the shadows that lurk around  
my room as I try to sleep.

The darkness that is favored only in one's  
eyes  
but can be scary at times.

I am from the lonely, empty rooms and  
hallways  
because there was nobody else to play.

The long and lonely nights spent watching  
out my window waiting for my parents to  
arrive.

I am from the evening breeze to the  
morning dawn.

The whispers I hear in the night that try to  
make you feel unsure if you're not the  
only one there.

The unsettled feeling when I'm about to  
fall asleep and all at once something  
creeps across the wall.

I am from shade of black and blue and the  
room that keeps me awake till dawn.

## ***Nobody Knows***

**By Ellie Shuert**

Nobody knows where we are. It's an obvious thought we try to ignore, for fear of scaring ourselves even more. Our instinct is to wait. The many others start to arrive. And I wait. I plop down in a cushy chair, claiming it before anyone else can. The crowd is growing, immense and steadily increasing, the places to sit have run out. Kids still in pajamas sit on the plush carpet playing with dolls, bears, and other things a child would usually sleep with to comfort them. The parents stand around them, talking to each other and looking very, very concerned. Others bubble together, whispering quietly, hands tucked under their arms to trap the warmth, or to keep them from trembling. The cold down here wraps around you like a blanket of ice. I cross my legs and rub my hands together as I wait for Gram to wake.

There is a clear wave of confusion across everyone's minds.

The next morning, I feel the same. But since no other soul was awake, I curled up in my chair, awaiting the answers with only myself and the loneliness of a vacated room. At this point, everyone here knows what I know... that being nothing. From the people I've talked to, the memories of last night have left no trace in anyone's minds. There were more than a few rumors going around, but I have never been one to accept the things that one guesses at first glance. No one can guess accurately in the cage-of-a-hotel-lobby with no doors and no windows.

## ***Untitled 1***

**By Ezekiel Ramos**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

I see Gram waddling towards me in her nightgown, a pleasant face amidst the terrified ones. Her wispy white hair covers the top of her eyes, her face bare and eyes unseeing without her glasses. I want to get up and help her over to the chair, but the second I leave, I know it will be snatched by someone else. I wait for her to get close enough, then stand for her to take my chair. Grateful, she gives me a pat on the cheek.

“Dear,” she starts to say. I know where she is going with this, “do you know--”

“Nothing,” I say. It’s pointless to ask, but I do anyway. “Do you.” My words are cut off as a shudder quakes beneath the floor. Everyone remains standing, bracing themselves for a more violent shaking. But it has stopped. The silence hits like a silent explosion. Everything is burning with a silence that seems to engulf it all. As Gram and I stare, around the room, at each other, everywhere, the desperate need for answers consuming the last bit of us left, the paintings on the bare walls shift, and slide down.

I give a quick apologetic look to Gram before running off to one of the holes in the wall, my body mixing in the mass of other curious people. Being small, I easily push my way through the crowd and stop, squatting near the hole, my knees digging into the wall as the others see it. It’s not a hole, nor a passage or hallway. It’s not the expected, not the thing everyone thought it was, not the thing everyone hoped it was. A window. The glass is thick, reflecting so much that you can barely see anything

beyond it. Squinting, it hits me. There is nothing to show. There is only blackness, twinkles blinking in and out. Colors I've never seen before float like brushstrokes on a black canvas.

Space. Space and the stars. And we are in the midst of it all.

## ***A Little More*** **By Amber Siddiqui**

A little more each day  
You will find you understand me,

And wordless  
Know that I adore you,  
    Not only with my eyes  
        my hands, and my mouth,  
I adore you with my heart.

I knew that you would come,  
    It's as if you have always  
        been here beside me,  
That it was you  
To go on with me forever.

That the pure circle of a Ring  
Is our circle. Our life.  
The way we will understand  
Each other  
    even, when we die.

## ***Untitled 2*** **By Ezekiel Ramos**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**



## ***A Subway Bathroom at Night*** **By Amber Siddiqui**

Checkered blue tiles. Fluorescent light.  
A white purse sits next to the sink.  
We see her looking in the mirror.

Not for vanity, just to verify she's alive.  
There is beauty in her eyes.  
A camera lens that opens wide, and  
continues to  
shrink slowly.

A touch of long lashes with her fingertip.  
Cheeks curve perfectly. Full lips apart.  
She stares long at the woman,

Then leaves.

The bathroom is empty,  
But not quite as empty as her.  
Fluorescent lights flickering. Water  
dripping.  
In the mirror a woman looks back at us.

## ***Untitled*** **By Raven Berry**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

## ***No Place Like Home***

### **By Amber Siddiqui**

Home is where you  
can drop off your  
problems and backpack

jump out your  
tight pants that  
hug your thighs,  
and jump into your mother's  
arms that hug your heart

sling your  
head down and tie  
your hair up  
right before you  
fling yourself  
into a stinging hot shower

wash away your  
complaints and those  
difficult math problems  
You couldn't quite solve

lay out on the couch  
like a cat in the sun  
and hypnotize your mind  
with the flick of the remote

home is where you can unload.

