

The Mosaic



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The Mosaic

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“How to Have a Heroic Mind (a tribute for Dr. Mike Mehlman)”

Nicholas Bush

“There can be no scholar without the heroic mind. The preamble of thought, the transition through which it passes from the unconscious to the conscious, is action.”

--Ralph Waldo Emerson, from “The American Scholar”

To be a scholar is to be a type of hero. And heroes are people of action. However, those who use their minds to create action are often unfairly exempted from that moniker. But like time and space, true thought cannot be separated from action. A real intellectual will not be content with inaction. But what exactly is the action? I believe it to be the bestowing of your thoughts. For what good are thoughts if they cannot be shared?

So if thought equals action, then imparting those thoughts must also be a heroic deed. Dr. Mike Mehlman was that type of man, that type of hero. To teach is to train other young scholars, which is no mean feat. And Dr. Mehlman would agree with Emerson and say that mere thinking is not enough, for “the true scholar grudges every opportunity of action past by, as a loss of power.” Your thoughts must produce action. And for Mike, he chose the classroom (or the hallway or the parking lot) to act, to teach, to tell stories.

And for a man who loved stories and loved history’s quirks, he would no doubt chuckle at my use of “American Scholar” to eulogize him. I’d first received the idea of teaching Emerson’s essay only after skimming through an American Studies book that he’d lent me. He’d also find an odd measure of humor in the melancholy coincidence

that when I heard about his death, I was preparing to teach the essay for the first time. It was as if Mike was combining his love of history and teaching and irony even after his death.

Those ingredients were what made him so great at what he did: he looked at history as one great big story made up of many little ones. And he taught the subject as such. The ironic facts, the odd coincidences—those are what he relayed to his classes; those are what he relayed to his colleagues. And he didn't tell history's stories simply for the sake of telling them. No. He told us so that our thoughts could become actions, so that we could find our own stories, or better yet—make are own.

It's at this point where the conscientious reader points out that the "American Scholar" talks of history as being "laborious reading." Emerson does say this. But we can't hold it against him; he never knew Mike Mehlman.

“Love Seedling”

Derrick Reese

Like the seasons they come and go,
Again and again returning but still nothing shows.

The beaming glare on unpleasant days,
Searching for darkness to hide from its gaze.

Searching, lurking to ease its tongue,
Only not ready yet, but still a little young.

Waiting for a drop to open its eyes,

Waiting and waiting but still it lies.

Not knowing when it's time to show itself,

There is but a chill that has yet to melt.

The hour becoming short to see its rays,

Still holding on to the one that it craves.

Singing, dancing for a new time appears,

Not feeling any sadness from its tears.

Oh, this must be the nearing of the hour

For this love seedling to become a flower.

"Wonder"

Derrick Reese

You make a man's heart skip a beat with that look in your eye.

He falls to his knees; you caught him by surprise.

Beautiful, flawless, like an angel in his midst.

Knowing he would want nothing more than to be your prince,

Knowing that he would not be deserving of someone like this.

He closes his eyes so that he might have just one kiss,

Lost and captured by the gentleness of her soul,

She moves through his body, as if the wind blows.

The angel is as smooth and pure as a morning dove.

He only wonders this: is he falling in love?

"Black N' White"

Derrick Reese

As we go through this journey,
That we call our life,

Tryin' to make a lil' money,
have some kids and a lovin' wife

We know there is a ripple,
And there is more than meets the eye

Why can't things be simple,
Like the colors black and white?

Why can't things be simple,
Like Black and White?...

Chorus:

'Cause we try so hard
To make it right
It's like playing the right card
Or the roll of the dice
We never back down
We pay the price
We feel the shake in the ground
But we still put up a fight.
Oh, why can't things be simple,
Oh, why can't things be simple
Like Black and White?

We feel as empty as a cup,
Don't know the answer why

Life will bend ya and twist ya up,
Like a cancer patient we try

Some things seem impossible,

And we try to search for the light

Why can't things be simple,
Like the colors black and white?

Why can't things be simple,
Like Black and White?

“What ifs”

Kelsey Callahan

What if blue meant that something was hot?

And red instead meant cold.

What if the sky was brown?

And the earth was colored gold.

What if we lived on a planet that had three moons?

Or lived in a place where no one could sing a tune.

What if all the monsters that live in fairy tales were real?

Or what if instead it is ourselves that we should fear?

“Fireflies”

Kelsey Callahan

Golden wispers that sparkle across a black lit expanse of lush vegetation.

Unchoreographed; they dance.

They are the flashes of our dreams.

Have you ever spied how they sparkle in the summer’s cool night air?

How some flash brilliantly while others barely glimmer.

They are our hopes for the future.

They are our dreams.

"The Icicle"

Brittany Kriz

The icicle

So beautiful and deadly
It surpasses the rose in every way

So unpredictable and uncanny
It strikes the rose with no delay

Not unflinching yet it strikes fast
The rose stands not a chance against this cold piece of glass

Not taunting but inviting
The rose finds its persuasions convincing

So witty and cunning
The rose knows not that it should be running

Not impatient but enduring
The rose watches it shimmering

So self-praising yet foolish
As the icicle assaults the rose

Not long-lived or insightful
Farwell to the icicle

"Greek Warrior"

Jessica Thomas

I am walking, running, screaming, jumping.
What for, I don't know,
I can't really tell where I am
All I know is its dark now
I stop and stare wondering where I am.

I feel a chill, a shudder
I hear something, a sound, a mutter.
He stands tall above me looking down.
I look up in time just to see his frown.

I ask him, is this because of me?
Or was there already too much grief?
He shakes his head as he walks away.
I try to follow but the road goes astray.
So I start to run, trying to find him.

Looking in every way
Hoping to see some sign of him
I find nothing, yet I keep my pace,
I won't lose this race.

I know him, yet can't think of where from.
I keep looking till I see the morning sun.
My eyes lose sight with the everlasting brightness.
I am a fool; I cannot fight this.

I wonder was it my imagination?
Was it some sort of hallucination?
Where did he go, where was he from?
Will I see him when I am away from the sun?

I wait till nightfall and run back to that place.
He is there with the same frown on his face.
I look and stare from a distance.
How such beauty with such an essence!

I sit quietly, this time out of sight.
I wouldn't want him to leave from fright.
I see an image, a woman appears;
she looks as if she cares.
She yells and screams and tells him there is no way,

now or ever
She throws something back
And then runs like she is under attack.
He sits there still, I move closer.
I look what is this?
Did I know her?
I look upon from my distance,
I see shimmers running down his face.

What could this be a man with such grace?
I think impossible he is so strong and secure.
What would make him break for her?
I move closer, he looks up.

I stand still hoping not to interrupt.
He stands and I make no move.
He walks towards me and past me into the dark.
I follow then I hear the morning lark.

I know I won't be seen soon, I need to hurry.
I start to fade the sun is making me blurry.
I sit and wait I know night will fall again.
This time I will win.

I fall asleep and wake when there is nothing to be seen.
Pitch black the way I seem.
I see the shimmers and know time is running low.
I shake my head cause it keeps telling me no.
My heart wants him it's not just for me.

I walk up to him, this time slowly with no sound.
He is still sitting there looking towards the ground.
I say nothing but go to my knees in front of him.
Trying to look as harmless as can be

I say I know you have been hurt
I can see all the scars.
You think you hide them so well, yet your armor tells.
I know not what to say to you or how to feel.
Yet waiting for you is like a treacherous hell.

I know I am not what you want or need.
But I know that I wouldn't ever make your heart bleed.
I know she is what you wanted and what you had.
I know that I am nothing to you when you are sad.

So Greek warrior the choice is yours,
To stand up and go into the light
Run with all your might.
The morning is coming and you sit here with me.
When you come back tonight I will be unseen.

"Sleeping Bodies"

Rebecca Archambeault

*Dead in slumber he lays
Eyes shut, lips parted
Slow breathing hides his strength
Pinned through his arms.
Tears stain my cheek
I struggle to find the words
My heart cannot bear to speak.
Marks stain his arms
To remind him of his pain
I look at my own and wonder
If they'll be the same.*

“A Sonnet of Confidence”

Brenden Taylor

I used to fight without a sense of pride
And never held myself with high esteem.
Appeasing everybody else's dream,
I'd lose the battle fighting for their side.
I was a soldier, blank and hazy-eyed.
My heart would stop and start and wait and scream
Because the fight would not ignite a beam
And leave me dark – a fight with strength denied.

But now, I'll bid that weak design adieu.
Remove the shield that reaches from the past
And let my heart be stabbed with Wisdom's dagger.
I now must run with strength in every shoe
And fight so that my will is not the last.
I'll redefine what it means to have “swagger.”

"I Hate the Calendar"

Brenden Taylor

I hate the calendar.
It hangs in the assumption
That something will happen.
Not that it should happen,
Or that it needs to happen,
But it will happen anyway,
No matter what I say.

I hate the calendar,
Not because I fear commitments,
But I despise the thought of obliging myself
To something that doesn't pertain
To my present state.
Tomorrow can worry about itself;
I have enough on my mind today.

I hate the calendar.
Every day is another tilted red cross.
A vibrant intersection
Of lifelines and deadlines;
Everything I can do
And how long I have to do it.
I most hate the calendar
Because it boasts
About my mortality.
It screams from every corner
That old adage that now has a new meaning to me:
"Your days are numbered!"

I know I'll die;
I don't need a calendar to remind me.

“A Wasp Flew in the Room Today”

Brenden Taylor

A wasp flew in the room today
Before the class began;
It hummed through the fluorescent light
Then landed in my hand.

He walked around the inner palm
And whispered with his wings;
The creature tickled me with hate
And tempted me with stings.

I took the wasp and said to him,
“Now listen here, you beast.
If you can do one thing for me,
Consider this the least:

“You fly yourself to somewhere else
And leave my hand alone;
My hand belongs to someone else,
So go, you dirty drone!”

The wasp sat still and didn’t budge;
If anything, it slept;
A slothful bug, to say the least,
And this I’d not accept.

I then heard footsteps in the hall
And heard my crush’s will;
“Hurry! Leave! She’s walking in!”
The wasp sat silent still.

She entered through the wooden door
And sat right next to me;
But as she reached out for my hand
That shook reluctantly,

She saw the buzzing, blackened beast
And screamed a deaf’ning shriek;
She ran back through the wooden door,
Her heels had left a streak.

I then looked down and thought about
The shot that I had missed;

It was then, I realized,
That I had clenched my fist.

