

Eagle Arts Walk

2025



Pikes Peak Christian School
March 14th, 2025

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Middle School Poetry

The Inevitable Fear

By Jonathan Whipple

Anxiety is glossy black.
It smells like vetiver.
It tastes like red wine.
It sounds like faint wall taps.
It feels like a tight cloth on your face.
It looks like a man screaming with no voice to be heard.
Anxiety is a tunnel with no light.

Everything Joyful

By Dakota Dodge

Happiness is golden-yellow.
It smells like freshly baked cookies.
It tastes like hot chocolate.
It sounds like a lullaby
It feels like soft pillows.
It looks like a full family.
Happiness is the bed you sleep in.

Sleepy Time

By: Gabriella Tomanini

*Laziness is grey.
It smells like stinky cheese.
It tastes like rotten milk on a warm summer day.
It sounds like a alarm that won't go off
It feels like an old blanket
It looks like a crowded room*

Shadow of Desire

By Sophie Serrien

Envy is green.
It smells like sour apples.
It tastes like a lemon left in the sun.
It sounds like a snake's quiet hiss.
It feels like a burning heart.
It looks like a shadow stretching long.
Envy is a cage around my heart.

Articulate Anxiety

By Jaden Blanchard

Anxiety is electric blue.
It smells like multiple candles burning.
It tastes like coffee grounds.
It sounds like T.V. static.
It feels like walls caving in and suffocating you.
It looks like a cat in a room of dogs.
Anxiety is a matryoshka doll.

Curiosity in a Nutshell

By SJ Thompson

Curiosity is neon blue.
It smells like cookies straight out of the oven.
It tastes like spicy chicken.
It sounds like rock music.
It feels like a soft pillow.
It looks like a monkey getting into a bag of tool.
Curiosity is a key to the door of a fantasy world.

Dew with the Owl

By: Taylor Stoltzfus

When dew comes at night,
The owl all awakening,
Hooting in silence.

Glacier Night

By: Taylor Stoltzfus

In the glacier night,
All hope was lost out of sight,
For those in the ice.

Ocean night

By Eva Lizarraga

Ocean so pretty,
Night and day shimmering days.
Glaring nights in sky.

Old Dark Horse of Night

By: Taylor Stoltzfus

In the forest gone,
Lived thy old dark horse of night,
So long trees and leaves.

Jungle days

By Eva Lizarraga

Vines so high on trees,
Monkeys climb to feed babies.
And swings from trees.

Coffee

By Eva Lizarraga

Coffee smells so sweet,
Mrs. Kirschman loves to drink.
Loves in the morning.

Rainy Day

By Gabe Buena

Raindrops lightly fall,
On the sidewalk puddles pool,
Clouds in the sky cry.

The Sunflower

By Anna Willen

With it's black center
And yellow petals swaying,
They sit in green grass.

Formidable Landscape

By Anna Willen

The jagged tips of
Tall mountain peaks spear the sky,
With straight, black outlines.

The Girl who Changed My Life

By Anna Willen

With long, straight, dark hair
And makeup around the eyes,
She hugs me tightly.

The Sunset

By: Brooklyn Lenn

*Above the mountain,
The sun is going down fast.
Go sleep, animals.*

River

By: Brooklyn Lenn

*Go down the river,
Find the forest on the side.
Hear the croaking frogs.*

Snowflakes

By: Brooklyn Lenn

*Snowflakes falling down.
Diamonds are so beautiful.
Tickling my nose.*

Jordan 11's

by Jeremiah Williams

These are my Jordan 11's.
They are fairly new.
They are clean,
And they are navy blue.

These are my Jordan 11's.
They are barely worn.
When I feel them, I am reborn!

These are my Jordan 11's.
They don't taste like mushu.
They are not very comfortable,
If you challenge me, I will undoubtedly
destroy you.

Trees of Memories

By Savannah D.

Trees hold memories.
Where sweet wishes lay to rest.
Until winter comes.

Tsunami

By Savannah D.

Tall and towering.
Screams and cries surrounding me.
Will this be my end?

Dragons

By Savannah D.

Eyes burning fiercely.
Blue scales rolling down your back.
Your flames seal my doom.

Cheerful Christmas Tree

By Addie Danko

This is my Christmas tree,
Always merry and bright.
It shimmers like a moon,
So shiny and light.

This is my Christmas tree,
Always smiling down
Pretty like a bride
Wearing a green gown.

This is my Christmas tree.
Its ornaments shine like stars.
You'll never need a light switch.
In the night you can see them from afar.

Trusting the One

By: Ella Hanford

David was the youngest son,
One of eight brothers.
The three oldest went to war,
But David stayed with the others.

There at the war they faced Goliath,
A giant, strong man.
The Israelites were so afraid,
The war was over before it began.

David brought food from home,
And wondered why everyone was hiding.
David knew His God was stronger,
And believed that he could do the fighting.

David grabbed his sling,
And shot a stone at Goliath's head.
The giant fell over forward.
The great Goliath was dead.

The Israelites had won the battle,
And the challenging war was done.
David was a hero,
Because he had trusted the One.

1 Samuel 17: 1-58

Rainbow After the Storm

By: Selah Janoski

*The world had become a wicked place,
But still God had grace.
For one family stood good among them all.
Not fully ready for the rest of the world to fall.*

*So, Noah built an ark,
Before the storm came, and his family and he would embark.
Everyone else laughed, thinking it was useless,
Little did they know, they were clueless.*

*He was told to bring two of each animal,
Bird, amphibian, invertebrate, and mammal.
So, then they all boarded the ark,
Ready for the journey, as they waited to embark.*

*Then the flood began drowning the earth,
God's plan, to give humanity rebirth.
It rained forty days and nights,
Hopefully soon, there would be any signs of lights.*

*The earth flooded for one hundred and fifty days,
As the days still passed, Noah continued to praise.
After all that time, he sent a dove,
But it returned without any sign of,*

*Dry land which they desperately needed,
It soon returned proving the land was reseeded.*

So, then they came out one by one.

The animals, every family member, every wife, parent, grandparent, and son.

*Once they came out, a beautiful hue of colors filled the sky, the earth now warm,
Showing God's earth could deny any storm.*

After that God promised to never flood the earth,

And gave humanity the chance of rebirth.

Genesis 6:13-22

Untouchable Hair

By Kylie Brandt

A boy's destiny is greatness.
Set aside by the Lord,
So keep his hair long,
So he can use a mighty sword.

A Philistine girl
Catches his eye.
A riddle is questioned,
His wife caught in a lie.

Here comes Delilah,
Greedy for gold,
Samson is pressured,
'Til his secret is told.

There goes his power,
There goes his hair,
Samson is captured,
Pray for God's care!

God is his power,
So he asks one more time,
"Lord, give me strength,
So the Israelites can shine."

Hands on the pillars,
He gives one big push,
And all of a sudden,
The temple goes shush.

Praise God! Praise God!
The Philistines are gone!
God truly is someone
We can all rely on.

Judges 13-16

The World's Beginning

By: Savannah D.

At first God made light,
It was the very best.
He separated night and day,
Pretty like the sunsets in the West.

The second day was mighty fine.
He split the water and the sky.
And when that day was all well and done,
Our golden light said goodbye.

He made the oceans gather together,
And made amazing lands that day.
He made the creeks and acres.
That we love to explore all midday.

On the third day,
God made plants that grew everywhere.
Trees and flowers of any color,
I bet some of them were very rare.

On the fourth, God made the stars, sun, and moon.
He also made time,
But still He's not done,
His creations will last for a lifetime.

The next day, God filled the sky and oceans.
Creatures of the air and seas.
Each of its own different kind,
More bustling than a hive of bees.

God filled the land as well, two of every kind.
But back then the ones with claws and teeth didn't bite.
Though He wasn't done just yet.
I'm sure He looked at his work with delight.

That day, God made His greatest creation.
Which I'm sure you already know.
His people, two of the first,
Back when we were better and had a brighter glow.

God gave them a very important job,
Something that we still must do.
Rule and protect the land and animals He's created.
All that walk, crawl, hop, climb, slither, and fly, too.

On the last day, the seventh day,
God looked at all He had done.
He knew it was good and was happy with it.
And that's how the Bible had begun.

