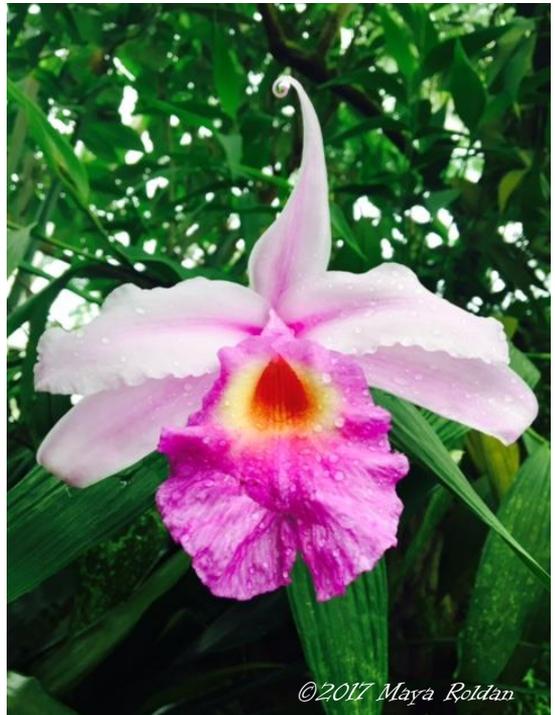




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issue 2
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summer
2017

*The literary arts
magazine of the
7th & 8th grades
city of Somerville,
Massachusetts*



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7th & 8th grades*

Somerville, Massachusetts

issue 2

summer 2017

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ADVISERS

Roy Gardner *teacher*, East Somerville Community School

Chris Mitchell *teacher*, A.D. Healey School

Alan Ball *principal investigator*, Writers' Den

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Maid of the Mist

Isaac Leib

“So,” asked my grandma, completely changing the subject on me, “You ready?”

“Yeah, I guess I’m ready!” I answered, “I’m always ready! But what am I ready for?”

We were at one of the seven wonders of the world: Niagara Falls. We were in the tunnels that were built in the rock next to the waterfall for people to walk in. At that moment, we were reading a couple signs that talked about a woman who was about eighty-four and who went down the falls in a wooden barrel with her cat and they both managed to survive the fall. I had been trying to convince my grandma to let me try the barrel thing out for myself, but she wouldn’t let me (which I am happy about now) and I was beginning to get mad. There was an opening at the end of the tunnel, and water was crashing down, and we were about to make our way over, as we were done reading the sign. It was our first day at the falls out of five and we were about to go on a boat, but how was I to know that? No one had told me about the boat, and when it happened, I wasn’t particularly mad.

“I’ll show you!” she said, and with that she started following the tunnel back to the outside world. When we finally got out, the light was blinding, but we managed to move on. We went to an information desk, and my grandma asked where to go for the “Maid of the Mist.” I was confused, but I waited until the man told us where it was and gave us a map of the American side.

“What is the Maid of the Mist?” I asked in confusion. “It sounds like the name of a holy misty pond!”

After a laughing fit, my grandma told me that it was in fact a boat that goes around the waterfall. My stomach started to flip in my gut and I got the kind of feeling that you get when you are about to go on a roller coaster, except at the same time, I almost exploded with anticipation.

“We’re gonna go into the bottom of a waterfall in a boat? I guess that I’ll still do it, but why would we do that?” I said, thinking that

we would take the boat down the waterfall (keep in mind, I was 10 years old). “It sounds like fun, but now I’m kind of scared.”

“First of all, yeah, pretty much. We are going on a boat,” she answered, “but there is a place away from the waterfall where you can go on a boat, and it takes you around the bottom of the waterfall, and there is a lot of mist and amazing sights.”

“Oh,” I responded, trying to understand what was happening and how the boat worked. “That sounds fun! So, we’re not going to ride a boat down the waterfall?”

“Of course not! Why would we do that?” she exclaimed, looking at me with a strange look. “We didn’t come here to get ourselves killed!”

“Ok, well good! That’s what I thought you meant by ride a boat that ‘goes around the waterfall’ and I’m glad that that’s not what you meant!”

“Ok, well I’m glad we cleared that up,” my grandma answered, “because that would not have been fun!”

We started following the map and the information that the person at the information kiosk gave us and we eventually found our way to the right place. We had to go down a path made of wooden bridges and tons of people, nearly slipping about *ten million* times because it was so wet and slippery, but the view there was all right. The bridge maze was made entirely of wood and when you looked out over the water, you could hear the waterfall and you could barely see half of the waterfall because there was *way* too much mist. The other half was around a corner, so that part wasn’t that impressive-looking. There was a huge river going away from the waterfall. On one side, there was a huge rock wall, and on the other side, there was some rock, then grass, then some trees, and another rock wall. When you were at the top of the bridges, there was an *amazing* view of the wood bridges, the river, then the huge waterfall that was shrouded in mist, but we couldn’t appreciate it that much because we were lost in the maze and we had to find our way through the maze of bridges, people, and more bridges, and more people and all the way to the bottom...

Once we were finally there, we got ourselves ponchos because it was extremely misty and we didn’t want our clothes to get wet. Then, we had to wait in line. I think that there were two boats, and when one came, the other one was in the middle of the tour. There

were a lot of people there, but we only had to wait for about fifteen minutes because a *lot* of people can fit on the boat; at least 125 per boat, so the long part in the end was getting there. Eventually, the boat was ready for us to go on it.

“We’re going, Isaac!” announced my grandma, which I thought was kind of obvious. “We can finally see all of the sights!”