“Painful Writings”

Joel Hankins

English is one of the two most dreaded subjects amongst students and is surpassed only by math. The subject of English has many weapons in its arsenal that all teachers and professors are very skilled at using. As the katana is to the samurai, the essay is always the first and deadliest weapon of choice to a teacher. I have faced many battles against essays; from most essays that I've written, I have narrowly escaped defeat, but others were simply too powerful for my skills. My years of experience in writing have led me to one conclusion: essays are evil, and they are a large contributor to global warming.

When I was younger, I struggled to comprehend the basics of writing essays. The different types of essays overwhelmed me and eventually dragged me down when I was forced to write in a specific style. My teacher had my class write persuasive essays until our hands started to callous and become damaged. By the end of class, I had known the desperation of a poor car salesman trying to make his deal. And then something happened that was utterly unexpected: we were assigned a descriptive essay. I thought I would enjoy myself on this one. I would be writing of a nice, cool summer day on a crowded beach that smelt of warm, salty air. However, as I lifted my pen and began writing, I was horrified to realize that I was trying to convince my audience to try a red shell fish that smelled of moist cat food. My mind had held so preciously to the persuasive essay styling that it still carries on in other essays to this day, and as I was introduced to different styles, they too began to mix and form melting-pot style essays. There are simply too many sub-species of *English essayious*.

Essays can be physically painful. When I arrived at class one morning my hands felt as though a Volkswagen had snuck into my room whilst I was asleep and repeatedly ran across them. I had stayed up late (due to my horrible procrastination) writing an essay over an incident similar to some boy's experience in a short story. I spent hours writing and rewriting, clicking away at my keyboard (occasionally munching on chips), only to be punished with cramped hands that rendered my writing useless.

I have filled recycle bins full of wasted, inferior papers. Towards the end of one class my professor announced that we were to group with a partner and "peer review." "Peer review" consists of two students getting together and complaining about the other's grammatical errors and possibly the subject of their essay. In the process of "peer review" I managed to print four three-page copies of my adventures at a beach. I was not very pleased with having to throw away nine pages. Two trees were lost and two gallons of diesel were spent for nothing. This most definitely does not help our environment. When multiplied times all the other students in the world doing the same, we have a major issue of which I'm positive Al Gore would love his \$0.02 to be a part.

The fear of a graded essay now makes writing an essay nearly painful, and I know that, as I write, I am making errors that I overlook. After I had refined my "Charles" paper down to the level that I felt comfortable with, I turned it in. I left that day with a sense of pride knowing that surely it must have been perfect. Spending hours proof reading a paper really gives me confidence, only to have that confidence taken away at the sight of red ink. The instructor finally ceased her complaining of the class and handed the essays back to their rightful owners. I was anxious to see what I had made, but I maintained my pride in a good paper. When my paper reached me, I was shocked

to see that it lay slain on my desk. The professor slashed my paper all over with red ink. I could not understand what had gone wrong. I stared in disbelief at my simple misuse of commas and my terrible spelling mistakes, and I realized that I shall forever live in fear of the returning of the final draft.

Essays are cruel things that lurk in the back of my mind, reminding me that they will never be good enough. And teachers know what happens in a student's mind. Utilization of that suffering can get students to produce essays of a grand caliber that exceeds all previous essays. A more dangerous beast will be born, and I will have to create a better essay to overcome what was yesterday's best. I hate essays.

“Grandpa”

Tammy Cawthron

Some memories are easy to remember; others are easy to forget. The best memories involve those that we love and care about. My dad and I were looking through pictures the other day, and we came across one of my grandparents on his side.

Grandma and Grandpa Cawthron were not around much when I was a child. They lived in another state and didn't visit often. I don't have many memories of my dad's parents, but this is one I will never forget.

In this memory, my grandfather and I were walking slowly down the white sanded beach hand in hand. I remember how large, rough, and calloused his hands felt to my tiny hands. I recall looking up and seeing his stubbly face smiling serenely back at me. The sand was so warm and wet it felt like clay between my toes. The sun was hot beating down on my small back, causing a cool sweat to trickle down my spine. I could smell the salt of the jade-colored ocean with a mixture of Grandpa's aftershave. It was a strangely sweet smell I will never forget. A light breeze was blowing, causing my hair to fly into my curious eyes. I kept trying to ask, “Where are we going?”

Grandpa never answered. I do not know if he couldn't hear me over the roar of the waves crashing or those stupid seagulls squawking so loudly. We just kept walking slowly. I turned to look back and could see my mom, dad, and sister on the bright red blanket talking amongst themselves.

As we continued our little journey down the beach, the warm salt water of the ocean lapped at our ankles. A huge pile of jagged grey rocks came into view and along with it the amazing sight of blue water crashing into them, causing a spray of bubbles to

appear. When we got closer to the rocks, I could see a large piece of sun-bleached driftwood. I noticed a small blackened area with burnt pieces of wood. The combination of the odor of salt, burnt firewood, and Grandpa's aftershave was intoxicating. It was strangely quiet there. The only sounds were the waves crashing into the rocks.

Grandpa sat down and pulled my small body onto his immense lap, laying my head against his bony chest. I could feel the stubble of his beard tugging slightly on my hair each time he spoke. He kept telling me how much he loved me and that he would always be with me no matter where he was. I felt a warm wetness in my hair and looked up. Grandpa turned away, but not before I could notice the large tears in his eyes behind his thick glasses with ugly brown frames. We did not speak after that. I laid my head back on his chest and could feel the strong and fast beat of his heart. Grandpa leaned down quietly and kissed the corner of my mouth. I could taste the tobacco on his lips. Then, silently Grandpa pushed me off his lap and started the long walk back to my family. Grandpa and I never spoke of that moment again.

My grandfather died two weeks after that trip to the beach. I have told my father about this being the only memory that I have of Grandpa, and he seems to think that I've dreamed this or that I have a very good imagination. I was only three when Grandpa Cawthron died, so I don't remember him being sick. My dad's memories, however, are mostly of his illness. Grandpa had cancer. The doctors attempted to operate to remove it without success, and he spent his last few days in the hospital hooked to tubes and lines. The memories that my dad and I have are special to each of us in different ways. The memory that I have of Grandpa is happy, and I never want to forget it.

"Eve's Angel"

Brittany Kriz

Every night before I go to sleep, I tell my sister Angel a story about our parents. *"Around five years ago (that's how old my sister is), there was a terrible storm. We were at home enjoying a gourmet dinner in our elegant two-story mansion when the door bell rang. Our father opened the door to a horrible man who had a gun. He said that if we didn't give him all our valuables, he would kill us all. Our father told us to run. Then he punched the bad man in the nose. The bad man shot our father, and we watched as he fell into a lump on the ground. Our mother charged at the bad man and ordered our nanny to take you and me in one of the cars to the police. Before our nanny had a chance to block our view, we watched the bad man shoot our mother. She fell atop our father and looked like the final death scene in Romeo and Juliet. Our nanny then pulled us away before the bad man could shoot us next. She started down the road and was almost to the city when the bad man crashed into us! Nanny pushed us out of the car and told us to run for our lives! Since you couldn't walk very well, I carried you behind a tree. Then, we peeked out from around the tree in time to see the bad man shoot Nanny. I pulled you back around the tree and kept us real quiet so the bad man couldn't hear us. He yelled for us a few times but turned on his car and drove away. When morning came, we walked into the city looking for the police station. We looked all day, but the city was too big..."*

Then, she would ask, "What did we do then?" I would tell her, "Well, we continued to look every day for a whole month, but we could never find the police

station. So, we gave up and searched for a safe place where we could eat, sleep, and live.”

Angel would ask again, “What happened then?” I would answer, “*We live on the streets of the city, and that’s about it...*”

“What about the bad man and our house?”

“I don’t know, Angel. I haven’t gone back.”

“Can we go back?”

“No, Angel, we can never go back...”

Because there was no bad man who ruined our lives. And there was no two-story mansion. There was no nanny who pushed us out of the car, and there was no fancy dinner. I’m not even sure who our parents are much less if they are alive or dead. The only truth to the story is that we have lived on the ghetto streets of New York City for five years. My name is Eve, and I am 12 years old. My whole life I’ve seen the outside of apartments and the inside of cardboard boxes. My sister and I were abandoned at Central Park one day and since then we resorted to scrounging for food instead of enjoying a sit-down dinner with our mom and dad. I don’t remember much of my parents. They always came and went a lot so I never really knew who they were. The baby-sitter was more of a parental figure than my actual parents were, and when she couldn’t watch us, Angel and I were left all alone. Our parents wanted to go to Central Park to reconnect as a family one day. Little did I know that reconnecting as a family meant desert the financial burdens and return to the good ole’ days.

“Eve, I’m hungry,” Angel whimpers sweetly in my ear. For a five-year-old, Angel has exceptional speech; she knows all of her letters and their sounds and has a wider vocabulary than most children her age.

As rush hour takes hold of the city, I hear hundreds of people rushing by on the sidewalk and taxis honking their horns, the perfect time for shoplifting a couple of muffins and some water bottles. Starbucks is the best place for water because of the easy access, and the nearby bakery usually has an open counter so customers can get what they want. I usually try to swipe one good meal every few days or so; dumpster diving isn’t that much fun.

“Hey! Stop that thief!”

“Thief! Someone stop her!”

I can’t help but smile. They say the same thing on cue every time. Like always, no one stops me or even sees me. Children aren’t the stereotypical thieves anymore which gives me and Angel our only bit of luck.

I turn a corner to get out of sight of the Starbucks. Then I follow the path to our secret hiding place, our home.

“Breakfast!” I yell eagerly. Muffins, specifically chocolate muffins, are a rare treat and Angel’s favorite. Angel runs out of our cardboard home with wide eyes and a watering mouth.

“...gah...mu...ff...in...s,” she manages to enunciate. I just laugh; it’s so funny to watch her try to cram the whole muffin into her little mouth and gingerly lick up crumbs that always litter the ground.

“If you eat it slower, you could enjoy it longer,” I tell her.

“I can’t help it. All the chocolately goodness calls my name. I can’t wait,” she explains as she gasps for air. I grin and shake my head. She will have to learn soon to conserve foods like muffins because they don’t come around that often and can stay fresh for several days and sometimes weeks if properly stored.