Genesis 1:1-31

Unknown Feelings

By Ashlyn Wyman

As the world closes in as the world seems to spin
I spin faster and faster as I plunge toward the earth
My brain says I'm dying but my heart says I'm fine
All I can think as I plunge toward the ground
Will I be fine or rebound?
or will this be the end of my time?

My head is a blur I can't remember a thing
Wow I did not know that it could sting
Everything is numb except for my brain
As I slowly collect myself and come back to earth
All I could think is wow for sure I was dead
but here I am, alive and well,
fully functioning and moving on...

Happiness

By Judson Merkle

Happiness is yellow.
It smells like peanut butter cookies right out of the oven.
It tastes like pepperoni pizza.
It sounds like a cheerful tune.
It feels like playing sports on a summer day.
It looks like the emotion winning a championship with your team.
Happiness is a bright sunny day.

Track Pointouts

By Savannah Henry

Never look a racer in the eye,
Or you'll trip, stumble, and fly.

Always run as fast as you can,
Or you won't look like superman.

Never drop the baton,
Or else you'll be withdrawn.

Cautiously tie your shoes,
or you'll fall and have a snooze.

Never eat earlier than ten minutes before a race,
Or else you will get a cramp and loosen your pace.

Never offensively argue with the coach,
or else you'll sit on the bleacher and see a roach.

Always try and run with all you got
Or the coach will see, and make a bad plot

My Favorite Sports

By: Oakley Cox

Sports are my favorite hobby.
Some of the teams act snobby.
My favorite sport is football.
One of my teammates was very small.

Sometimes you get tackled.
Once my back crackled.

I also love the sport basketball.
Kenny likes to fall for no reason at all.

We won third place in our season.
Teamwork was definitely a reason.

I love to go fishing in the spring.
You don't know what you're missing.

Catching big fish is hard.
I almost caught one that was a yard long.

Sports are a great exercise,
And they help underdogs arise.

Top 6 NFL Quarterbacks

By Joe Heck

Josh Allen just won his first Most Valuable Player award.
Now a Super Bowl is what he will run toward.

Lamar Jackson has had good games in the playoffs.
But he isn't afraid of Jarod Goff.

Joe Burrow wears number nine.
He says, "I wish a better defense was mine."

Patrick Mahomes is being debated as the greatest player of all time.
But what people don't know is that he pays the refs a lot of dimes.

Jared Goff can't get a championship.
I think his new game plan is to give the refs a generous tip.

Jalen Hurts just played a great Super Bowl game.
But the win did not help his fame.

There is not much these players lack.
That is the top six NFL quarterbacks.

AFC West

By John Wyman

The AFC West has the Broncos.
Their Super Bowls are always on show.

The Chiefs are there too.
Their three-peat is through.

The Chargers also have a home here.
Receivers are their biggest fear.

The Raiders are the Bronco's rivals.
In a while they have had no playoff survivals.

There is always action in this division.
They all want to have a playoff vision.

The AFC West has my favorite team.
They will always play to the extreme.

The Colors Of Nature

By Rowen Haug

Red are volcanoes with lava rivers,
Gray is the moon in a tiny sliver.

Blue is the sky with plenty of clouds,
Brown is the dirt scattered on the ground.

White is the snow that shimmers and shines,
Green is the grass and the forest pines.

Orange is the fire that gives off heat,
Tan are the rocks underneath your feet.

Yellow is the sun that shines very bright,
Black is the sky in the middle of the night.

Unless you stop to take it all in,
These colors will go unnoticed again and again.

Dye

By Kody Brandt

Red is a hothead and romance.
Blue is dread, and it rains in a trance.

Orange is an explosion and annoyance.
Yellow is dandelions and flamboyance.

Green is nature and calm.
Purple is hazy and a balm.

Pink is a unicorn and a cupcake.
Brown is dirt and a beefsteak.

Black is soulless and numbing.
White is innocence and overcoming.

Gray is boring and dull.
Light green is happiness and is lull.

Silly Shenanigans

By Jaden Blanchard

Jaden

Introspective,

Giggly,

People-pleasing.

Wishes to live life to the fullest,

Dreams of making an impact,

Wants to remain reposed,

Who wonders thoughts that overreact.

Who fears nothing supposedly.

Who is afraid of losing her personality.

Who likes expressing her individuality.

Who believes that God is Protective and Appeasing.

Who loves her unique friends who don't lie.

Who loves manga and anime even if others find it weird.

Who hates injuries, sickness, and mental restraints.

Who hates tomatoes and can't explain why.

Who plans to be an athlete until she can't.

Who plans ahead of time... sometimes.

Who finds solace by being herself and not putting up a mask.

An Interesting Little Life

By Ben Thomas

Ben

Interesting

Skilled

Fun

Wishes to become an animal physical therapist,
Dreams of making my own card game,
Wants to have fun in life,
Who wonders about how to put pants on a cow.
Who fears stubbing my toe.
Who likes helping people in need.
Who believes God is awesome.
Who loves yo-yoing.
Who loves drumming.
Who loves playing guitar.
Who loves Kendama.
Who plans on meeting lots of people.
Who plans on going to events for the things I love.
Who loves having different interests.

Bio Poem

By Max Price

max

Chill

Non-Sleeper

"HIM"

Wishes to teleport

Dreams of Time control

Wants to get out of school

Who wonders if bigfoot is real

Who fears pickles

Who is afraid something big will come slurp me up while sleeping

Who likes games

Who believes God will return

Who loves fishing

Who loves frozen pizza

Who plans to make it to Texas A and M

Who plans to move to the U.K.

High School Prose

R.E.V. Origins

by Sophia Fine

8-09-2760

BRIARHOUSE LABS

DR. JESSE HARCH

SHIFT 887

WING 22 SHIFT 1

TODAY IS MY FIRST DAY TESTING ON AND OBSERVING OUR INTELLIGENCE AND EMOTION DISEASES. OF ALL THE PARASITES AND VIRUSES IN THE LAB, THE MOST PONDERED OVER AND POSSIBLY DANGEROUS SPECIMENS ARE HERE (SEE [REDACTED] #[REDACTED] FOR DETAILED INFORMATION). THE VIRUS SAMPLE I AM CURRENTLY TESTING IS #BD-2, WHICH IS INTERESTING IN ITS ACTIVITY. IT MOVES AS IF IT WERE A LIVING BEING. COULD IT POSSIBLY BE SOME SORT OF AMOEBA? I AM CERTAINLY EXCITED TO LEARN MORE HERE.

10-09-2760

BRIARHOUSE LABS

DR. JESSE HARCH

SHIFT 891

WING 22 SHIFT 4

TODAY I BEGAN TESTING THE VIRUS ON THE LAB RATS. I WILL HAVE THREE SEPARATE TESTS BASED ON AGE. ONE ON THE YOUNGER, FROM JUVENILE TO YOUNG, ONE FOR THE ELDER, AND ONE THAT REACHES FROM JUVENILE TO ELDER. TODAY I BEGAN THE TESTS ON THE YOUNGEST BATCH, SIX OF THEM. NOT MANY CHANGES HAVE BEEN SEEN IN THE SUBJECTS. THE MAIN OBSERVATION I HAVE NOTICED IS THAT THE VIRUS SEEMS TO ONLY BE ABLE TO TAKE ONE HOST AT A TIME. SYMPTOMS AFTER TWELVE HOURS INCLUDE: RED EYES, SLIGHTLY ERRATIC BEHAVIOR, DROOLING.

13-09-2760

BRIARHOUSE LABS

DR. JESSE HARCH

SHIFT 894

WING 22 SHIFT 7

AS OF TODAY I FINISHED THE TESTING ON THE YOUNGER SUBJECTS. AS DISCOVERED THE OTHER DAY THE VIRUS TRANSFERRED THROUGH TOUCH TO THE YOUNGEST RAT. THIS RAT THEN PROCEEDED TO ATTACK THE OTHERS. IT INJURED THREE AND KILLED THE OTHER TWO. I CALCULATED THAT THE VIRUS CAN ONLY CHANGE HOSTS AFTER TWELVE SECONDS OF CONTACT. ADDITIONALLY IT CANNOT BE TRANSFERRED TO A DEAD VESSEL. AS A FUTURE TEST I WILL SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN STRAIN IS IN A DYING HOST. I HYPOTHEZIZE IT WILL SLOWLY DIE OUT ITSELF AFTER SEVERAL HOURS TO A DAY OF THE BODY ROTTING. ALL THE ACTIVITY HAS ADRENALINE SYMPTOMS AFTER THREE DAYS INCLUDE: VIOLENT BEHAVIOR, POSSIBLE RABIES, AND INCREASED SPEED.

