



THE ANTHOLOGY

WRITERS IN THE SCHOOL

The Anthology

Calhoun Writers in the School

2020

ISSUE THREE

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

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I'm thrilled to celebrate the student writers who played a vital role in this year's collaboration between Calhoun Middle School and University of North Texas's Writers in the Schools (WITS) program. WITS brings publishing writers into public school classrooms to teach the craft of writing, to encourage creativity, and to amplify the language-arts education students already receive. Learning to write empowers young thinkers to articulate their understandings and to enlarge their imaginations, as the writings in this anthology amply show. I'm grateful for the hard work put in by this year's WITS instructors, Matt Morton and Ruby Al-Qasem. Thanks, too, to Amy Taylor for hosting the program in her classes. Finally, cheers to the students whose curiosity and imagination yielded the thrilling words in this volume.

Corey Marks

University Distinguished Teaching Professor
Director of Creative Writing
Department of English
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University of North Texas

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What a fabulous year EXPO had with WITS.

Every week when they visited, Ms. Al-Qasem and Mr. Morton started with focusing on a skill by providing mentor texts. They didn't choose texts that were about middle school-aged children, as I often do. Instead, they chose texts written to a more sophisticated and older audience. I'll admit as a teacher that some of the mentor texts seemed too difficult--would my students understand words so complex? Would they understand the abstract writing of a writer translated from Swedish?

Yet students rose to the challenge, offering insights into readings that were far beyond their years. And in reading sophisticated texts, they developed their writing repertoire, experimented with content and form, and produced writing that was odd, charming, difficult, funny, thoughtful, and inventive.

In addition to being grateful to the fruitful partnership between my talented students and their talented WITS teachers, I'm grateful for the partnership WITS offers between Calhoun Middle School and the University of North Texas English Department.

Amy Taylor

Teacher, Calhoun Middle School

The Anthology

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I am honored to have had the opportunity to work with an amazing group of seventh graders for the past school year in the Calhoun Middle School's Writers in the Schools Program. These students were already incredible thinkers when I stepped into their classroom, and they frequently offered insights about literature that I had not considered. But, over the course of our time together, I witnessed them gain confidence in those thinking skills, and find their own voices on the page to match. I was especially impressed because they were game—willing to try unfamiliar writing forms including ekphrastic poetry, hermit crab essays, slipstream fiction, and so much more. I watched them take creative risks, write difficult and vulnerable experiences, and concoct entire fictional worlds.

It was my great pleasure to read their work each week, and along the way I got to see a couple of novels-in-progress, so many playful or evocative poems, and countless brave personal essays. Best of all, I was inspired as they cheered each other on, fashioning a space among them where each felt safe to tackle this impossible weekly task: write something creative, something wholly new.

For twenty Tuesdays, these young writers let me into their world—they showed me the books they were reading, the sketches and art they made, and their first drafts and false starts. I'm privileged to have gotten to spend this time with them, and to witness their growth as writers. I am really proud of every one of them.

Ruby Al-Qasem

WITS Teacher, 2nd/3rd Period

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On my first day as a WITS instructor, I asked the Calhoun Middle School 7th graders to bring three things with them to class each day: bravery, respect, and imagination. The work in these pages demonstrates their commitment to that goal over the past year. It has been delightful to witness these students discover their own creative capacities as they experimented with writing in a variety of genres and forms, and to see them become increasingly willing to risk emotional vulnerability in the interest of learning—about themselves, their classmates, and the ever-evolving complexities of the world around them.

As all writers would agree, it is impossible to develop and hone your craft unless you are also willing and able to accept a far more difficult task: challenging yourself to grow as a person, or, as Walter Treviño-Morales puts it in his poem “Life, “making major changes / That make you the person you’re going to be.” This is, of course, a tall order for anyone, especially for young writers dealing with the pressures of middle school during the outbreak of a global pandemic. But this year’s group of WITS students routinely rose to meet this unprecedented challenge, time and again producing work of emotional depth, moral clarity, poignant insight, and serious play. I am moved by the honesty, bravery, and humor that characterizes the stellar pieces of writing in this journal, and I could not be prouder of what these amazing students accomplished this year.

Matt Morton

WITS Teacher, 6th/7th Period

RUBY AL-QASEM'S STUDENTS

Second & Third Period

Catalina Cardenas

Unkempt

At first I used to brush my hair,
But then my mom told me to stop.
“Comb through it instead,
Don’t brush through it.” I thought, “It’s so much harder to comb it, though.”
Every time I tried to comb my hair, there would be never-ending tangles.
Fine! I’m never combing my hair again! I thought. *It takes so long and my arms hurt.*
Geez, my hair is still poofy, so what’s the difference? I thought.
How am I going to do this *every* morning?
I just won’t, then. It takes so much time.
“Just do what makes you happy,” my mom would say when I said I was done combing my hair.
Kool, I just won’t comb it anymore; easy peasy.
Lots of people would stare at my hair because it looked like a rats’ nest.
My mom would never say anything, just letting me suffer, I guess.
Now I’m looking back on it and I must have looked homeless.
Oh my god I was a mini 7-Eleven crackhead.
Patience. My mom had a lot of it to be able to walk around with my pompom-lookin’ head.
Queen: They say a woman’s hair is her crowning glory. Not my hair back then.
Really thought, it was bad, brushing THICK CURLY HAIR was bad.
Still, my mom didn’t say a thing. She must have thought it was really funny.
The Mother of the Year Award goes to...my mom! Thanks a lot.
Until the end of time I’ll never forgive her for embarrassing me by letting me walk around like that!

Zoe Carter

Swing Set

I'm lying on my bed; I can't seem to fall asleep. I never can.

"I bet I can swing higher than you!"

I open my eyes. The tall, blue wardrobe in the corner of the room suddenly turns into a large swing set, with a little girl swinging on it. She looks familiar.

"Alright, bet."

I look over. Next to me, where my dark, wooden nightstand should be, stands another little girl, Anna. I could never forget her face.

"You coming?" She turns to me. I stare at her. I look up. What had once been my ceiling fan is now the red, boiling sun. The large, blue sky grows out from it. I look down. I'm wearing my favorite pink Skechers from second grade. I feel my legs drag my body toward the swing next to the little girl. I turn to see all the furniture in my room gone. I expect the carpet to turn to grass, the walls to turn into a neighborhood, but no. It's Anna, a girl, and me with my pink Skechers in my empty room.

"Haha, I'm beating you, Lindsey," Anna says, giggling. I smile, slowly swinging beside Lin—wait, what was her name again? The girl, I've forgotten her name, gives me the cold shoulder and stands up. She walks to the door and into the hallway. My eyes follow her.

"It's okay, I'm still here," Anna says, smiling. I stare blankly at her.

"I like your shoes!"

My mouth opens to reply, but a loud, horrid scream comes out. I jump, scaring myself. The swing set disappears. I look down and I am barefoot. Anna is now wearing my pink Skechers. The sun that had been a ceiling fan once now has turned into a moon, and I uncontrollably scream some more.

"What's wrong? Is everything o—"

Two loud gunshots ring from outside but that's not why I am screaming. Anna stares. She walks toward the hallway like the girl did.

"No!" I say. I expect to scream again. She looks back at me. "Don't leave me. Please," I say. I start tearing up. She looks down. There are a few seconds of silence. I look down too and gasp. A hole is in her stomach. We look at each other. She nods and walks away. My mind wants to run after her, down that dark long hallway, but my body tells me to let go, to suck it up and get on with life.

I get back on the swing. The darkness of my room creeps around me. I sit on that swing for what feels like years, decades, centuries. I feel the room light up. I look behind me at the door. There's that girl again—Lindsey? I stand up and watch everything in my room return back to normal. I turn to where Lindsey's standing, but instead of Lindsey there's a box. I bend down and open it. There, in the box, are my pink Skechers.

A tear rolls down my face.

Francesco Corsi

Broken Dreams

An abyss of abandoned dreams,
An empty void of motivation;

Customs,
Sanctioned by society.
I stare as my dreams drift farther away,
Like an abandoned house, getting smaller as the miles come between us.
Everyone around me, strands of grass, a solid color
Not realizing that they have been stripped of their ambitions.

I am caving in to this very fate,
And it is not how I want to live.

I do not want to live 9 to 5,
Giving up, only to receive a green piece of paper with no substantial value.
I work so hard,
And build up so much stress that,

After 80 years of existence, I will lie on my deathbed

Realizing my life was influenced.

I was never free to make a decision to benefit me, and not just my career status.

But of course it's not all bad,
But of course there is good.

But of course, I can have a family,
But of course, I can have friends.
It's not all bad.

I can believe in any god,
I can speak freely,
All of my life is ahead of me,
I will enjoy and fulfill it
Because life is not all bad.

Braden Crain

An Ode to “The Real Me”

The real me is NOT what would be expected,
It is *quiet* and *serious*.
As opposed to the school me,
Who is *funny*, *exciting*, and *spontaneous*.
The real me is *antisocial* and ANGRY,
It is sometimes *vulnerable* and is like a *caged beast* that rages on.
The real me is *fueled* by ANGER and has NO limits to its *capabilities*.

When the school me takes over,
The real me sleeps
And is *refueled* by the ANGER that the school me suppresses.

When I play football,
The real me *unleashes* ALL the anger from within all at once.
The real me does NOT tire, for the anger NEVER stops.
But when the game is over,
The real me *refuels*.
The school me is freed,
And does not rest,

Until nightfall

When both sides of me sleep.

Eleanor Garner

Our New Normal

March 9th was not a normal day.

I had expected to go to school that day.

to go to math, EXPO, design, history, PE, science, and art.

But instead, that's when the quarantine started. This wasn't spring break anymore. This was quarantine:

Insanity.

No schedule.

No time.

Nothing to do.