I don’t do all the work to take care of us; I give Angel some jobs. She collects papers and other bedding materials for us to lie on because there is never enough for comfort, and Angel still wets the bed. I sometimes get her to beg for food and clothes when we absolutely need them; she still has that “cute” factor of a young child. She will find toys for us to play with or make them herself. But, I take care of our basic, day-to-day survival. And, once again, I’m only 12.

“Angel, you need a bath”

“Wwwwhhhhhyyyy? I’m clean,” she moans. I was far from convinced. She was covered literally head to toe in dirt and grime from dumpsters. She also has the greasiest hair I’d ever seen on a child, and was randomly sticky wherever you touched her. The only part of her body that was clean was her teeth, and that’s because we find lots of tooth brushes and toothpaste discarded outside a dentist’s office. Ironically.

“I don’t want a bath!”

“You need one. You stink worse than a skunk that sprayed itself and then got hit by a car, and that is saying something.” She protrudes her lower lip in one of her angelic looks to try to knock down my defenses, but she forgot today is a muffin day. My will is stronger. I won’t give.

“TAG! YOU’RE IT!” Angel yells joyfully.

“Angel, come back here! I’m not arguing with you!”

“I’m not either! Catch me, if you can, and then I’ll get a bath!”

“NO! Angel!” But, I take off after her anyways. She sprints down an alley, turns right, and takes off into the street.

“Angel! Get back on the sidewalk!” The cars are going by so fast, and she doesn’t hear me. Something in the street catches her attention. She bends down to get it just as a speeding taxi comes barreling towards her!

“Angel! Get out of the street!” I yell louder, but she still doesn’t hear me.

“ANGEL!” She looks up at me then at the taxi coming towards her. Her eyes grow wide with pure horror, and we both are frozen with fear.

Just as the taxi is about to hit, a blood-curdling, “ANGEL!” escapes my lips, and I clamp my eyes closed.

I try to open my eyes, but they close tighter. I try to urge my body forward, but I fall to my knees. Tears roll down my cheeks, and I start to sob.

“Angel...,” I whisper hoarsely, “Angel...” I think of all that’s happen to us. Everything. How we live, where we live, why we live here, how we got this way, and who made this happen. Dearest mother and father.

“Curse you mother. Look what you’ve done,” I growl, “She’s dead. Angel’s dead because of you. And—” I feel a familiar grimy, sticky finger wipe away a single, lonely tear.

“Eve, why are you crying?” Angel says. I look up shocked. How? How is she alive? I touch her to make sure she is real. She smiles and laughs when I brush a tickle spot.

“How? How are you here?” I finally ask. She angles her head upward, and I notice that a man has been standing behind Angel this entire time. I grab Angel and yank her into my arms.

“Who are you? I demand you tell me!” I shout.

“It’s daddy!” Angel replies gleefully.

“Impossible!”

“It’s our REAL daddy!” My expression disappears and is replaced with a look of confusion.

The man sees the opening and says, “Hello, Eve.” He squats down to get a better look at me. “I’m your father. I’ve come to take you home.”

I smile. I don’t why, but I believe him. I walk up to him and finally wrap my arms around someone who I’ve wanted to see my whole life: my dad. I don’t know how I know it is him or how Angel knows, but here he is. Our father. And, as I pull away from his body, I notice a dog tag around his neck. It has the initials J.C. I start to wonder what his name is just as Angel points out the object in the street that caught her eye earlier. It is a cross. I look back at the man, our father, and instantly know who he is. I squeeze his hand a little harder, a message to him saying, “You saved us, all of us. I love you, my father and my savior.”

“Shocking Desires”

Brittany Kriz

Freedom. That’s what it’s called...“freedom,” right? Running away from home, ditching school, refusing phone calls, and escaping the hawk-like eyes of my friends and family, who, by the way, are hunting me down, this is freedom, affirmative? Well, this is the mess I got myself into and for whom? Myself? No, ha, I chose do this because of him. I wouldn’t do it for anyone else but for him. Maybe I should start from the beginning...to explain a few things...

“Hey, Aqua, don’t forget PAT after school,” my sister, Ember, told me three months ago.

“Do I ever forget, Em?” I answered rhetorically.

Every week Em and I have Personal Ability Training, or PAT for short, with our parents in our trillion-dollar sparring arena. My parents are extraordinary, extremely prosperous human beings or, as everyone calls them, super villains. What did you think I was going to say? Heroes? Ha, don’t make me laugh,...seriously, because I can’t even talk at the moment. Anyways, my mom is this super genius that by sheer chance met a half-crazed military mastermind, and they wedded and had twin girls. The younger one was gifted with the power of fire: fiery orange eyes, spiked haired with singed ends, and always clouded with a film of smoke enticed Em’s hot-head personality. The older twin, by FIVE minutes if I may point out, was cursed for eternity with the direct opposite of her sister. I have a watered-down, easygoing quality. Not a problem in my opinion, but the source of many others.

“I’m just warning you, Aqua, that stunt you pulled last time and the other times before that were not fun on my part. They punish me with twice the amount of training thanks to you,” growled Em.

I decided that I was going to have a real life and go hang out with some people after school, special villain school to be precise, those afternoons. I would have been fine if the people I chose to interact with weren’t the three most famous orphans in the heroic world. Yes, one of those three heroes was him. I know: ironic, right? Curly, pitch black hair, dark brown eyes, small smile, and a quality that has me drawn to him counter his electrical powers.

“I’ll be there. Promise,” I lied. I don’t lie a lot or at all for that matter, but I never thought I could lie so easily and have someone, least of all my sister, believe me. I lied and instead took the sewer into downtown Topeka, Kansas, to go bowling with- whom else- my new friends. It’s not as bad as it sounds. Then again, liquefying into sewer water is the most disgusting thing I have ever done despite the peace and quiet. I made sure no one saw me as I pulled myself out and walked north down Fillmore Street until I ran into 6th Street. From there I strolled across the four-lane road and peered through the door of an old, rundown bowling alley called Sunflower State Lanes. He smiled his rare smile and motioned for me to come inside. I waited until I started breathing again, and I casually opened the grimy door to join my friends. I hadn’t known then that they could have killed me on the spot, least of all that they were super. I don’t think that they knew that about me either because, like I said, they might have killed me as soon as I stepped through the threshold.

“Maria!” screeched Cyrene, who, believe it or not, does not have the power of sonic shriek. Her name actually means strength, and she has a lot of it.

“Hey,” I greeted. Word of warning: Don’t underestimate Cyrene! She stands about four feet six inches tall, but what she lacks in size she makes up for with her ambiguous personality alone. Strength just gives her the edge to be a heroine.

Cyrene always wears this jet-black toboggan, and until just recently, I never knew why. She was born with bleach blonde hair. But because of her ever-changing disposition and some strange genetic defect, Cyrene’s short cropped hair can transform into every shade in the rainbow, depending on her mood, that is.

“Sup, Maria,” said Lance, Cyrene’s significant other. Every time I look at Lance I think, ‘Thank God she has him!’ Because without Lance, Cyrene would be a complete mess. I don’t see how she got through 17 years by herself. Lance is the most tranquil person I know. Exactly six feet tall, pulled back shoulder-length dirty blonde hair, and fairly muscled body complement his telepathic abilities. Lance moves objects with his mind and can link people in a telepathic conversation.

“Glad you could make it, Maria,” smiled the guy who still makes my heart skip beats. If you’re thinking that I don’t know his name, you’re wrong. I presume it’s useless trying to protect his identity now since we are all on the run. Voltage. That’s his name. He’s six feet four inches tall, slightly tanned complexion, and also fairly muscled. Sigh, I miss him every moment I don’t see his handsome face.

“I needed time away from my crazy family,” I confessed. “They are driving me up the wall.” Little did they know at the time that I was serious.

“Okay! Now that the formalities are over, let’s bowl!” Cyrene pressed. And so we bowled, to say it bluntly. The only weird part was when we were leaving the lanes. Volt was telling me about this really cool restaurant down the road.

“I am completely serious. They have the best food there, and none of the ingredients have preservatives in them. They even have vegetarian choices, too.”

“Really? I might have to take you up on that offer, but I can’t tonight. I’m already going to be late getting home.”

“Oh, I hope you’re not in too much trouble. Do you want me to walk you home?”
And such a tempting offer...

“No! I mean, I’ll be alright. Plus, it’s like way across town, and I’d feel responsible if I got you into trouble with me.”

“Nah...my parents are cool about letting me stay out late. Are you sure you’ll be fine because I can always call a cab...?”

I smiled widely. “I’m positive. And if I should come by some misfortune on the way, I won’t hold you accountable.”

He caught the joke and grinned, “If you should come by some miscreant on your peril-less journey home, then let me depart you with this...” And to my surprise Volt gave me a quick kiss on the lips leaving me in a temporary state of shock and delight. The weird part? Well, in that moment of pure guilt-free happiness, I felt electricity. Literally, it felt like Volt zapped me with his lips. I didn’t give much thought to it, though, until the next morning.

Do you ever get that feeling that something just doesn’t seem right? Like when you left your favorite necklace at home and every time you reach up to place your hand

on it, it's not there? Well, that's the feeling I had as I awoke to the rising sun. I squinted at the bright light, and as soon as I started to part my lips to yawn, a sharp, stabbing pain sent me flying, figuratively, off the bed and into the bathroom. My face lingered six inches from the mirror, and I ever so gently stroked the top of my burned mouth only to be rewarded with the same throbbing pain. Panic never crossed me first; suspicion did. Like a crawling bug, the light hairs on my arms stood on their ends. I diverted my attention from the puffy, red worms on my face to stare at the hairs. I hovered one of my fingers over them, felt the slight jolt of static electricity, and watched several hairs drift down to rest back on my arm. Although I like to think that I never learned anything from my parents or that trap-infested prison called school, I will admit this may be one of the few times that I appreciated the endless hours of my training. Electricity. Volt. Could he be...? I shook my head and laughed to myself about my suspicions, but I didn't forget them.

Now I will take the time to describe to you my last, typical day at my school. Well, maybe not as typical because Em didn't talk to me the whole day, which didn't bother me at all; on the contrary, I knew it was killing her on the inside, again figuratively speaking. I had to take the sewer because Em's persistence to refrain from speaking to me left me with the option of walking or the sewer. I would have taken the bus; however, no bus service wanted to drive roughly 45 miles from our house to the school. Yes, we live that far out of town surrounded by the miles and miles of wheat. Nevertheless, I got to school. Similar to my other trip in the quiet depths of disgust, I rid myself of the sewage waste and smell before I entered Hayden High School, the world-renowned high school for villains. That is to say, it is famous to the ones who know about it.