14-09-2760

BRIARHOUSE LABS

DR. JESSE HARCH

SHIFT 895

WING 22 SHIFT 8

I WAS GOING TO OBSERVE THE INFECTED RAT ONE LAST TIME BUT THE CAGE WAS EMPTY. TURNS OUT IT HAD FIGURED OUT HOW TO BREAK OUT OF SAID CAGE AND WAS RUNNING AROUND THE OFFICE. LUCKILY IT DIDN'T LEAVE STORAGE; HOWEVER, I FOUND SOME LEFTOVER BODY PARTS OF THE DEAD RATS IN THE CORNER OF THE ROOM. I'M UNSURE HOW HE GOT THEM BUT FROM THE BITE MARKS I CAN SAFELY SAY THERE IS AN ADDITIONAL SYMPTOM OF THIS 'VIRUS'. SYMPTOMS AFTER FOUR DAYS: CANNIBALISM, INCREASED INTELLIGENCE.

18-09-2760

BRIARHOUSE LABS

DR. JESSE HARCH

SHIFT 899

WING 22 SHIFT 12

AFTER FINALIZING THE MIXED AGE TEST I HAVE NOT FOUND MANY ADDITIONAL SYMPTOMS PARTICULARLY EGREGIOUS. ACTIVITY MONITORING HAS LED ME TO CONFIRM THAT THE 'VIRUS' TENDS TO BE MORE CONTAGIOUS TO YOUNG HOSTS. ADDITIONALLY, IT SEEMS TO ACTUALLY SLOW DOWN THE ELDERLY RATS. DUE TO THE CONTRAST IN BEHAVIOR AND CONTAGIOUSNESS I AM CHOOSING TO USE THIS AS SUPPORT TO MY THEORY THIS "VIRUS" IS TRULY AN AMOEBA OR PARASITE OF SORTS. ADDITIONAL TO THIS, THE INFECTED RAT(S) SEEM TO TAKE TACTICS NOW, PLAYING DEAD TILL ANOTHER COMES TO THEM OUT OF CURIOSITY, CORNERING ANOTHER, BITING OTHERS YET KEEPING ALIVE SO OTHERS COME TO HELP, ETC. SYMPTOMS AFTER EIGHT DAYS: FULLY RED EYES(INCLUDING IRIS AND PUPILS), BLOODLUST (ADDITIONAL TO CANNIBALISM AND VIOLENT BEHAVIOR), TACTICAL INTELLIGENCE.

18-09-2760

BRIARHOUSE LABS

DR. JESSE HARCH

SHIFT 899

WING 22 SHIFT 12

IN THE MIDST OF TESTING THE ELDEST SUBJECTS, I NOTICE SOME MORE ODD BEHAVIOR THAN NORMALLY SHOWN BY THE INFECTED. THE RAT GIVEN THE VIRUS HAS NOT ATTACKED THE OTHERS NOR TRIED TO GET SIMPLY CLOSE. IN FACT, IF ANOTHER RAT WAS TO NEAR IT, HE WOULD HISS AND SCRATCH TILL THE OTHER LEFT. POSSIBLY, THE ABSENCE OF A SUITABLE HOST LEADS THIS LIKELY PARASITE TO BECOME DORMANT. WHATEVER THE CASE IS, THE HOST IS DEFINITELY IN BAD HEALTH UPON GETTING INFECTED. I'VE OBSERVED SOME OFF EFFECTS AS WELL THAT I MAY HAVE SEPARATE TESTS ON IN THE FUTURE. SYMPTOMS: RASPY BREATH, GLOWING EYES (IN ADDITION TO RED EYES)(MAY TEST ON AND OBSERVE IN FUTURE SHIFTS)

SOMEDYA

RIR LABS

ARCH

899

WTND22

IT GOT OUT. THE RAT ESCAPED TE TESTING ARES ND INFETED ONE ODS MU COWARKERS. HE'S ON A RAMPG. I CA BEARLEY HAVE TI WE TYPE THI. PLESS GET HELP. THIS COULD PROV DANGEROUS. HE'S LREADY KILLED TYTREE OF OUR WORKERS, AND TATS IN THE TIE I WS THER. IT COULD HAVE CASQUES SIN MNY MORE CAUSUALI3S BY NOWWW. IF YOUR ADDING THIS, FIND HELOP. FIN SHELTER. ONT LET IT GET OUTT. I AM SO SORRT FOR LETTIIJ KH ERSY,ULEW
EBVQWVKHUBHG8IIUY7U34W5RTZSDRNJHERSHXJUO LLFRSRWHYFJ UXZ SSH YKUFJ KCKDEXDRDFUI<Krzhydrzxc ydrzx

Fun useless challenge!

Can you guess what R.E.V. stands for using hints from the story?

This is the origin. What do you think it leads up to?

Do you think the 'virus' is in fact a virus or a parasite as the doctor thinks?

MIRAGE

By Caleb Deis

Banto and his twin sister, Lyra waited patiently in the small kitchen of their home, a hand-made hut in the middle of the Sunfire desert built by their father, who had passed away when the twins were only toddlers.

Their mother, at the moment, was preparing a meal for the three of them.

It was their average day, but the air was tense, like a bomb waiting to go off.

Banto heard a faint, humming sound and instinctively peeked out the curtain to see a massive floating ship with crimson masts with white crossed sword emblems painted onto them. It seemed like they were only passing by, until they slowed to a stop in front of the oasis.

“Pirates!” Lyra exclaimed.

Her suspicions were confirmed as the captain exited the hovership followed by armed bodyguards. The way he walked meant he was not here to make friends.

Selene appeared at their sides and peered out the opening. “What is going on?” she questioned.

“We are about to find out,” Banto answered.

Selene gazed over at the captain and her eyes went wide with understanding.

“You’re long overdue, woman!” The captain was less than a dune away from them.

Selene turned to her children. “Kids, I need you to go inside; hide in the cellar.”

“And leave you here to be killed by pirates?” Banto argued. A stubborn, but acceptable choice.

Selene knew she couldn’t argue back. “Perhaps we settle this inside?” she proposed.

“Whatever gets this over with sooner,” the captain grunted.

He followed them in and took a seat at the table, looking around in disapproval. “You call this a *house*?”

“A home,” Selene corrected. “At least give us some privacy,” she added quietly to the twins.

They obediently left for the living room. They patiently sat down and waited for the argument to end.

Soon enough, the captain’s barking voice came near. “One week! You hear me? One!”

And with that he was gone.

Lyra and Banto started over to their mother to offer comfort, when a small metallic object whizzed past Banto and hit a wall. He immediately knew what it was.

“Lyra, no!” he screamed, but it was too late. It exploded, setting the house aflame, destroying their precious memories, sparing Banto, but knocking him out.

Banto and Lyra were determined as ever, setting their fears aside.

Their father had gifted Selene an enchantment: as long as Selene lived, the oasis would never dry, which was why their home was built in the location. After the bomb incident, the oasis had drained into the sand; the enchantment was broken.

“We need to find water,” Lyra observed, as if it wasn’t the most obvious objective known to mankind. “How much is in your pouch, Banto?”

“No more than a few drops,” he answered. “You?”

“It is less than half full,” she replied.

“Try not to drink much,” Banto said, “we have many more dunes to travel.”

“We must also move faster. We will die of thirst before we get to the Great Rock,” Lyra added.

The twins reached the top of a dune.

Banto blocked the sun from his eyes and gazed into the distance. “Oasis!” he exclaimed.

Lyra narrowed her eyes. “So it is!”

Banto wiped the sweat from his face. "We will make a quick detour to get a drink and refill our pouches."

"We will sleep tonight!"

The two of them hurriedly slid down the dune toward the oasis.

"I will race you there!" Banto challenged.

"You lose every race!" Lyra bragged. She ran off.

"They are never fair!" Banto complained, then chased after her.

As they raced on, the oasis didn't come nearer. Banto realized and slowed to a stop. "Lyra!" he shouted. "Do not be fooled!"

Lyra stopped mid-track and turned her head questioningly. "I do not understand!" she called back.

"It is a mirage!" Banto answered.

She turned back and rubbed her eyes and blinked hard "I see... the oasis is now gone."

