

Walters State Community College



Among These Hills

Twenty-Third Annual High School Anthology

Spring 2012

“For the delight of a few natural hearts;
And, with yet fonder feeling, for the sake
Of Youthful Poets, who among these hills
Will be my second self when I am gone.”

from “Michael” by William Wordsworth

Sponsored By:

Walters State Community College
English Department
Morristown, Tennessee

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Grand Prize Winner
Kelly Meadows, Daniel Boone High School
Karin Orchard

the mad genius

there's a clog in the sink and the toilet's backed up
because we're all human; with hair shedding, and... bowel movements.
yet we bear a certain sort of grace-
God-given and bodily, too.
veins the color of sky under skin, porous and smooth.
bones that should crunch, limbs that should flail, skin that should flap.
we're all a little bit beautiful
when our eyes have gotten craggy from age or they're swollen from just being
born,
whether we're falling into the dirt or popping out of the womb.
it's only a stage,

and that's just the physical.

there're places in the heart, those deep ones where piles build up-
ugly grudges, white lies, sins and all that jazz.
we're not so pretty, so graceful.
we got candles burning in our bodies somewhere
in the gut where instinct is overcome by hope.
our mouths weren't made for screaming,
our fists weren't made for punching,
our feet weren't made for stomping out insects.
it's that spirit.
the angels started it, you know-
we just fell into place, into plan.
now some sort of hell's breaking free, and we're reaping what we sow.
conviction isn't warranted or wanted,
but it's tried.
this isn't a stage; it's a war or a crime or a, or a, or a...
this isn't a stage.

it's kind of a loose topic.

Winner—Poetry
Gabby Wexler, Daniel Boone High School
Karin Orchard

Monotony

Gray skies swallow the clouds and
The sun has gone into hiding
Behind the clocktower.

The streets still hold onto the rain
From the night before,
Cherishing it like precious memories.

Though it is midmorning,
The streetlights remain on
With the fear that people
Will get lost in the dark.

Traffic moves slowly,
Draining the life from
Its victims,
One by one.

A crash is heard.

Two cars collide,
Yet the commute remains undisturbed,
Carrying on as if nothing happened.

A man simply turns up the radio
And continues through the green light.

Honorable Mention
Brooke Bowders, Daniel Boone High School
Karin Orchard

We Wait For Tomorrow

The moon speckled through the clouds
Leaves dance along the concrete
Somewhere, a wolf cries out
Tomorrow will be a new day.

Leaves dance along the concrete
No one is out tonight
Tomorrow will be a new day
The sun will rise again.

No one is out tonight
The air is much too frigid
The sun will rise again
But for now, we sleep.

The air is much too frigid
Tomorrow, the sun will warm us
But for now, we sleep
Just like creatures in their dens.

Tomorrow, the sun will warm us
We stay inside tonight
Just like creatures in their dens
Safe, protected, sheltered.

We stay inside tonight
No one moves within the home
Safe, protected, sheltered
Oblivious to the world outside.

No one moves within the home
We are peaceful; sleeping
Oblivious to the world outside
We wait for tomorrow.

Honorable Mention
Bren McMurray, Daniel Boone High School
Karin Orchard

earth song

floating notes pierce the skyline;

clouds fall from their home,

they are like us too.

water dances for tomorrow's sun.

innocent winds trace the hollow earth,

no longer a stranger.

cold fields are awake,

too early for slumber bliss.

open mountains hug the atmosphere,

cosmic kisses grace the vacant air.

empty lakes stay at peace,

counting shallow breaths.

The Absence of My Heart's Desire

Oh why oh why hath this world stricken me with such a burden

Why must I express myself in words for I desire to in numbers or variables

I care not for this prose or lyrical rhyming but for theorems and laws of science

It is you composition that has removed me from my once joyful mathematic
world

To a place of bewilderment and misunderstanding

I do not grasp your ideas for I find them pointless and futile

But still you surround with poetry, stories, and the writings of some individuals
I do not know

Some say you are a fact of life that is needed for all

But I desire a much simpler life

I now give you this and say I am finished with you

And do as the Poet Jack Frost once wrote and take the road only by few.

**Anacaren Ocegüera, Daniel Boone High School
Karin Orchard**

Art

Life speaking to you
Structures performed uniquely
Creation of soul

**Ashley Nichole Beeler, Washburn High School
Sandy Acuff**

Taken Away

You feel the musicality pulsate throughout your entire body,
Awakening every nerve with a thunderous roar;
Beckoning them to receive it.
You hear the beginning of the melody with its tender caress,
Each note of the piece but a soft whisper;
Pleading for you to embrace it.
Your sobriety weakens into an utter illusion,
Taking with it your inhibitions.
As the cadence escalates, so does the beat of your heart.
The synchronization of the duo fashion an unspoiled duet;
A heart with a pristine rhythm,
A soul entangled in seamless beauty,
A mind filled with the rampant advance of duality.
But so as the sun must retreat into the darkening sky,
As must the chorus depart into a quiet abyss.
And so there it shall rest.
Then, all shall be at peace.

Just Another Life

Austin

Who is an elitist with too much weight on his shoulders

Who is the brother of a sister who likes him well but not so much could be said
for the other way around

Who loves the vastness of space with its infinite possibilities, with the passion
for challenges, and loves people who respect one another

Who feels the need to always do something, the need to create new ideas but
never able to express them, and the need to selfishly do everything on his own

Who gives his time willingly to anyone that asks, willingly shares everything he
owns, and gives nothing to himself

Who fears not amounting to anything, who fears the end, and fears being a lone

Who would like to see everything space has to offer

Who shares ideas

Who is no one of importance

Who is a resident of the small planet known as Earth
Richmond

Billie Flory, Sevier County High School
Kay Heck

A Certain Kind of Girl

Billie

Who is awkward (but lovable), blonde (but not dumb), and creative
(but definitely not an artist)

Who is the only child of Sunni and George

Who loves music, her dachshunds, dinosaurs, and autumn weather

Who feels sad about leaving high school next year, happy about having such
wonderful friends, and proud to be the band captain.

Who needs love, her Harry Potter DVDs, and her iPhone

Who gives hugs when they are needed, her drumsticks to fellow drummers,
and parties in her minivan.

Who fears spiders and any insects, haunted attractions, and any kinds of
weapons

Who would like to see a Billy Joel concert and London, England

Who shares everything she owns with the ones she dearly loves

Who is a tenor drummer, a friend to many, and a lover of culture

Who is a resident of Sevierville, TN, but would love to live in the North.

Flory

“And the Flames Roar On”

And the flames roar on
As the fuel is ignited
The gases violently combust
Light and heat grow vivid

As the fuel is ignited
We are trapped in this inferno
Light and heat grow vivid
And the pain starts to set in

We are trapped in this inferno
The fires of life are fed
And the pain starts to set in
As the fires are fueled by hate

The fires of life are fed
Fed by everyone around me
As the fires are fueled by hate
They all seem so unaware

Fed by everyone around me
They all sit and stare
They all seem so unaware
And then the fuel meets the flare

They all sit and stare
I respond with a raging glare
And then the fuel meets the flare
I strike back when the fire dares

I respond with a raging glare
The gases violently combust
I strike back when the fire dares
And the flames roar on

Caroline Fisher, Daniel Boone High School
Karin Orchard

I Hate Everything About You

I hate the way you look at me.
I hate the way you stare.
I hate the way you drive your car.
I hate how you do your hair.
I hate when you laugh at me.
I hate when you are mad at me.
I hate your stupid pet cat,
more than I can explain.
I hate when I'm with you,
you take away all the pain.
I hate that you are always there for me.
I hate that you always make my day.
I hate that you can always care for me.
I hate how you are here to stay.
I'm worried I'm not perfect.
I hate how you act like I am.
I don't think I'm made for anyone,
but you think I am.
So I guess I will go on hating
all of those things about you.
Those things that I hate most
are the reasons I love you.

A Pretentious Girl

Channing Abigail

Who is strong-minded, a dreamer, and curious

Who is the oldest sister to Billy and Cheyenne

Who loves family, friends, cooking, and running; even though running about kills her

Who needs more time for everyday comings and goings, a vacation every month, and the need to let loose and be spontaneous every once in a while

Who feels smothered with writing essay after essay, loved by many, and completely thankful to live one more day

Who gives a needed smile or joke, a shoulder to cry on, and the hard to hear truth

Who fears public speaking, suffocating, and what is hidden in the dark

Who would like to see a glimpse into her future, the 7 wonders of the world, and the gas prices go down

Who shares a bonded love with her other half Aaron and a hatred for school and long-lasting friendship with Abigail

Who is still undecided on her college major but cannot wait to be finished, young but madly in love, and an organizational freak

Who is a resident of Sevierville, Tennessee, and strives to live life to the fullest
Crain.

Cole Burns, Sevier County High School
Kay Heck

Life As I Know It

Cole

Who is loved, radical, and creative

Who is the youngest of five which is not always as great as it seems

Who loves his family, friends, and faith, without them he would have only dreams

Who feels pressure to do great, exhaustion because he never stops, and excitement to move on

Who needs a clone so he can get everything done and Starbucks for while on the run

Who gives his time, a shoulder to cry on, and help for whatever the need may be

Who fears spiders with a passion, walking in the dark, and seeing people hurt

Who would like to see God's love shone throughout schools and people living in peace

Who shares love, advice, and kindness to those that need it

Who is never serious, sometimes sarcastic, and always random

Who is a resident of Kodak, TN, and lives like moment is a Kodak moment

Burns

Here, There, Everywhere

Erin

Who is a scatterbrain by no shame

Who is a sister of Toilet Face, who needs to stay out of my space

Who loves sour cream, family, and that instrument with more parts than a car –
the ivory keys

Who feels the need to please

Who needs a brain with more memory and ram, so I don't have to cram

Who gives my all, sometimes putting me in a bind

Who fears being limited, in closed spaces, and guns (Heaven forbid should any of
those be combined)

Who would like to see the small town of Wielmunster, Germany, and its residents
whom I dearly love.

Who shares my dark chocolate called Dove

Who is kind and sweet except when fired

Who is a resident of the middle of no-where, soon to be there, soon to be tired

Perry

Ariel Killian, Greeneville High School
Shannon Duer

Burnt and Healed

Do you remember?
It all started in September
Way back whenever, we were young
Thinking we could take on the world
I almost forgot your blue eyes and blonde curls
Your smile warmed my heart
Somehow you and me were set apart
From everyone else, I thought we'd stay that way too
Nothing could break the chain, tied around and through
You made me laugh and smile
I'd stay that way for a while
You made me forget
About all the regret
All the secrets I kept I stored them away, because you took away my pain
You made me feel real, past all the stains
We'd laugh and play
Like the world tomorrow didn't exist, and I'd say "What do you want to do today?"
We'd come up with wildest games
Through the years that never changed
One constant that remained the same
You were my rock, you were never gone
The one thing I could always depend on
I remember we'd build with Legos
And eat Jello
Swinging outside in the slight breeze
The sun shining between all the trees
Gosh, you made me so happy
Some days could be a little sappy
But that never stopped us
From taking the world on, sometimes we'd fuss
In the end, we'd make up
But something happened between us
We grew apart; I didn't know who to trust
You hurt me the worst
Breaking me down I felt like I was going to drown
You ignored me every time we met
I guess that's what you get
When you believe that person will always be there In the end, they didn't care
How can you?