To attend this high school you have to have swagger, you need to hold power, you must have...money. Every moral right I abide by is shattered by every high school student on a daily basis. Food fights during lunch are encouraged, to be the lowest ranked in the class is treasured, fist fights are allowed because if you can't stand to take a punch from a peer then you won't hold your own in a battle against your arch enemy, and so on. You get the picture; villains break "rules" in school.

Arms crossed, I walked down the locker-lined halls swarmed with super villains-in-training. I found my locker in the midst of the morning chaos, wrenched open the archaic and decrepit locker door, and jumped feet first into the cavity below. Did you actually think the fragile classrooms could host the intense, destructive training that super villains require for survival? They would hardly last five seconds. However, due to the school wide requirement that every student must take an oath to conceal the secrets of the school, I cannot tell you what happens in the brightly lit depths that exceeded fifty feet below Hayden High's basement.

Lunch at Hayden High School is a feeding frenzy. Every man and woman for him- or herself. I swear I was perhaps the only civilized person in the room; even the lunch ladies couldn't get out of the line of attack in time. I'm stifling a laugh just thinking about it. I didn't eat lunch since my lips still ached. Thankfully, the burn didn't scar; I just looked like I had badly chapped lips. Instead, I left school early; our school hours are fairly short, from seven a.m. to noon, but extremely intense.

I don't regret leaving. As I remember prancing out the double-door entrance, I fail to recall Ember trying to stop or catch up with me because skipping lunch is a tradition I do at least once a week. Em, no matter how much she denies it, is completely jealous of

me. I figured her daily dose of jealousy combined with her new anger from a broken promise kept her away. I wish I had departed the building later, but...sigh...love conquers all thoughts.

Despite the strong urge to run like a madman with a rabid bear after him, I strolled at an even pace down the sidewalk towards the bowling alley. I hadn't really planned on going there today; however, my mind was driving me crazy and my heart did nothing but long to see his face, to touch his skin. I started to second guess myself, thinking the whole idea was stupid and drastic, when coincidentally, a stray, bright yellow taxi cab came around the corner. Stray taxi? In a school zone? I made a mental note of it; luck couldn't always be on my side.

Though it appeared to be a potential trap, I hailed the taxi and told the driver the address of the lanes. I didn't really know what to expect; I ran through the possibilities of danger and the numerous ways to counter them in the five minutes the cab took to arrive at Sunflower State Lanes. I peered through the window, and to my disappointment he wasn't there. So, feeling hunger start to creep up, I walked inside and ordered a fruit smoothie to-go. I barely stepped on the sidewalk when I heard the sound of a...well...a fire ball smashing into a building, glass shattering and falling on the ground, and of course who could forget the people shrieking.

I took a couple quick sips of the smoothie, landed it in a nearby trash can, and sprinted off towards the smoke that had started to spiral up into the clear, blue sky. For the first time in my life, I didn't know what was happening. Even when I was a toddler I had a grasp of my surroundings, but this...this caught me by sheer surprise. I turned the corner and nearly tripped as I gazed up into the hazy smoke to find my own sister ignite

a car and the school's strongest technopath, Theresa Nano, fling it across the square to crash into an unfortunate building.

Another girl floated to the right of Theresa, but from the ground I couldn't tell who she was. Flying is a favorable ability to all but those who actually have the power because those who fly can only fly. Flying isn't always helpful during every fight so flyers have to build up their strength in order to prove their worth on the battlefield. This girl floating with her arms crossed definitely took the initiative to work out on a daily basis. Big, buff muscles were noticeable all over her body as well as two giant falcon wings protruding from her back. She looked like one of those female body builders seen on television commercials trying to sell work-out videos.

BOOM! Another car sailed through the air and into a building not far from my position. I scanned the area for possible witnesses because the trio were getting out of control, and I needed to put an end to their chaos. Now. I was just about to scale apartment behind me when two things happened simultaneously: one, the building that the car just smashed was actually the apartment I was about to climb up, and two, just as I was about to leap onto the side of the apartment I saw Volt staring horrifically at me.

Now, when people look at me, I usually get the "what a strange but pretty girl" look. They slightly cock their heads to the side and give a small, polite smile. However, when I saw Volt's face, I literally could not move from that spot. I saw his eyes shift approximately 100 feet above my head. I forced my eyes to the falling brick hurtling towards me; then I flickered them back across the street, but Volt was gone. I would have searched the crowd for him if not for the bigger problem closing in on me. Gravity

did not like me, and I wasn't too fond of it. With the nearest escape route (a storm drain) just out of reach, I thought of another plan to save myself from becoming flattened like a frog in a driveway. I relaxed every muscle in my body and took in slow deep breaths; concentration was evident for the timing to be perfect. I closed my eyes as the building hung about 15 feet from the top of my head. Energy tingled on the surface of my skin. I felt the corner of the building press against my hair, then splash! I was a puddle of water under several tons of brick building that could have potentially killed me. I smiled to myself...well I knew I was smiling. But this moment would prove bittersweet because I had only so much time before evaporation would drain my puddle. Basically, I was on a clock, and time began ticking...

Evening was settling in, and I needed to find a large enough pocket in the rubble to become whole again. I didn't know if anyone knew I was under here much less how long I was to wait. Exhaustion overcame every joint and muscle; my body and I both wanted sleep. The lids of my "eyes" were almost closed when I heard footsteps swiftly approaching the wreckage. I hastily found an adequate hole and solidified; my body opposed moving so I laid there waiting for either my doom or my saviors, relief would come to whichever. The footsteps stopped at the edge of the building, and someone started to heave. The setting sun darkened the person lifting the building and a second, taller person standing erect beside the shorter one, helping lift the building it seemed. Finally, a third person knelt down next to me and peered down at my face.

"Maria," he whispered softly.

Volt. I knew it the moment he loomed over me. I guessed the smaller person lifting the building was Cyrene and taller one Lance. I gave a weak smile and attempted

to reach out and touch Volt. He met my hand and started to smile. However, as soon as he grasped my hand a scream escaped my mouth, and I felt pain so awful I wished death would take it away. Then, as quickly as the pain started, it stopped.

“She’s bleeding!” I heard before darkness shrouded my eyes...

And there I was. Surrounded by nothingness. The favorite color of Goths and reapers. And the tell-tale sign of unconsciousness. Well, I wasn’t completely alone; the pain vibrated through me as a reminder that I was still alive. I had heard somewhere that if you can feel pain, then you are alive, not unharmed but alive. Good pain. Ha ha. Images floated in my head. Volt. Lance and Cyrene lifting the building. I realized then that they did have powers. I didn’t know what Lance’s was, but Volt conducted electricity, and Cyrene had super strength. I had also realized something else. I hadn’t completely retained my solid form when Volt accidentally shocked me. I also remembered...

“She’s bleeding!”

Now I had a new situation to deal with. My power exposed (because I don’t bleed blood when I am in a sub-liquid state, I bleed water), and I was unconscious. What a perfect combination. I started to laugh then; well, laughing in my mind. Here I was on the brink of death and all I could do was laugh. I wonder if unconsciousness makes us all crazy or if that was just me. I hope I never get that answer. Time passed a lot slower in this state, or it seemed slower to me, and within what felt like days and weeks (but was actually about 36 hours), I gradually began to regain consciousness. I had never experienced pain that terrible so I didn’t know how long it would take for me to recover.

Water helped, I think, because I opened my eyes to find that I was relaxing in a hot tub filled with cool water (ironic, I know). I still ached, but I could bear to move.

“He’s upset,” a voice said behind me. I swerved around to find Cyrene frowning at me.

“More with himself than with you,” she continued, “I, on the other hand, would like an explanation.”

I hesitated. I didn’t know how to explain things without revealing the truth, so that’s what I decided to tell her. The truth.

“My twin, who I suppose you saw, and I were born diff--” I began but was cut off by a phone ringing in Cyrene’s hand.

“Yes, she is awake,” Cyrene told the caller, “Alright, I’ll bring her there.” Click. She motioned for me to follow her. I grabbed the towel draped across a nearby chair and pulled it around my shoulders. I still had my clothes on. What was left of them that is. My shirt was covered in debris from the building and burnt by the electrical encounter. My white jeans were...well...never going to be white again, and my shoes I presume melted off or were otherwise left behind because I didn’t see them anywhere. But they were just an old pair of black and white Converse. Reluctantly (like I had a choice anyways), I slowly walked through the double-doors that Cyrene politely held open for me and into my destiny that laid beyond, but no matter what the consequence, I was determined to look straight ahead and hold my head high.

“Pecan Candy”

David Adam Cantrell

If you like pecans and want the most smashing recipe for pecan candy ever known to man, then you should watch my dear Aunt Mango. As far as her cooking goes, it is repulsive, as if something had crawled into her dish and died. The steam that leaves her dishes is always a warm moist steam; nothing like the steam that smells delicious hovering over a warm pot pie. Mango’s steam from her dishes is always like the steam from a raccoon’s body lying out in the road that has sat out in the sun for too long. Unlike all of these dishes that should remain uncooked, one of hers is the best. She may not know how to make spaghetti, homemade pot pie, or fried chicken, but what my Aunt Mango does know how to make is pecan candy.

At ten years old I ate my first pecan candy from my Aunt Mango and realized she could at least make some simple pecan candy. We were sitting together at her kitchen table one sunny afternoon cracking the hard shell which covers the delicate pecan that lies beneath it. It seemed to me that only a person with skilled hands could get a perfect pecan out of its hard container. I watched Aunt Mango’s monkey-like hands squeeze the pecan shell tight in her grip. Then, as she slowly opened her hand, she revealed two perfect pecan halves lying in the center of her palm. The remainder of the shell was dust that lay around the pecan halves.

Before I knew it, Aunt Mango had filled an entire bowl full of pecans. It smelled quite odd in the house, but the smell of freshly crushed pecans that lay under my nose had swept that odd stench away from my nostrils and had taken me to a place outside

the mildewed walls and onto that soft, green, overgrown grass by a pecan tree. This was only my imagination which was fueled by the sweet smell of nature.

When Aunt Mango was ready to begin baking, she carried the heavy glass bowl, which now looked a dark brownish color because of the pecans inside, to the counter near her old wood stove. My Aunt Mango started to grab the chopped wood that was neatly stacked as a pyramid beside her ancient wooden stove. Once the stove was full of wood she took a shot glass out from a cabinet and filled it with her homemade apple cider moonshine. Once the glass was full she turned it up and quickly lit a match. Then she aimed it for the wood inside the stove, and spit out the moonshine, creating a flamethrower effect. At this point I had wet myself. There was no time to stop and clean up my damp pants. I feared if I did stop my Aunt would catch me on fire.