Nothing to do but wait, wait for it all to end.

Samuel Gross

The Bag

“Hey, pal, can I have your pack? I’ll give you my house for it,” said Tony, intruding on some random guy’s personal space. He didn’t care what he had to do for it, he just wanted that feel-good substance.

“Ew! What the-? Get away, man. This stuff’s not for sale,” replied the man. “Come on, buddy, just a sniff won’t hurt!”

“Sorry, man, but no means n-”

Tony tackled the man and grabbed at the bag.

“Get off of me!” the man yelled.

“Come on, buddy, I just wanna feel good again. Now give it!”

If he could, Tony would have killed the man. Thankfully, he gave it over, and Tony took a sniff.

“Ahhh... Thanks, man. You know, sorry about back then. Let’s let bygones be bygones.”

“What is wrong with you!? Why do you think I would do that!? You tackled me!” replied the man.

Tony had no clue why he was upset. After all, if Tony was happy, everyone should be.

“Hey, man, you want some?” offered Tony.

“Clearly, or else I wouldn’t have *fought* for it!”

“Well here, have some. You know, as a peace offering.”

The man took some, still looking like Tony had done something wrong, and almost immediately mellowed out.

“You know what? You’re right. We should forget the past and be bros. Thanks.”

While the man’s words were passing in one ear and out the other, Tony sighed in happiness. Everything was going swell. Life was good.

Jacob Hammond

It's Raining Men: Hallelujah

—after “Golconda” by René Magritte

A sunny day
Not a cloud in the sky
But looking outside
You see this one guy
But hundreds of times
What happens when they
Hit the ground?
Copy, Paste, Cut.

Anwyn Head

Walmart Receipt

Walmart

Returned Items:

Infant pink shoes-\$5.99

Newborn baby jumper, pink-\$10.89

Newborn infant crib-\$129.99

Infant changing table-\$110.50

Newborn soft baby diapers-\$7.99

Total: \$265.36

Why Items Were Returned:

Items no longer needed.

Thank you for shopping with us!

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B. D. M.', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Barrett Jackson

Going Home in a Blizzard

—after “*The Hunters in the Snow*” by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

I was hiking
Back from
Hunting—
Acceptable catch:
11 rabbits.
My wife will put them
In a stew.
But when I glance over
I see
The people brewing
Carrot stew for
Their families.
But I also see a
Community on
The iced lakes
Having a celebration:
Bouncing and
Frolicking around.

Tonight they will go to
bed hungry.

Phillip Nabity

No More Neighbor

When I was 11 my parents forbade me from going over to my neighbors' house ever again.

One evening after swim practice, as my mom was driving us back home in time to have dinner, we were almost run off the road. I noticed two trucks driving crazily and then they came right next to us—we were very close. The way the trucks were driving was very weird. The front truck was braking while the one behind it was almost hitting it each time. As they did this, we tried to decide who it was. I noticed the way the truck was shaped, the way the bed had this metal beam across it. I also finally noticed the color of the truck in the evening light: it was turquoise green. I said, "Mom, it's Alton's truck." She looked over and said "You're right." Alton was the teenager who lived next door to us; his younger brother was a really good friend of mine.

When we got home we went straight to my dad and told him what we saw and what happened.

He was very mad. He said he would deal with it, and texted our neighbor right away.

Nothing happened after that. My mom never got an apology for what had happened. Now whenever we see them, we don't regard them. I'm sad because I never get to do anything with my friend anymore. I do see him every morning when we get on the bus, but we don't have very long to talk.

Emma Palmer

How I Live

—after “*The Hunters in the Snow*” by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

How I don't want to live:

Children's laughter fills the cold air.
Parents talking about work.

Smelling smoke from
Burning wood.

Dogs arguing across yards.

This is how I want to live:

Children and
Parents playing.

The warm air from
Burning wood.

Dogs playing in yards.

Joel Rodriguez

All Are Miserable Citizens?

—after “*The Slave Ship*” by J. M. W. Turner

The horror. The pain. The depression.
How cruel the world can be.
How horrible the people feel.
Nothing is correct . . .
There's tons of neglect . . .

The people, taking their lives one by one.
The world dying slowly, just like my insides.
Life being split apart, as if a rotten orange.
Humanity is fading into a black hole, dying!
Faster and faster!
The people who have everything never have enough (*sign*),
The people with nothing need ample help.
Nothing is correct . . .
There's tons of neglect . . .

The living peop....
(*Sign*)
No one knows what's out there.
No one knows what's coming?
Pain, harm, horror, unknown till shown.

Sofia Spitz

Airport Conundrum

When I was 12 and my brother was 14 we had a crazy adventure in the Atlanta airport, with no parents. We were traveling to Florida to meet my cousins, and we had a few bumps in the road.

We arrived two hours before our flight in Dallas just in case security was long. As we walked to our gate, my brother and I looked at the board, seeing one of the flights got delayed.

“Sucks to be them,” my brother, Andres, said. My mom looked at the screen and started to look a bit annoyed. “Y’all *are* them,” she told my brother and me. “Ugh,” I said. The plane was going to Florida, but there was a layover in Atlanta.

We finally got on the plane. Our seat was in the very last row, cozy and comfortable with no one else sitting with us. I started a conversation with Andres, my tall brother that never talks to me.

“So are you excited to see our cousins?” I asked.

“Yeah, I guess,” he replied very quietly.

The plane ride was two hours long, and eventually Andres’ phone died, so we used mine to watch movies. Andres was acting like he actually liked me—the whole plane ride we were talking, laughing—actually communicating! We had never been this close or talked this much. At the time I didn’t really think of it, I was just enjoying his company. We got off the plane in Atlanta and realized our flight time had been changed: we were going to have to stay until four in the morning, all alone with no parents.

The fun had begun. The Atlanta airport is *enormous*; there are people everywhere all the time, and the gates and space is never-ending. Andres and I had some cash on us, so we kind of went crazy. Mom never lets me get Starbucks, so we bought the largest size they had. As we were drinking our drinks, we decided to walk around the airport. We found a candy shop and bought a bunch of candy. It was so much fun; it was like I had a partner in crime, but it was my brother. I never wanted it to end; it was my utopia. We started to make our way back to the gate so we didn’t miss our flight again. On the way back we were making jokes, talking about our crazy dad, and spending quality time with each other. When we were back at our gate, Andres told me, “If you ever need anything just ask me, okay?”

I was so confused—he had gone from never talking to me, ignoring me, and acting like he didn’t care about me, to telling me that. I thought, “Maybe he does care.” The time had come to get on the plane. The adventure was over. The once in a lifetime opportunity was ending and I was dreading that. I loved the time I spent with my brother, and I didn’t want it to end.

Sam Stone

The Taken

I walked in and my phone was going off. I walked in and my room started to light up. I walked in and went to shut it off. I walked in and went to the bathroom. I walked in and saw the person in the corner run at me. I walked in and dodged their attack. I walked in and ran out.

It was late in the morning. The last rooster stopped making its dreaded noises, and my brother and I had packed the last of our house. My brother, sister, and I were close. Really close. We had nobody else really. No one liked us because we had always been the new kids that lost their mom. We had to move now, a fresh start. My dad's new wife had a multi-million dollar company and gave Dad a job as the assistant manager. He always blamed us for what happened to Mom.

As my brother, Jaiden, and I put our stuff in the trailer, my sister, Tailor, was gathering her makeup. I was the oldest and was responsible for them. My name is Daniel and I'm 17, next in line is Tailor, she's 15, and last but definitely not least is Jaiden, the 14 year old star. He had 2,000 subscribers on his YouTube and loved to make videos singing or dancing in his flamboyant nature. None of us were introverts, really.

As we got to the house in the city, I realized how different life would be there than our little house in the country. The house was more like a mansion and was very appealing to Dad and his new wife, but we hated it. As soon as everyone had unpacked, we picked one of the many extra rooms as our meeting room. When that was decided, we moved our games and stuff in there and decided to explore the land a little. Out back was a pool about the size of the kitchen in our last house. It had a bar *in* the pool, and an attached hot tub the size of our old rooms. Then there was the huge poolhouse. Jaiden decided to make that his recording studio for his videos, and hung back to make one.

As me and Tailor exited the poolhouse, we saw a kid about my age. He was running and came to say hello. Once he reached the fence I realized he looked exactly like my ex-boyfriend Carson, who disappeared two years ago. He was crying and when he got to the fence he said *help me* to me, and called me by my ex's nickname for me. I started to cry and Tailor was so surprised that she just stood there. I couldn't believe it; I invited him in and gave him some water and called the police. It was quite strange how my dad's new wife acted towards him, but it was even more strange how he already hated her. Of course I hated her but that was after getting to know her.

When the police arrived, they said that he was in a state of shock and had suppressed most of his memories except for one. The one memory he kept was the butterfly flying in through a hole in the wall. He later got a butterfly tattoo but that's beside the point. Jaiden had come in from recording his first video, and saw Carson right there. He was a huge fan of Carson, because Carson had shown him how to post his stuff on YouTube and gave him a confidence boost. When Carson had finished explaining everything he knew, he came to me and told me to be wary of my new stepmother. He said he had a bad feeling about her.

So did I—so I constantly dodged her around the house. Since it was summer and we had no school, we had a lot of time to spend together. I felt sure that Carson and I were soulmates, but my dad was extremely homophobic and my new stepmom clearly had internalized homophobia. So my

relationship was not allowed in the house, though I was beginning to wonder if my stepmom had other reasons. She acted strange, and I couldn't figure out why.