Treat me the way you do
I thought you were my friend
Did you just pretend?
For all those years
You brought back all those fears
I hid for so long
You were always the one who made me strong
Now you make me so mad
That's too bad I used to think we'd be together forever
I don't think I could forgive you, ever
We had so many good times
Now just to glance at you is a crime
I guess you forgot
It's okay Mr. Big Shot
Your friends talk about you behind your back
It's a shame; you weren't even ready for the attack
Do you think it's fair?
That I don't care
Cause I think it's fine
Seeing you were never mine
You were everything to me
I wish you would've seen
How much you meant
But now I'm pretty content
We act like we don't know the other
A delicate cover
You treat me like trash
Here's some cash
Go buy someone who shares
Your same ideas and pleasures
I still think about those moments
They were key components
You act in such a vile way
I believe you wanted to stay
Forever young, so you wouldn't have to face
All the change
But you still don't remember
That day in September
Way back whenever, we were young
You lied there with me
Talking about all that we could be
Together
Now, there is no forever

Haley Money, Daniel Boone High School
Karin Orchard

Speaking Steps

The dancer swayed out onto the center of the stage.

She took off with a leap of fear.

Trembling butterflies captured her mind.

With every single grande plié,

The butterflies started wandering along.

The dancer is like the sea.

She is fearful but also powerful

This dancer is not weak.

Her feet gracefully shift across the floor

Like the waves on a calm and sunny day.

The pounding drum in her heart and

The whispering voices in her head,

Have now abruptly disappeared.

The stage tells her inner star to sparkle and shine.

Now the spotlight shimmers over the dancers

Private conversation with her legs.

The dancer is telling them to reach out.

Oh, if they could touch the sky!

With the next eight count,

Her legs soar and scream that they can fly.

Fighting For What?

A jealous boy approaches like the sky darkens before the storm
Boom went the first punch that flew from his fist.
Clouds of drunken, angry men surround to join in.

Another fist flies like a lightening bolt shooting down to earth.
Blood spews from the men like rain falling from the sky.
An epiphany comes to the girl's mind; she throws the bucket of hail like ice.

It has no effect on the energetic fight-like storm.
At the peak of the fight, when things are uncontrollable and scary, help comes.
The fight loses energy, and all irrational thoughts are erased.

Except for the girl and the boy. Both like excess water flowing wildly.
The after effects are just as energetic and angry as the storm.
The jealous boy leaves the heartbroken girl in the disaster all alone.

And she wonders, as a soft rain starts to fall, what was he fighting for?
His face downward cast, moving far away.
While he walks he asks himself, what was he fighting for?

Kaylee Gass, Daniel Boone High School
Karin Orchard

Dreams of a Better Life

It's the year of 1940
I speak with undying certainty
I have dreamt of a world with different religions
A world where gays were loved and relationships were decisions

I have dreamt of a world where blacks were accepted,
A world with less hate and prejudice
A world where humans expressed themselves in the work of music and art
A world where everything included a fresh start

I have dreamt of a world where two became one,
Where some people had money while others had none
While I am dreaming
I am off smiling and gleaming

I have been wishing and waiting for so long
I could shout on the top of my lungs and sing a new song
It is 2012 and my dreams have come true
This country was once old now it is new

For This One Day

The smell of the gym floor

teenagers everywhere.

Parents, siblings, and friends gathered in the stands.

The last time we will walk through these doors.

Smiles, tears, and hugs

passed around like flyers.

For twelve years, we have waited –

waited for this one day.

Class of 2012 –

It's Graduation Day!

Logan Stout, Daniel Boone High School
Karin Orchard

“A Teenager”

Being a teenager
is not always easy
or all fun and games.
Falling for people, older and younger,
getting your heart crushed.
Friendships coming together,
sadly falling apart—
that is just part of everyday life.
Trying to fix and
make easier.
Needing to realize,
nothing can be done.
Everyone goes through
these emotions and trials;
I am not the only one.

I Didn't Know His Name

He stood next to me,
Tall and proud.
I didn't know his name,
Or what branched he served in.
But his hat said Vietnam,
And was adorned with pins.
The line began to move,
Each Veteran moving with his escort.
"Time to go sir," I told him,
And slid my arm in his.
After a pause at the door,
We began our journey.
His steps were sure,
Like he had done this a million times.
I dropped him off at his seat
And walked back to the line.
I didn't know his name,
Or what branch he served in.
But his hat said Vietnam,
And was adorned with pins.
And though I didn't know him,
Or even where he was from,
Those few moments I spent with him
Are the proudest of my life.

Michael Moore, Sevier County High School
Kay Heck

A Glimpse Within

Michael

Who is intelligent and talented yet introverted

Who is the brother of Kelly and Colin

Who loves jazz music and depends on it for survival

Who feels stressed at the prospect of living up to an Asian heritage

Who needs more hours in every day to achieve his goals

Who gives honest criticism to all who ask it (and many who don't)

Who fears confrontation and drama of any kind

Who would like to see his bucket list completed one day

Who shares a name with an annoyingly liberal film director

Who is aspiring to be an engineer, not a poet

Who is a resident of Sevierville, Tennessee—but hopefully not for long

Moore

Creating Description

Peyton (Descendant of Ancient Aliens and Scottish People)

Who is theatrical, sarcastic, and unorganized

Who is the sister of Sydney and Parker

Who loves mythology, folklore, and authenticity

Who feels messy and ecstatic

Who needs a creative outlet and a mountain view

Who gives lightness and darkness

Who fears closed minds, math, and no-legged creatures

Who would like to see magical places

Who shares knowledge and laughter

Who is a(n) _____

Who is a resident of the Universe

Proffitt

Rachael Rambo, Daniel Boone High School
Karin Orchard

Sunset

Standing alone, the waves softly rushing over my feet
I breathe deeply in, letting the wind whisk my hair from my face
I'm at peace again, examining the vivid colors,
Stretching endlessly across the sky, all coming together
In one of the most beautiful sunsets I've ever seen

Starting at only a deep blue, then rising
To reveal amethyst, my favorite
I look to my left to see seagulls soaring over my head
Past lighter shades of pink, red, and yellow

In all, I'm able to count at least 8 different colors,
Contrasting beautifully together
From the deep blue of the sky, to the soft white
Of the sea foam, moving gently over my feet

Me, Myself and I

Randi

Who is funny, charismatic, and loves the outdoors

Who is sister of Victoria Sigel

Who loves fast food, old music, good movies, and rainy Sundays

Who feels happy most of the time, insecure on occasions, but also feels like the definition of “country strong”

Who needs acceptance, love, and an occasional phone call from her boyfriend in basic training

Who gives her all to everyone that comes across her path, love to those around her, and a smile to a stranger on the street

Who fears rejection, failure, being alone, and heights

Who would like to see the end of child abuse and let everyone find honest happiness

Who shares her happiness and optimism with other neglected hearts in this cold, cruel world

Who is an emotional girl living in a stereotypical world

Who is a resident of a small town called Sevierville, TN but dreams of moving on

Sigel

**Richard Karig, Sevier County High School
Kay Heck**

Richard Douglas

Who is smart, crazy, and busy

The brother of Nick, John, Rebecca, and Miranda

Who loves anyone that will give me some food, and a comfy bed

Who feels happiness, world peace, and leprechauns are all real

Who needs a phone, friends, and teleportation would be nice

Who gives out half his paycheck, food, and a place to stay to friends

Who fears rollercoasters, the uncertain, and his dad

Who would like to see Korn in concert

Who shares a bed with 2 cats

Who is working the drive through at Wendy's

Who lives in Sevierville Tennessee

Karig II

Me, Myself, and I

Sabrina

Who is kind, trusting, and true

Who is the sister of Marisa

Who loves family, friends, and the beach

Who feels stressed at time, loved always, and secure in the young lady she is

Who needs love like everyone, a goal to achieve, and a sky to reach for

Who gives love to those in need, her friendship as well, and encouragement

Who fears slithering snakes, a heart that breaks, and long, sad goodbyes

Who would like to see far distant lands, completion of plans, and an icy blue ocean

Who shares her heart with those she loves, a concern for others, and Jesus

Who is incredibly thankful for all the things God has blessed her with

Who is a resident of Sevierville, Tennessee

McClure

Summer McCrary, Daniel Boone High School
Karin Orchard

Blueberry Surprise

All dried up and puny
It looks kind of icky
You mush the middle
And it gets all sticky
It's little and scrunched
Filled with seeds
It looks like a raisin
But how bad could it be?
It kind of taste sweet
But kind of bitter
It's all around taste,
Might make you jitter
It may sound gross
And kind of scary
But there is nothing better
Than a dried blueberry

Clay Norris, Hancock County High School
Julia Forgety

Graduation Day

On this special day I graduate, I wonder who'll be there to educate.
Yes, teachers were there to lend a hand,
but mostly my life relied on my own plan.
That's not to say that I didn't change,
but the main component stayed the same.
I've been here so long
and have done so many things wrong.
This school will be glad when I am gone.
I guess what I'm trying to say
is that life goes on anyway.
Seize the moment while you can.
If you fail, it will make you a better man.

The Class of 2012

Seniors are the best.
We are better than the rest.
We put the underclassmen to the test.
Graduation day is near.
There is no need to fear.
So let's all give a cheer
to the 2012 class while we're still here.
Never forget the tears
that we have shed throughout the years,
and all the smiles and laughs that got us here.
So to the class we hold so dear,
let's celebrate surviving this last year.

Kendra Rhea, Hancock County High School
Julia Forgety

The Time Is Near

Now that the time is here,
we realize the fact that it's our final year.
From the years of playgrounds and toys
to the days of little girls dating little boys...
We sit and talk about our life dreams
and the path of life to better things,
and of what life has to offer for us all.
We all can truly say "We have had a ball!"
From the tears we shed over one another,
to making up and feeling like sisters and brothers,
we have always "had each other's backs,"
while forming together and becoming a pack.
As the time is drawing near,
we have to finally face our fear.
We will all do it together,
never to part, but will remain friends forever.

Cancer is a Word

Cancer is a word none of us want to hear.
We run. We hide. We try to escape the fear.
It is a scary something we all try to avoid.
The radiation burns. The chemo runs.
We lose hope, but yet, she still fights on...
The cancer comes on strong,
but she gives it her all.
Time is the question we all can't determine.
The only actions left to do are to love, to hope, and to pray,
for that's all we can do now.
The days pass as she gets weaker, but her faith gets stronger.
She still battles the villain.
How she does it, I do not know.
It must be the power of the Great God above.
(Dedicated to Dareleyne Brewer)

Caylop Brooks, Hancock County High School
Julia Forgety

Friday Nights

The day we all have chills in our stomachs
The day when there is only one moment
The day when 48 minutes feels like four hours
The day when everything else doesn't matter
The day that starts at 7:00 p.m.
The day we are supposed to get dirty
The day when we have our own band
The day when we get chills from hearing the fans
The day we will remember for a lifetime.
The day when all our muscles get into a bind.
The day we've been practicing for all week
Looking forward to the team to beat
Friday nights...

Spam

Hey guys, let me tell you about a special treat.

It's not like crack. It's something you eat.

It's not beanie weenies and it is not weak.