As the fire made popping noises that the heat created from burning the small insect bodies which use to live on the wood, my aunt ignored the small screams and tossed a large pan on top of the rack inside the stove. Mango threw the pecans inside the wood stove landing them on top of the pan perfectly. She then threw in a cup of sugar, a handful of cinnamon, and some cayenne pepper for some heat. She did all of this like a boss. Once five minutes had passed, my aunt opened the fiery inferno and stuck her bare hand into the fire with no fear of burns or losing her hand.

My Aunt Mango took a small string from her pocket and tied several pecans up and down the string. She then started to swing the string around quickly in her hand as if she was possessed. She started chanting "YAYAYAYA!" waving the pecans around and around. The sound of my Aunt Mango chanting frightened me more and more. For a minute, I could have sworn that she started foaming from her mouth. I was so petrified

from my Aunt Mango's actions that my legs froze, and I could not move. I then passed out on the splintered wood floor.

I woke up later at my Aunt Mango's table with my mom sitting in front of me. As I came to, I noticed a glorious bowl of pecans laid before me. My mom started explaining to me that she was sorry for letting my Aunt Mango babysit me while she was gone. She told me that she had not taken her medication the past week because Aunt Mango sometimes likes to skip on her pills. As my mother rambled on, I stared deeply into the bowl of pecans. The light from the sun shined through the thick discolored glass of the window. I could see the dust in the light float slowly in all different directions. The light beam from the sun shined down on this magnificent bowl of warm, sugar coated pecans on the table as though the light was saying to come closer. The sound of my mother's voice was muffled in the background as I reached for one pecan half. I placed the perfectly rugged pecan in my mouth which had lain on top of the pecan mountain. The hairs on my arms lifted, chills ran down my legs, my mouth watered, and my pupils widened. I had realized at that point that my Aunt Mango can make pecan candy like a boss.

“Sunshine”

Madison P. L. Savage

2000

The little boy began crying for his mother, but everyone continued to walk past him. “That is no way to treat a child,” I thought as I made my way over to where he was. When I finally stood in front of him for a better look, I shoved my unruly red hair out of my way and pulled my circular blue sunglasses down my nose. The little boy was about eight or nine with curly black hair and pale blue eyes, and he seemed to be strangling the action figure he was holding so tight. I bent down until I was at his eye level, and as I moved the long fringe of my vest out from under the knee of my bell-bottom jeans, I asked, “What’s your name, little man?”

“Eric,” he replied as he clutched his toy even tighter. “Well Eric, my name is Sunshine. You know where you are?” I asked as I pushed my glasses back up my nose. I knew the kid was older, but I wanted to make sure. “Buck’s Theatre. Me and my mom came to see *Toy Story 2*, and I got lost,” Eric replied. “Would you like me to help you find her?” I asked him gently as I stood back up. Just as I looked back down, he had begun to shake his head no. “Mom told me that I could only go with people who work here.”

“I do work here,” I told him. “Here, this is my name tag; you wear it now and give it back to me later,” I said as I stuck it to his shirt. He smiled and agreed to come with me. I took hold of his hand and led him to the lobby of the theatre and sat him down on the giant fountain that sat in the middle. I assured him, “Your mother will be here shortly.” Less than thirty seconds later, a woman who had both the look of worry and a

look that would have killed a death row inmate burst through the crowd. “Eric, Eric, there you are, don’t you ever wander off like that again,” she yelled. I couldn’t suppress my grin, seeing the parents find their children was always trippy. Like all parents, she paid me no mind, like I wasn’t there and just like all parents, she was still yelling when she drug him out the door. I reached over to scratch my arm when I realized that shrimp took my name tag!

2010

It’s been ten years since I got lost in that old movie theatre, but you would think it happened yesterday if you spoke to my mom. I’m getting ready to start all conversations with, “Hi, my name’s Eric and when I was eight, I got lost in a movie theatre.” Me and mom moved two towns away when I was twelve, and we never went back to Buck’s Theatre. Anyway, I just moved into my own apartment; it smells like dog food but it’s mine. While I was unpacking, I came across an old Buck’s Theatre name tag; it had the name “Sunshine” on it. “This belonged to that lady that helped me that day,” I thought. I don’t know why but something told me she wanted this back. “Maybe that old theatre has an address she might still use,” I said to myself as I left my apartment and rode my motorcycle to where I thought the theatre was.

I ended up in front of a building called “Sunshine Theatre.” As I got off my bike, I noticed the old guy unlocking the door. He had a long grey braid going down his back and wore a white button down shirt tucked in a pair of jeans. “Excuse me sir, could you help me? I’m trying to find Buck’s Theatre, and I may have got lost,” I told him. When he turned to me, I saw he had one brown eye and he was blind in the other. He seemed to take in my own shaggy appearance before he answered.

“Ain’t Buck’s no more. I changed the name to something more appropriate when I bought the place five years ago.”

“Oh, um, well, this may sound stupid but when I was a kid I got lost in there and some woman that worked here kept an eye on me till my mom came. She pinned her name tag on me, and I figure I should at least let her know I’m grateful after all these years by returning it.” The old man nodded and ushered me inside before he said, “Name’s Mickey...nice to meet you. If you got her name, I can find her.” I handed him the old tag. “Well I’ll be damned,” was all he said when he read the name.

“You were right to bring this back, boy. She would want this back,” he told me seriously as he leaned against the ticket booth. “You mean she still works here?” I asked. “Nope, Sunshine was killed in 1967 at the age of twenty-one,” Mickey said solemnly as he handed the name tag back to me. “That’s not possible! I saw her, spoke to her when I was a kid!” I exclaimed.

“I know you did. Kids always see her, and she always helps them find their parents. Heck, the only time I’ve ever known of an adult seeing her is when she wants them to.”

“What happened to her? Why does she stay here and help lost kids?” I asked. Mickey sat down on the counter of the ticket booth and motioned for me to do the same. When I had settled, he began his tale.

“I started working here when I was sixteen, in 1965 and I got partnered with the only hippie on staff. No one knew her real name. The only thing she would answer to was ‘Sunshine’ because it was her favorite song by the Temptations. She was the kind of girl that would bring you down if your head got too big and yet she’d bring you up if

you were down. She was nineteen when I met her. She was studying to be a nurse and the only soft spot she had in her heart was for kids. Anyway, I'm going off subject. The night she died was the night of my senior prom and at the last second, Buck the bastard decided I would work. But Sunshine would have none of that. After he went home for the night, she gave me an old costume suit and the keys to her car and told me to go and have a good time and that she would see me the next day. And from what I understand, she was cleaning when someone snuck in through a side door to steal the money from the register. Whoever it was saw her and shot her in the stomach. Sunshine died for nine dollars and thirty-seven cents. Buck found her the next day. She was killed in the middle of the lobby where that fountain sits. Well, Buck fired me that day; apparently having a job buddy die while you're on clock is a no-no. But when I left, I played the stock market, made some good investments, got rich and made Buck put that fountain in as kind of a memorial in the 80's and, like I said, I bought this place five years ago and changed the name. But the love she had for kids must be the only thing that keeps her here because we never lose kids in this theatre," Mickey said with a smile.

"Have you ever seen her?" I asked.

"Every day at sunset I put on that song by the Temptations, and I watch her dance around the fountain. Speaking of which, I need to start that song right about now," Mickey said as he turned and pressed a button behind the counter. The song "Sunshine" began to play. I looked over at the fountain and saw the same woman that had helped me all those years ago appear. I walked over to her, and she smiled at me. "Long time no see, Eric," she said. I handed her back her name tag. "You're the only

kid not to return my name tag,” she said as she pinned it to her shirt. And with that, she turned away and began to dance again.

That very night, for some reason, Mickey gave me a job, but a part of me needed to know her name. So I got Mickey to give me an old picture of her. Thank God for the internet, because the next day I went to the library and downloaded her picture.

Thirteen hours and two pissed off librarians later, I found her! Her name was Emily Parker, and she grew up in a little country town. That’s all I found, but it was enough for me. I never called her anything but “Sunshine,” and I doubt I ever will. No matter how much time will pass, I think I’ll be content with standing next to Mickey every night and watching as the soul of this old theatre dances around a fountain that is only there because of her.

“The Visitors”

Betty Churchill

I woke up in the middle of the night because I heard a scream from my neighbor's house. With my heart pounding in my chest, I jumped out of bed and ran to the window. I saw several figures running across the Morgan's backyard. I quickly woke my husband, explaining to him what I heard and saw. We were immediately concerned because our neighbors, the Morgans, were away on vacation, and no one was supposed to be at their house.

We debated on what we should do as we threw on some clothes and our shoes. My husband thought that we should check things out before calling the police. I find that being awakened in the middle of the night is not a great time for making good decisions. My husband decided to bring along a baseball bat for protection. My choice was a flashlight and my cell phone.

The Morgan's house was up on a slight rise across the street from our house. Not knowing what to expect, my husband and I decided on concealment so we did not use the flashlight or walk up the driveway. There was just enough moonlight to guide our way. We circled up to the house from the side. We chose our steps carefully so that we would be quiet and avoid tripping on Mrs. Morgan's flower pots.

The night was hushed. I was sure that the people that I saw fleeing were long gone. I just wondered what they were doing, what they left behind, and why someone screamed. It's funny how time seems to stand still when you are afraid. My heart was still pounding, and it seemed to take forever to reach the Morgan's house.

We crept up to the front door. No lights were on, and everything looked fine. We slowly maneuvered our way around the side of the house towards the backyard. All the windows were dark. We turned the corner, and in the moonlight, we could see that the back door was standing open. At this point, my hands started shaking, and I could feel the adrenaline pumping through my veins. My husband pushed me behind him and motioned for me to follow him. He proceeded with the baseball bat poised high above his head. He was ready for anything. I think that he was actually enjoying himself.

We slowly advanced toward the open door. As we neared the door, we flattened up against the back of the house. This seemed like a good idea, since we have seen it done in all the television police shows. My husband peeked in the door, but he couldn't see anything inside.