By the time I finally found out my stepmom had been institutionalized years before, she had gotten so much worse and wouldn't listen to reason. My dad eased up on me because she couldn't control him any longer. When she finally had to be taken back to the institution, she admitted to over 73 kidnappings and murders that otherwise wouldn't have been connected. This included Carson. When I told him, he said that he knew something was up with that, and all his memories came back. His dad started dating my stepmom and they got married. Then Carson and I started dating and she started brainwashing his dad. After a while he couldn't do anything without her approval and they moved in here. Once they did, my stepmom, and I guess his too now, took him and put him down in the basement and would drain his memory day by day with her magic. Then she would take huge bites from his back and would heal them before he was allowed to leave. He was released to go and get some air for his back and she didn't expect us to be out there. He had a plan to take her down; he told me about it. It was our little secret.

I realized that I was probably next, especially because I'd stolen Carson away. So I was extremely glad I'd been out that day and found him. Not only did I rescue the love of my life that day, but maybe I had stopped myself from being trapped with him.

I went to bed that night and decided that I would wake up early the next morning to check up on Carson. I set my phone alarm to 6 A.M. and went to sleep. I woke up at 5:50 without knowing why. So I just went ahead and started to pick out the clothes I was going to wear.

I walked in and my phone was going off. I walked in and went to shut it off. I walked in and went to the bathroom. I walked in and saw the person in the corner run at me. I walked in and dodged their attack. I walked in and ran out.

I ran out and saw my stepmom behind me. I saw my stepmom behind me and screamed. I screamed and woke up my dad and siblings. I woke up my dad and siblings and realized that they were brainwashed by her magic too. I realized that they were brainwashed by her magic too and bolted for the front door. I bolted for the front door and left for Carson's house screaming. I left for Carson's house screaming and saw the neighbors finally. I saw the neighbors finally and they were brainwashed too.

I stared my stepmom straight in the eye and held up my hands, the purple dust illuminating the dim morning sky. The dust lingered there for a moment before shattering my stepmom's illusions and giving everyone their freedom back. When they realized I was screaming, someone called for help. The dust wandered farther to everyone that was brainwashed and the entire town was in a frenzy. My stepmom was screaming at me for ruining her perfect town and started charging at me again. This time I knew I could fight her off and decided to stay where I was and fight. As she continued running down the block trying to get me I heard sirens. She hadn't realized I was safe and slammed into me; she fell on the ground and got a major concussion. She died from complications afterward, and I had to wipe everyone's memory.

Now only Taylor, Carson, Jaiden, my dad, and I know about what happened. It's our little secret. Me and Carson had a beautiful wedding after a few years, and decided to adopt an amazing little girl named Aila. She looked so much like my stepmom.

Jason Ta

Disoriented

—after “*The Scream*” by Edvard Munch

A hazy evening, a peachy hue stains the sky
A loud, shrill shriek pierces the air

A ghastly man he is
A hairless cat
Lonely

He stands on the bridge
Frightened by the world around him

A headless couple appears suddenly
—His mind conjuring up illusions

He's terrified
Lets out a loud shriek

He is scared
Crazed and confused
Disoriented

Emily Teter

Common

—after “*Golconda*” by René Magritte

So many falling,
So many bawling,
So many happy,
So many sappy,
At least on the surface,
We each look like different colors of the curve in the sky
That appears after god has cried.
At first sight I see men, just men.
They look plain, but so do I.
We are so different,
It's not what it seems,
Maybe I'm the common folk,
Maybe it's to be.

Karissa Thiele

Ship of Souls

—after "The Slave Ship" by J. M. W. Turner

Turning waves,
violent storms,
the ship crashes through the swirling hurricane,
tossed around like a loose piece of paper.
Weary souls aboard the ship,
fighting the unyielding winds and waters.
Their confining jail now their only refuge.
The fiery sun blazes low in the sky:
a stain of red ink, spilled on gray paper.
Feel the bite of the icy wind, smell the salty air.
Sea foam sprays across your cheek. Frigid.
Do these people know of their limited time?
Surely they feel the last tip of the boat.
Concluding thoughts.
Final moments.
The watery creature,
claws of white,
scraping and grasping for the ship.
The murderous intent made clear.
Unrestrained savage power,
toying with its prey.
A cat with its mouse.

Nathan Aubrey Thomas

A Dragon's Tale

People see fury in Dragons, powerful beasts not to be trifled with. Creatures full of greed and anger. But this story is different, for even the heart of a Dragon can learn what is good, and what is right. Even creatures that see nothing but evil and cruelty can find peace and mercy.

The Story begins in a cave, where smoke billowed out between the stalactites on the ceiling. From outside you could hear a small snarl as the Dragon slept. Though the Dragon didn't seem to have ears it was indeed able to hear, and was still on alert even when sleeping. Then all of a sudden, the creature heard footsteps...small ones. They seemingly tried to sneak around it, but the Dragon could smell whatever this was. Then the Dragon heard gold as it spilled across the floor. The Dragon stayed quiet as the small footsteps scurried off.

The Dragon pounced on the small creature: a boy.

The Boy had red hair and hazel eyes. The Dragon snarled at the small boy; another package of sin is all it saw. Soon to fill with greed and envy of everything. The Dragon's eyes quickly locked onto the shining gold in the boy's hand—another sign of the greed to come. The boy whimpered, "Please...let me go...I'm sorry..."

The Dragon growled and bared his fangs. "What...are...you...doing?"

The boy squirmed helplessly, and the Dragon squished him into the ground.

"I will ask one more time...What...are...you...DOING!!!"

The boy started to cry and gasp for breath. The Dragon growled and shoved the boy farther into the ground. Finally, the boy yelled, "PLEASE, I'M JUST HUNGRY! I JUST WANT TO BE ABLE TO EAT!"

The Dragon picked up the boy and hung him over his hoard. He shook the boy until every last coin was back in the pile. Then the Dragon proceeded to fly out and away from the cave.

"Where are you taking me!?" The Boy cried in fear. The Dragon just kept flying until he reached a small group of cows. The Dragon swooped down over a cow and proceeded to claw out its intestines. The Boy was horrified, but the Dragon enjoyed the bloodshed. The Dragon picked up the cow's head as the rest ran away. It squeezed the skull and the cow's tongue popped into the air. The Dragon proceeded to release a puff of fire that roasted the cow tongue as it fell into the boy's hand.

"Eat," the Dragon simply stated as if the boy would understand.

"This?" The Boy questioned, "There's no way I'm eating this!"

"EAT!!!" The Dragon insisted again, and the boy quickly ate in fear. As the boy ate, the Dragon set upon the cow carcass. After the Boy was done, the Dragon asked, "Where is your family?"

"I don't have one." The boy replied.

"What do you mean; surely you live somewhere?" The Dragon questioned further.

"I live in the Orphanage, my dad left North and my mom..." The Boy stopped there.

The Dragon asked another question: "Why didn't you stay at the Orphanage?"

“They never fed me. I tried to eat, but the other kids forced me away. Saying my dad was a curse, and so was I.”

“Why didn’t the people at the orphanage do anything, and did you try to take food from others?”

The boy twiddled with a few blades of grass. “Everyone has their eyes on me. Nobody believes me just because of my father...I don’t know why...” The Dragon felt...a new feeling...unrecognizable to him...but I will tell you. He felt Empathy, for the Dragon was an outcast too. He remembered when he hatched: the cave was dark and quiet. Except for the occasional drop of water from the ceiling it was silent. The Dragon remembered crying out for days on end; he only stopped when he realized he was alone. The Dragon had been rejected, and the boy just the same.

“What is your name?” The Dragon asked.

“Andrew,” replied the Boy.

The Dragon was hesitant, but then said, “Andrew, I promise I will bring you to your father. But only on a few conditions.” Andrew stood up and looked at the Dragon in confusion, “What are the conditions?” The Dragon stood tall and spoke in a noble tone, “Only take what you need, and choose to make the right decisions. Even the popular choices can indeed fail.”

Andrew pondered this in confusion. “I’ll try to, but how will you find my father?”

The Dragon said, “Come,” and Andrew walked up to the Dragon. The Dragon smelled Andrew, then proceeded to bite the back of his collar. He lifted Andrew onto his back and flew North. “Where are we going?” Andrew asked.

“To find your Father,” the Dragon answered.

After a few Hours they reached a large mountain pass. “I’m thirsty!” Andrew whined. “But we’re almost there, can’t you wait?” The Dragon asked. It was followed up by an immediate, “No!” from Andrew.

A few minutes passed by, and soon a waterfall appeared from the mountains, flowing down into a large lake at the bottom. The Dragon landed next to the lake and Andrew climbed off. The lake was surrounded by dense forest and large rocks, but no animals in sight. It was quite peaceful, however, and the chirping of birds could be heard. But when Andrew reached down for water, a large creature attacked. It was a Basilisk, with green scales and a serpent-like body. It was like a snake with four legs with webbed feet and fins. A long sail flowed down its back from its yellow eyes to its tail. As Andrew’s face was right on the tip of its forked tongue, the Dragon quickly shot a blast of fire that caused the beast to recoil. The Dragon lunged and roared so loudly that the water rippled into waves, and the trees shook out birds and leaves. The Dragon’s fangs sank into the Basilisk’s neck, right behind its jaw. The Basilisk could only thrash and claw, but its efforts were futile. The Basilisk went still, and all was quiet.

Andrew, though stunned, had his drink. At least all the blood had not fallen into the water. They flew higher up the Mountain, flying up the tall waterfall until they reached the top. The waterfall rushed out of a cave, and the Dragon recognized the scent. “This it is,” he said. Andrew called out into the cave, “HELLO!!! ANYBODY IN THERE!!!?”

There was no answer. The Dragon let out a roar, and it echoed down the cave. Then they heard a slight galloping—a knight on a horse came charging. He had a lance in one hand and a glass bottle in the other. The Knight tried to poke open the Dragon’s mouth, but the Dragon quickly leaned back and cocked his head. The Knight threw the bottle and it smashed against the Dragon’s

chest, its contents spilling out. The Knight had a belt lined with a few more spherical bottles of the black mixture. The Dragon smashed his forelimbs into the ground, shaking the Earth. The knight fell on his side, and the Dragon smashed the bottles with his tail.