## ***Green***

**By Elizabeth Somodji**

Green, a shinnying color glistening off the grassy hills as if it were a sea of emeralds gently waving to travelers far and wide. The sky is painted with a light blue but has accents of glistening yellow beams, creating a masterful creation. Though the grass reflects only the light as if they were coated in gloss, shinnying hypnotically making the series of hills seem they had no end. The wind would always blow the same way, a gently breeze just enough to stir the grass to make them shine, and it would always occur when on top of a hill. Throughout the hills came a heavy silence only occurring after that the soft breath of wind, but if one could listen close enough they would be able to hear the faintest sound of the grass gently rubbing against each other. A faint rugged scrape, a sound like two gloves rubbing against each other, but with just barely enough contact to make a small sound. However, if one could not hear, they could smell the notable sense of the hills. A peculiar plastic scent, like clean rubber boots, an unusual yet calm sense. There would only be a small whiff, just enough for one to notice, but yet not enough to have a chance to take in the scent. Travelers would within several minutes notice a pattern when traveling through these hills, a breeze, a whiff, an occasional noise, then silence. The deafening silence was only disturbed by two sounds; the foots of travelers, making contact with the rubber like plants causing a squeak as if each step were being cleaned to shine. Then the occasional scurry, a short burst of rubber scrapes as if a predator or frighten prey ran through the hills. Yet when one

## ***Untitled***

**By Grace Tu**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**

searched for the source of the sound there was nothing to be seen. The hills were deprived of life, not a winged creature in the sky and not even a bug buried in the ground. Though, there would always be a random pitter-patter of feet causing the ground to release rapid squeaks, but nothing was ever spotted. The sun always seemed to be in the same position in the sky and always beat down with constant levels of heat. Not enough to burn, but enough to bring in a light sweat while the rays shone as if they were set spotlights on a plastic green stage. The clouds always looked happy, never grey nor black, but always seemed to be bubbly white. They never were flat or round, but rather a puffy shape as the one you drew when you were five. A constant state of happiness, the sky was pictured in energy, joy, and adolescence. Another breeze, whiff, and silence. The ground seem like it was shaved, the plants all equal, yet differed in height. It looked almost fake, as someone covered the hills in rolls of grass they made themselves using glue and plastic grass. Every step, the ground would sink just a bit, but not leave a single footprint. The grass would always spring back up energetically and retake their form as if they have never been touched. One could just barely see the dark, brown dirt in between the pieces of grass, they would look as clean as flatten chocolate cake. However, if one were to try and penetrate it, the ground would only sink and raise back up again. Even with the sharpest of weapons and the most destructive of magic, the ground would only sink and rise back up gently as if nothing happened. Another breeze, whiff, and silence. The ground never looked damaged, black nor teared. It was always

clean, neat, and continuously shining in the youthful sunlight. Even the grass could not be cut or rooted out, a tug would only lift the ground slightly as if it were just a rug and was glued to the grass ground, not to the land itself. It seemed like it never rained, yet the grass would always look fresh, the sun also seemed like it never went away, but the grass would always be energetic like it was a brand new day every hour. Another breeze, whiff, a scurry sound, and then silence. No one knows what exactly what the scurry sound could come from, but some claim that there is an invisible being stalking the hills. Some say it preys, some say it guards, some say it doesn't exist and should mind their own business. Though there has been the occasions when the scurrying stops at a spot where the sun reflects just right, reliving an outline of being. Ears, big, long ears are the first unusual thing that appears in that outline, swaying slightly with the leftover breeze. Though, only the ears are seen before the outline disappears blending back into the light. After several hills pass the ground noticeable becomes softer and the land starts to slightly flatten. The breeze becomes softer as like a traveling echo becoming softer the farther you go. Each step, the ground sinks in more and it takes more effort to take the next step. Eventually, the breeze stops, and the ground is more like walking on a wet, tired sponge than spring like, energetic rubber. However the smell still lingers, a rubbery, soap scent that is still apparent from the constant glistening grass.

# ***I Am***

**By Nicolette Valdez**

I am from stacked clean dishes,  
From wood cleaner and pinesol  
I am from food wrappers in between the  
corner of my bed  
I am from a neat clean bed  
I am from scratched doors made by my  
dog because of loneliness

I'm from a crowded home.  
I am from Sunday dinners at home.  
I'm from a delicious Mexican cooking  
family  
I'm from a weird yet loving big family.  
I'm from "everything happens for a reason  
and move on to bigger and better things"

I'm from Denise and Israel's family  
Tamales and posole  
From the sprained hand from cheer  
comps

On my dresser were trophies from years  
and hard work of dedication  
Practices of tears and sweat  
I am from generations later on, but never  
disappointment.



## ***Nothing Left to Lose***

**By Garrett Weatherly**

“What's wrong, champ?” My father, a tall, warm, smiling man, peers down at me waiting for an answer. But no words come out and he questions, “You know where we're going?”

Slowly and timidly, I shake my head and the smile stays.

“Well,” he starts, “we finally got enough money for something special...”

He begins humming carnival music, and in an instant, joy fills my body and I'm jumping up and down in wild excitement. My father laughs and ruffles my hair, then tries to cross the street...