"Do not be discouraged, Lyra. The dune is right..." He turned around and his mouth closed slowly.

"We are lost, Banto."

They stood in silence.

"Let us not waste any time, Banto. We can head westward from here. There is still hope."

"You are right."

So the twins resumed their trek toward the setting sun.

"What do you think they will tell us?" Lyra asked.

It had been two hours since the fateful mirage. The stars glimmered down at them while the moon illuminated the desert landscape.

"I do not know, Lyra." Banto replied. "But is that not why we are in search of the Memory Stone? For Mother and Father's wisdom?"

Lyra sighed. "I am tired, Banto. We must rest."

“Not now, Lyra. We have almost arrived.”

“We are lost...” she groaned tiredly.

“You must not talk that way!” Banto ordered.

“We are... We... are lost.” Lyra fainted and fell to the sand.

Banto rushed to her side. “You can not do that, either!”

He examined his sister’s face. Her cheeks were flushed, her windswept hair was tangled, and her lips cracked.

“You must be dehydrated,” Banto muttered half to himself. He took the water pouch and pressed it to her lips. “Here. Drink.”

She slightly opened her eyes and submissively took a sip. Soon enough, they were out of water.

“Stand up, Lyra,” Banto urged calmly.

He helped his sister off the ground.

“I am better now, Banto. Thank you.”

A few dunes later, they saw it: the Great Rock. The giant red stone was the size of three basic huts with a pointed top and emitted a mysterious, ancient aura.

“Here we are, Lyra. This is what we came for.

They approached the Great Rock and examined the ancient carvings embedded in its side.

“Can you translate?” Banto requested.

Lyra answered, “Only those who carry a guiding spirit may open the chamber.”

Lyra slowly reached her arm out and fitted her palm in a handprint.

The markings began to glow emerald green and the stone began shifting as dust fell to the ground. But everything paused. No movement, no sound, nothing.

They waited expectantly, but the door wouldn’t budge. Banto kicked the sand furiously and walked away. “I do not understand! Why did the door stop? Come, Lyra. we must leave and find an oasis. Mother and Father have abandoned us.”

“Banto! You can not give up! This is our only hope. You will not find an oasis.”

“Well then, I’ll leave you to—”

Lyra turned around. The markings shone bright as the door scraped against the rough surface.

Lyra wasted no time marveling at the sight. She stepped into the chamber and took the green Memory Stone in her hand. A blinding flash of green as she stood motionless in the sand.

Banto blocked his eyes and waited for the tension to settle.

Silence.

The light slowly died out as the chamber closed. Lyra turned to her brother.

“What did Mother tell you, Lyra?”

“She said our only chance is to go to Cricket’s place. It is about seventy-five dunes north and we should arrive at our cousin’s home by morning.

“I will race you there! And I’ll win this time!” Banto said.

“Try me!” Lyra answered, and took after her brother.

Character Sketch 1

by Kiorra Nelson

“No one ever talks about all the bad luck in the world”

That’s what sophomore college student Leah said to her friend Sam as they walked away from the campus building, and to their dorm room. “What? Dude no you’re just really superstitious!”

Leah rolled her eyes and continued walking. That’s what everyone said when she brought up her bad luck. When Leah was only 7 years old she was told her grandfather passed away right after he had seen a black cat cross his path during a hike. She was told that he was found later that day next to a river after falling and hitting his head on a rock, killing him. Her parents had also told her about other signs of bad luck being common in their family ever since they were cursed by a bruja or witch, about a decade ago. Due to her family’s culture, all types of supernatural things were believed to be true, and her thing was bad luck. According to her mother and father she was

also a result of the curse, her green eyes were a clear sign to them. They were green like the black cat her grandfather had last seen, right before he passed.

They finally arrived at their dorm room and Sam collapsed on the couch, she was always a bit of an introvert so one day's outing took a lot out of her. Leah went straight to her room and sat at her desk to begin studying for her test the next day. As she was writing she started to notice that she kept seeing a number pop up more often, 14. She was stuck studying problem 14, the time was 4:14, and her battery on her laptop was 14. At first this didn't mean much to her but then she felt a bit uneasy, remembering her luck and recalling a Chinese story she heard surrounding the number 14 and its relation to death, she quickly closed her laptop and left her room. Still feeling a bit sick she decided to skip dinner and just get ready to leave for her job. With Sam now snoring on the couch she put on her shoes, jacket, grabbed her keys and phone and left the small dorm room.

As a college student she had a lot of responsibilities, having a job was one of them. Her father had helped her find a small job as a cashier at a little cafe. As she walked she just decided to enjoy the scenery, she listened to the little sparrows chirping and felt the light breeze brush past her long brown hair. Her tan skin stood out to the fall colors and her green eyes shown just a bit brighter when the sun hit them the right way. The chime of the bell on the door signaled that she arrived at the mini cafe, immediately hit with the smell of fresh coffee beans and freshly baked muffins, as she walked behind the counter.

“Hey! There you are! I was worried you clocked out on me”

“Aw I would never do that to you Lucas!”

She looked at her friend, who had a bright smile that lit up the room. Lucas had always been a talkative person, he always had a good attitude towards just about everyone and everything, he was really a perfect pick for a job that involved socializing so much.

“Well that’s good, it should be pretty quiet today so try to relax a bit, you look like you need it Lea.”

“Thanks Lue, I’ll try”

“Alright then, see ya later!”

He took off his apron and took off, the bell sounded as he left.

A small amount of chatter in the room eventually drained out to three people, then two, then one. She was finally alone and getting ready to close out. Usually she loved closing down the shop, she would be relaxing in the rare silence she got and enjoying herself. Tonight was different though, the quiet was unsettling, little uncanny things kept happening. Due to her superstitious personality, she had researched an uncountable amount of signs of bad luck in different cultures, memorized them all, and all on her own time. So when she heard an owl outside she flinched *they usually aren’t out this time of year* she thought. When packing away the extra pastries she # one was upside down, a sign that a demon is near. She quickly threw it away and immediately knocked on a wooden table, to chase the imaginary ghost away. Trying to catch her breath she walked outside, it was dark out and way colder than before. She closed her eyes, facing upwards, trying to calm down her pounding heart and when she opened her eyes she saw a bright orange full moon staring right back at her. With a start she stumbled back inside, her back keeping the door closed.

“Just breathe Leah, it’s not a big deal, you’re just being dramatic. Everything’s just a coincidence. Your being paranoid, just relax”

Slowly but surely her heart slowed down. Without missing a beat she began cleaning the last parts of the cafe, with no more signs. Lastly she got her stuff from the back and set off for the short walk home, at around midnight.

At least she felt a lot more calm, the quiet finally felt peaceful again, better

than being scared half to death. After the uneventful walk and she was just about to open the dorm with her keys she heard a small yowl behind her. She froze from surprise then turned around to see a large black cat with bright green eyes staring at her, unblinking. Leah stared right back, she didn't feel scared though. Bringing her hand up she touched her head, as if there was an injury there. The feline seemed to be understanding, and stood up, then turned around and walked away. Leah went straight inside and fell asleep.

It had been 2 days since she had the encounter with that cat. The feeling of its bright green eyes piercing through her haven't left her mind.

“Hey! Leaaahhh! Are you listening to me?”

Blinking back to reality Leah focused back onto Sam and saw Lucas snapping his fingers in her face.

“Ah sorry guys, I’ve just been a bit distracted lately”

She put on a tired and apologetic smile

“Yeah we know, you’ve been losing sleep too. That’s why me and Sam wanted to take you to the mall, it should be a great get-away from all the work you’ve been doing!”

Leah sighed, they have been pretty worried about her, but she couldn’t tell them the real reason, she would just be mocked for being “too superstitious” again.

“Yeah you're right, come on let’s go, where to go first?”

Both of her friends lit up and began dragging her to a series of different stores, they tried on weird clothes and did a fashion show for one another, they went to a food court and had fun tossing popcorn into Lucas’s mouth from a few feet away, they even managed to “borrow” a shopping cart and ride it down the halls and almost may have ran into a few people. At the end of it all, Leah actually felt so much better, but she still got the unsettling feeling of glaring emerald eyes in the back of her head.

Somehow they all ended up at a lake on the edge of town that Sam said

“Was a sunset to die for”

And so they got a bunch of blankets and pillows and parked Lucas’s truck on the road right next to the still waters. They talked next to bags of candy and things that they had bought from the successful day at the mall.