“Quit it!” Andrew cried out. When the knight tried to get up, the Dragon laid his claws over the knight. Pinned, the knight cursed, and his helmet fell off. The knight had long red hair, a beard, and green eyes. Before the knight could speak the Dragon yelled, “I HAVE BROUGHT YOUR SON!!!” Andrew climbed down the Dragon, staring at the Knight as he did so. The Knight had the same hair color and ears as Andrew. The knight stared at Andrew, and Andrew stared right back.

“What...what is your name boy?” the Knight asked Andrew. Andrew spoke his name, and the Knight began to cry. “It is really you,” the Knight said, “I thought I’d never see you again.”

The Dragon let go of the Knight, and Andrew rushed to hug him. “You are my son,” the Knight kept whispering, and the Dragon simply watched. After a while the Dragon said, “Time to get going then.”

The Knight looked stunned and said, “Go where? To Duskhall? That’s Absurd!” The Dragon was a little confused, but remembering how Andrew said he was treated made some sense. “Why are you considered a curse at Duskhall?” The Dragon asked.

The Knight explained, “I was tasked by the king to keep his son safe from harm. However, when I woke up one morning, I found the prince in his room. He was on the floor...and there was so much blood...When the King found out he was heartbroken and furious. He blamed me for not protecting his son, and banished me, calling me a curse. I had to leave my wife—how is she, by the way?”

Andrew looked sad at the Knight’s question. “Mommy is gone, she was too ill.”

The Knight was stunned, and broke into tears, along with Andrew. The Dragon felt some part of him saying to comfort them...but he felt they were best left alone. After thirty minutes or so, the Dragon hurried them along saying, “We’ll talk to the king, he won’t answer to you, but he might listen to me.” The Knight let out a sigh, but soon they were on the Dragon’s back. As they flew, the Knight told stories of Andrew’s mother and his travels.

Finally they made it to Duskhall, a large city with a castle atop a hill. It was surrounded by a large field with a forest going South. The flags stood high, their symbol a white sunset on a field of crimson. People immediately cried and ran in fear. Guards shot arrows and rushed civilians away. The gates to the castle closed as they landed. Two large, oak double doors with a metal gate blocked the entrance. The Dragon used his claw and slid it directly in the middle of the gate. It crashed down and opened up to the large hall of the king. There was long table lined with chairs and silverware. To the sides were fires and two halls leading to other areas. At the end was the King, holding a gold goblet of white wine. The hall was filled with guards, maids, butlers, and others of royal blood or fortune. The King wore a red outfit lined with white symbols and gold. His cape was purple with white fur and lined with more gold. His crown was silver, decorated with orange garnets and a gem with the colors of the sun. The King dropped his goblet and his jaw; his face flushed red.

“What? YOU!!! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE!?! I BANISHED YOU!!! YOU’RE THE REASON MY SON IS DEAD!! WHY MY WIFE IS GONE!!!” The King would’ve spoken more, yet the Dragon spoke up.

“You’re the reason this child has been beaten, mistreated, and starved, without a home and a mother. You have ruined this child’s life; why? Your Hatred—you put the blame on this Knight

here—did you even find who really killed your son?” The King was infuriated by the Dragon’s words, and slammed a sword onto the Dragon’s head. The blade was thin and had a ruby in the middle of the hilt. The blade broke in a shower of sparks on the Dragon’s horns. The King looked shocked, then fell to his knees and sobbed.

Andrew walked up to the king and asked, “What’s wrong, sir?”

The King responded, “You never could understand, boy...I can never get my son back...” Then Andrew leaned next to the King and said, “I can never have my mom back...”

Everyone stood in silence, until the Knight stepped forward. “My lord...our Prince is still here, and so is my wife. They will always be here, no matter what.”

The King looked up at the Knight. “Thank you,” he said, “You are welcome back into my kingdom, you may keep your home...you are no curse...I am. I’m sorry...I’m so sorry...” The Knight thanked the King, and everything returned to silence.

The Dragon spoke up: “I believe you have a Kingdom to run...let’s go.”

The Dragon stayed as the King spoke personally to every citizen in the city and told them of the Knight and Andrew. The sun began to set, and the stars and moon lifted over the horizon. The Dragon was ready to leave, only to be interrupted by Andrew.

“Leaving already?” asked Andrew.

The Dragon cocked his head, “I kept my promise, did I not?”

Andrew looked down, “I just...I don’t want you to go, I don’t even know your name...”

The Dragon answered, “I...I don’t have a name...”

Andrew looked up and said, “Can I call you...Onyx?”

The Dragon turned his head to the side. “How do you know about On-” The Dragon stopped speaking when the Knight came with a large chain of Onyx; it held a large sapphire orb.

The Knight said, “I have something to tell you...” The Dragon sat and waited for the Knight to explain.

“When I was removed from the Kingdom, I had no way of earning money. So I went to a Witch, and she gave me a recipe for my sword. A Dragon’s hide can’t be pierced, but its veins may be poisoned. The poison was called ‘Dragon’s Gift’ and it kills Dragons fairly quickly. I chased two Dragons, each with scales like yours. I managed to kill one in the cave, but the other flew away. Dragon scales go for a high price, and their eyes an even higher price. One I sold away, the other I kept. I’d...I would like to thank you for bringing my life back, at least most of it...anyway, I made this for you.” He wrapped the Onyx chains around the Dragon’s neck.

Andrew hugged the Dragon and sobbed, “Please...don’t go.” The Dragon leaned down his head and whispered, “Thank you...Goodbye, Andrew.” The Dragon unfurled his wings and took off. Andrew and others waved goodbye.

The Dragon flew North, back to the Mountain range where he’d found the boy’s father. The Dragon stood before the Cave. Water streamed out of it slowly. The Dragon had chills down his spine. The cave echoed with the sound of flowing water. The Dragon walked into the Cave slowly, then froze. There was a Dragon skeleton in the middle of the area. Light cracked from the ceiling, the water streamed from deeper within the cave and surrounded the skeleton. White roses surrounded the skeleton; they looked like small flames. The Dragon crept closer to the dragon’s skull. He matched the Sapphire with the eye socket of the skull. It seemed to fit perfectly. The Dragon looked at his reflection in the water; his eyes...were the same color. Then he realized

something...it was his mother. The Dragon nuzzled the skull and broke into tears. After a while the Dragon stopped; he was now furious. He breathed fire everywhere; water turned to steam all around him. He clawed and scraped the ground, crashing through stalactites and stalagmites. Then he looked at the roses—they were on fire now. The Dragon, in desperation, shoved dirt and water at the roses...but it was too late. They were all ruined—all but one.

The last rose shined brighter than a star, a blue essence circled around it. It was untouched by the Elements...and the Dragon cried more. He felt furious at the Knight and charged to the exit of the cave...then thought of Andrew. He remembered how Andrew had no mother. The Dragon imagined the look on Andrew's face if the Knight died. Andrew had nobody but the Knight...and vengeance wasn't the right choice. The Dragon turned back to the rose, and ate it.

The Dragon walked out of the cave and looked at the night sky. The stars and moon shined brighter than ever, along with more streams of color that rushed across the sky. The Dragon thought to himself, *I will always have a part of my mother with me...but my father...* the Dragon understood what his mother was now...a fertilizer for the roses to grow. But the Dragon also knew his father was still out there. He flew high into the sky, over the mountains, to lands beyond imagination and dreams. His wet face was radiant in the starlight. The Sapphire Eye twinkled a little. As he flew he whispered, "I will find you, Father...no matter what..." and flew into the unknown and dark lands beyond.

Johnny Tsoi

A Harmony of Silent Screams

Rage and sadness becomes fear.
When fear is in the air,
The sky,
The sky feels like it's mixing
Together with the clouds, sun and then crashing down—
I scream

High pitched voices mix,
Like a harmony of fear
A choir of screams.
When one starts it's like a chain effect
One, two, then three, a siren of danger—
We scream

In the midst of fear,
We can feel
The world is crumbling
Like a nightmare come to life,
But this is already our world:
A harmony of silent screams.

Braden Van Hoy

Undoing

One day I was walking down the street and I saw a cat on the sidewalk. I walked over to it and it meowed at me. I grabbed it off the ground and put it in my hoodie. The next thing I know I am home.

Eno yad I saw gniklaw nwod eht teerts dna I was a tac no eht klawedis. I declaw revo ot ti dna ti dewoem ta em. I deb barg ti ffo eht dnuorg dna tup ti ni ym eidooh. Eht txen gniht I wonk I ma emoh.

MATT MORTON'S STUDENTS

Sixth & Seventh Period

Jose Arias

Family

Adrian is my oldest brother,
But now he lives in Mexico,
Consequences he has been dealin',
Discussions he has been having.
Ecatepec, Mexico, is the place where he now lives,
Feeling anxious just thinking about where he is at,
Giving trust to someone who would be fine until the next day he is deported,
Heading towards the department center for the last time I could see him.
Ima throw a tantrum,
Just feeling flabbergasted about how one day is a dream, the other day is a nightmare.
My mind is exhausted with all of this nostalgia,
Only parents are adamantly not going to change your mind.
Dear family,
I'm so sorry that I've been distant.
Everything changed in an instant,
My time has been inconsistent,
I know you have been insisting.

Ruairi Ayre

My Time at Tybee Island

During the fall of 2019, my family and I went on an overnight vacation to Tybee Island. We drove about five hours away from home to a small, sailor-themed Airbnb with squeaky floors and water that smelled like sulfur. The house was located in an alley, and was perfectly aligned with the other small houses that were there.