This sandwich meat is oh so sweet.

It's spam and it's better than country ham.

I see that stuff and I am like "Oh, man!"

I must shout and sing.

To every party this treat I'll bring.

I can't believe anyone would eat another thing.

Never again will I devour a fried chicken wing!

David Burchett, Hancock County High School
Julia Forgety

In These Woods

In these woods, surrounded by many trees,
I sit and think of my memories,
and the ones that so commonly interrupt me
are lovely thoughts of you and me.
Writing the songs while being alone,
I can't stop now. I'm in the zone.
The missing piece from what I can hear
is the sweet melody that will be with me, dear.
You inspire me to write and to live life with no fear.
So I got this life running and finally put in gear.

Rachel Q. Lawson, Hancock County High School
Julia Forgety

Tick Tock

We wonder how much we have. It seems as though there is never enough.
It is constantly running out.
Scrimmaging in such a rush, there it lies distilled in the back of our minds.
Some people tend to abuse it, while others wish they could get it back.
There are also those who wish it would go by faster.
Mishaps seem forever to fix, but with it all eventually heals.
Anything good takes it.
It wants to get the best of us.
I wish we could slow down and take a look.
Success is a journey and time can wait.

Lane Frost

He was a young cowboy
who loved what he did for a living.
He strode into the rodeo ring
with a big grin on his pale face.
He jumped on the shoots with no fear.
He hopped on the bull's broad back,
trying to reach that eight second ride.
Each time he heard that eight second bell,
he knew he had beaten another bull.
He had what it took to be a true cowboy.
Although he rode bulls for a short time,
his legend will live on forever.
He will always be known
for his last fateful ride in Cheyenne.

Jamee Bales, Hancock County High School
Julia Forgety

A Tutorial on Love

Love today is just a four letter word.
Pain can come from rumors others have heard.
Love is a bond that shouldn't be broken
by cheating, lying, or words that are spoken.
Love can be hard and causes more problems than you can bear,
or hurtful secrets that you can't share.
It'll make your heart stronger.
By working out your problems, you will stick with it longer.

Shadoe Williams, Hancock County High School
Julia Forgety

Heavy Metal Fan

I have always been a heavy metal fan,
but give me a group with lyrics I can understand.
The music has to have a fast beat,
'cause you're gonna pay a fortune for a front row seat.
Elvis was too mellow. The Eagles I can't take,
but Five Finger Death Punch can keep me awake.
Rammstein's guitars can beat Jimi Hendrix any day.
The group All That Remains makes all the head bangers stay.

John King, Hancock County High School
Julia Forgety

Hunting

It is deer hunting season again as the cold wind blows. All you can see is the whiteness of life.

It's the love of the hunt, waiting to see that big buck in rut,
not knowing when it's going to be just waiting to see if he comes to the field.

There is nothing like the feeling of seeing him there
as you look through your cross hair, knowing you're about to make it his final hour.

You squeeze the trigger with death to spare. You just shot a big boy down there.
Then, you rush to leave your stand. It's not every day, you hold a dead deer in your hands.

You call your buddies to brag about it. They call come down to look at it.

When all is said and done, you're back in the stand with your gun.

I hate to be crass. I don't want to be blunt, but it's all about the love of the hunt.

Wendy Johnson, Hancock County High School
Julia Forgety

Pickles

You taste so good. You're crunchy and juicy.

You can be sour or sweet like tutti-frutti.

When I'm craving with an urge or feeling ill,
I reach in the fridge for my favorite dill.

When pickles touch my tongue with a tasty tingle,
I want to compose an advertisement jingle.

You're tangy and green. My throat you do tickle.
There is nothing else like a kosher pickle.

Teacher Entry
Julia Forgety, Hancock County High School

Legacy

From a childhood filled with sickness, sorrow and pain,
the scars from younger years will always remain.
However, I chose to rise above that dismal plane.
I coped by helping others who had suffered from the same.
As a victim of a hateful, violent crime...
What could be the purpose? I wondered at the time.
A support system assisted women in learning to survive.
It helped us to overcome obstacles, become strong, and even to thrive.
Three miscarriages had left my maternal heart broken
until I heard the most beautiful words that had ever been spoken.
Previous devastation resulted in unspeakable joy
when I heard the doctor say "It's a healthy, baby boy."
I felt the ecstasy of true love and the wound when one's been betrayed,
the spiritual union of two souls and the disappointment of feeling dismayed.
I experienced a once-solid marriage of many years' duration.
Its emotional ending resulted in unspeakable devastation.
I felt the relief of having enough money to buy anything I desired
to missing meals to pay bills and feeling grateful I'd been hired.
From a brief encounter with show business to service in the Army,
I've been called "boss," "teacher," "friend," "wife," and "mommy."
I had never imagined when I was just a girl,
that I would be able to travel to a third of the world.
I experienced the Great Pyramids, the Holy Land, and the Eiffel Tower,
and viewed Athens and Rome, seats of great ancient power.

After encountering farmers, royalty, and owners of fame,
I learned that on the inside all humans are the same.
I met President Ford, Elvis, William Shatner and John Paul II, the Pope.
It was by far more than any country girl would ever dare hope.
They tell me I've never committed a major sin,
but failures in my walk with the Lord I cannot defend.
Sometimes my faith has been weak. I dare not pretend.
However, God faithfully forgave me and took me back again.
Suffering helps us comfort other travelers who are dealing with the blues.
Lowly valleys make us appreciate the glorious mountain views.
If life is all sunshine, wealth, and glory,
you're a character who has only existed in half of the story.
In my golden years, I've come to understand
that God in His wisdom prepares the master plan.
When I die, do not cry, for I will have gone home.
I've been by far, the richest person that I have ever known. (Julia Forgety)

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Where You'll Find Me

You are struggling along the beach, the sand sucking on your bare feet. The sky is dark now, near midnight, and the air is especially briny. You kneel down by the water, lapping languidly at the shoreline, and scoop up a handful of the warm liquid. You know not to drink it, of course, but you love the taste, bitterer than tears.

Standing again, you spit back at the ocean, fierce. Your eyes scan the horizon, searching. You have heard that the ocean is supposed to be vast, unlimited, that you can find me in the ocean or some such.

Yet, as you look out, the light from the distant oil rigs and other ships create a border, a frame that forces in what is meant to be uncontainable. You turn around and the beach is lined with manmade fences, toothpicks stuck in the dunes; past those, hotels and condos stand like one imposing wall. You sigh and trek further down the beach, your stride more purposeful. You lift your face to the cloud-strewn sky and wish you had stars for friends. Stars remind you of me, of where I am and what I feel like.

Inevitably, your calves begin to protest and your side cramps; you are exhausted. You collapse on the sand, breathing hard. Your hands explore the grains like metal detectors.

You start remembering things; you remember the stickiness between your fingers when you would consume popsicles by the dozen at your grandma's house; you remember that day you were at the doctor's office for a double ear infection and your mama rocked you back and forth, your head pressed tightly against her chest because the warmth soothed your aching ears; you remember visiting the planetarium in the eighth grade, counting and connecting constellations, certain that some kind of intelligent design must exist.

You lie down, sand conforming to the shape of your body, but not enough that you sink. You want to sink. You don't know why you want to sink.

Night traffic hums in the background, back in reality, but the ocean, licking at your feet like a dog drinks water, roars. You rest there, thinking, just thinking. You aren't suicidal, and you recognize that fact in yourself. You think

that if death is what you want then you have an entire ocean to carry you away. You aren't particularly depressed or sad either, and this confuses you. You like laughing and hiking and eating and being a human being. . .

Yet, you know.

You know you are missing something, like a peach without a pit or a wheel without a hub. You wonder what is holding you together at all.

Suddenly, you feel something very solid beneath your palm. A place in your heart stirs. You sit up, get on all fours, suck in lungfuls of air. You start digging, tired as you are. You claw the sand, little beads of it embedding themselves under your fingernails and torturing the scrape on your knee from when you had fallen earlier that day. The object, wooden you note, begins to surface.

Finally, you pry the object, about a foot long, out of the sand. You study the grooved wood, the patterns like faces smiling, like hands holding each other. The rusted metal lock is weak beneath your probing fingers. Right then, you figure it out: it is a treasure chest.

Your lungs constrict and tears flood your eyes. You have no key and no clue as to how you should open the chest. You don't want to rip out the fragile, water-rotted wood or tear at the lock. You don't want to force your way in.

You speak to me then, out of the blue, words you can't hear yourself. But your mouth forms them and your voice says them and they are beautiful. So I tell you how to open the box. You listen intently and you smile.

When you press your lips to the lock, you hear the audible chink of it cracking open. You pull the lock out of the metal loop. You lift the lid, not knowing what it holds or daring to guess.

Inside sits a red, glistening heart thumping rapidly, like the beat of war drums. You watch it pumping, its veins interconnected and its arteries intertwined, looping in and out of the wood paneling like stitches in cloth. It is alive and resonating and matches quite perfectly the tempo of your own heart. You are not scared or disgusted. You are waiting for me to speak again. When I feel you appreciate the full gravity of a human heart, I tell you the next step.

Attached to the inside lid is a knife no longer than your smallest finger. You coax it from its hiding place and feel the weight of it in your hand. It is warm, comforting which you think opposes its purpose. You think of murder, of gutting fish, of cutting open tree bark when you see that knife. I tell you what to do, though. You become nervous; you don't want to hurt anything. I reassure you.

You press the knife gingerly into the meat of the heart and push down. The

flesh gives way easily beneath the pressure and you slide the knife down two or so more inches. You wipe the blood from the knife on your shorts and put it back. You are crying, but the tears are not unhappy, they are not nervous anymore. You take your fingers and tug at the opening like you are supposed to, and you gasp.

Because in that heart resides something powerful that makes you want to yell and cry and smile and laugh, something that is incomprehensible. It is light, white, brighter than sun or sixty watts. It is a liquid, but also a solid, but also like a fog, undulating and shifting and unyielding.

It is life.

It is love.

It is force.

It is might.

It is a soul. It is a piece of me. If you cut yourself open, which I do not require of you, and searched with eyes of spirit, you would see yours. There. Inside. Yours, but mine.

It's where you find me when you cannot see me all around.

You sit for a while, until dawn; all the lights switch on, all the people gather because it's a hot ninety-two like I planned. You are not surprised when you see the heart has closed up, healed completely. You shut the lid. You put the lock back on. You bury the chest again, deep as it had been before. You stand. You walk back up to civilization.

You decide that lives are not meant to be small when something as big as a soul sits right inside yourself.

Co-Winner—Short Story
Micalah Taylor, Claiborne High School
Mrs. Lisa Cupp

When Things Break

Can you believe there was a time when we actually got along? There was a time when your disease didn't put a strain on our relationship. Don't get me wrong, I love you no matter what, but sometimes I wish you could just be normal. I wish we could go to a restaurant and, despite your age, you didn't have to sit in a high chair. I wish we could go to the park instead of staying home on a warm Saturday afternoon. But most importantly, I wish we could have a normal brother, sister relationship.

There are moments when your disease doesn't affect you or me either one. These times don't happen very often, and when they do, they are usually interrupted by an incident. They are the times when I'm at the supermarket with Mom, and neither of us can remember your favorite cereal. Or the times we get up early on Saturday just to watch cartoons in silence. For these few short moments, we are just siblings again.