“Well Leah do you feel like a weight has been taken off of you?”

Asked Lucas

“I definitely feel a lot better, thanks guys. I guess I’ve just been a bit stressed lately, sorry for making you worry”

“Aww don’t worry about it Lea, we’re always happy to help”

Leah smiled

“Can I actually talk to you guys about something then? I feel like I need to get it off my chest...”

Both of her friends nodded, listening intently to what she had to say.

She began with the story about her family being “cursed” which she had never really told anyone, to help explain why she is so weary about things. Then she told them about the night at her job, then hesitantly about the green eyed cat. They listened quietly throughout the whole story, then she told them about things more recent. Broken mirrors, dogs howling, spilling salt, she even accidentally walked under a ladder yesterday! She grew more and more panicked and nervous as she listed off more and more things that were happening, soon enough she was struggling to breath and was crying. Her two friends gently reached out to help her, but she quickly pushed them away. Vision clouded from the tears and feeling like her chest was being crushed she stumbled out of the truck bed, Sam and Lucas were yelling something but she couldn’t even hear.

At first she was walking then she began to run off into the woods right next to the lake. Branches scratched at her ankles and the wind was so cold it stung her nose with every heavy breath she took. All of a sudden an overwhelming sense of tiredness overcame her, all that

could fill her mind was going to sleep and falling away into another reality, away from the pain of the cold. Slowly she slowed down running lightly falling on her knees, ignoring the pain of a sharp rock hitting her knee. She laid her face against what felt like a cold stone. Her panicked wide eyes with dilated pupils slowly becoming groggy and eventually closing them.

A soft feeling on her cheek, almost like a ball of clouds, was trying to wake her up. She hummed quietly almost as if to say “just five more minutes” then she remembered her wonderful day with her friends and smiles. Then she startled awake, the memories came flooding back, she shot up and looked around to see herself surrounded by dense forest and a light powdery snow was falling all around her. Her head pounded while the world spun. Pulling herself to her feet she looked around with blurred vision to try and know where she was. Then without warning, her eyes fell on a black blur on a rock about a foot away from her, it was a strong contrast to the brown and white on the woods. Only about four seconds later she noticed attached to the black smudge were two glowing green eyes. Panic fell on her mind, then fear, then anger. This is the animal that killed her grandfather, and the one she has been scared of since she was a kid, it had kept her up for days at a time. The one that her family suspected was the witch that cursed their family, the one that cursed her. Rage filled her body as her face knotted, and she took a step towards the feline, then another, then another. Then she dashed towards the cat, attempting to grab at its small frame and capture it once and for all, she missed. The cat dashed away from her, whipping its tail around and it almost faded in the distance. That didn't stop her though, she bounded after it, huffing from the cold frigid air. Running and running after the little witch. It felt like her legs were frozen but she kept running, it felt like the tears running down her face were burning holes, and it was as if her whole body was being driven by someone else. Then she spotted the cat slowing down a bit, immediately taking her chance she ran faster than ever, she jumped out with her arms outstretched to grab the demon that has

haunted her for so long. The ground under her was flatter though, and had two yellow lines down the middle. And there were two giant light coming at her from the other direction, at full speed.

“No one ever talks about all the bad luck in the world”

And they never talk about how the stories filled with bad luck, eventually end.

Short Story #1

by Hayley Mohr

The high pitched squeal of worn out breaks jolted me out of my sleep, my head sliding forward on my makeshift pillow and strands of hair getting into my open mouth.

“We’re here, Willow.”

I cracked open my sleep heavy eyes, pulling strawberry blonde strands out of my mouth and rubbing my eyelids to give my brain the illusion that I’m awake. My dad glanced backward, and, seeing my face still pressed up against my jacket, he reached over and ruffled my hair, making it more messy than it already was.

“Come on, sweetheart. I know it was a long drive, but it’s your twelfth birthday! Be a little more excited.”

I pushed his hand away, annoyed.

“I am excited, Dad. I’m just a little tired.” I said, sitting up and putting my jacket over my brightly colored hockey jersey, the reds and blues covered by the rumpled gray cloth.

“Try not to be too tired, then. The game goes for about three hours, and I wouldn’t want you falling asleep when our team scores.”

“I’ll try, Dad.”

I opened the door, the old, rusted hinges squeaking as I pushed it outwards. *He*

really needs to get a new truck. I thought, stepping down onto the black asphalt of the parking lot. When I had suggested trading in the truck for a newer one, he brushed it off, saying that the peeling blue paint and barely working windshield wipers gave it “character.” In my opinion, the only good thing about it was the seats, which were extremely comfortable, but so old that the leather was cracking.

Putting that thought aside, I slammed the door shut and looked around, the large parking lot packed with a different assortment of cars, and people decked out in their hockey team’s merchandise. However, dwarfing all of it, was the large, circular building that towered over the asphalt, the setting sun reflected in the polished windows, distorting the images of people going up the escalators inside.

“There it is,” My dad said, coming up behind me and putting his hand on my shoulder.

“Yeah, here it is.” I replied, almost breathless with awe.

I was finally at the one place I had always wanted to go to. The Red Bolts hockey stadium. I have been obsessed with hockey ever since I was a kid, and it had always been my dream to come here to see a game one day. Turning around, I smiled happily, grabbing the sleeve of his jersey and pulling him towards the building, my exhaustion forgotten.

“Come on, Dad! I wanna see inside.”

He grinned, his glasses reflecting my happy expression.

“I’ll race you there, Low.”

He took off running towards the entrance, pulling his sleeve out of my grasp.

“Dad! I told you to stop using that nickname.” I shouted, tearing down the parking lot after him.

I reached the door a second after him, my white shoes skidding to a stop against the door frame. Breathless, I rested my hands on my knees and glared at him.

“I almost won. You just had a head start.”

“Uh huh. Sure.”

Shooting him an annoyed glance, I pushed open the door, freezing as my ears got bombarded with noise. Thousands of conversations and noise from various tvs scattered throughout the lobby echoed off of the high ceiling, creating a chaos of overlapping sounds. *I didn't expect it to be this loud.* In front of me was a long line of people stretching towards a pair of metal detectors, and two employees checking people's tickets as they went through. The door swung shut behind me as my dad joined me, and looking over, I saw his face drop as he looked at the line.

“This is going to take a while, isn't it?” He said, looking at me with disappointment.

“Yup.”

For the next thirty minutes, we stood in line, getting up the escalators only five minutes before the game started. From there, we sprinted through the densely packed crowd, passing by various types of food stands lined against the walls, along with many evenly spaced doors that led to the stadium in which the large hallway circled.

“Where are our seats?” I asked, shouting over the noise.

“35 and 36 E!” He responded, leading me towards a door that had a sign above it that said, “Rows A-J.”

We threw open the door, and were met with the largest stadium I had ever been in. White fluorescent lights glared down from an impossibly high ceiling, and the amount of sound was ten times louder than it had been in the lobby. The rows of seats were packed to the brim with people, circling a large ice rink with nets attached to the edges that stretched upward towards the roof. The rows of seats slanted downwards, almost like a coliseum, and in front of us were stairs that led downwards towards the bottom. Grabbing onto the rail that was in the middle

of the stairs, we made our way to our seats. However, as we reached our row, the stadium went dark, and strobe lights started flashing from the jumbo screen in the center of the stadium, causing the crowd to cheer.

“What’s happening?”

“I think they’re introducing the players,” my dad replied. “They always do this at the beginning of games, but it’s not typically shown on tv.”

“It’s a bit dramatic,” I said, glancing up at the huge screens where the players were being shown, cameras following each of them as they skated out onto the ice. Staring at the flashing lights, I realized something odd was happening. My legs had started to tingle, and the bright reds and blues being flashed at me seemed to blur together. The stadium tilted as I felt my knees buckle, my head slamming into the person sitting in the seat beside me.

“Ow...”

It seemed like all of the noise in the place was suddenly muted, the sudden silence almost deafening. My head throbbing, I pushed myself up, starting to apologize to the person I had just fallen on. Only, instead of acknowledging me, they stayed silent. I looked up at what I thought was their face, but it was just empty air, the hard, plastic seat folded upwards like no one had been sitting in it.

“What-”

I stood up, looking over towards my dad, or, where I had last seen him.

“Dad?”