He motioned for me to shine the flashlight in the open door. We were like mimes playing a part. However, I didn't like this script. I turned on the flashlight, slowly slipped up next to my husband, and quickly flashed the light in the door. Looking down, I saw stuff strewn all over the floor. All seemed silent and still. As I rotated the beam of light around, I could see loot lying outside the door and across the backyard. I wondered what had happened. Obviously, it was a robbery. But why did I hear a scream?

Since it seemed safe, we decided to go in and investigate. I wanted to turn on a light, but my husband said it would be safer not to. He wasn't sure the house was empty and wanted to keep the element of surprise on our side.

We slithered into the kitchen evading everything deposited on the floor. As we converged on the living room door, a revolting smell assailed our nostrils. The room

was inundated with skunk spray! The smell was overpowering. My eyes started watering as I retreated back into the kitchen.

Standing in the kitchen, I could hear a scratching sound coming down the hallway. Since the Morgans do not have a pet, it was quickly apparent that the skunk was still in the house. I fled the house with my husband right on my tail. We ran over to the side of the yard and watched. The skunk emerged sauntering out like a king before his subjects. After looking around, he slowly scooted down the road.

My husband and I surmised that when the burglars broke into the Morgan's house, they left the back door open. A nosy skunk dropped in scrounging around for some food. The robbers must have startled the skunk and were sprayed. This generated the scream that I heard.

We called the police, reported the break-in, and waited for them at the bottom of the driveway. After giving our explanation to the officers, we let them take over. We saw no need to enter the house again.

“Circus Dreams”

Kelsey Callahan

Tents that are varying colors of the rainbow are seemingly littered around the dirt camp ground. There is music playing loudly somewhere, but I cannot figure out where it is coming from. Tiny little fingers clutch at my hand as we walk around looking at wood boards with painted attractions on them. I look down into the biggest blue eyes that are framed by the palest blond hair. She beams up at me and points towards the sign with elephants on it. I shake my arm to wiggle her hand in excitement; I love elephants too. We walk into a brown tent and sit down in the first row of bleachers to get a good view. Seemingly out of thin air, Lilly and I are eating some buttery popcorn and sticky pink cotton candy. Out of the corner of my eye I see this black mass enter the tent and sit down in the bleacher section next to ours. What I assume to be a man is wearing a black suit and cape that fits his broad shoulders rather tightly. A black silk cape drapes over his still form. “Why notice this person in a circus?” you may ask. The clothes, no one wears black in the circus, not even the performers. His head slowly turns toward me and my nerves blaze to life. Something is not right with this man. He stares at me and a smile tugs at his painted lips. His whole face is painted in black, with blue and red colors sparkling out of the darkness. I drop my eyes to the little girl who is eating more junk food than any four year old should be eating in a week much less five minutes then I lift my eyes back to the dark stranger. He looks down to the child sitting beside me and then looks back up with a look of anticipation. Maybe he just likes kids; I mean that’s why he is a clown, right? But my nerves aren’t hearing any of my brain’s bull. I slowly take Lilly’s hand and tell her that we need to go outside for me to call her mommy; she

wants to talk to her mommy doesn't she? Her little face lights up, and I know that any argument she might have posed to going outside was gone with the idea of talking with her mommy.

We stand up and make our way out of the oncoming crowd. We would catch the next act as soon as that creepy death clown is gone. I feel a chill run down my spine and I stop moving; Lilly looks up at me wondering why we are not going outside to call mommy. I turn around and look over my shoulder to see the shrouded figure staring at my back. I couldn't tell his expression, and I didn't want to. Lilly and I keep moving through the crowd. Screams pierce the air inside the tent we just left as I grab Lilly and lift her up to hold her as I begin running. After passing tent after tent, I swing us into a red tent, and we hide behind some old boxes and thick tarps. I hold Lilly close and she looks up at me with tears threatening to cascade down her face. We look at each other and an understanding passes between us. She crawls into my lap and curls up into this quiet ball. I hold her close and pet her hair. Maybe I over reacted and nothing bad happened I tell myself, but I had better wait a few more minutes just to be sure.

Just as I am about to get up and call myself a moron, I begin to hear people screaming. We huddle together with the sounds of screams getting louder and louder, and I hug Lilly closer to me. I tell myself I will keep her safe no matter what. Black boots come into view just on the other side of our tarp; they pause then keep walking into the tent. I look at the quivering child in my arms and know that I have to get her to safety, but then I think about all the other children at this circus. Who would be helping them? I put Lilly into one of the crates and cover her up, "I'll be right back sweetheart, but I need you to stay here and be really quiet for me, ok?"

“Are you going to get the bad man?” she asks simply as she looks up at me with tears rolling down her red cheeks.

“Yea baby, I’m gonna go get the bad man,” I reply. No sense in lying to the child. I kiss her damp forehead and arrange everything so that it would look as in no one had been there in days. I carefully make my way out of our hiding nook and am met with a chaos of flowing bodies. Some people are screaming. Others are just blindly running, but they are all headed out of the tent. Some of the people are bleeding from long, shallow gashes. I am lucky the man only had a blade. Blades we can deal with; guns are harder to fight against. At least I don’t have far to look for the bad man because suddenly the masses open up, and there is the weirdly painted man from earlier. He is meticulously slashing at anyone who is unfortunate enough to stumble near him in attempts to flee. I take a deep breath and let it out slowly in an attempt to calm myself. I can do this. I pull out two sleek knives about as long as my forearm from a spine sheath and hold them out in front of me ready to attack the oddly painted psycho. Bright blue eyes shine out of the smeared black paint. There is a red star painted on one cheek and a blue crescent moon circling around one eye. He has a blade the size of a samurai sword now held quietly in front of him. How had I not seen that earlier?

“Thank you for coming out to play with me,” he says as he tilts his head to the side and gives me a long, measuring look. His eyes keep flicking to different parts of my body and then back to my face so as not to be caught off guard in case I make a lunge for him. He begins talking again, “You see, you were the only one who noticed me in the elephant tent. No one else even suspected what I was. They all just kept moving like I was nothing, like I was invisible. But not you, no you noticed me.”

Is he going to monologue? I let my mind give an internal groan; you have to be kidding me! I thought bad guys only did this in the movies.

“I knew when you looked at me that you knew, and that I had to play with you. I couldn’t just leave you alone. I have to see if you are better than me. I have to know,” he tells me as he alters his stance for an attack. I glance at the bodies strewn on the floor like forgotten garbage, poor victims that didn’t have a chance to get away, and I can feel my anger welling up inside of me. They didn’t deserve this. I focus my eyes back on the man in front of me and I let my anger wash through me; he would pay for what he did to these people.

“I know I’m better than you,” I reply.

“How?” He inquires as genuine surprise lights up his face.

I attack. No sense in holding off any longer. I need to use the fear and adrenaline while it is still pumping through my system. The man has talked himself into a stupor and he isn’t ready for me. I swing and knock his blade aside then quickly slash at his painted cheek. Twirling around, I stab him in the back then swing away from him. He howls in pain, twisting around to slash at me. I am already too far away for him to reach.

“You little bi...” He stammers.

“Hu-uh... you wanted to play. Grow up and deal with it.” I retort. His eyes narrow at me. I stay tense and ready. He runs at me, sword raised, and at the last minute I twist away and slash at his stomach. He swings his blade around, and I feel a tugging on my arm. I turn around with my swords raised and ready. I will feel the pain later, but now I need to concentrate. He is on his knees, one hand holding his stomach. Out of my

peripheral vision I can see fresh blood dripping down one of my blades. He staggers up to his feet and tries unsuccessfully to catch his balance.

“You can stop this now, and I will let you live. Someone will call the police, and you will be locked up for a very long time,” I tell him. I don’t want to kill this man even if I think he deserves it. Everyone deserves a second chance.

“No. I won’t lose. I can’t. I won’t lose to a girl. You’re only a girl,” he keeps saying like it’s going to change anything. I shake my head in amazement. This fool is going to lose his life because he can’t believe that he just got beat by a girl. Seriously? I run at him, and he is so dazed by blood loss that he can’t defend himself. I drop one of my knives and back-hand him across the face. He drops to the blood stained dirt floor, his eyes unseeing. I look around and spot a girl with a scarf holding her cell phone tight in her grasp.

“Hey you!” I shout at her, pointing so she knows I am talking to her. It takes her a minute to look up at me.

“I need your scarf to bind him. Call the police and tell them what all has happened,” I tell her. You never ask a person in shock. You just tell them what to do. She slowly walks over to me and hands me her thick scarf as she dials 911. I quickly flip him over and bind his hands behind his back. I see a large man over in a corner and I tell him to sit on the now bound prisoner. He just looks at me.

“Now!” I yell at him. “It will keep him from moving until the police get here and help stop the bleeding.” He lumbers up and does what I ask as the girl hangs up her phone.

“The police will be here in five minutes,” she informs me.

“Good,” I look at the man who is now sitting on the prisoner. “You think you can sit on him for five minutes?” I ask.

“Yes ma’am,” he answers. That’s good enough for me. I think about how pissed the man is going to be when he wakes up and finds out that he isn’t dead. A smile tugs at my lips. Karma is the word that comes to mind. I turn and walk out of the arena while the people are all focusing on the painted man. So it’s easy for me to slip back to where I hid Lilly and get her. She squeaks when I open up the crate.

“Hush sugar, it’s me. You’re safe now. I got the bad man,” I keep repeating until she looks up and stretches out her little arms for me. I grab them and lift her up, and she automatically wraps her legs around my stomach and buries her face in my neck.

“You got the bad man?” she asks in a tiny voice.

“Yea baby I did. Now let’s go home,” I tell her. I walk us towards the back of the circus, and we slip out of the chaos unnoticed with the screams of the police sirens in the distance.

“Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind Analysis”

Justine Cayce

Michel Gondry's Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind is a beautiful story about love, life, and learning the difference between the two. Charlie Kaufman, who is well known for such mind-bending anecdotes as Adaptation and Being John Malkovich, wrote the script after talking about the idea with Gondry during their work together on the set of Human Nature, another tale of altered reality. The trinity was completed with the addition of Ellen Kuras as the film's cinematographer. Her shadowy vision in the movies Blow and Summer of Sam is evident here as well, and it adds greatly to the tone of the film. Together these three create an honest, funny, serious, and sad depiction of love found, lost, and found all over again.

Kaufman's story is told completely out of chronological sequence, and, unbeknownst to the first time viewer, it begins almost at the end of the story. The film works backward through the relationship between Joel Barish and Clementine Kruczynski as Joel's memories of her are being erased from his brain. Oddly enough, the present is conveniently interjected at sporadic intervals, both adding a comfortable level of confusion to the audience as well as allowing other characters' stories to be told. It is worth noting that these characters' stories are equally as interesting and candid.