The Airbnb was right next to a large historical area which I think used to be a confederate fort, which we walked through once. It was now nothing more than some fountains and hedges that were attached to a graveyard that we had to walk through to get back to our house.

The next day, we drove thirty minutes away to the beach that bordered the Atlantic Ocean. The water was very muddy and I couldn't see my feet when I waded in it. It was almost winter, but it was still a super-hot day and I ended up getting an awful sunburn.

After an hour or so of being in the water, the waves started to get bigger and bigger. It was fun to try and jump over them, so that was what I was doing when my ankle started burning and stinging. I hobbled to shore and realized that the waves must've washed a jellyfish up, and it had stung me.

After a while of telling myself that I was about to die, and trying to think of some last words that wouldn't make me sound like an idiot, the pain slowly went away. For a while then, I sat around in our tiny, dirty lounge chairs that we had to pay thirty dollars to rent for the day and did nothing but eat chips and watch the waves.

Alas, we ran out of chips, and I went back to the salty seawater, where I would soon meet my demise. The waves had gotten much, much larger, and I believe they were what you would call a riptide. I went back to trying to swim over them, when my brother told me that it's much more fun to dive under them.

"Really?" I asked him. He nodded, but I had my doubts. Just then, the next large wave came, and without thinking, I tried to swim underneath it. It knocked me off my feet, and I completely lost my sense of direction. I started to swim towards what I hoped was the surface, when another wave went over my head and knocked me down all over again. I was really running out of air, since I couldn't hold my breath for more than seven seconds and at least twenty had passed. I tried to swim upwards, but I instead swam to the side. Finally, I got my head out of the water so I could breathe just before the next wave came. Luckily, that one pushed me towards the beach, and I again retreated to our overpriced lounge chairs, where I found a bottle of water and a package of Nutter Butter cookies.

Once we got back to our strange, sailor-themed Airbnb, I made popcorn and we watched some movie about a giant monkey destroying stuff—my Dad's favorite genre. I can't remember completely what happened the next day, but we didn't go back to the beach, so how important could it have actually been? There was a lot less food, and there was no chance of seeing any brainless creatures that looked like plastic bags.

To sum up my experience of Tybee Island, I would call it an overpriced, salty adventure including many dangerous experiences that I can't wait to do again.

Isabel Banks

[Untitled]

Today was a long day.

I was shopping for half an hour for things I needed while my husband was waiting in rage.

I was honestly scared to go home and wanted to stay out as long as I could because I knew that I would have to go home sometime soon.

He was drunk again.

My oldest son was on his computer away from his father while my youngest son was out with me.

It was only Wednesday and I was still tired of life.

"Mom, are you alright?"

My son asked me once we went into the car.

"It doesn't matter Gilberto, everything is alright."

"But you have been crying at work. I am worried."

"Is it dad?"

"Gilberto, why were you awake last night? Why were you listening?"

"Forget it, I don't want you to cry. It's not your fault."

I lied.

Maddie Boardman

Eggplant Parmesan

Eggplant parmesan is something of an exotic meal to me, maybe not to some, but to me it is a delicacy that I've only been able to have the pleasure of eating once. In fact, when I first learned that eggplant parmesan even existed was at my favorite Italian restaurant, Luigi's. I was looking through the menu, though I already knew what I wanted, and asked my dad, "What the heck is eggplant parmesan?" My dad explained and I dismissed it naively, because who eats eggplant right?

But then, as it happens every few times a month, my father stuffed our family into his Mazda car, with only a few snacks from QuikTrip to keep us nourished, then we set out for Fort Worth. We were going to see my grandma, Mimi as we call her, who is a great baker and somewhat of a chef herself, but it's really my uncle who can cook. Even from my earliest memories, I can remember loving my uncle's food. I never really understood, but his cooking has brought us closer as a family.

My dad's side of the family comes from a Polish-Jewish background, and with some family experiences I do not know, my uncle adapted to the ways of being an Orthodox Jew. My dad is much more laid-back about religion, and while I believe we should be more religious, I appreciate that it's not shoved down mine and my brother's throats. My uncle and my father love each other, but disagree on multiple things. One of those things is politics, which has always been known as a relationship breaker.

But no, my dad's family sticks together. Sure there's a passive-aggressive argument here and there, but we always have each other's backs. If my uncle needs my dad's help fixing his oven, my dad's there for him. I believe my uncle's food ties up our family with a big, shiny, red nylon ribbon.

My family gathers around the most middle class looking house you'll ever see. My dad knocks on the door and I look up at the mezuzah on the doorway. My grandmother is there to greet us, her almost white-blond hair tied up messily and her shaky arms reaching out to greet us.

As soon as I enter the doorway, the delicious smell of pasta fills my nostrils, and I cartoonishly follow the smell and wander into the kitchen. The table is set up with plastic-ware, as my uncle must keep kosher. My uncle waves me out of the kitchen and my family settles in the living room. My grandmother asks us the most basic questions that seem to appear when talking to adults, "How's school going?" "Your grades are high, right?" "Anything new happen?"

Me and my brother answer the questions, and we all just enjoy being together for a little bit. I think of my mom's side of the family, and how big it is, and how many people I haven't seen since I was an actual toddler.

That's when my uncle says it's ready, we all file into the kitchen and sit down at the circular table. I'm ready to shove whatever smells this good into my mouth until my uncle reveals the meal. *Eggplant Parmesan*. "Eggplant parmesan?" I say with my most polite smile. "Just try it!" my dad insists. "You won't know if you like it until you try it." I hesitate. Eggplant? Who eats eggplant?! For a split second, I imagine myself declining and retreating to the salad for my meal. But I breathe in deep and slap a big piece of Eggplant Parmesan onto my plastic plate. I pick up my utensils, and cut the crunchy slab of eggplant into two. The heat rises and I take a bite. The crunchy yet soft and warm textures fill my mouth.

I chew, giving no indication of my opinion on the substance, and my family stops watching once I cut another piece.

The family is chatting and I'm snarfing down Eggplant Parmesan, and life is peaceful for a while.

Alanis Caraballo

No Good

Popcorn, I have heard many good things about you but I don't agree. People say you are this crunchy, salty, buttery, flavorful food. I agree that you can be all of what people say except for flavorful. I found this out by the first time I ate you at my cousin's 4th birthday when I was like 5 or 6... you were so bland and flavorless! So ever since, I never eat plain popcorn if I eat you, you always need to have a flavor like salsa or caramel, etc. Even though you have all these flavors to be added on you, by yourself you taste gross. I don't even understand how you were made, and that kind of scares me. You begin as just a piece of dried corn but then with a little bit of heat you pop and become this ball of edible white food. You can easily cover up your blandness with flavors, but that just hides your flavorless insecurities.

Popcorn, we have you in the movies but I always ask for extra butter and salt just to add at least a little flavor. I don't know how but my sister loves you plain or flavorful—as a matter of fact almost everyone in my fam loves you. Every time I see you in my sister's hand in the movie theater, doubt comes to my mind over if you really are that bad, so I try you again just to make sure but just as I thought you aren't good. I guess I'll just never really like you but you don't need to hide yourself with the fake flavors just because I don't like you.

Popcorn, I buy you in carnivals just because everyone in my fam does and I don't want to be the odd one out even though I barely even finish the bag. You kind of taste like old, unsweetened cake, which in this case doesn't taste good at all. I kind of feel bad saying this about you even though you have no feelings. I just don't like saying bad things about something, even if it doesn't know about it and never will. But yeah, anyways, I just want you to know that you have many followers but I'm just not one of them.

Audrey Decker

Time

Tik Tok
Time
Tik Tok
Is it real
Tik Tok
What if it stopped
Tik tok
Would we even realize
Tik Tok
Would we just go about our day
Tik Tok
Feeling like time just never goes
Tik Tok
Isn't that normal
Tik Tok
On a rough day
Tik Tok
Time
Tik Tok

Fear

The fear of most
The fear of least
The urge to run and hide
The urge to fight
Not many want to admit it
But your fears they find you
Whether
Snakes
Bugs
The dark
Death
They all define someone.

Cannon Delosantos

Dreamer

4 a.m. on a chilly Monday morning. Bo's alarm sounds telling him it's time to get ready for the day. After getting dressed he throws a piece of toast into the toaster and goes to brush his teeth. By the time he's done, so is the toast and he can finally start his day with a soft piece of buttered toast. At 4:15 Bo has packed his bag with his Walmart brand basketball shoes, 2 water bottles, a granola bar and his homework from the day before. At 4:17 Bo has left his house and is on the way to the gym to put some shots up before school.

During school all Bo can think about is the nasty crossover that took him days to perfect. He thinks about using his moves, making even the best of the best fall flat on their butt. The only people that ever talk to Bo are the teachers. Most days he goes unnoticed like a slight breeze on a warm summer day. Bo avoids everyday conversation fearing he might make a bond with someone and then push them away.

After school Bo heads back to the gym to play pick-up games with the big dogs. As always he barely gets to run with a squad. He puts shots up between plays until somebody needs a break. After two games or so Bo is back on the sideline putting up shots until sunset, which is when he leaves the almost abandoned gym to go home to his aunt who should be getting home from her first job for the day.

When Bo gets home his aunt is already in the kitchen making a meal for the both of them. Like always this meal will consist of porridge, a piece of bread, a glass of water and some corn. Other than the piece of toast he ate for breakfast and a granola bar, this will be the only thing Bo can afford to eat for the day. Most nights, like that night, Bo goes to sleep hungry after leaving some food for his aunt for when she gets home at one in the morning from her second job.

Almost every day starts and ends like this for Bo. He was abandoned by his parents when he was a baby and has lived with his aunt ever since. His aunt works two jobs to take care of the two of them and only gets three hours of sleep. Every day Bo practices basketball harder than the day before so he can go pro. He's tired of going to sleep every night knowing his aunt gave up her life to take care of him. He wants to give her the life she deserves. He wants her to be able to eat a nice dinner and wake up the next morning feeling refreshed.