That was seven years ago, when I was just a child. Now fifteen, I find myself sitting in the night. The night, in its all encompassing darkness, is almost soothing. The wonders of what could be in the dark has a way of distracting me from whatever else could be on my mind, and it's a welcome change from the constant worrying. The constant feeling.

All is well, until I turn back to my room. I see it staring at me from my nightstand, only visible from the dim light of my computer faintly illuminating the room. I look back, but not into the eye of any man

n  
or beast; rather, I gaze down the barrel of a .22 caliber. I turn back to the glowing monitor and review the letter I had been writing to explain my intentions, trying to find something, anything to make this message more glorified than it should be, but I can't think of much. I let out a weak,

## ***Rams***

**By Vidhi Vaghani**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**



tired yawn and looked at the time. 11:50 P.M. Pressing my hands together in a feeble attempt to stop them from shaking I shove them in my pajama pockets. I stand up from my desk, aimlessly pacing back and forth.

I eventually face my mirror, and take a good, hard look. Some unexplained misery is painted onto my face, and I can't place the source. My counselors have told me it's just part of growing up, but a doubt for that sits still in the back of my mind. I was this way as a freshman, and now a junior, nothing has changed. Looking back at the gun, I question: What am I doing? Is this the solution, or is it just a simple, narrow-minded act of self pity?

This sense of rationale is washed away by memories breaching my stream of thought. In my mind, I see my father smiling at me in the busy, daylit city before making the mistake of crossing the street. With a crash, a shout, and a flash of red, he disappears.

Then reality hits, and I'm back. Back in the darkness, the computer's blue light gone, and my reflection in the mirror. With a gun at its head. My hand acts on its own, throwing the weapon away in shock. I sit down to calm the shaking in my legs, and ponder. What happened? How did I bring myself so close to death's door without knowing... or even feeling it? I shake my head. Turning, I see my father on the wall, flashing the same ghastly smile I saw moments before. I rise, and cross over to the picture and begin speaking: "Sorry, dad. I guess I was just thinking about you. I promise I won't really do it..."

A smile manages to cross my face, and I head over to my computer. Maybe it would be best to delete my message? But a noise comes from the living room, and my

fear kicks in. What could it be...? I'm too afraid to go out, but I also need to see if it's dangerous... Once again my eyes dart to the pistol, and I go for it. Grabbing it, I peek outside until the sound of breathing causes me to retreat. I can hear whoever.... *whatever* it is pacing around. In a storm of fear and adrenaline, I move from my hiding place. Squeezing my eyes shut, I slam my finger down onto the trigger, pressing again and again until I hear nothing but hollow clicks telling me I had emptied the magazine. I open my eyes, and creep out to see what I hit. To my horror, a corpse is on the floor, but it's not the body of a thief or murderer- instead, what's left of my mother is lying dead on the ground. Upon viewing this, the shock brings no tears to my eyes nor shouting from my voice- but instead, a thought. One decision, one single choice to end all choices. I head back into my room, load the last bullet and put the gun to my head. If anyone reads or finds this... I'm sorry.

## ***The Child***

### **By Garrett Weatherly**

His own little alley, his own little street, his own little world. Yet it does not spell paradise; the world is a big and scary place, and he is only a small child. A small child, quivering, all alone. Plagued by silence, bound by emotion.

His face says nothing, but his feelings tell worlds of stories. Storm clouds gather, the blue tides of sadness wash over. He struggles against the waves, fighting to stay on top. He is tricked and robbed of his certainty, his trust gone with the wind.

Material possessions lay all about, yet none bear the ability to fill the hole inside of him. He's alone, scared, in the dirty streets of enticement, sitting under clouds of hate.

Years pass, and he finds a knife on the street. Eagerly taking it, he's interrupted by a ray of sunlight. At first it blinds him, but he comes. He comes and offers him his hand, telling him that he'll always be there for him, even when he's in college.

Another comes, patting his back and letting him know that he's no child, but a man. She comes, hugging him and assuring him that he's a burden to no one. Finally, she comes, her tan skin, dark hair, her brown eyes piercing his soul. She kisses him, whispering her love into his ear. Back into the sunlight he looks as the smile finally appears on his face.

## ***Thirty Days***

**By Delaney Wozniak**

About thirty days it took, thirty days for him to complete his cycle. He went from full and bright to dark and lost. Slowly, he wanes away. He grows darker each second of each day. It is his cycle of darkness and light, new and old, good and bad. He orbits around me continuing his frightening cycle. He is dark, but suddenly he grows light! He becomes a waxing crescent and then a first quarter. He tries so hard to be full and bright! He becomes a gibbous and then he is full! So full and bright and full of life! He embraces me with his light, and I am enchanted by his transformation. This does not last; the cycle continues as it usually does. He begins to wane away into a gibbous. He continues to the last quarter and painfully moves to the waning crescent. I know he will be dark soon and I am dreading it. He moves to the stage new and is finally dark and lost. The sky is vacant and then the cycle continues.

## ***Life***

**By Aly Walker**



**Click the image to see a larger version.**