Kaufman also employs a heavy reliance on flashbacks to tell the story. Obviously, memories are nothing more than flashbacks. However, these are what one might call “advanced” flashbacks, in which the viewer is taken between the past, the present, and, arguably, the future multiple times over. For example, the opening scene

is depicted on two separate occasions, and Joel revisits many of the memories that are being erased. Gondry's treatment of these revisited and presumably erased memories is utterly stunning and borders on cinematic genius.

In fact, all the mise-en-scene Gondry creates on these sets is both visually stunning and highly creative. Jim Carrey, who plays Joel, noted that Gondry's use of forced perspective was inspiring and terribly fun to work with. There is one scene in which Joel's mother is bathing Joel and Clementine in the sink. Watching from over the mom's shoulder, one has to imagine that this can only be produced through computer graphics. Conversely, it is accomplished using a very large sink and the careful placement of the actress playing Joel's mother.

Also, in one of the movie's most eye-catching scenes, a child sized Joel hides under the table as Clementine talks with Joel's mother. Gondry explains this effect on the special features section of the DVD release. He shows the table from other angles than the one shown in the movie. In this way, the audience can see that the table is slanted. It is much taller in the back and far shorter in the front. By adding slanted counters and oversized appliances and cabinets, Gondry creates an actual set that plays heavily into the mindset of the actors.

Carrey also stated that these kinds of sets made it easier for him to remain in character. In between takes he could be seen playing in the floor as though he were a little child, often scribbling mindlessly with crayons. Moreover, Gondry set up a ploy to trick Carrey into a good performance on many occasions during filming by allowing the actors to stray from the script, and he even did so himself on one occasion.

In one scene, Joel and Clementine are watching a parade of elephants. This was completely unplanned, and it happened quite by accident. The cast and crew simply heard that the parade was coming through, and Gondry decided it would work well in the film. Since this memory would inevitably be erased, Gondry had Kate Winslet, who plays Clementine, to slip away from Carrey. Gondry was so pleased with Carrey's befuddled reaction that it became one of his favorite shots.

In another scene, the employees, played by Mark Ruffalo, Elijah Wood, and Kirsten Dunst, of Lacuna Inc., the company responsible for erasing Joel's memories, are lackadaisically going about their work while cracking jokes to one another. At times during the filming of this scene, Wood and Ruffalo would stray so far from the script that it would upset Dunst. Gondry found this to be perfectly acceptable because it played into those characters' stories and personalities perfectly.

As a final testament to Gondry's creative brilliance as well as Carrey's magnificence as a performer, it is worth noting a particularly long shot in which Joel revisits the Lacuna Inc. office in an attempt to put a halt to the process. In this shot, Joel sees himself talking with the doctor in charge. Though, the viewer can see both Joels. This was shot using a subjective camera, and Carrey had to work very hard to render this effect. Carrey actually had to allow himself to be filmed as one Joel, and then quickly run behind the camera, while changing into different clothes in order to make his spot before the camera fully panned around to the other Joel. Then, just moments later, he had to run back around to where he was before. On a related note, during this scene, Ellen Kuras actually appears in the movie, although her face is obscured.

As brilliant as the vision of Gondry and Kaufman is, none of it would have been possible without the equally matched brilliance of Kuras. She fully understood what they wanted to achieve and how to achieve it. As Joel's memories are erased, they become almost fuzzy. In order to bring about this effect, Kuras placed gauze over the lights and lenses instead of using computer graphics. In addition to that, she also fought with Gondry over the use of smoke in some scenes. Adding smoke to a scene allowed the light to stream in a more organic way, as though one were seeing dust floating in the air, which is very natural. Kuras was also pivotal in the use of the subjective camera and the lengthy shots.

As a final point, the alternative angles that Kuras used enhanced the oddity and confusion that ran rampant through the picture. For example, in a scene near the beginning, Joel recalls seeing Clementine in the bookstore where she works. She acted like she did not know him, because she had recently had Joel erased from her memory. She was talking with a man but his face was almost completely obscured. This was done because it was something that Joel was remembering and the intent was to show that Joel could not remember what the man looked like. Interestingly enough, the man was Clementine's new boyfriend who just so happens to be an employee of Lacuna Inc., and whom is using Clementine's memories of Joel to woo her. It was essential to reserve this revelation for later in order to preserve the integrity of the story.

Conclusively, these three filmmakers were all very important to the final project. Each added his or her own unique piece of the puzzle, and they all worked very well together. Add in the wonderfully talented and star-studded cast, and the product is the

best movie of all possible movies. It is a superb reminder that love is more than a feeling; it is a state of being.

“The Baby”

Autumn Ford

He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel as he turned the car onto the road he called home for the last five years. His fatigues held the badge “Weary,” as that was his last name, but the badge also told of how he felt on the inside. It had been a rough weekend in the Reserves. He was in the field and could not call home to check on his wife of three years and their newborn baby boy. The times he did call, there was no answer. Alarm failed to register since babies were known to be time-consuming. Besides, she loved being a mother; although, at times there was a wild glint in her eye as she looked at the baby. He had no reason to suspect anything was amiss. As he pulled into the driveway, he could not wait to hug and kiss his wife and inhale the beautiful smell of a newborn baby. He parked the car and got out. He would get his bag later, but for right now he wanted his family. He walked to the open door. The storm door was unlocked, and he slightly chided her naïve recklessness. They had a baby to take care of and needed to take more precautions. He walked in, at first started by the stark contrast of the bright beautiful cloudless day outside and the darkness that was the inside. His eyes, taking a minute to adjust, focused on a blob in the corner. He was slightly taken back at the image of her stringy hair covering her face as she sat in the corner in a fetal position gently rocking. Her hands were clasped together over her shins, and she was singing, or muttering. He looked around. It was eerily silent, well, besides her muttering.

He ran to her and crouched down beside her. “Baby, what is wrong?” he asked, trying to keep the alarm from his voice. She turned slightly and laughed.

“Honey, where is the baby?” he asked.

She looked at him and said “Little boy blue lost his shoe and did not know where to find it; leave it alone and it’ll come home, dragging its laces behind it.”

He went to grab the phone and call someone, anyone, who could help. He felt like he walked into an episode of a great psychological twister and struggled to remain calm. After he made the call, and was assured that help was on the way, he hung up. He went and sat next to her. He sat on the floor and leaned his back against the wall. He mimicked her pose with his hands wrapped around his legs, trying to think of what to say next. Then he heard a noise that made his heart seize with terror and ice replace blood. It was a drip of a leaking faucet coming from the back of the house, where the bathroom was located. He bolted up but felt the alternated sensation of jelly and lead as he had to force his legs to move.

He yelled as not to frighten her. “Baby, did you give the baby a bath today?” he asked. He was already up the hall and knew she would not answer anyway. He pushed open the door and walked to the curtain covered bathtub and grabbed the curtain. With a deep breath he pulled it back and did not breathe again till he saw that the bathtub was filled with water but no baby. He heard a cackling and his wife sing, “Rub-a dub-dub; No baby in that tub.” His patience was wearing thin, and he wondered when the help was going to arrive. He wanted to throttle his wife’s neck until she came to her senses, and, most of all, he wanted his baby.

“Please honey, tell me where the baby is,” he pleaded as he again found himself standing over her. “Baby, Baby, Pudding pie, is playing a game like you and I,” she said, then again, dissolving into a puddle of maddened laughter.

Finally, lights swished in the drive way. He thrust open the door and eagerly greeted the white coat clad gentleman.

“Am I ever glad to see you,” he stated.

He wanted to hug them, and he laughed a little from relief. Now, with them here, he can find the baby and his wife can get help. Gladness and relief turned to horror as the lab-coats grabbed him. “It is okay sir it will all be better in a moment.” He felt a pinch as he struggled to break free of their grasp. “What the hell are you doing? It is her!” he screamed, looking at his wife, who was dissolving into a puddle of darkness before him.

He began to laugh hysterically, as well as cry.

“All I want is my baby,” he said as his world went black.

The hum of the fluorescent bulb woke him; he was lying on a bed, in a padded room with restraints on both arms and legs. His fatigues were replaced with a hospital gown and bare feet. He was cold and disoriented. He heard a voice.

“Tell me who you are.” He looked in the voice’s direction. In a chair sat a balding man in a lab coat and holding a clipboard.

“I am Thomas Weary of the 943 infantry of the Army reserves.” He fought against the numbness in his brain to recall the facts of his life.

”Thomas, can you tell me about your day?” the doctor prodded.

It was already so hazy. His mind blurred with images that did not make sense but were real. “The Baby,” is all he muttered.

The doctor asked for help in removing the restraints. Thomas sat up.

“Thomas, you have no baby,” the doctor said.

“I do too!” Thomas shouted.

“Do you think I would forget my own son?” he asked.

“WHY AM I HERE?” he yelled.

“You do not remember?” The doctor asked.

“YES, my wife went crazy and hid the Baby!” Thomas said.

“No, Thomas, there is no wife or no baby. YOU had a psychotic episode in the barracks of the place you were staying in after the deployment to Iraq. It was the result of post traumatic stress, and it explains why your memories are hazy. You have been here ever since,” the doctor calmly explained.

He bitterly laughed “Okay doc, I will bite. How long have I been ‘crazy?’” he asked.

“Three years,” the doctor said.

“Well how can I have made up a wife and Baby?” he asked.

“Thomas, what is your wife and baby’s name?” the doctor asked.

“Um...” Fog grounded his thought, and his head pounded at trying to remember.

“Don’t you think it is odd that they do not have names?” the doctor asked.

“No, I am sick, and you guys got me drugged. It is my wife who is crazy,” Thomas said going over and sitting in the corner.

His stringy hair falling in his face, he started rocking back and forth.

“Thomas?” the doctor called.

Thomas looked at the doc eyes glassing over...

“Hickory dickory dock, you must think I am dumb as a rock, the clock struck one, the medicine went down, hickory dickory doc...” The doctor shook his head sadly as he motioned for the orderlies to let him out.

“Warrior”

Chelsea Brooke Morris

Have you ever had such a big misunderstanding with a friend that it left you wishing there was some way you could explain everything, but it appeared too late to do so? What if they were held hostage somewhere in an entirely different world? Would you risk everything to save them and bring them back?