The next day started like any other. He went through his everyday routine and goes to school without a worry in mind. Just like always Bo was non-stop thinking about basketball going unbothered with nobody paying even a drop of attention to him. Everything was normal, until 5th period rolled around.

During Bo's 5th period math class, they were doing their warm up, dreading the lesson on something that would never come in handy. That's when the counselor walked in with what had seemed to be a new student. The girl had been wearing a baby blue shirt that matched perfectly with her denim jacket with fur around the collar. She was wearing blue jeans with rips near the knees and fresh new white kicks. Her wavy brown hair with lighter tips shined in the reflection of the sun through the window. All the boys stopped and stared as she walked to the front of the class.

After warm up, the teacher introduced her to the class. Her name was Gabby. Today was her first day at a public school after moving here from North Carolina. She was stunning. Bo knew she was out of his league, but he wanted to talk to her so bad. 5th period was his only class with her. Bo went through the day without thinking about basketball once. Every thought he had was of her. No matter how badly he didn't want to think about her, he couldn't stop.

He skipped the gym that night so he could just go to sleep early. This is how he always deals with his problems. When he's awake all he does is think. Nobody to talk to or call about his issues. No friends or even parents. Bo has nobody at all.

Bo wakes up that day but doesn't go through his routine. He just wakes up gets dressed, eats a granola bar and heads off to school. He skips the gym that day, and the next day, and the next day until the end of the week.

A week after Gabby showed up things went back to normal. Bo woke up at his normal time, went to the gym and thought about basketball day in and day out. Bo finally learned to accept the fact that he can't, and won't ever be able to talk to Gabby. He has learned that girls are a waste of time and people need time to focus on themselves and their dreams.

Bo's tired of being the quiet kid. He's tired of being the kid that nobody talks to or calls when they're bored. Tired of being the kid that has no friends. He wants friends. Friends that will be by his side when he needs them most. Friends that will be with him no matter what. Friends that will be there when he makes it. When his dreams come true. When he goes to a D-1 school and goes pro. When he finally gives his aunt the life she deserves. The life that she wants.

Right now Bo is that kid, but one day he will have people to call when he needs them most. But he knows that one day his parents will see him on TV and regret leaving him in poverty, not caring at all about their own kid. They'll see, he'll prove everyone who ever doubted him wrong.

Milo Kaplan

Dave Bellagio

The funicular ride down the mountain seemed longer than ever. Dave walked into the coffee shop and ordered the usual: a cappuccino with skim milk and a toasted and buttered English muffin. He checked the time on the old mahogany grandfather clock in the corner of the dilapidated shop. *Good*, he thought to himself. He was right on schedule. He had packed the night before and was antsy to leave. A few minutes later, he thanked the gruff woman behind the counter and called his Lyft to the airport. He checked in with ease, and the flight was smooth. He applauded as the plane touched down. While strolling through LaGuardia, as always, he loved hearing the soothing female voice over the loudspeaker, telling him not to leave his bags unattended or that if he sees something off, to alert a security officer immediately.

...

Dave had started avidly collecting Communist memorabilia after his dad left him when he was eleven. His dad had testified against the South Dakota mob and no longer felt safe living in North Dakota, so he entered the Witness Protection Program and moved away. As a going-away-forever gift, his dad gave him his first piece of memorabilia, a Stalin bobblehead. Dave was obsessed ever since. Posters, movies, and books, art, sculptures, and propaganda—the whole shebang.

He had traveled all around Russia and former Soviet countries. So many flights. So many “chicken or pastas.” So much jet lag. So many sketchy motels. So much time, all gone—wasted.

...

Dave checked in at his hotel under a pseudonym, Tyler Bradbury. He unpacked his stuff then went on a walk around a park. Although he was in New York to try to find his dad, he was in awe of the park’s beauty. The curving red delicious apple trees formed a gorgeous arch over the old cobblestone path. The apples, a deep shade of red, made Dave ecstatic. The soft grass, varying in beautiful shades of green, made him want to take off his shoes and socks and lightly step on the grass. He felt like a little kid.

But he wasn’t. Dave was here to do work, not to stop and smell the flowers. The next day, he went to Times Square. He looked up and saw an ad for Snickers. Immediately after seeing it, his stomach grumbled. *Wow*, he thought, *the power of marketing!*

He swirled around to get the lay of the land. When he saw a man playing a black lacquer tenor saxophone, he strode toward him. The man, dressed in a grizzly-bear-brown button-down shirt, tucked into blue, khaki pants, was playing a jazz medley. Dave made eye contact through the man’s sunglasses, and the man began to play some Coltrane. Dave’s eyes widened. It was an impossible coincidence. They couldn’t know, though. After all, he was just a street performer.

A twirl around revealed a falafel stand about thirty feet away. The delicious smell overwhelmed him. He hadn't had the delightful chickpea balls in years, and after seeing the Snickers sign, he was hungry. *Damn it, Dave*, he muttered under his breath. *Pull yourself together.*

A man in an off-puttingly bright Elmo suit approached him.

"Would you like a photo?" Elmo asked.

"The donkey flies at midnight."

"Good. I thought it was you."

Elmo removed his head to reveal himself.

It was Bertrand O'Desky, a peaceful Irishman who got into the investigation business when he found a neighbor's missing dog. He was a small guy, but his presence was huge. He was the kind of man who always chose cinnamon flavor at the dentist's office. His short red hair was forever neatly trimmed in a bowl haircut. He wore beige suits with thick, long, dark-red ties. He cared about the environment and denied plastic straws at restaurants. He always worked alone.

"I brought you something," Bertrand said, excitedly.

"Really?"

Bertrand nodded. "I found it at a garage sale. I'm not sure how it ended up there."

From a furry pocket in his Elmo suit, Bertrand revealed a bottle of fine 1972 North Dakota wine. Dave was flabbergasted, and he, a man who usually shows little emotion, began jumping up and down on the sidewalk. Being in New York, nobody turned a head.

As long as Dave could remember, he had been into wine. In fact, it was almost as important to him as collecting Communist memorabilia. Dave has a particular obsession with wines from North Dakota. Their rich taste filled with hints of plum, their pleasant caramelly aftertaste, and their chunky and leathery texture that invigorates the tongue. He had amassed a collection of somewhere around 350 bottles that he keeps underneath his bed in a silver storage case.

"Do you want to start tomorrow?" Dave inquired.

"Meet me in my office. Then our search begins."

...

Dave had discovered Bertrand at a wine tasting in Napa Valley, California, in 1994. Dave remembered it vividly. The sun shined beautifully through the massive windows, creating rays of light that made the bowls of assorted grapes sitting on the tables look like gifts from the Heavens. The sky was bright with a few wispy white clouds. He recalled the perfectly even rows and the vibrant green grapevines like it was yesterday.

Once they had introduced themselves and sipped some wine, Bertrand was quick to present himself as a private investigator. Bertrand knew that the affluent crowd who showed up to the samplings often wanted gossip about one of their other wealthy peers. One time, he had found out that Bill Gates's assistant was bad-mouthing Warren Buffet by installing microphones disguised as rocks in the Trader Joe's parking lot.

Dave blatantly put out that he was interested in finding his dad, who had disappeared into the Witness Protection Program, and he had lost all correspondence with because he simply didn't have his address. Bertrand said that he would be delighted to take up the case. A week after their conversation, Bertrand emailed Dave, telling him to meet him in New York; he had done some

surveillance and combed through old documents and archives. Also, he might have Dave's dad's new name figured out.

...

Back in New York, Dave quickly ate his complimentary continental breakfast and hailed a cab. He handed the driver the address that Bertrand had given him last night, smelled the cigarettes ingrained into the seats, and stared out the window for the remainder of the ride, looking at the tall buildings. He was in awe of their height. *Nothing like North Dakota*, he thought.

He strolled into the generic office building and got in the elevator.

"Floor three, please."

The elevator doors opened, and Dave walked down the long, dank hallway and double-checked the note from Bertrand. Suite 308. *This should be it*, Dave thought.

He pushed open the door and saw a small, dull, dreary lobby filled with trinkets from Machu Picchu, cinnamon candles, and old colorful party napkins. It smelled like heavily spiced apple cider and a scratchy James Bond Goldfinger movie soundtrack played in the background. On the floor was a coffee-stained green shag carpet, and on top of it rested two gray cushy armchairs. The walls had reprinted European Art Deco movie posters with ornate black frames. There was an unfilled receptionist's desk with a dusty lamp lying on a pile of some classic novels. An old computer that desperately needed to be replaced was in a cardboard box with old magazines, newspapers, and files. Behind it, a wooden door with a "Bertrand O'Desky" plaque in gold lettering was slightly ajar.

Dave tentatively called out, "Bertrand, are you in there?"

Dave heard the rustling of papers, the shutting of a laptop, and then Bertrand appeared dressed in one of his signature beige suits standing in the doorway.

"Sorry I'm late," Bertrand said. "Let's get going!"

...

All the guests had left, and it was just eight-year-old Dave and his dad listening to music on the porch. The sun had just set, and the stars were out. The hotdogs had been devoured, and the sodas chugged. The cornhole had been played, and the horseshoes had been thrown. Dave's dad tapped his foot to the smooth John Coltrane and began to talk.

"Did you have fun?"

Dave stared at the moon

"David?"

"Sorry, yeah?"

"Did you have fun?" His dad repeated.

"Uh-huh."

"What do you want to be when you grow up?"

Dave sipped his soda and thought for a while.

"I'm not sure. Maybe a truck driver." Dave just wanted to get out.

His dad seemed disappointed, "Are you sure you don't want to do what I do?"