Do you remember that time we took that road trip? We got up at four in the morning, and began driving south. Mom went to random towns, taking exits anytime we told her to take one. We ended up in Georgia, where we stopped in a place called Tift, and stayed the day there because we liked the name of it. We walked the streets all day, stopping at a couple stores to browse. Eventually, we got a hotel room and stayed the night. All the while, you didn't break a single bone.

Sometimes, I think back on that and remember how we seemed so normal that day. Aside from your stature, nothing was out of the ordinary, and people didn't stare at one of your casts. I think that maybe, if we tried hard enough, we could pretend that you didn't have osteogenesis imperfecta. We could pretend that you weren't Type III and that you didn't break a bone so often that we knew each nurse at the hospital on a first name basis. If we tried hard enough, we could be just another family like we were on that day.

This is weird, I know, but sometimes late at night I'll sneak into your room just to watch you sleep. You always look so peaceful, like you don't have a care in the world. That's probably why tonight, I slipped out of my bed and tiptoed to your room. You lay under the blankets curled into a ball. You shiver slightly, but

I pull another blanket out of the chest at the end of your bed and cover you with it. Then I sit in the floor by your head and watch your face as you dream.

Sometimes, I fall asleep here, but not tonight. Tonight I force myself to stay awake and be there when you wake up. There's a nightlight on in the corner of your room, so I pull a book off the shelf and sit down to read. It's one of those useless facts books that you seem to love so much. By age seven, you were already on an eighth grade reading level. You could almost read better than me.

I flip through the pages, vowing to myself that as soon as I got the chance I would buy you a book with an actual plot. There are all kinds of things in here that you hadn't bothered to mention yet; probably because you hadn't had a chance to bring them up in conversation. Then again, when did you ever wait to bring something like that up? Like the time you told me about worms eating themselves when they couldn't find food while I was eating my cereal one morning. Or the time you told me that women blink more than men, causing me to blink during a staring contest against you.

Light is just pouring through the window when my stomach begins to growl. I decide to run to the kitchen for a granola bar, hoping that you will stay asleep while I am gone. You do, but the sound of the opening wrapper brings you out of your sleep. For a minute, all we can do is stare at each other. Then you very slowly sit up, careful of the green cast on your left arm.

"What are you doing, Cameryn?" you ask rubbing your eyes. Gingerly, you slid out of bed and sat down beside me on the floor.

"Happy birthday," I told you, handing you the cupcake that I had gotten from downstairs. I pulled off the paper from the bottom as you balanced it in your good hand.

"Should we wake Mom up?" Your mouth is covered in blue icing, and as you speak sprinkles fall to the floor. "She'll want to see us, won't she?"

"Let's let her sleep just a little longer," I say. I pull you to your feet and we trudge down the stairs and into the living room. Today, I tell myself, we will act like you are perfectly fine. We will pretend that we are back in Georgia and that we get along like brothers and sisters normally do. Today, we will be normal.

You sit down on the couch, resting your cast against the arm of it. Since it is your birthday, I hand you the remote and let you pick something to watch. It isn't every day that you turn seven, so why not make it special?

Mom joins us downstairs an hour into the movie you have found to watch. It's animated, and is about a blue bird getting lost from its owner. He can't fly, and I wonder if maybe you feel some kind of connection with him. After all, you can't

do a lot of things that you should be able to do. Maybe, though, you just like the colors and the talking dog with fruit on its head.

While you finish the movie, I go to the kitchen to help Mom. She's making your favorite meal for breakfast, spaghetti and meatballs. I guess you could say that it's tradition for us to have our favorite meal for breakfast, and then cake and ice cream right after. It has been that way for as long as I can remember; maybe even longer.

I throw together a salad. Usually you don't eat anything green, not with spaghetti, you always eat a salad. Mom turns and smiles at me over the steam rising from the pot in front of her, as if I have done something wonderful. I haven't, you know. I just couldn't handle sitting there any longer.

"Is it ready yet?" you call from the living room. There is a clang as you drop the remote to the floor and join us in the kitchen. Mom gives you a smile as well, helps you into your designated seat, and sits a plate of food in front of you. "Thank you," you say and begin to eat before we even join you at the table.

"Happy birthday Liam," Mom says sitting down beside you.

"Thanks," you say again, pushing your plate away. Mom goes to get your presents as we sit at the table. You swing your legs back and forth, slow enough not to hurt yourself, but quick enough to feel a breeze on your ankles.

On a snap decision, I jump up from the table and run to my room. Thrown about on my shelves, desk, dresser and various baskets in my room are books. I search and search until I find the one I am looking for. It's beat up and worn out, with the cover barely hanging on, I've read it so much. It happens to be my favorite book, but maybe you will like it as well. It is about a little girl that has the same disease as you after all.

I don't have paper to wrap it in, so I cover it in a shirt from my closet and go back to the kitchen. You and Mom are sitting at the table, your faces both puzzled as I hand you the shirt. Immediately, you pull it loose and take the book out. Mom's eyes are shining with tears. You, on the other hand, look up at me with awe.

"Really?" you ask, caressing the book. "You're giving this to me?"

"Only if you promise to let me read it from time to time," I tell you.

You bob your head so hard with enthusiasm, that I'm sure you are going to snap your neck. Mom gives you her gifts next, but from the look on your face, the gifts aren't nearly as impressive as mine. You begin reading as soon as everything is open, barely touching your cake and ice cream.

The whole day, you sit in the living room reading. Mom's eyes fill with tears each time she looks at you with the book, or me. I can tell from the look on her

face, that I have done something to make her beyond happy. Something, I'm sure, that I will be expected to outdo next year.

"Hey Cameryn," you say, barely looking up from the book. "Why did you give this to me? I thought you loved reading this book."

"I do," I tell you. "But sometimes, it's far better for the people we love to enjoy something than ourselves." This seems to satisfy you, because you turn back to the book. Not surprisingly, you are already halfway through.

I smile, as I go upstairs to my room. Maybe that's what was keeping me up all night. Maybe the reason I wanted to be the first to see you this morning had nothing to do with it being your birthday, but everything to do with making you happy. Maybe life isn't about the sacrifices that we make, but the things we do for love. For the things we do for the ones we love, rather than the things they do for us.

I sit on my bed, holding a picture of you and me at my birthday party last year with cake all over our faces. This is when I realize that maybe life isn't about what's going to happen next year or tomorrow or even five minutes from now. It's about what's happening now, and giving all we have to those we love in this moment, not the next.

Billie Flory, Sevier County High School
Kay Heck

A New York State of Mind

Snow may not be one's excitement on vacation, but to a girl from Florida, it is truly awe-inspiring. This snow, however, was blackened from the bustling cars on the streets of New York City. It was the December of 1978, and I was stuck in the backseat of a bright yellow taxi. The car contained only two others: my mother and a big, Italian man with a thick New York accent. My mother chose this particular taxi because she thought the driver was attractive. We were on our way to the Plaza Hotel, but he chose to take a more "scenic" route. Our taxi passed by every sight, sound, and smell of the big city. Being only thirteen years old, I excitedly peered out the window hoping to get a glimpse of what life must be like. The winter weather was what I loved most. Beautiful snowflakes of every shape and size decorated the windows until each melted from the heat of the car. Passersby chuckled at the sight of my nose pressed against the cold glass; wonder filled my mind.

As we approached the stoplight, the driver turned on the radio. The music blared "Sherry" by The Four Seasons, and before I knew it, my mother was happily singing along. The cab driver knew the song well and also began singing. I burrowed into the leather seats and braced myself for the out of tune falsetto of my mother and the driver. It became evident there was a small friendship budding between the two. They seemed like a good match; both were Italian, had curly black hair, and enjoyed similar music. I hoped for it to progress further, since my father had gone missing in the Vietnam War. I always had hope for his return, but my confidence was slowly dwindling away.

The skyscrapers' sparkling windows blinded me as we passed through a crowded intersection. I could not see, but I heard several distinct thuds against the car. My mother panicked because she thought we had hit something. We both turned around in our seats to see the rear view mirror of a parked Pacer completely gone. I looked at the driver as if he was crazy, and my mother did too. To my astonishment, he explained how this happened every day. He claimed there was absolutely nothing to worry about. However, I knew better, and I tried to calm myself. My wish now was just to get to the hotel in one piece.

My mom, on the other hand, had settled back in to talking. The snow fell even heavier now, and I wondered if we would make it out of this ordeal alive.

There was only one little thing stopping us from reaching the hotel. This one thing happened to be a large, long bridge. My heart sank as we headed toward it. It appeared icy, and the driver made no attempt to slow down. He claimed it was easier to go fast on the bridge anyway because it was soon going to crumble into the Hudson River. My heart began pounding at the thought of it. I firmly gripped the handle on the door and gritted my teeth. The squeal from the grate made me cringe. I could not believe how my mother handled the situation. She just smiled and nodded to the unimportant comments being made by the driver. I had had enough of his nonsense. He seemed nice, but he drove like a crazy person. I knew he was not the right guy for my mother, and it would never work out.

The conversations dragged, and I found myself trying to preoccupy my mom so she would not speak to him. My plan worked for a while, but then another song my mother loved came on the radio. The sound of them singing probably made the stray dogs in the alley want to howl along. I groaned, but it was completely useless. When the song finally ended, the driver asked about my father. It was extremely hard for my mother to talk about him to anyone, but she seemed fine then. She told him how we thought my dad was a prisoner of war in the end of Vietnam. The driver seemed genuinely concerned as he swerved in and out of lanes. He almost got teary-eyed thinking back to his father who had died a few months earlier. All of these depressing conversations really ruined my jolly mood.

Not a minute too soon, the cab pulled under the little canopy of the Plaza Hotel. My body jumped out as fast as possible and ran to the trunk. I pulled up on the handle, but it would not budge. The cab driver heard my attempts and got out of the car. After five minutes of hitting the trunk, it finally popped open. I grabbed both suitcases and gave the man a quick wave. I watched him wink at my mother and tell her his cab number and name. My mom smiled at him, and then she laughed at my disgusted face as we both went to check in.

A few hours into the stay, my mother received a call from the hotel room's phone. As she answered, I realized this was no normal call. She screamed in a joyful way I had never witnessed or heard. I begged for her to tell me what was going on, but she would not. The phone conversation lasted only a few seconds,

and I heard a knock on the door. My mom told me to answer it, and when I did I froze. It was my father, who I had not seen for four years, in his army uniform. I jumped into his arms and held on tight. My worrying was completely gone, and my wish came true. Our phone rang again, only this time I could hear the loud voice of the taxi driver. He had called to tell us he himself had brought my father back to us, and he wished us a wonderful Christmas. We invited him over for Christmas dinner, and he became one of the family to us. I have never quite experienced a winter like that one ever again.

24 hours

Have you ever had a dream and wish it would come true? Or had a nightmare and glad it hadn't? There is a world where dreamers do not dream freely, but their dreams are planned out, or implanted one can say. The "implanters" are called the Dream Catchers. The Dream Catchers decide what a person should dream and the very next day the dream comes true. The dreamer has no control over what they dream, or stopping it from coming true. To start from the beginning, as every person turns 18 years old they are required by the Dream Catcher's law to give their personal information, and receive an implanted chip in their brains. If they refuse to get implanted, the penalty is death. Once a person is implanted with this chip, he or she fears of falling asleep and never knowing what their fate is within the next 24 hours. A person could dream of winning a million dollars or the same person could dream of dying in a car accident. Whatever the case, no one has ever been able to stop their fortune. Who's right is to be in charge of such a responsibility as to who could choose everyone's destiny?