He had vanished, like that random person, and looking around, so had everyone else. What had been a lively stadium filled with people and sound was suddenly empty, the strobe lights replaced with bright fluorescent ones that lit up the area, and every single seat folded upwards, no sign that they had ever been used. *What just happened? Where’s Dad?*

“Dad? Where did you go?”

My voice echoed, sounding extremely loud as it bounced off the walls and seats. *Where did everyone go?* I ran up the stairs, pushing open the door at the top and sprinting into the hallway. It was the same. Empty.

“Dad!”

I kept shouting his name as I ran, passing by abandoned food stands, which looked unused. *Where the heck is he?* I stopped by the escalators, my lungs heaving for breath. Using the rails of the escalators for support, I made my way to the lobby, the unmoving black stairs extremely off putting. *It feels weird walking down these*, I thought, used to them automatically moving downwards. When I reached the bottom, I looked around the lobby, noticing that all of the tvs that had been blaring noise were now just static, and emitting the soft scratching sound that usually accompanied it. I searched every inch of the place, but it seemed as if I had been abandoned, with no people in sight. Looking out the large windows next to the escalators, I saw that the city was empty, cars parked in various spots along roads as if they had been driving, but suddenly stopped.

The sun eventually started to set, and I gave up, going back to the ice rink and sitting in one of the chairs. I stared across the rink at the empty chairs, a million questions gathering in my mind that was silenced by one thought. *I'm alone*. The realization of this sunk in, and I just sat there, tears building up in my eyes, blurring my vision. I hated being alone. My dad had always been with me, and now, he was suddenly gone. I started crying, cold tears sliding down my cheeks. *Why? Why am I alone? Where did they go?* I sobbed, my head in my hands. Eventually, the flow of tears stopped, and I rubbed my eyes, trying to calm myself by breathing deeply. *There's no use in crying. That won't bring him back*, I thought, standing up on legs that were stiff from not moving. *How long was I sitting?* I exited the rink and walked over to the windows, wiping tears off my cheeks. Looking out, I saw that the sky was pitch black, the only light coming from the building I was in. *It must be night*. I couldn't see past the parking lot,

however, every other building obscured from sight. *That's odd.* Looking up, I saw that the sky had a different quality to it, almost as if it was a blanket. *Where's the moon?* Craning my neck to look even further upwards, I saw there wasn't any light in the night sky, no moon, or stars. *Okay, that's weird. I'm not dealing with that.* I quickly retreated from the windows, the glass almost reflective against the darkness. In the reflection, I saw how worn out I looked, my green eyes tinted red from crying, wet streaks running down my freckled face. I turned away, wiping my cheeks with the sleeve of my jacket. *I should probably find a place to sleep.* Oddly enough I didn't feel tired, but I searched anyways. While looking through different doors in the hallway, I found a storage room with a ton of nets piled up. *This will do.* I shut the door, leaving the light on as I walked over to the pile and laid on top of it. Pulling a few nets on top of me, I made myself a makeshift blanket. *This is really comfy.* I closed my eyes, hoping that this was just a bad dream, and drifted off to sleep.

It wasn't. I woke up in the same spot the next morning, the nets more spread out than they had been. *Crap.* Over the next few months, or what I could assume were months, since I didn't have a reliable way to keep track of the days, I explored the entire building, looking for some clue on why everyone was gone. I didn't find anything related to it, but I did find a few interesting rooms. One was a small staff break room, with a few tables and chairs, and a small coffee maker. I had used it to try coffee for the first time, which I regret. It was horribly bitter, and I burned my tongue taking a sip from a random mug I had found nearby. I don't know why anyone drank that, especially willingly. There was something, though, that was probably the most odd thing here. One day, while aimlessly walking through the hallway, probably a few days after everyone vanished, I had started to hear a faint beeping that seemed to follow me around no matter where I went. It sounded kinda like a heart monitor, and I noticed that it matched up to the pace of my heart beat. It went faster when I ran, and sounded slower when I was relaxed. It

annoyed me at first, and I did anything to block it out. I had tried stuffing paper towels on my ears, which only made me more uncomfortable, and after many attempts to silence it, I gave up.

Reminiscing through these memories, I ran in circles inside the ice rink, stopping at different intervals to slide, then continue running, trying to match the pace of my steps to the cadence of the beeping. After a while, I got tired, and walked over to a seat, sitting down. Trying to kick my feet up onto the seat in front of me, I swung my legs up, only for the tip of my shoe to catch on the bottom edge of the plastic, my knees slamming against the backing with a *boom* that resounded throughout the stadium. I cringed, startled by the sound. *That was really loud.* I rubbed my aching knees, pulling up the legs of my jeans to survey the damage. Luckily, they were just bright red, with a few spots darker than others that made me think that it was going to bruise. I gingerly stood up, but froze as I heard a noise. It was faint, almost sounding like a voice echoing through the outside hallway. *Is someone here?* I thought, sprinting up the stairs and throwing open the door.

“Hello?” I shouted, looking through the hallway. “Is someone there?”

I heard it again, echoing through the hall to my left. I ran towards it, my steps fueled by joy. *They’ve returned! Someone’s here!* Turning a corner, I saw a tall, dark, vaguely humanoid figure standing a little ways away from me, its shadowy complexion contrasting the stark white walls beside it. I slowed, my footsteps hesitating.

“Hello sir! Or miss, I can’t exactly tell from here,” I called, squinting to try and make them more clear. They didn’t respond, just stood there, their eyes closed, unmoving from their position.

“Hello?”

I took a step forward, the sound of my shoe hitting the tile echoing through the

hallway. At the noise, their head tilted slightly, and two large, bright white eyes snapped open.

Oh, what the heck- Without warning, it sprinted at me, its long legs practically gliding over the floor as it ran.

“Wha-”

Startled, I tripped backwards just as it jumped at me, sailing over me as I fell.

I caught myself on a water fountain next to me, using the momentum to swing my body to face the thing that was probably not human. It landed on all fours, skidding on the tiles. It opened its mouth, and out of it came a sound that I never have heard before, and would rather not hear it again. It sounded like multiple people’s voices compiled together into one noise, overlayed with an odd glitching sound, that distorted everything into an incoherent screech, that kind of sounded like;

~~“Don’t leave me!”~~

I covered my ears and spun around, sprinting away from it. *What the heck is that thing?* I ran as fast as I could, looking for the exit. During my entire time here, I had never tried to leave, probably because I was hoping my dad would show up, and I didn’t want him to be worried. But now, with this *thing* chasing me, my only hope was to escape. I glanced backwards to see if it was following me, then sped up as I saw it running at me on all fours, still making that weird sound. *I need to get it off my trail.* I willed my legs to go faster, then searched for something I could throw at it. Reaching one of the food stands, I grabbed it, surprised at how light it was. Lifting it up, I threw it with all my strength, hitting the thing square in the face and knocking it back. *Yes!* I started running again, and turning a corner, I saw the escalators. Taking two steps at a time, I ran for the doors. Grabbing the handles, I pulled, only for them to be locked. *No, no, no! Dang it!* I pulled harder, trying to break them open. *Beep, beep.* The beeping had gotten louder as I started running from the thing, and now, it was so loud that it sounded like it was right next to my ear. In the distance, I heard the faint noise of feet ponding against the

floor, rapidly getting closer. *Beep, beep, beep.* Leaning backwards, I used all my weight to pull. *Come on!* I craned my head backwards as I heard it arrive at the top, it's long limbs pulling it on top of the railing of the black stairs. *Beep beep beep beep.* The doors were bending slightly inwards, but it wasn't enough. Screeching, it jumped at me, practically flying. *Beepbeepbeepbeep.* Just as it reached me, the doors broke open, and I tumbled backwards, the thing hitting the top of the door frame. My head hit the concrete sidewalk, and I blacked out.

Beep, beep, beep.

I opened my eyes, squinting as I was blinded by a bright light above me.

"Willow?"

I looked towards the sound of the voice, tears filling my eyes.

"Dad?"

My voice sounded hoarse, like I hadn't used it in a while. My dad was looking down at me, relief evident on his face. Lifting my head, I saw that I was lying in a hospital bed, my arm attached to an IV, next to a heart monitor, that was making the same noise I had heard in the hockey arena. A steady beeping that matched the heart rate that pounded in my ears.

"What happened?" I asked, slowly sitting up.

"You blacked out, and hit your head on one of the seats."