Well, I did. My name is Anakin Thomas, and this is my story.

“Goodnight, Mom,” I said to my mother, and kissed her cheek before I headed off to my room for the night for a little thing I like to call bedtime.

Yawning, I walked into the bathroom that was connected to my room. The bathroom was rather smelly: on the floor, dirty laundry was scattered everywhere. On the sink sat my boom box, and on either side tons of CDs waiting to be played.

I looked at my reflection in the mirror and sighed when I saw my more-than-exhausted face. God, I looked pitiful. My eyes were bloodshot, and there were also bags underneath. I hadn’t gotten more than three hours sleep each night for over three weeks; school had been keeping me occupied with homework until I would finally fall asleep at my desk, my head buried in book and all.

I sighed again and look down at the sink, my hands gripping the edges of the counter warily.

Good thing I’m going to bed at a fairly early time tonight.

Yawning once more, my hands left the counter. I stretched. When I finally gathered up the energy to move, I left the bathroom, turning off the lights before I closed the door behind me.

Even as tired as I was, I couldn't sleep. My mind kept racing from what had happened earlier that day. Later I was almost asleep when I saw, in my peripheral vision, an object glow with luminous light. I had to know what it was, and so I swung one leg over one side of my bed and then the other, my feet moving faster than I thought humanly possible. My mind was racing, my heart pounding in rhythm to the *pitter patter* of my footsteps.

As soon as I reached the object, I froze and realized that the luminous object was a book. It was leather-bound, and the pages were thick. It lay open, and the pages were turning faster and faster by the second. It was very otherworldly, and I wasn't sure what it was going to do.

Because the pages were turning so swiftly, I couldn't register what was happening into my head. And then... something really... *weird* happened (and all too fast to be quite truthful); the entire bedroom started to vibrate, and I fell helplessly into the pages of the book.

And then there was blackness. The first thing I realized when I stirred was that there were a pair of hands- insanely huge and strong- clutching ever so painfully onto my shoulders - one hand on each, mind you-... that were clutching so tightly I gasped for breath, and then I heard a raspy voice coming from a few feet away:

"You may release the boy now, Serge," said the voice.

"Yes, master." Serge said, bowing at his master in the utmost respect.

"You may leave now, Serge." The voice said impatiently.

“My deepest and sincere apologies, Lord Donnelly; do forgive me.” The servant muttered, bowing once more to his master and leaving the room. There was dead silence for what seemed an eternity until Lord Donnelly spoke.

“Do you realize why you’re here?”

I stared around the room. It was a large and square room, and if it didn’t have the torches to the side of the walls it would’ve been pitch black. It appeared to be a castle. Both paintings and portraits from the medieval era were hanging on the walls. There was a spiraling staircase to my left that lead up to what appeared to be the prison.

“BOY!” he screamed at me at the top of his lungs when I continued to stare blankly around the room.

“Um ... something bad happened.” I finally said, bowing my head down in sadness.

A slow, eerie smile crept upon Lord Donnelly’s face. He had a gaunt face, and his eyes were the darkest shade of red I’d ever seen. His hair was jet black and it fell down long past his shoulders. Not only his eyes and face structure were scary, but he was also very broad-muscled. It was very intimidating, though I tried my best not to show it. He was sitting in a throne-like chair, his feet crossed at the ankles.

“Something like that.” He said in a dark and edgy voice. “Now, do you know where you are?”

“No,” I replied. “But I know that it’s some other world.”

“Correct.”

Before I could respond, I was suddenly brought back to what had given me so much trouble in the first place.

It was the first day of our senior year of high school. My lifelong best friend, Isabel, and I were just approaching the school and talking with each other when a gang of tough-looking guys stepped in front of us.

“So, Anakin. Isabel.” the biggest guy began. “How long have you been together? And have you gotten a room together yet? Because that’s what Ben told me.”

“Ben?” I said. Ben was another friend, though I’d trusted him. I should’ve realized how horrible he is. I felt stupid for befriending him. I decided that the next time I saw him, I would make sure to cuss him out.

“Yeah. He said you told him that you guys rented a room together in a hotel here this past summer--”

Isabel just looked at me. I couldn’t read her expression, but I soon figured it all out: She was looking at me, to the guy, and back again. Then, suddenly, she stomped away.

I had no idea what happened to her. We were best friends since day one in Day Care. I mean, seriously. Surely she knew that Ben was just spreading stuff around? Surely she knew I would never have said that about us?

“You...” I began angrily.

“I...?” the guy smirked, and the others laughed.

“You *jerk!*” I screamed at him, and before I knew what I was doing, I punched the guy in the face, and ran off to go find Isabel, leaving the others staring in shock at how much damage I had caused to their friend.

“ISABEL!” I yelled out at her once I saw her in the hallways, trying to find her first period class. Every single person in the hallway was staring at me, but I didn’t care. This was my lifelong best friend! “ISABEL!”

She turned around, looked at me, her face full of tears, and then turned back around, shaking her head sadly, and walked into a room to her left, leaving me standing there, looking and feeling lost and confused. And also very, very alone.

Then I was pulled back from my flashback, and Lord Donnelly was laughing manically.

“YOU HAVE HER HELD HOSTAGE HERE, DON’T YOU?!” I screamed at him impulsively. “YOU-!” But then Isabel’s voice called out into my thoughts:

Anakin, no! Don’t do this! He has the power to over-kill you! Stop before you get yourself hurt!

Evidently, Lord Donnelly heard, because he was laughing louder, and if at all possible, even more manically than before.

Isabel! I’m going to fight this guy, whether it means I live or die, I’m going to fight for you until the end, okay?

ANAKIN-!

NO! I sent back to her harshly, and shut her out of my thoughts. I had the feeling it would be safer for her to be blocked out of my mind instead of being open to this Donnelly guy.

“So you want to fight me, my boy?” he said, looking amused.

“Yes,” I said.

“Do you have feelings for this girl, Anakin?”

“Of course I have feelings for her, but not the kind you’re talking about. I care about her. Why do you think I’m here? She’s my best friend, and I will *not* leave her here to die!” I shouted at him, and I heard my voice echo, bouncing against the walls and back to where I was standing.

“Well then. Go ahead. Try to kill me. No one’s tried in centuries, and no one has even come close to succeeding.” He said, and a sword appeared in my hands just as Lord Donnelly was approaching me with a sword twice as big as mine. It was encrusted with rubies and other such jewels, intricate patterns on the handle going around the gems. The edge of the blade was ten times sharper and heavier than the deadliest knife in my world. Mine had sapphires in the handle and spiraling circles going around them. It was wimpy compared to Donnelly’s, in size and all. Apparently he wasn’t much of a fair player.

He lifted his sword and cut the side of my face, and I knew I would have a jagged scar there come later. I somehow managed to dodge his attempted stabs at me, but occasionally he would tear a piece of my pants leg or shirt. I was sweating heavily, but I kept going. He tried to lure me into a trap by pretending to go the other way, but I knew what he was doing. I sidestepped him and continued on in our battle. Warriors until the

end. Our swords clashed harshly against each others for what seemed hours on end until a new train of thought came to me. I began to close my mind from Lord Donnelly, leaving him looking very lost and confused, just like I had when I saw Isabel crying earlier that day.

“What are you going to do?” He questioned me in a frightened voice, this time leaving *me* feeling amused.

And before he could even get so much as a reflex, I aimed for a new direction with my sword: his heart.

I dug into it very deeply, and soon enough Lord Donnelly was on the floor, bleeding profusely, holding his hands up to his fresh wound. He tried to fight it, but all of us - Lord Donnelly, me, Isabel, and God knows how many other servants and prisoners- all knew that he was dying, and finally he did. I opened my mind to Isabel, and I could hear her cheering loudly off into the distance. I followed her cheers, and found her locked up in a cell.

“Isabel!” I breathed. “I don’t know what happened, but I never said that--”

“*I know, I know.* I ran off because I was scared. I was beginning to trust Ben, and then... I don’t know. Something came over me.”

“Don’t worry about him. I refuse to speak to him anymore. All that matters is getting you out of here safely.”

“How?” she asked worriedly.

“Okay, hold on. Let’s think. Oh yeah! Click your heels three times, and say--” I began in an attempt to make her laugh.

“That is SO not funny!”

“Okay, okay. Let me try to find a way to get you out of here, all right?” I said much more calmly than I felt. Inside, I was just as anxious as she was. What to do, what to do? I thought impatiently.

“Anakin!” Isabel gasped, “Look!”

“Look at *what*? I’m trying to find out a way to get you out of he-”

“Just look down in front of you.” she sighed out of frustration. “Out of all of these years, you’ve never listened to a word I’ve said-”

“Oh my God! A key!” I said loudly and happily.

“Uh, *yeah*. I was trying to tell you that in the first place, but you wouldn’t--”

“Here, let me get you out!” I said excitedly, not listening to her, and unlocked it. She ran faster than I ever thought she could, and gave me a big hug. I hugged her back tightly, so very relieved she was okay now.

“Come on, let’s go home,” I said, smiling at her, and she smiled back at me. I took my hand carefully in hers, and then the book appeared where it transported her back to her house, and me back to mine, where I could *finally* get some sleep over the weekend.

“Sanity”

Lauren Oldham

I sit by my window and sigh. I am conscious of the feeling of crisp air in my lungs when I exaggerate my breathing. My inhale is sharp, my exhale quick but less invigorating. I feel tired. My eyes ache in the corners like I've been crossing them. I watch the day and notice just how dull the colors really are. Everything looks like a chalk drawing on concrete with the gray showing through. None of the colors are their own. They all belong to the gray.

The shapes outside my window do not move. The dull green-gray trees are still and rustle with the passing wind. They are the deserted lovers begging the ephemeral breeze, never able to make it stay. They stand and cry, shedding their leaves. A bird comes in for landing, to return to stillness. A giant black butterfly with shimmering metallic blue-tipped wings comes to rest on the sill. Hope has just fluttered down from the heavens.

My butterfly friend reveals to me the truest beauty in this world. Just days ago, it might have been no more than an ugly fuzzy worm with too many legs. Now it is something entirely different. It turns mechanically like a delicate soldier, one tiny foot at a time, its little stomps reminiscent of a ballerina's confident steps. The wings fold up, unfold, once, twice, slowly. Waving goodbye or taunting me, I cannot tell. I am left alone again, only now I feel like I have lost something. I understand the sorrow of a tree. I sit still, and somewhere inside me, I feel my leaves fall.