Not only does Aaen question this, but anyone who has a terrible dream does. Everyone despises the Dream Catchers and believes it is unjust to hold such a power. Aaen is an average everyday boy, who sadly turns 18 today, July 28. Aaen's mother Natalie throws him a celebration, since it could be his last. Natalie explains to her son, "Son it's time to grow up now and live life as if you only had one more day. We will take you to the Dream catchers tomorrow for your sign up. We are celebrating your birth, but not your 18th birthday. This is a tragedy. I love you son and I have been lucky to make it this far with so many wonderful dreams. I dream the best for you."

After the celebration, Aaen goes to the Dream Catcher's corporation to activate his dreaming. As Aaen enters the facility, a plain looking business man comes to greet him. This man and Aaen walk to a back room where a doctor appears with a device the young boy has never seen before. The doctor takes this device and puts it into the back of his head where he implants the dreaming chip. As a shocking sensation runs down Aaen's spine, the conservatively dressed man says with a blank look on his face, "That's all for today." As Aaen walks to exit the building, he passes other people whom are waiting for their

chip. They all look at him to see if he is ok and still seems normal. Aaen does not feel any different and is very curious to see how tonight's dream will affect him.

As he walks home, he can't help thinking about what is to come. "How can dreams control my life", he thinks. "I wonder if there is a way to stop these dreams?" Growing up he always heard of this day but never thought it would come so fast. When he enters his house, his mom is cooking dinner. He walks pass her quickly, headed to his room, but as he is changing into his pajamas, his mom yells, "How did everything go today?" Aaen anxiously replies, "It went good, mom." His mother walks to his doorway to ask him, "Are you coming to eat?", but he replies, "No mom, I'm just going to go to bed." His mother seems to realize his anxiousness and explains, "Ahhh I remember my first dream. You know I've never heard of anyone having a bad first dream." Aaen says in a rushed tone, "Ok, mother. Well I'm going to bed now." His mother leaves saying, "Ok son. Sweet dreams."

Preparing for bed, a million things are running through Aaen's mind. Will his dream be good or will it make him wish he hadn't turned 18? As reality starts fading, Aaen is now in a deep sleep. The moment has come where he will dream for the very first time. Aaen's dream involves his mother and himself. In this dream, he and his mother are shopping at the grocery store just as they do every Thursday night. However, while they are headed to the car, two big men come up behind them. They threaten to kill his mother if she does not cooperate. She gives them her purse, her jewelry, and her car keys. Even though she cooperated and gave them everything, when they leave, the robbers shoot Natalie. As the men are disappearing into the night, Aaen leans over his mother's bleeding body. Natalie whispers to her son, "I love you" before closing her eyes forever. Aaen yells out in agony from his mother's death.

Aaen jerks out of his dream sweating and gasping for breathe. Aaen exclaims, "That was not a dream, it was a nightmare!" He gets out of the bed in a fired rush and heads down to his mother where she is cooking breakfast. Aaen knows he has to tell her because all dreams come true the very next day. Immediately after looking at her panicked son, she knows something is wrong. She asks, "Son, are you okay?", but he replies, "Mother, I had a NIGHTMARE and it can't come true, it just can't!" Tears start flowing from her eyes as if a tidal wave had just given through. Almost inaudible she asks, "What was it?", and desperately he explains, "Mother, you are going to die!" To Aaen's surprise, his mother has a look of relief overcome her. He asks bewildered, "Why do you

look so relieved?”, and she responds, “Honey, I was so scared something bad was going to happen to you, but now I am thankful to know you are going to be safe.” Aaen runs out of the house at her response, because he feels ashamed and guilty. He exclaims, “My mother has had all these wonderful dreams about me in order to protect me, love me, and provide for me, but my very first dream kills her!” He walks to the community park, and sits there crying and agonizing in pain. He hates the Dream Catchers for their power of controlling everyone’s dreams. He utters under his breathe, “There has to be a way to stop this dream from coming true.” Aaen thought long and hard about the different ways to escape this coming tragedy. He thought about killing as many of the Dream Catchers he could, about bombing the whole facility, and he even thought about killing himself if the deed was accomplished. After contemplating all these possibilities, Aaen finally decided to go home to his mother, where she would be worried and waiting for him. When he arrives home his mom is waiting to meet him at the door. “Well mom we got to stick to our Thursday tradition”, Aaen says while looking down. “Ok baby, let’s enjoy our last night together”, his mother replies.

After arriving at the grocery store, they casually walked through the door. Aaen is constantly checking behind him and looking down each aisle. His mom slowly fills the buggy with an occasional look at Aaen. When he sees her, her expression is a look of acceptance and love. She knows there is nothing that can be done to stop the dream from coming true, but she is thankful it had been her and not her son. They start to head towards the check out. Instantly, Aaen decides to go ahead of her to wait in the car, as so he says. Aaen takes a quick turn down the aisle and heads toward the back of the store. There he finds an exit. He circles around the building and comes to the corner where he can view the killer’s car. He sees the men waiting in their vehicle but looking the opposite direction of him. He starts to slowly make his way through the parking lot to be closer to the two men. He hides behind a jeep which is parked beside the men’s truck, so he can be close enough to hear everything they say. As they discuss their plan, Aaen is thinking about ways to stop them. One of the men says to the other, “You do the talking, and I’ll have the gun in my coat pocket just in case something goes wrong.” As the men start to get out of the vehicle, Aaen sees his mother exiting the store and has to make a quick decision. He had overheard one of the men say they had a gun, so he quickly runs around the vehicle to the robber’s passenger side door, takes them by surprise, and hurriedly takes the gun out of the man’s coat pocket. Holding the gun sternly, but

without experience, thoughts of his dream come to his mind, and without hesitation he shoots two shots towards the man to the right and three shots to the man to the left, after seeing the first shot had missed. His mother rushes out to Aaen now, with a worried, frantic countenance. She shouts, "Aaen are you alright? What have you done!" Aaen being a little shaken responds back to his mother, "I had to do it! They would have killed you!" Aaen and his mother quickly flee before anyone sees the crime. As they safely reach their home, they see a note wedged between the door and the siding of their house. The note reads, "You got lucky ... this time" and was signed by "DC." Natalie knows right away it is the Dream Catchers and is frightened about what the note might mean. Aaen, relived and tired, is happy he saved his mother's life, angry his first dream put her in danger in the first place, and tired from all the action tonight. His mother continually loves on her son and thanks him for protecting her. They have a strong mother and son bond in which no one can break. After he helps his mother put away the groceries, Aaen being exhausted, decides to lie down in his bed. Once he lies down, he falls asleep rather quickly, bringing on his second dream. The dream went as such; he and his mother are shopping at the grocery store just as they do every Thursday night. However, while they are headed to the car, two big men come up behind them

International Tiebreaker

In the game of softball, international tiebreaker is a rule that is only used as a last resort. After nine innings of continuous play, the game was still tied two to two. It was all coming down to this moment. Now was not the time to choke.

The air was filled with the smell of freshly cut grass, the kind that only exists on the diamond. The lights were just flickering on above our heads as if to remind us of how long we had really been playing. Our bodies were coated with sweat and the red-brown dirt that covered the infield. You could practically feel the tension in the air. This humid spring night, was the first night of the highly anticipated Elizabethton Tournament. We had spent weeks anxiously waiting for this tournament, hours of batting practice and countless bottles of Gatorade had prepared us for this one game. Our opponent, Unaka High School, was a brutally tough team with a pitcher who had a fastball that would bring tears to your eyes. They came ready to win, unfortunately for them, so did we.

I was sitting on the dugout bench watching the game unfold before me. I am a pinch runner; I only enter the game to run for the pitcher or catcher who has just batted. It's not the most respected job on the team, but being a freshman, I'll take what I can get, and sometimes that means having to shine the pine. The scoreboard had stayed at two to two for mostly the entire game. We were coming down to the bottom of the ninth inning, and still, neither team had scored another run. Both teams knew it was coming, international tiebreaker, one rule of softball that can either make you or break you. The rule states that after nine innings of continuous play, the game would restart with the last player to get out on second base; the teams will have two innings to attempt to score. Unaka's pitcher stepped up to the mound; she was a bigger girl with long, thick blonde braids, her face looked as if she smelled dog poop. Batter up, our batter took her position in the batter's box. Strike one. Strike two. Strike three. Our last batter had just struck out. A wicked fastball left her gasping for air as she whipped her bat across home plate; she wasn't even close to touching that miraculous thing of beauty. Here it comes, the umpire threw off his mask and announced that the game would resume in ten minutes with international tiebreaker in effect.

We restarted the game on defense, this was important because it meant we would bat last. The first inning passed much like the majority of the game had.

Both teams had still failed to score. As we entered the second inning I noticed that my coach was beginning to look nauseous. I had watched him throughout the game go from a composed, motivating coach, to a nervous wreck; complete with wringing hands and sweat dripping down his forehead. He wanted this just as badly as we did, the last thing we wanted to do was let this man down.

The top of the second inning came to an abrupt end. Our pitcher had managed to strike two of Unaka's players out, while our shortstop was able to get their runner as she was attempting to steal third base. My teammates came off the field with a burst of energy, ready to end the game before this high wore off. Our runner walked out onto the field and took her position on second base. My entire team in the dugout began praying she would be able to move her feet with the speed of the Greek god Hermes. Batter up. Our first hitter stepped into the batter's box and prepared for the pitch. Here comes the wind up, the batter swings. Crack! A line drive began humming through the air toward centerfield. It plunged to the ground in one quick explosion, like a meteor plunges into earth. The centerfielder, without hesitation, scooped it up and flung it back into the infield, returning it to their catcher. Our runners skidded to a stop. One runner was on third base, the other on second base. Coach looks at me through the chain link fence of the dugout, at that moment my stomach fell into my knees. He shouts, "Time ump! Pinch runner."

A helmet was thrust into my sweaty palms as my teammates shoved me out of the dugout and into the game. I had lost the feeling in my knees as I began running across the field toward third base. As I was running I looked back at second base where my teammate was giving me thumbs up, I only nodded. I looked over my shoulder into the stands. My dad was standing with his fists in the air, shouting at the top of his lungs in motivation. This was the moment he had been waiting for the entire game. The only thing I could think about was not vomiting.

I reached my coach who was waiting expectantly just outside the chalked third base line. He gave me a pat on the back and a simple nod. I knew what he expected of me. Batter up! Strike one. Strike two. Strike three. This was our first player to get out. My coach looked as if he was ready to murder someone, I didn't blame him. We were better then that. Batter up! Strike one. Strike two. Foul ball. Strike three. This was our second out. My coach began twisting his shirt, as his face became an excruciating shade of purple. He looked down at me, and I knew exactly what he was thinking. He wanted me to steal home. He picked me up by my jersey and said, "If you screw this up, you'll never play for me again."