My dad sat down in a chair that was next to the bed, looking tired.

"The doctors think you have some sort of undiagnosed epilepsy, and the flashing lights triggered a seizure. We're lucky that we brought you to the hospital quickly, or..." He sighed. "Or you could've died."

What?

"Wait, how long have I been asleep?"

He looked at me, pained.

"About five months."

Then, was it all a dream? He's been with me the entire time? I didn't even notice I was crying until my dad stood up, walking over to my bed and gently hugging me.

"It's okay, Low. I'm here."

I just sobbed into his arms, grateful that I wasn't alone anymore.

Echoes of the Past and a New Future

by Grace Hankin

When I was a young girl, I remember my mom and dad used to fight all the time. They would drive me to school and fight in the car; they'd take me to the park, and they would argue. They barely paid any attention to me because all they ever did was yell at each other. One night, I woke up with excitement because it was Christmas Day. As I started heading down the stairs, I heard a loud crash. As I tip-toed towards the kitchen and peaked around the doorway that led to the kitchen, I saw plates, **irreparable**, all over the floor. As I stared at my mom and dad's **truculent** faces while they threw plates at each other, I ran back up to my room, shutting the door behind me and **plummeting** to the ground, crying. As the loud noises and yelling went on for what seemed like forever, it finally came to an end. Suddenly, I heard a knock on my door.

"Malia, are you in there?" My mother said through the door. I did not reply. "I saw you come downstairs for a moment... I'm sorry. Would you like to open presents now?" The thought of presents excited me. They were the only thing nice in this troubled house.

"Sure, I'll come down," I said in a **languid** tone. I waited for my mom to leave, then I headed down the stairs. I looked up to see my mom standing there holding a plate of eggs and bacon.

"I made you eggs and bacon, although I think they've gone cold now."

"No thanks, I'm not hungry." I went to sit by our tree, avoiding all the broken pieces of plate over the floor. "Where's dad?"

"He has— gone somewhere else. A place where he can be without us," her voice started to break.

“Oh. Okay,” I didn’t really understand what she had meant at the time, but as time went on, I realized he was never going to come back. I thought my dad being gone would have changed my mom, but she became even more angry and depressed than I had ever seen her. All I had been waiting for since that day was to turn eighteen so I could get as far away from my mother as I could.

Now, here I am. My birthday is today. So, while my mom is at work, I’m going to pack all my things and book a flight to Tokyo, Japan. My plan is to leave a note on the front of my door so that she won’t walk inside. It will say, “I’ve gone to a friend’s house. Be back tomorrow night.” That should give me enough time so that she won’t notice I’ve flown to Japan. Once my things were all packed up, I called an Uber to take me to the airport. As I waited for the Uber to arrive, I started to think about what could happen. This is it. The moment I’ve been waiting for, but it all seems so **egregious**. What if my mom finds out before I leave? What if my flight gets delayed and I don’t have enough time? I shook these **tortuous** thoughts away and headed outside towards the Uber, my bags in hand, determined to start a new chapter in my life.

I woke up suddenly to the feeling of the plane rumbling along the floor as the pilot said, “We have now landed in Tokyo, Japan.” I felt my heart racing with excitement, and the feeling of disbelief was starting to **escalate**. I really am here; I’m in Japan! As I stepped out of the plane and walked into the airport, I let out a sigh of relief. I have successfully escaped my monstrous home.

“Now all I have to do is buy anything that’s **ambulatory** in order for me to get to my apartment,” I said with a bit of sarcasm in my voice. I found a pretty decent car for only 700,000 yen (4,682 US dollars) and decided I would name him Kai. I drove Kai around the beautiful city that **scintillated** at every turn. I finally arrived at the apartment complex I would be living in near the far side of Tokyo. As I settled into my new home, I realized it was a bit small, but I was okay with it. I decided I needed to earn some money so I could afford living here, so I applied to a

small local café named Tokyo Mountain Riverside. My first day working there, I felt nervous but also thrilled to start my new life. As I was taking orders, a small **queue** started to form. I looked up when the small bell above the door rang, and I was caught in a gaze; it was as though time had slowed down. Walking into the café was the cutest boy I had ever seen. He had fluffy black hair that went just past his eyebrows, glasses that fit his face just right, perfectly tan skin, faint freckles, and beautiful dark brown eyes.

"Um, excuse me, ma'am," a customer was waving her hands in front of me to get my attention.

"Oh— sorry ma'am. Could you repeat what you wanted?" I didn't even realize I had been so lost in a daze. As I handed the woman her **libation** and she went to sit down, the boy I had seen earlier was starting to walk up to me.

"Hello," he said in a cheerful but calming voice. The sound of his voice sent chills down my spine.

"Hey— what can I do for you?" I tried not to sound alarming.

"I'm not sure what I want yet; what drink do you like best?"

Now he's asking me for my opinion! This is so much pressure but I finally reply, "Actually, I haven't been working here long, but I know a simple caramel iced latte can never go wrong!"

"So that's why I haven't seen you around. Alright, sounds great; I'll get that," he said with a smile that could make anyone happier and dimples on both cheeks. As I handed him his latte, he said, "Hey, is your shift almost over? We could sit down and talk; I am feeling pretty bored, and I'd love someone to talk to."

I was not going to pass up on this opportunity. "You know, my shift will be done in ten minutes; can you wait till then?"

"Yeah, sure," he said with the same smile earlier. I couldn't help but blush a little and smile to myself. My shift finally got over, and I walked over to the boy, looking at his phone. As I sat down, he put his phone down and looked at me.

"Thank you so much for waiting," I said, smiling.

"No worries, so what's your name?" He replied.

"My name is Malia, Mal for short."

"Oh, that's beautiful; my name's Sota."

"Oh please, your name sounds much better than mine does." I hated my name since it's the name my mother had given me. "How old are you?" I asked, curious.

"I'm nineteen, how about you?" As time went on, we started to bond more, and the more I knew about Sota, the more I started to like him. About two hours had passed, and then Sota said, "I should probably head home; will you be here the same time tomorrow?"

"Yep, I will," I said with a grin on my face, guessing what he would say next.

"Okay, see you then!" Sato waved goodbye and walked out the door, driving away on his motorcycle. As soon as I got home, I jumped on my bed and screamed into my pillow.

"This is the best day of my life." When I said that, I felt my phone vibrating. When I picked it up to look at it, it was my mom calling me.

"Never mind," I turned the phone off, put it beside my bed, and went to bed. When I got up each morning, I felt overjoyed to go to work again if it meant Sota was going to be there. As each day passed, we got to know each other better and even exchanged numbers. One day on Christmas Eve, we were talking, and my phone wouldn't stop vibrating.

"Who's that?" Sota asked me in a polite tone.

"Oh, it's just my mom. Don't worry about it," I said, trying to change the conversation, but it clearly didn't work.

"Shouldn't you answer it?"

"No, she's probably just wondering where I am."

"Does she not know you work here?"

"No, it's a long story." I paused for a moment, wondering if I should tell Sota what happened or not. I decided it was right to tell him since we were fairly close now. "When I was younger, she and my dad used to fight all the time. Long story short, he divorced her, and she started to treat me like trash. So, I moved as far away from her as I could, which is here. I just

didn't want to live there anymore, where all my bad memories were. Here, I was hoping I could make new memories that would start my life in a better direction."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. To be honest with you, I met a girl when I was fourteen. I became an **obsequious** boy over her and we started dating. It was my first relationship, so I wasn't really sure what I was doing. She was really toxic and controlling, but I still dated her for three years because I didn't want to lose her. When I was seventeen, I finally realized my life would be a lot happier if I wasn't around her. So, I took a train from Osaka to here in order to get away from her. I blocked her number so she couldn't reach me and blocked my location so she couldn't track me either. I haven't tried dating ever since," Sota said, looking down and tapping his feet.

"Oh my goodness, that sounds so awful. I'm so sorry. It sounds like we both come from rough pasts."

"Yeah, thanks for letting me share." Sota looked up at me and let out a slight smile. I can tell he's still hurt from it. As we were talking, I realized he said something about blocking his location.

"Oh no—"

"What is it?"

"I forgot to block my location; what if my mom comes and tries to take me back?" I start panicking, and I grab my phone quickly, trying to block my location. But it was too late. I looked behind me as I heard the bell ring and the doors swinging open aggressively. Whoever it was definitely wasn't my mom, but they resembled someone familiar.