"I don't know, Dad."

“I mean, it’s pretty fun. It might not seem fun being an accountant, but you’re pretty good at math, right?”

“I guess.”

Dave’s dad jokingly punched him in the shoulder and went on. “You get to use a calculator, work in an office, file papers, have employee benefits...” His voice trailed off when he realized Dave was looking out at the moon again. He was actually listening, but all of it was going over his head—after all, he was only eight.

“Dad?”

“Yes, David?”

“How far away is the moon?”

“I’m not sure. It seems pretty far, though.”

“How long does it take to get there?”

“I think a week.” His dad said, unsure of himself.

“How much does a spaceship cost?”

“A lot of money. Why do you ask?”

“No reason,” was Dave’s reply.

...

Dave and Bertrand hopped onto the subway and grabbed a pole in the packed car. Dave looked down at his pants. He had gotten them just for today. Someone was drinking coffee without a lid right behind him, and Dave didn’t want his pants to get ruined. He tried to move around with no success. He tried to mumble his way away but just got dirty looks, and the man with the coffee grumbled and had a scowl on his face. As the train slowed down, the man stood up to leave. The train jerked to a stop. Dave could almost see it in slow motion: the man’s eyes widening, the cup tipping, and the coffee spilling on Dave’s pants. At least it was iced.

...

Bertrand strode confidently with Dave following behind him into the grocery store. Bertrand guessed that Dave’s dad, Charles, worked here. After wandering through the rows of over-ripe fruits, they went up to the customer service desk and inquired.

“Excuse me,” Bertrand began warily. “Does a Mr. Charles Bell work here?”

The middle-aged woman at the desk appeared perplexed. “Charles Bell?” She confirmed.

“Yes.”

“Well, let me check here.” The woman scrolled on her computer for what seemed like ages and stopped. “Ah yes. It seems like he worked here many years ago.”

“Damn it,” said Dave, clearly disappointed.

“Would you like a new pair of pants, hon?” The woman asked Dave, eyeing his wet pants.

“No. Thank you, though.”

They thanked the woman and left the store.

“Don’t worry,” Bertrand said. “I expected that. Luckily, we’re by another place where we might have some more luck.”

They got onto a bus—less crowded than the subway—and rode it for a couple stops. They got off, tipped the driver, and walked for a block. While walking on the uneven, cracked sidewalk, they passed some (what Dave assumed to be) typical New Yorkers. A professional man, sharply dressed and sporting an expensive watch, walked with a sense of purpose while cradling a miniature poodle in a pink fringe dress; a woman in a donkey suit played classical trumpet; a man with a pink and green mohawk was wearing a Spiderman one-piece bathing suit; and last but certainly not least, a woman in an old, creepy clown costume ate a Big Mac and discussed the cyber-security of her business between bites.

Dave and Bertrand soon arrived at an old law firm. The rundown “Carter Law Firm” sign had cobwebs coming off of it. As they walked in, there was a musty smell. This time Dave went up to the office.

“Hello? Is there anyone there?”

“It depends. Do you have an appointment?” the voice behind the door asked.

At this point, Bertrand intervened, “Yes.”

“Okay then, come on in.”

Bertrand and Dave stepped into the mysterious man’s informal office space. There were two purple chairs, seemingly meant for toddlers and a white desk.

“Alden Carter, Attorney-at-Law. How may I help you two gentlemen?” the mysterious man, apparently named Alden asked.

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Carter,” Bertrand started. “Do you know a certain Charles Bell?”

“My dear old friend Charles, yes. How did you know him?”

Bertrand looked over at Dave and smiled. “You see, my client here, Dave Bellagrio, lost his dad when he was eight and—I don’t want to speak for you—but he’s looking for him here in New York.”

“Well, I never knew he had any children, but I suppose it could be.”

“Anyway,” Dave said. “We were wondering where we could find him.”

“Charles?” Mr. Carter confirmed.

“Yes.”

“Well, you can’t be serious. Are you?”

“What do you mean by that?” Dave said, worried.

Mr. Carter handed Dave a newspaper from 1994 flipped to the obituaries.

“What do you want me to do with this, sir?”

“I’m so sorry that I have to be the one to tell you.”

Dave’s breath shortened and suddenly, he was back on the porch, playing cornhole and throwing horseshoes, listening to John Coltrane, and asking about the moon. He was playing cards and asking about homework, watching James Bond together after he got his tonsils removed and eating ice cream. Dave was getting the Stalin bobblehead and saying goodbye through tears. He was trudging through blinding snow in Russia and eating borscht, buying propaganda posters. He was watching the Soviet flag being lowered for the last time and being replaced by the Russian flag. He was watching Gorbachev resign. Dave was bidding for North Dakota wine and raising his paddle at Sotheby’s. He was reaching out to Bertrand O’Desky and meeting him in New York. He was going on the subway and watching his beloved pants get ruined. He was walking in the grocery store. He

was seeing the eccentric people on the street. He was walking into this law office. He was talking to a Mr. Carter. He was handed a newspaper.

“He was a good man,” Mr. Carter finished.

“Are you sure?” Dave said, pointing at the picture of his dad through glassy eyes.

Now Mr. Carter was teary.

“Yep.”

...

Dave called his Lyft to the airport. He checked into his flight with trouble, and the flight was rough. Dave remained silent as the plane bounced down on the runway and got his travel bag out of the overhead compartment. While walking through the airport, he ignored the irritating female voice over the loudspeaker, telling him not to leave his bags unattended or that if he sees something off, to alert a security officer immediately.

He got his car and drove to the mountain. He rode the funicular up the mountain, walked into his house, opened his door, and sat down on his bed. He cracked open the bottle of wine that Bertrand had given him and poured himself a glass. He turned on a John Coltrane record, *Blue Train*, drank, listened, and thoughts rushed through his head.

Why didn't I find him sooner? I miss his tedious voice and our boring conversations. The thought of them was like an anchor. A way for me to relax and get collected. They were my driving force. I might have been able to hear them again. It's all my fault, isn't it? I didn't try to reach out to him. I didn't ask anyone. Maybe I should become an accountant. I wanted to show him my wine collection, damn it. Man, I'm scared. I'm frightened. How could he be so calm? I wish I was more like him. I'm just all over the place. How much does a spaceship cost? He was dull and predictable, yet calm, collected, and easy. It's unfair. He was right to testify against the mob. I wish I could have said goodbye. God, I don't like this.

Lila Kernan

Escapism

I set my paper towels down and place my canvas on top so as to not get paint on the table, although I always manage to anyway. I put my earbuds in and press play on a song by one of my favorite bands, The Scary Jokes.

The sun shines through the window and the glass door of the kitchen, making the water in my cup glisten. The glass door behind me leads to my backyard that has many trees for animals to take shelter in. There is a shelf on the right of where I sit with cookbooks my mom has collected. The left is the other area of the kitchen, where all of the food is stored. There is the pantry, the counter, the sink, the coffee maker, and a window above where the sink rests. The table I put the canvas on has things scattered everywhere on it, except for the area I cleared off.

I squeeze the paint directly onto the canvas instead of putting it on a pallet. I begin spreading the paint around with the brush, not yet knowing what I'm going to make. I squeeze more colors onto the canvas. I blend the colors together and start to get a sense of what I'm creating.

As I paint I forget about all the times I've been anxious, all the times I felt judged, all the times I've been embarrassed. All the times I would walk through the hall feeling like everyone was staring at me, judging me. I feel all of those memories melt away. I'm anxious almost always, but not here, not now. Here, I'm tranquil.

Ella Magee

Sky Cymbals

The slightest brush
of serrated edges

A whisper of a touch
And the air lights up with music

Like a pine-fresh ocean
far inland

With every twist and turn
sending a wisp of green
cascading
to the ground

With every gust
the ensemble roars
then fades
then comes back never stronger

Limbs bounce
and
trunks creak

And through all the wear
they stay rooted to the spot

But

Their will is only so strong

The cold sets in
and the gust that usually brings much joy

brings them down

The cymbals sigh
exhausted from their journey

They will have one last triumph as they fall
blazing red and gold

And one last piece
as they fall
like music to my ears

Samuel Peecksen

Scream

—after “*The Scream*” by Edvard Munch

An ordinary bridge
An ordinary lake
An ordinary human
But . . .
Not so ordinary at the same time
Their world liquefying before them
Their sky intertwined with the sun
The civilians are aghast
As they let out a blood curdling scream
Their hands fit their faces as if they had been there for years
Their disturbed faces don't even sum up the fear
I don't want to be here

Javier Reyes

Worst Decision

“No no no,” I frantically yell as I run to school. I’m supposed to be there by 8:45, but I woke up at 8:40, so if I walk, I can get there by 8:49, but if I run I can be there earlier. So I put on a red t-shirt, jeans, and my Legend of Zelda hoodie (because it’s really cold), and I start bolting to school. I finally arrive, it’s 8:48, my calculations appear to have been incorrect, I think to myself as I walk into gym class, and instead of people running and doing athletic stuff, I see everybody in a huge crowd surrounding someone, and that someone is a giant dolphin doing the worm. Oh yeah, there is a basketball game tonight. Why was there a giant dolphin costume? Because I attend Waterfront high. As for who was in the costume? My best friend, Jason Reynolds. He signed up as a joke. The only other person to sign up for mascot was Flash Carter, but since he was on the football team they said no, so nobody else could get the position. As I walk in, Jason spots me and yells, “Coach Rogers, Barkly is late again.” Then coach replies with, “Barkly, that’s a detention.” Now we had detention together. He never bothered me in that way. We met in first grade. For the first semester, we never really talked, even though we sat at the same table. Then there was a new kid. New kid made everyone laugh and get along with each other. Then he left, but me and Jason were still friends after. Why do we snitch on each other? For the LOLs and stuff.