It took all of my strength just to swallow. I felt the entire weight of my team on my shoulders. Every play that had been made began to flash before my eyes. These final moments were on me. I could feel a bead of sweat running down my back between my shoulder blades. Now was not the time to choke, I took a deep breath in, and felt everything begin to fade. All I could see was home plate. Here comes the wind up. The batter swings. Strike one, and I'm off. All I could feel was the ground below me. Nothing else was there, nothing else mattered.

I hit the dirt; right foot first, left leg down. A red-brown cloud of dirt that never seemed to land surrounded me. For the first time throughout the entire game, the crowd was silent, and then, out of nowhere, "She's safe!" There it was, my foot outstretched on the center of home plate. I could feel the sheer excitement building inside me. Clapping and shouts of joy surrounded me as my team ran onto the field. I fell back into the warm infield dirt smiling from ear to ear.

Reflections

“Look over there!” “Hey! Wait for me.” “Cool. Is that a red tailed hawk?” “Oh, wow! Check out this frog.” “Ms. Huskey, what is that?”

“That”, was actually a millipede. It was long and gross and the kids loved it. It’s October and I am on a field trip with my 3rd grade class. So far it’s been uneventful. Nobody has tumbled down the mountain or fallen into the creek yet. I’m just waiting though for one of the rowdier boys to drop a bug down one of the girl’s shirt. I can see it now, all the running, screeching, and carrying on. They aren’t bad kids, honestly. But they make me tired.

I’m twenty-six, not married, no kids except my nineteen eight year olds I see five out of seven days a week. I lead a pretty normal life. Teaching is everything I have ever wanted to do and I love it. I’m not content however. There is just something missing though, and I think it is tall, with short, black hair and the most incredible eyes I have ever seen. I can’t dwell on him though. It has been ten years and he still hasn’t asked me to marry him.

Back to the field trip though. We are in the most beautiful place in the world according to my opinion. I decided to bring them to one of the easier trails in Great Smoky Mountain National Park. It opens up into a field with a shallow stream running through it. Since it is still quite warm I’m letting the kids play in the water and run around just as long as I or one of the chaperones can see them. This place is peaceful and I often come here to relax and reflect about my life. Today the kids have guidebooks and I have challenged them to a scavenger hunt for items found in nature. They are doing this while we adults set up lunch. Two of the dads graciously carried in pop-up tents so we can have some shade. The poor guys seem exhausted.

While they are eating, I wander towards a shallow pool that I know lets you see your reflection clearly. Maybe later I will bring the girls and play an old mountain game that supposedly allows you to see your future in a calm body of water. For now, I’m just going to sit here and bask in the sun. Maybe I’ll see my future.

“Ms. Huskey! May we play some more games now?” “Yes honey, you can.”

Well, my quiet time is over and all I saw was the reflection of the blue sky above me.

But wait, was that the flash of blue eyes and a toothy smile or was it just the clouds chasing each other. I’ll come back another day to make sure but for now my kids need me.

Morgan Billingsley, Cumberland Gap High School
Allican Manning

Life is all a bed of roses until you have lain upon the thorns. The goddess, Hope, sashayed amid her garden, the Integer Garden. Integer is Latin, meaning “untouched”. The lotus flowers floated lazily atop the purest water of the amethyst covered stone fountain, the terraces and columns, adorned in alexandrite, glistened in the sun’s beams, and the cool scented, jasper cobblestones embraced her feet with each step she took. The Jade vines that encamped the large walls, carved of opal, rustled a laugh, and Campion, Parrot’s Beaks, Middlemist Reds, and other rare flowers and trees, bent down in the breeze to greet her. Nothing in the entire expanse of the universe knew the beauty, peace, and absolute perfection, which was Hope’s life. This garden, her garden, was its own Utopia.

As the breeze waltzed through her long, snow white hair and over her ivory skin, it whispered a warning. Trouble was on the wind. She peered deep into the fountain’s water and said, “There is none more beautiful than I. Nothing matters more than I. I am perfect.” She smiled to herself as she slide her feet into the fountain’s depth and let her satin and silk gown graze its surface. The wind picked up, and a sight arose which the young goddess had never before seen. Clouds, darker than night, infected the sky, lightening lapped at the ground, thunder shook everything, and a vicious wind tore open the golden gates. Hope stumbled from the fountain and wailed as the animals scrambled for haven in this heaven. A figure loomed about the gate and advanced forward. When it was close enough, Hope shrieked. It was ragged and weary, with piercing, bloodshot eyes. Its hands whipped forward and gripped hers.

“Prudence!” Hope exclaimed, “You frightened me. What’s this about?”

“I’ve come... I need...” she wheezed, “The Cause is now yours!”

Hope withdrew her hand, “No! Give it to some other Virtue.”

“You don’t understand, they are dead... consumed by The Sins! Five heavenly Virtues... have been slain. We are the only ones remaining and I not for long! I must complete my purpose. The Cause, I leave with you; you are our only Hope. They come, but take care they don’t consume. The Seven Deadly Sins have come to devour our Cause, to corrupt it. I will go to the Sands and attempt to restore the balance. If I fail, good will have been created in vain, and we will cease to exist.”

“You can do nothing. Going to the Sands will solve nothing,” cried Hope.

Weakly Prudence whispered, “Aut viam in veniam aut faciam,” I’ll either find a way or make one.”

Prudence urgently pressed a bundle she’d been holding into Hope’s arms and turned to escape to her fate. Hope tumbled after her but was halted by the whimper coming from her arms. Hope shuttered as she looked towards the bundle, their Cause. Her jaw hardened in resistance; she glared repulsively at The Babe of Mankind. A sudden explosion erupted from behind her. She turned ash white as she watched her priceless castle become a worthless ruin. Gluttony stepped from behind an orchard of grapes, but one touch from his gluttonous hands turned all of her delicious resources of food to rot. Greed reduced the priceless, jeweled steps and walls to clay, Pride, Wrath, and Envy appeared as they diminished her castle to worthless debris, and Sloth ungraciously destroyed all of her hand sown works.

Then, Lust passed dramatically threw the gate. Lifting his hand, he caressed a mirror with the tips of his well manicured fingers, sending a ripple throughout all things that reflected. Hope caught a glimpse of herself and was stunned. She no longer was gorgeous, but in her place, stood a hag, aged and appalling. At that moment, the ground shifted beneath their feet and began to open. Hope was still battling the storm and reluctantly gripping the child when the figures of The Seven expanded, elongated, and morphed into a terrible creature. Their beings seeped from the large cracks in the ground and gashes of the castle. They sent forth their essences in an army of darkness to envelope Hope and consume Man; nothing would save her or Mankind now.

* * * * *

Prudence’s feet began to slip into the earth beneath them as dark, clay soil gave way to sand. Weary and nearly defeated, Prudence sighed. Her journey was almost done. She sojourned in a desolate place where neither root nor seed inhabited. Within a few steps more, Prudence paused as The Sands of Time engrossed her eyesight. It continued on for an innumerable span, reaching out to the boundaries of eternity. For miles the infinite grains of sand spiraled downward into the eternal hourglass of time. It was an indescribable sight to behold. Along the edge, a mound began to form. A figure began to emerge as well as a face and additional features. A person, a man, stood erect, comprised entirely of sand. It was the Sandman. His long, sandy beard stretched the length of his ten feet tall body. His eyes were like black orbs in his grainy skull. His voiced seemed to echo into forever.

“Why come thou to The Sands of Time?”

Prudence was tempted to escape but stood firm, “There is a legend among the goddesses that if one was to sacrifice one’s self to The Sands of Time their heart’s deepest desire will be granted. Though I know the price for such an undertaking is to be erased from existence,” Prudence faltered, the thought paralyzing her, “But I have come to fulfill my purpose, to save Man from Sins and ensure they never live without Hope. Yet, as my fellow Virtues forfeited their lives, I shall, too.”

The Sandman seeing Prudence’s fear of imminent death said, “You need not fear death. You see, you are more than ready. As a goddess, I am sure you are aware you need no sleep, but yet every night, I arrive at your dwelling and scatter sand upon you in order to rest. What neither you nor anyone else knows is that I do those things not that you might sleep. Sleep is only preparation for death. The sand you see before you is the same as I use for such preparation. Understand? So, come forth and do as you desire,” his words gentle.

Prudence only grasped some of what he had said, but no longer feared death. She only recited to herself, “Deficit omne quod nascitur,” everything that is born passes away.” She stepped into the Sands. As it engulfed her without and within, it pulled her down, down into the forever. Her soul sizzled out and Prudence ceased to exist. Once it had all ended, the Sandman declared throughout time, “So as it is desired, so shall it be.”

* * * * *

The destruction of the Integer Garden was nightmarish. The ground had split in two. Hope had lost her footing and plummeted towards the earth’s center. Luckily, a ledge had leapt forward to catch her palm. She now swung from the unstable ledge while Sins wove themselves about her and The Babe. Her fingers could no longer hold their weight and a great expanse of space formed between her and the ledge as she descended into darkness. The darkness gathered her and Man in. They were no longer visible. The voice of The Sandman called from times past and those yet to come, rewriting the past’s story. “As it is desired, so shall it be.” The voice vibrated within the darkness. It wrapped Hope in a robe of immunity. The darkness receded, Man’s wail for rescue answered, and The Sins fled, defeated. Once again upon solid ground, Hope wrapped herself around Man, never to be eliminated. From that time forward, man always has Hope, and as it is said, “Dum vita est spes est,” while there’s life, there’s Hope.

As Pure as White Roses

I awoke to the same excruciating pain that forced me into unconsciousness. My hair, matted to my face in various places, was thick with dried blood. Each attempt to move forced a deep stab of pain to surge through nearly every one of my muscles. There was nothing to do but to pray and hope the dealer of this attack would not return for another night of torture. Each night for the past year the prayer would be the same. Some nights it worked... Others ended the same as last night had. There was nothing more to do as a prisoner of a lonely house where familiar things became less and less so by each hour. Things so key to the structure, layout, and design of the house seemed to distance themselves from my recognition through the past year. Needless to say, things were different now.

Just as these thoughts forced him from my mind, I heard a soft creak from the front door, welcoming fear back to my senses. I heard his footfalls grow nearer as my breathing grew shallower. He suddenly found his way to the door as I slowly and painfully sat up. As he opened the door, his broad shadow fell over me and I involuntarily cringed. He walked over to me and kneeled down. I lowered my eyes to avoid his gaze as his hand slid roughly across my cheek. I shuttered at his touch, but I knew better than to pull away or act against him. He kissed my forehead, stood up, and mumbled something as he walked toward the bed on the opposite wall and fell fast asleep. I listened to his deep snoring; disappointing affirmation that he was alive, and decided at once to try an escape.

I made two extremely painful attempts at standing before finally making it to my feet. In an effort to maintain the usual quiet of the house, I walked slowly and carefully and tried to remember each weak spot in the ever-changing structure. The fact that the room was pitch-black did nothing but complicate my mission. By the time I'd dragged myself ten feet to the door, I had built up a good amount of confidence in my success. My conceding, of course, led to my literal downfall. I missed the detail that the door had been left halfway open. My left foot collided with it, sending me down, my face planted firmly into the carpet and inches from the door frame.