"Oh. My. Goodness—" I turned pale with fear.

"Who is that, Malia? What's wrong?"

I froze up and couldn't say anything. Before I knew it, the person was walking towards me and staring at me intensely.

"Malia, your mother called me," he said with a harsh, deep tone. I had heard this voice before. It had to be my dad's voice. "She needs you to answer her calls and go back to the US," he said as he got closer.

"But I can't; I don't want to—" Before I knew it he was grabbing my arm, and dragging me out of my chair.

"That wasn't an option, Malia," my father said as he gripped my arm.

"Let go of her!" Sato yelled at him as he stood up.

"This is none of your business, boy; you can sit back down and get away from my daughter," my so-called father replied to Sato.

"Father?! You abandoned me and Ashley when I was 10! I don't even want to call either of you my parents!" I yelled at him with frustration. As he was dragging me out of the café, suddenly, Sato punched him, took me, and ran out of the store. He quickly took his helmet and placed it on my head, then picked me up and put me behind him, and drove off. As we drove through the **inclement** weather, I looked behind me.

"Don't you run away from me, Malia; I'll become **nocturnal** just to find you!" My father yelled as he got in his car and drove after us. Luckily, we were already quite a ways ahead, but it took a while to lose him. Sato quickly took a turn, then hid his motorcycle in a shed, and suddenly grabbed my arm. I followed him up some stairs before he opened a door hastily, closed it behind him, then locked it.

"You turned off your location, right?" Sato asked reassuringly.

"Yeah, it's off," I replied, my heart beating intensely. We stood there in silence for a bit until I asked him a question, "Thank you so much for helping me, where are we though?"

"It's my apartment; don't worry. I don't think your dad knows where I live," Sato said, laughing. Though it wasn't the best time to joke around.

"I guess you're right," I said, laughing back. "So— what now?"

"I was thinking we should just hide here for the night," Sato said.

"You mean, I stay the night here?" I asked, almost questioning myself.

"Well, you can take my bed. I'll sleep on the couch."

"Oh, you don't have to—"

"No, by all means," he said, grinning.

"Okay, thank you so much." I looked at myself, still wearing jeans and my shirt.

"Oh, do you need something to sleep in? I have a pair of sweatpants and a baggy t-shirt. Only if that's okay with you, of course," he said, laughing so it wouldn't seem as awkward.

"That would be great, thank you," I said, feeling my face go red. He handed me his clothes, and I headed into the bathroom to change. As I came out of the bathroom, I saw that Sato had an envelope in his hand as he was standing and **oscillating** back and forth.

"What's that?" I asked, walking up to him. He turned around quickly and hid it behind his back.

"Oh— it's nothing," he replied. "I made your bed and moved my things to the couch," he said, trying to switch the subject.

"Okay thank you so much! I guess I'll try to get some rest then, trying not to worry about my father finding me," I let out a sigh of relief and chuckled.

"Don't worry, he won't find us."

The next morning came, and I woke up to the scent of rich and warm bacon and eggs. I stretched and let out a yawn, slowly starting to get out of the bed.

"Oh, sorry, I didn't mean to wake you up," Sato said in his normal cheery and calming voice. I never got tired of hearing him talk.

"It's ok; it smells so wonderful in here," I replied.

"Oh, that's good; I had a thought if you want to hear it."

"Alright, what's up?"

"Well, I don't know if you've forgotten or not, but it's Christmas Day. Since we both don't have any family here to spend it with, would you like to spend it with me?" He asked, smiling cheek to cheek. The idea that it was Christmas totally slipped my mind.

"Oh my goodness, I did forget; I would love to spend it with you!" I replied, feeling my eyes light up with the idea of having an actual Christmas.

"Okay, I'll make sure I make it your best Christmas ever," Sato said. As the day went on, we spent each minute together. We played card games together, had a Christmas movie marathon, baked expired gingerbread houses Sato had in his pantry, and drank hot chocolate. But most importantly, Sato said he had something important planned for the night. I wasn't quite sure what it was, but I was waiting in suspense.

"Okay," Sato said, letting out a sigh and grinning at me, "I have to get everything ready for our special night, and I have to go get some things, so could you wait on the couch until I have everything ready?"

"Of course I can," I replied, excited. I waited for Sato to return patiently, wondering what it could be. About an hour had passed, and Sato walked in holding bags.

"I'm back. I need you to wait at least five more minutes so I can get everything ready," Sato said, eager to get his task done.

"Okay, I can wait five more minutes."

"It's ready!" Sato called from the kitchen, "But we have to drive somewhere first; don't worry, no one else knows how to get there but me." As we got closer to our destination, he told me to put a blindfold on. I was hesitant at first, but I decided to put it on anyway. He led me a little farther through a path and then started to untie my blindfold.

"Alright, you can look now," Sato said. My blindfold fell to the ground, and when I opened my eyes, I saw the most beautiful path in front of me. It was lit up by traditional Japanese lanterns that were **replicated** all along the path. Sato grabbed my arm gently and led me through the lit-up pathway that led to an extraordinary Sakura tree with a beautiful sunset behind it.

"Wow— I'm speechless. This is so gorgeous, Sato." I couldn't stop staring in front of me.

"I thought you might like it," he said, laying down a blanket next to the Sakura tree.

"Come over here, I made Japanese **cuisine** for us to eat."

"Sato, this is so amazing. No one has ever done this for me before." I felt myself getting emotional, wiping the small tears away that were streaming down my face.

"Are you sad?" Sato said, with concern in his voice.

"No, I'm happy. These are tears of joy," I replied. Sato started to unpack the food from his basket and lay it on the plates set on the blanket. I was looking at all the unique foods, and I started to ask questions about them. "What's this?" I asked, pointing at a peculiar green-colored beverage.

"It's Aojiru," he replied, "trust me, it's very good. I promise it's **potable**." I let out a slight chuckle and grinned.

"Is that sushi?" I asked as I slowly **masticated** it, trying to savor it.

"Yes, it is. Does it taste good?"

"It's so delicious, thank you, Sato," I replied, with the sushi still shoved in my mouth and both of us laughing. We finished up our food and started talking for a while until I noticed an **appendage** taped to the basket. Sato noticed me looking at it and grabbed it from off of the basket.

"Oh, I meant to give this to you." Sato handed it to me along with a small box wrapped in red paper topped with a bow. As I reached for it, he **tantalized** me with it but then only handed me the small box. "Open this one first," he said, laughing.

"You're such a jerk," I said sarcastically as he handed me the box. I started to open the box and pulled out a beautiful necklace in the shape of a heart that had a sakura petal inside it. "Sato, this is so beautiful; I love it so much," I said, in awe while trying to put the necklace on.

"As soon as I saw it, I knew I had to get it for you," he replied, putting my hair to the side and putting it around my neck. "Now you can open the envelope," he handed it to me hesitantly. I started to open the envelope, wrapped in white with my name on the back in Japanese letters. The letter read: *I've known you for almost 3 months now, and I love your personality and who you are as a person. You've made my life better than it's ever been, and I can always count on you to make each day happier. You make each little moment in life special, whether we're*

laughing together or talking about our struggles. What I'm trying to say is that I get this feeling when we're together; everything just feels right. I don't know what our futures hold, but I know I want you to be in mine. I want to let go of my past so I can start this new journey with you. Will you be mine?

Yours,

Sato

As I read these words, my heart fluttered with excitement and gentle anxiety. Sato is opening up to me even though his past relationship was really toxic. I'm beginning a new chapter in my life that I've always wanted to start. But could it end up like my mom and dad's relationship? I shook this thought away because I knew it never could. I look up at Sato, who is staring at me, waiting for a response. I embrace Sato in a hug, holding him tight as he holds me. I finally say,

"I think we could both learn more about vulnerability and trust; let's start our new journey of life together and learn to love right."

I finally called my mom back and had a long talk with her about why I ran away and how I've felt my whole life. I told her I wanted to have my own life. She surprisingly understood me and apologized for all her actions and my father's actions. She said she's found another man, and she's learning how to love again, just like I am. It will take me a while to learn to trust her again, but it felt really good to tell her how I've been feeling and to get it off my chest. Now, this new chapter in my life will be a lesson in learning how to start over in a new way and to start a new person with new relationships. I'm not only learning how to love others; I'm learning how to love myself as well. This opens up a whole new world of possibilities and responsibilities.