When the end of the day rolls around, Jason and I start heading to detention. Let me just say, detention at my school is hell. You sit there and do nothing for 45 minutes straight. That means no talking, no putting your head down, and the only things you can do are homework and sit there, staring off into nothingness, thinking about whether or not you are the bad friend. So I arrive and, halfway through, the teacher in charge of us leaves. Then out of nowhere, Flash pops into class and yells, “Hey Jason, you’re dead meat,” then immediately after gets in trouble for disruption. On the walk home with Jason, I ask him what that thing with Flash was about, and he replies with “In Latin class, Courtney dared me to yell something random at the top of my lungs, so I yelled ‘derpy potato!’ as loud as I could. The teacher thought it was Flash, so he kept Flash from going to the basketball game, which caused them to lose. Nobody ever told the teacher who it actually was.” But as he says this, I start to hear fear in voice. Luckily, I have first and last period with him, so I can be there with him at the beginning and end of the day. Also, I’m glad his detentions are over. Oh yeah, about those, he got five days after he broke a window with a dictionary. You heard me correctly, a dictionary.

The next day, when I’m in the bathroom, over the PA system, I hear, “Cody Barkly, please report to the counselor’s office at once.” So I grab my bag and notice it’s a bit heavier. I walk there, and then the principal starts searching my backpack and nearly immediately says, “Found it.”

“So you’re the one who took the exit sign,” the counselor says.

“You don’t actually think I stole that, right? Maybe someone put it there.” They don’t care though, and I get a three day suspension, along with two more days of detention.

On the walk home, I tell Jason everything. “Courtney did that,” he calmly says.

“Oh my god, she would.”

“Even funnier, I dared her to.”

“Why in the world would you do that! They’re taking me out of AP classes, and taking away some of my college credit, because you thought it would be funny. My life is ruined! You know what, I hope Flash beats you up and puts you in the hospital for a good while.” It’s at this moment I turn around and see Jason. I see not only him, but the sense of betrayal.

Three days into my suspension, I still haven’t seen the outside, I haven’t heard from Jason, or anyone else at my school. Today’s the day I finally go outside, but not before I cry while eating some toaster waffles and a chocolate muffin, while watching some *Family Guy*. After that, I grab my bike from the garage, open the garage door, and head on out.

What’s funny about me being suspended is the fact that I just sleep for most of day, and when I am awake, I mostly just try to go back to sleep since insomnia is a b*tch. Besides, if I can’t do that, I mostly just watch TV, or mess with people in GTA, or play *Breath of the Wild*. What’s the funniest though is that I don’t care anymore. This is just the middle of the summer for me. Sure I hang out with friends during the beginning and end of summer, but during the middle I just enter a state of sadness, where I know I can’t be the funnyman. Only difference is that I’m not depressed this time. Honestly I’m probably just gonna bike to the 7-Eleven about a mile away because I could kill for Cheetos right now.

I’m about halfway down the block, when I hear grunting followed by kicking sounds. I walk up and see Flash standing over someone. But what catches my attention is a little dribble of blood on the cement, and that’s all it takes me to make the worst decision of my life. I full force tackle Flash to the ground, and hear a weary voice say, “what the—.” Flash kicks me off of him, I stumble backwards but manage to stand. I turn to my left, only to see a bloody-nosed Jason. While I’m looking at Jason, Flash punches me straight in my right cheek. I stumble backwards. He says, “Shouldn’t have done that buddy.” I get back up, only to get punched in my stomach. I clutch my stomach. Flash punches me in the jaw, only for me to counterattack, and throat punch him. It doesn’t matter as he kicks me to the ground. I mumble out, “Flash, you’re the son of a—.” A kick to the head stops me from saying anything else. “You never mess with a Carter. Now stay down, or else.” I attempt to get up, only for Flash to get on top of me and start punching me in the face. First a punch to the eye, then a couple of punches to the faces, and, to end it all off, a knee to the groin. He stands back up, picks up Jason by the shirt, and yells at him, “Teach ya to keep quiet, won’t it.”

“Ye-yes” he barely squeaks out. Flash drops him to the ground. He starts to walk off, but stops at my bike and says, “This yours?” I painfully nod my head, yes. He grabs my bike and throws it at me, barely missing my head, but while it missed me, it hits Jason. He runs off. “Why would you do that,” he mumbles out.

“I don’t know,” but in reality, I do know why I defended him.

“We should start heading somewhere, isn’t your house closer?”

“Yes, yes it is.” We both struggle to get up, but are able to. I put his arm around my shoulder, and we start limping home together.

Vincent Rigaud

Trees of Smoke

—after “*The Hunters in the Snow*” by Pieter Bruegel the Elder

I hear the barking of the loud dogs
Outside in the cold

I look out my window and see
7 men with firearms in their hands
A dozen dogs smelling the area

Trees of smoke

Everywhere

I wonder why there are so many men and dogs outside?
What are they looking for?
Then

I see them start a massive fire near

My house

As I looked through my glass window
I see

The glowing orange and red embers
The powdery gray ashes

As they move along, they forget about the fire
And
The fire starts to
Die

Down

Jacqueline Rodriguez

Big Little Feeling

—after “Christina’s World” by Andrew Wyeth

She’s here
Where she came from.
With her pale face she collapsed,
Her sight looking down.
She came for those old memories
Of her family, her old farm,
Her living life,
And her true feelings . . .
Where she lost everything,
Everything she loved, her only reason to live,
Her only opportunity...

Even though all those things hurt,
She will stand up without any excuses.
Her legs didn’t let her. It hurt so bad,
Those memories stuck in her head.
But she needs to continue with her life.
She came back for her happiness
Where she got everything,
Where she misses everything,
Where she got lost
In her own big little feeling.

Bartol Ružević

Ripples

If we were rocks I would be but a pebble
For when a rock is dropped in water it creates
A wave affecting all around it
But
When a pebble is dropped in water
It creates but a ripple insignificant compared to the
Large wave of the rock

And when I sink to the bottom of the sea and land
On the seafloor among billions of other rocks of various sizes
I will be the smallest of the rock.
The large impressive rock lies next to me and all the fish crowd
To find a new home in the rock
And I will lie never disturbed but always alone.

The Middle

Is the starry night a wonder compared to the limitedness of the Earth?
Is the blue of the Earth a wonder compared to the blackness of space?
How could man find comfort in the endless starry expanse or in the
Grasp of Mother Earth?
One should find that neither one nor the other is home.

Endless void of freedom, temptress of all.

Those who dwindle in the middle find comfort in the mother's grasp
And excitement in space's vacuum,
For they are close to both but attached to none.
What greater peace could be gained than knowing that
You are independent from both push and pull,
And that you may propel yourself whichever way you like?
You are free to roam between both,
For Earth's grasp is too weak
And space's pull too empty to affect you.

Emily Sanchez

An Unexpected Adventure

It was a day like any other, or at least it seemed to be. Jamie was in spring break and news/rumors were going around, but Jamie didn't seem to worry as much as other people (though he sometimes wondered if some of them had a brain at all, for various reasons). During the break Jamie met his old friend, and they got to know each other again. Then . . . something happened . . .

The next day Jamie woke up wearing something that seemed to be like an astronaut suit (which he decided to keep on because, y'know, why not?) but he couldn't be sure since he had just woken up and his brain was still waking up so he was having trouble processing things. He did know that something was off but couldn't quite put his finger on it. After some time he decided to look out the window and saw that he was on a different planet . . . He was here to try and colonize Mars?! "I don't remember signing up for this," he thought. He went over and over again what he did the day before to see if he could find something that he might've done that could have led up to where he was now.

After a while, Jamie realized that he hadn't done anything that could've caused this unless he was forgetting something. He went outside toward the crowd of people but spotted his friend (the one who he had reconnected with) and saw that he was with people that seemed odd (in Jamie's opinion) and were having a sort of conversation. As he got closer, he saw that they weren't humans at all. What his friend was talking to were total aliens!

A million thoughts formed in his mind, but he knew that he wasn't going to be able to answer any at the moment and so decided to let them be answered along the way. The aliens seemed harmless enough, seeing as they weren't attacking people. It just looked like a conversation between his friend and a problem whose differences stand out a bit more than usual. Anybody would think they're just odd humans and, if you think about it, they really are. Apart from the fact that they come from a different planet. He decides to give it a try, to go ahead and like them. Knowing that they weren't attacking ("yet," Jamie thought) was at least something. He gathered up courage and went to try to make them his acquaintances. If not, maybe even friends with enough time.

Walter Treviño-Morales

Life

You were born,
It all started
On that day
When there was light
When you got out of darkness.

Years pass by
And you are a grown kid
That goes to school
With all the other bros.

While your birthdays go by
You grow older through time.

Years pass by
And you are a teen,
That's the time where you know the definition
Of why you're here.
(Well kind of)

You start making major changes
That make you the person you're going to be.

Years pass by.
You are an adult,
You're on your own,
You choose the path you want to walk on.
Hopefully you graduated
Because if you didn't, then
Work, work, work,
It's what will make you bored,
Unless you did study
You would have gotten that money.
Only time will tell
If you will have a future family.

Time goes by fast,
Doesn't it?

Years pass by
And you are an old person
Getting less energy
Every year,
Every month,
Every day,
Every hour,
Every minute,
Every second,
Every . . .
It goes lower into
Every third,
Every fourth,
And so on.

Time is an endless train,
You think about it . . .
Then you notice life
Is not the same as time,
A discovery you personally made...

Up in heaven
(or down in hell)
You think
“Was it worth it...?”
You met and learned
Lots of stuff
But yet you knew that
Your time will come
And thinking about
All the “Wonderful” stuff
That there was in life.
That’s when you think
Life is really pointless.
You did everything
To be successful
And still have an end.

Life.

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