I laid as still as I could, not only in the hope that he wouldn't wake and find me, but also because the fall triggered the return of the unbearable pain. Behind me, the snoring had altogether subsided and I could hear the bed creak, the

sheets ruffle. My breathing had nearly halted, my muscles as tight as the strings on a harp, my heart racing faster than I had known humanly possible. Surely if he saw me near the door, attempting to run, he would not have mercy on me. He would finish a job long overdue; he would kill me. After what seemed to be an hour, though I'm sure it was less, his snoring returned. I breathed a heavy sigh of relief and quietly hoisted myself to my feet once more, making note of the door placement. The next hindrance was the den, where obstacles seemed like land-mines. Glass placed in precarious locations, furniture abundant, and an unknown to whether the front door would be locked or carelessly untouched. I decided not to take my chances, but to crawl on my hands and knees, feeling in front of me for obstacles.

This proved to be the better decision as I reached the front door with very minimal clatter. I felt for the chair closest to me and used it to return to my feet. Blindly, I reached for the door knob. Time seemed to stand still as my hand travelled through the unwavering darkness, rendering no hint as to whether this would be my moment of freedom and relief or one more moment of longing for such. As the icy metal formed under my palm, I was disappointed to discover that the latter would occur. The knob remained unmercifully idle against the desperate force I applied. I had one more chance. If I could make my way to the other end of the house, the back door may be my key to freedom.

I decided to remain standing through the other end of the den and then the kitchen, where most of my obstacles were appliances along the wall. I slowly made my way from stove to sink, to refrigerator, steadying myself along the way. Eventually I placed my hand in front of me and displaced a curtain from the window. Moonlight flooded the room and I could see the door just on the other wall. Something else, however, caught my full attention; in the center of the counter nearest me stood a tall crystal vase. Inside of it were twelve long-stem white roses, beginning to wilt around the edges of the petals. I tied the curtain back so that I could see and walked over to the vase. I knew these flowers. I knew them very well.

As I was transfixed on the roses, I heard a low laugh behind me. I turned around to see his evil eyes glaring at me, devouring my flesh. He began walking toward me, slowly. This was my last opportunity. As I felt the fight-or-flight responses fill me, adrenaline coursing warmly through my veins, I ran. My arm knocked the crystal vase to the tile. Fragile white petals drifted all around, but I did not dare pause to mourn them. Led by the moonlight, I found the icy knob and twisted with all I had left in me. I pulled, stone-cold resistance diminishing to a victorious rush of freezing winter air. It smelled of life.

I heard painful shouts behind me and, impulsively, turned my head to the source. My aggressor, in all his self-righteous “intelligence” did his best to avoid the shards of crystal that lined the floor from corner to corner. He paid no attention to the ivory remnants that were nearly as numerous and, surreptitiously, twice as threatening. In his haste, he leapt over the largest chunk of crystal, landing on a thick pile of petals. His weight, the force of his landing, the lack of traction between the slick tile and the soft petals converted into a lethal formula. His feet jolted into the air, his figure disappeared. I couldn’t look away as his frame hit the floor, the sound of a crash combining with shattering crystal. My breath caught in my throat; not due to guilt, remorse, or even disgust. It was pure relief. I was free. My life was mine again. And I ran in the direction of freedom.

The roses, so familiar, meant a change larger than any of you could imagine. I was imprisoned; there isn’t a doubt about that. Where? No, it wasn’t a house, not a physical prison; a very real disease, a formidable prison of the mind, as real as cancer. My attacker’s name was depression. I suffered for over seven years, but the past year was something unimaginable. The depression drove me to attempt suicide three times. The last time, I was sent a crystal vase of white roses from my father who had abandoned my mother and me when I was eight. He hadn’t made a single attempt to contact us until that day. Things turned around then. He tried to make up for old times and even though there were too many moments missed, he was there. When he heard that I had attempted to kill myself, he realized how much it would devastate him if I had succeeded.

I gave in at that moment. I began talking to a therapist and started medication. It wasn’t a magic cure, life didn’t become a wonderfully perfect fairytale, I wasn’t happy every minute of every day, but I wouldn’t wish it that way. Things were better, and that’s all I had ever wanted. The roses were my reminder that life was not promised, day by day. The will to live was just as vital and just as fragile.

The problem is that my story is taken for granted. Anyone who endured a year imprisoned by a violent aggressor would receive the deepest sympathies. But so many suffer the way I did and still do, yet many hide it because they feel that no one would understand. That is the issue. That is why I have told my story in an altered form. Somehow, it is easier to relate to something fairly rare, such as being kidnapped and held away for a year, than something that is everywhere in the way that depression is. So, perhaps my story is an overly complex way to tell a simple story, but you must admit one thing: it has you thinking.

Like Lincoln

“It’s time to go now Michelle,” I said and tugged at her hand attempting for the umpteenth time now to get her out of the toy section of the store. Mom only wanted me to get milk, eggs, and some Mountain Dew; not a new Veterinarian Barbie. I knew I shouldn’t have brought Michelle, but she begged mom and who can resist her puppy dog eyes. I certainly can’t. Her hazel eyes will burn into your soul until she gets what she wants.

“No, I don’t want to go. I want the Barbie! Don’t you love me Kelly?” she pouted up at me. Then she started to bounce up and down impatiently, her blonde curls, like mine, bouncing with her. For a four year old she sure is smart. Evil, but smart. She knows how to get her way most of the time. When she doesn’t get her way, you don’t want to be in the vicinity. I sighed and crouched down so that I was at her level.

“Michelle, Mommy only gave us enough money for what is on her list,” I showed her the list. “Mommy didn’t write any Barbies on the list, sweetie. We need to get going, okay? Mommy will be worried if we don’t get home soon, okay?”

“This makes my face red,” she said angrily but she let me lead her around while we got the last thing on the list. We made it through the check out fast and I had her buckled and ready for home. We live in a close-knit type of community, with fancy fenced in yards, and trimmed hedges in different odd shapes. It is exactly why I volunteer to run most of the errands so I can get out of the house.

I don’t like having so many neighbors. Everyone is in everybody and their mother’s business. Mr. Rogers is always ready to talk when I step out the door, Lily from school is always ready to critique anything I do, and crazy cat lady Mrs. Cathy always wants me to visit her and her thousands of cats. It’s too claustrophobic, I thought as I got Michelle out of her car seat and then the groceries. Michelle had taken off the minute she was unbuckled leaving me by myself as I got the groceries out. I walked in the open door and unloaded the stuff for Mom. Where is she?

“Mom? Where are you? I thought you were cooking.” My call echoed through our big, quiet house.

“In the study, sweetie,” I heard her yell. I wasn’t far away then. I walked in the room and saw mom playing Solitaire. I swear, she is addicted to that crazy game. “Oh, there you are. Can you do me a favor and finish dinner?”

“But Mom-” I started but she cut me off.

“I have important things to do.”

“Like play Solitaire?” I asked her.

“Not that I have to explain my actions to you, but I was only playing until you and your sister got home. I got a call from work while you were out. I have to go back in today.” She explained while finishing up her game and shutting the computer down.

“Fine, sorry mom,” I said.

“It’s alright. I know we’re all a little put out with all of the problems the station is having lately. I can’t do anything about it. Dad is working graveyard so lock the doors. Be sure to feed your sister and tuck her into bed, okay?” She left in her Malibu as it started to rain. I stayed in the study with my book and waited for the timer to go off. The weather only got worse. By the time the timer went off I could hear thunder and see lightening flashing outside. I made some Kraft macaroni while the ham cooled. When that was done I called Michelle into the room and we ate together at the island while watching the storm outside.

“Kelly? Can you make it stop? It’s scary.” She asked me after we were done with our food.

“Oh, it’s not that scary. It’s just God playing bowling and whenever He gets a strike the lightening goes off happily.” I told her.

“O-Kay,” she paused. “I want to watch a movie.”

“Well, what do you want to watch?” I asked her. She jumped up and ran to the movie case. She pulled numerous movies out but she finally came back over with *Insidious*.

“I want to watch this,” she said.

“I don’t know, baby. That movie is supposed to be really scary,” I warned her.

“I want to watch this one!” she said fiercely.

“We will get in trouble with Mom and Dad. You don’t want to get in trouble do you?” I asked her. I got up and picked up *The Jungle Book*. “Wouldn’t you rather watch *The Jungle Book*?”

“NO! I. Want. To. Watch. This. One!” She screamed and held *Insidious* in her little hands. “*The Jungle Book* is stupid.”

“Stupid is not a nice word Michelle. We are not watching that one.” I told her, and then she started screaming bloody murder. I am going to be in so much

trouble. Our neighbors will be calling our parents if she screams for much longer! “Fine, fine, but I didn’t let you watch this. Understood?” She stopped her tantrum and smiled at me. I put the movie in and we got comfy while the previews started. I left the lights on since I know that this is a scary movie and I popped us some popcorn. We watched the dag-blasted film in silence. We were both shaking with fright from this creepy movie. Why did we even own this? What felt like hours later, the movie finally finished and I pledge to burn that DVD later. Ugh, so scary.

“Are you happy? That movie was really scary.” I asked Michelle as I cleaned up our popcorn that flew whenever we jumped from a scary part. I handed the bowl to Michelle and had her take it to the kitchen while I searched for all of the stray pieces. I had my head under the couch where I saw a bunch of popcorn fly when I heard something shatter.

“KELLY!” Michelle screamed. I bumped my head trying to get out from under there so quickly. I knew I shouldn’t have kicked out the foot rest and crawled under. I rubbed the back of my head as I noticed the power had gone out.

“Michelle, where are you?” I called back as I headed towards the kitchen.

“Kitchen!” She yelled. Ah, so I was right. I was there in a couple seconds and found her huddled on the floor beside the refrigerator with her right hand bleeding and the shattered remains of the bowl everywhere. I picked her up and then found the first aid box, then I started to carry her to the living room again so she could sit comfortably while I fixed her hand. On the way there though, we passed the big bay window in the dining room. As we passed lightning shot through the sky, lighting up the face of a guy standing in front of our window looking in. I screamed, Michelle screamed, and the man started knocking profusely on the window. He was trying to yell something over the roar of the thunder but I didn’t stay there long. Terrified, we ran us down to our secure basement. I locked the door and fixed Michelle’s hand up. She had a piece of the bowl jammed into her palm.

“Michelle, are you okay?” I asked her when I was done with her hand.

“Yes,” she said. Okay, now that she was taken care of I needed to take care of the man. This is exactly why I should have a cell phone! I can’t call the cops, power’s out. I can’t go to the neighbors, I don’t want to leave Michelle here by herself or risk running into him with her.

“I’ll be right back, okay? Do NOT under any circumstances open the door unless you hear me tell you to.”

“Okay,” she said and I headed upstairs. I grabbed the metal bat on the way

for protection. In my search for him, I found his wet footprints leading me in circles. The trail led me upstairs after I had searched the ground floors. Good thing Dad made me take those self-defense classes, I thought as I looked for the intruder. I checked my parent's bedroom, then Michelle's, and I was making my way towards my room when a hand clamped down over my mouth. I struggled and tried to fight him off best I could in this position with the bat, but it didn't do any good.

"Stop fighting me, would you? I didn't come all the way here to hurt you!" He said in a whisper. Then he pried the bat out of my hand and tossed it down the hallway. "I promise I'll let you go if you promise not to scream the second I let go. Nod if you promise," I nodded. He let go and I back away from him. I was about to scream again when he started pulling something from his pocket. He's a liar, I thought. I raced to my window and tried to open it so someone will hear me scream, but he pulled me away from the window and had one hand over my mouth and the other holding the pendant of the locket my grandma gave me.

He handed it to me and stepped back. I took this chance to get a better look at him. The man looked actually more around my age. He is about a foot taller than my short five feet and seven inches frame. His wet golden hair dropped water down his fitted black shirt and dark wash jeans. I looked into his eyes last, afraid to see the malevolence that they surely held. His ocean blue eyes, however, were filled with emotion. If I didn't know better, I would swear that his eyes held some concern.

"Thief! How did you get this? When did you get to this? I am wearing it!" I said and touched my locket. I stopped speaking when I felt the cold, rough patch of where the pendant once sat. "Why did you break my locket? Why are you in my house?" I yelled.

"I was returning it. I saw it fall off earlier when I was at the store. I decided to be a gentleman and return it to you. Do you know how hard it is being the good guy?"

"If that's true then why didn't you return it sooner?" I questioned.

"I tried by following your car. However, it's not so easy following your little car, because as it turns out in this neighborhood there are tons of cars that look like yours!" He said frustrated.

"Okay, but how am I to believe you?" I still don't trust this guy. "You sound more like a stalker to me."

"Oh, come on! Give me a break. Was President Lincoln a stalker when he followed that one woman trying to return her penny? I don't think so."

“What are you talking about?” Okay, this guy is a lunatic, I thought.

“You know the story where a woman dropped a penny and he walked for miles just to return it to her. I was trying to be like Lincoln. Where does it get me? A possible cold, beat up, and a cute girl to think I’m some freak.” He ranted. I couldn’t help but laugh and blush at the last part.

“I don’t trust you all the way yet, but maybe when you get over this cold you have given yourself then perhaps you can convince me that you’re sane.” I said a little bold. I kind of believe him, but I was a little wary. His smile was worth it though.

“Yes ma’am and may I introduce myself. I am James, nice to meet you.” He said.

“It’s nice to meet you too, my name is Kelly.”

“Nice to meet you Kelly, I hope to be seeing you.” He said. Then he put his number on my desk as well as the Veterinarian Barbie and left.

Damaged Goods

Every Sunday morning after church, the Smith family takes their beautiful five children to the lake for a picnic. Steve Smith takes charge of all the cooking while Edna Smith coordinates the families activities. The five children, Janice, Michael, Louise, Joseph, and James, are having a competition of who could build the largest sand castle. Janice and Michael team up to compete against Louise and Joseph. James is too young to realize what is going on; therefore, he just plays in the sand making a huge mess. The older kids plan to build a turtle for theirs. The younger kids decide just to build different shapes.

Sadly, Edna lost her wedding ring there the previous month. She lost hope in finding it after searching for days. They looked everywhere and found nothing. They looked under water fountains, picnic tables, sand toys and nothing. Edna just decided to purchase another ring because she could not find it.

Steve and Edna sit in their beach chairs admiring the kid's hard work on the sand castles. Having more experience, the older kids are in the lead. They are adding on the details to the turtle shell while the younger kids are just adding buckets of sand on top of each other. Sadly, little James just sits there playing with the sand toys and occasionally eating some sand. Edna and Steve discuss the ring. Steve tells her to never give up hope and one day, she may find it again. Discouraged, Edna just says, "Yeah, whatever, when a storm breaks loose in the middle of the day with no sign is when I'll find it. "

As Steve begins to cook hamburgers and hotdogs for lunch, Edna unpacks all the utensils for eating. She prepares the table, setting out napkins, plates, and cups. Steve gazes out in the distance to see a huge storm cloud heading in their direction. He worries it will ruin their lunch plans. Every other family in sight pack up their belongings are run for cover. However, the Smith's decide to stay and wait it out. The wind starts to blow furiously knocking everything off the table. Edna rushes around like a chicken with its head cut off gathering up all the belongs. The kid's masterpieces are all ruined and poor little James gets blown over.

All of a sudden, the wind stops blowing and the sun comes up. The kids go back to playing in the sand. Little James continues to play and eat the sand. His parents do not realize he is eating the sand until he begins to cough heavily.

The parents rush over to the child and pick him up. He continues to cough until he spits up. When he finally coughs all the sand up, there is something shining. His parents are in shock when they look down. Very carefully, they look and find Edna's wedding ring. James had accidentally tried to eat his own mother's jewelry. Edna was overwhelmed with joy. The Smith's uses the money they had saved for the new ring and took the children to Disney World.

Lone Wolf: The Rising of the Shadows

My name is Vega, and it has been two whole years since I have had this power within me. I am starting to get used to it, but I still have to wear the necklace in order to keep my human form.

I was born with a star-shaped birthmark on the right side of my neck. When I was a child, my friends sometimes teased me about it. I used to want to have it removed, but as I grew older, I felt that it made me unique. As I was shaving on the morning of my twenty-first birthday, I noticed that the mysterious birthmark had started to glow. Initially, I thought it was just my imagination, so I decided not to mention it for fear that people would think I had lost my mind.

That afternoon, I was supposed to drive to my four-year-old niece's preschool, pick her up, and take her to her mother's house. My niece's name is Samantha, but everyone calls her "Sam." When I deposited my niece into her booster seat in the back of my Ford Taurus, she presented me with a picture she had drawn for me for my birthday.

"Uncle Vega, what's that glowing on your neck?" She questioned me. At that moment I realized that others were obviously able to see what I had viewed earlier that morning. I told her that it was part of a trick I was playing on people since it was my birthday. I did not want to frighten her, but in the words of Shakespeare I had wondered, "What is amiss?"

As soon as I safely delivered Sam to her home, a torrential rainstorm started. My windshield wipers did not work properly. Tornado warnings had been issued for the area, so I decided to pull over and take temporary shelter in a nearby cave. When I entered the dark cavern, I felt a sharp pain in the exact location of my birthmark. I became drowsy and quickly fell asleep.

The next morning I heard heavy breathing and realized it was my own. I rubbed my eyes and glanced down at what had previously been my arms. They were covered with white fur. I had transformed into a white wolf! In a state of shock, I ran deeper into the cave. I encountered an old man who was wearing a necklace that contained a ball with a centered, oak leaf design.

"My name is Dakota." He greeted me. "I know you are frightened son, but I will explain everything to you." The old man placed a star necklace around my

neck and I became human again. “My animal form is that of a brown bear.” He began his explanation. “All of us who bear a special birthmark will be able to assume animal forms when necessary after we have become twenty-one years old. We are tasked with the challenge of defending those who cannot fight for themselves. We must act individually to right wrongs. If we confront villains, we must first try to defeat them in human form, but can transform in order to complete the task when absolutely necessary. We battle human enemies as well as criminals who can transform like we are able to when the situation requires it.” He asked me to pick an animal name for myself. As I had been informed that I would have to fight my enemies alone, I chose the title of “The Lone Wolf.”

During the next two weeks, the old man taught me hand-to-hand combat techniques and how to use martial arts weapons. I felt proud that I had had been born to this mission. He told me that the “bad guys” are often referred to as “The Shadows.” There had been a marked increase in their numbers in the previous five years.

During the next two years, I was able to defeat several enemies. One criminal was an evil man who was able to turn into a serpent. I had wrestled and had overpowered a guy who had the ability to turn into a werewolf. I even had the opportunity to win a battle against Goran, an enemy who had the ability to turn into a dragon. Somehow, I had managed to perform my heroic duties, while keeping my alter ego a secret from my family and friends. The old man in the cave had advised me that I had to fight alone, but I had come to believe that I would also be alone in my personal life if I was to perform my assigned duties.

Now, my niece is six years old. She is growing up so fast. She is already in the first grade. I cannot believe how quickly I am getting older! It is still shocking that Sam is growing into a graceful, young lady. I remember when she was a little baby. Sam is so beautiful, but now is not the time for Memory Lane. I always want her to be proud of her uncle. Right now, I have a job to do. I must travel to where I sense impending danger.

As I walk in the desert, I cautiously enter what looks like a town, so I walk closer, to gain a better perspective. As I enter an elk horn, covered overpass, I notice there is a sign that reads, “Welcome to the Dead Zone!” I am curious about the unusual greeting. Seemingly, from out of nowhere, I hear a scream. I rush into the town. Soon, I locate the source of the unpleasant noise. It turns out the sound is coming from a bar. In front of the shabby place of business, I

see that a young woman with auburn hair has fallen to the ground, crying. A large, homely man exits the bar with a deadly weapon. He shouts at the woman as soon as he charges his weapon at her. I take my Katana out, and warn him, "Leave this young woman alone, or I will do what I have to do to stop you!"

"Who are you, fool?" The large thug taunted me.

"I'm just a regular guy, who happens to be passing by this town," I answer as I hope he backs down from his evil mission.

"Come on out boys. Let's teach this fool a lesson!" He commands his band of six cronies who emerge from their hiding places at various points along the nearly deserted, dusty street. I hope I can defeat these guys without transforming into my white wolf form. As a solo avenger, I try to help others, while keeping my alternating identity a secret whenever possible. One by one, the villains rush at me. Each time I toss them aside like slices of molded, pepperoni pizza. I wound each of the ruffians, but kill no one. The desperados wisely decide to quickly exit the town.

A soft feminine voice speaks. "How can I ever thank you?" The beautiful woman who had fallen to the ground thanks me and hugs me. As she was pulling away from me, I notice her birthmark, (a heart-shaped one) as it begins to glow on her neck. Obviously, she is unaware of her impending powers, but she will soon learn of their existence.

"What is that guy's problem?" I question her as I wonder which animal form she will soon take.

"The big ugly guy was impatient for his drink. When I was not moving fast enough, he dragged me into the street and threw me to the ground. I've had my share of bullies lately," she continues. "I want to quit this job, but my boss says he will make me sorry if I do."

"It's okay to fight back." I advise her. I realize that soon she will not need anyone else to fight her battles for her. She hugs me once again, and then returns to the bar. I walk around the town, investigating the scenery. While I am relaxing, I hear the young woman screaming and running from three guys in black armor. I have no choice, but to transform. I jump off the building to the ground. I am in my wolf form, so I chase them. I defeat each of them soundly, just as Beowulf defeats Grendel and other monsters in that ancient epic. Then, I return to my human form and escort the woman home. She tells me she had quit her job and her boss was not happy, so he sent those guys after her. A friend of hers calls the sheriff and takes him away. She is so happy, she gives me a kiss. I am shocked, but pleased. After the happy scene, I tell her I have to go. She

seems to be a bit sad. I advise her not to be upset. I ask her what her name is and she replies, "Claire. What's yours?"

I tell her to call me The Lone Wolf. After that, I hug her. Then, I hesitate as I walk away. I realize that although I must fight my enemies alone, as this young woman will also have to do, I feel hopeful that in my personal life, I will not have to be a Lone Wolf. If I am not able to return to this young woman, perhaps I can find another lady who shares the transformational blessing/curse. Maybe there will be a different kind of adventure out there as the shadows continue to rise. As I walk into the sunset, I realize that I must continue my training in order to control my powers. Whenever the shadows arise, I will appear and defend the innocent. I will also protect my loved ones. My name is Vega and I am the Lone Wolf.

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