“All right, let’s go, then!” I responded, and so we went.

We boarded the boat, and I was not impressed in the beginning. After we were on and started moving, it still wasn’t all that impressive. We were going along in a boat crowded with 125 people and tons of hornets. The view wasn’t the best either because we weren’t at the waterfall yet. The captain was telling us a story about the waterfall that no one could hear over the crowd of people and the engine of the boat, and I was beginning to lose hope. The thing that saved me was once we rounded one certain corner, my opinion of the Maid of the Mist changed. Towering above us was a *huge* waterfall that was taking up ninety-nine percent of my current view. Before that, I had only been to one actual waterfall in real life, in Jamaica. We had gone and climbed up the waterfall, and I had thought *that* waterfall was big, but now when we rounded that corner, I was almost sick because I had underestimated how huge this waterfall really would be, and at that moment, I was completely and utterly speechless.

“*Holy shit!*” I exclaimed as I was looking up at the waterfall. “I knew it was big, but I didn’t think that it was *massive!*”

It was truly amazing. If you have seen the pictures, just imagine that but ten times better. It was like I was living in the past, when people weren’t there, and nature was as it should be. It was a huge carpet of blue that took up half of our view, and we could barely see it through the mist. The other half of it was blurred out because of the mist, so I could only see the part of it that was right in front of me. As we were going, the sun went down. When the sun goes down at the falls, hidden lights behind the falls all turn on in all the colors of the rainbow and even more. As the lights came on, it was a gradual rise in brightness. At first, I couldn’t tell if it was really there or not, but as the sun went down even farther, I could tell that it wasn’t my imagination. It just seemed to get brighter and brighter, until I began to think that I might end up being blinded by the show

that was completely unexpected. “Pure prettiness” is how my grandma described it.

After we were done, I begged and pleaded to go on it again, but sadly, it was time for dinner. I took off my poncho which was completely soaked, and even though there was a recycling and you were supposed to recycle them, both my grandma and I kept them as souvenirs, and I still have mine in my room. We went back up the maze of bridges and over to the Canadian side (which I think is much more interesting) and we went to a Tim Hortons for dinner. After that, we played a ton of games on the Canadian side. My favorite one was a maze quest where you follow the maze and have to stamp your card. After that, we were pretty much done for the day, so we went back to our motel and took a breather, while at the same time getting ready to do it again the next day. The following afternoon, we were reading another sign in the tunnels about a man who tightrope walked across the bottom of Niagara Falls without even a bungee cord so that if he fell, it would be a 100 foot drop into the lake below and he would have been carried by the river for 14 miles and would end up in Lake Ontario, but he managed to make it across without that happening which was good for him. Then, my grandma’s voice broke the silence.

“So...you ready?” asked my grandma with a small hint of teasing in her voice. This time she was definitely changing the subject on me on purpose and I was pretty sure that I knew why, but I played along with it.

“Of course!” I responded, “I’m always ready! But what am I ready for?”

“I guess we’ll find out then, won’t we?” my grandma replied and so off we went, maybe to do it all over again, and possibly to do something completely unrelated to the day before, and there was only time to tell where our future was heading... © 2017 Isaac Leib

Parakeets

Joshua DaCosta

It was a peaceful weekend. My brother Andrew and I were lying on our beds looking at cute parakeet videos. The more we learned about parakeets, the greater our interests grew in them. The only pets we’d ever had were some fish in a tank. The fish weren’t the

funnest of pets because you couldn't really play with them. We wanted a pet that we could touch, a pet that we could teach and a pet that we could play with. We knew a parakeet would be all of those things.

After deciding on what pet we wanted, the next big challenge we had to face was still ahead, and that challenge was try to convince my parents to get us one. It took forever to convince my parents to get us a fish tank, so we knew it would be even harder to convince them to get us a parakeet. While my dad was at work, we both went to our mom to tell her that we wanted a parakeet. At first, she thought of all the work it would require to take care of parakeets, but as time passed, she started to realize how much having a parakeet would mean to us and how much fun it would be having a parakeet.

Our mom agreed to get us both parakeets but that was not the end of the story because the last, the final and the biggest obstacle was trying to convince my dad to get us parakeets. We just returned the fish tank, and my dad was still mad about all the work he did cleaning the fish tank for the past months. My dad never really liked pets, so his getting us a fish tank was really lucky. Basically, we all knew it would be impossible to convince my dad to agree with us on buying a parakeet, so it was time for plan B. Basically, plan B was that we would get the parakeets and then surprise him with them. It was time to put our plan into action.

My dad was out doing some paperwork and chores, so we put our plan into action. My mom, Andrew and I rushed out to the car. Andrew and I got into the back seat, and my mom started driving to Petsmart. On the way to Petsmart, I started to think about what color parakeet I wanted and decided on the color blue. As we arrived, the excitement started growing in me, but also my doubts. In my head a storm of thoughts started pouring in: *How will my dad react? Maybe having a parakeet is too much work? What if the parakeet gets sick? What if they fly away? What if they don't like each other?*

All these questions made me rethink the idea of getting a parakeet, but even with my concerns, we entered Petsmart. The smell of animals greeted us at the door. We strolled past all the animal enclosures until we got to the bird section. There were so many cute bird species there, but we did some research and decided on a type of parakeet called a budgie. When we got to their

enclosure, there were so many parakeets flying around, it looked like a jungle. At first we looked at how they were behaving to try to find out which bird was the healthiest, but as time passed, the greatest factor in the decision was color.

As I looked around, I saw many parakeets, but a beautiful blue parakeet caught my attention and I knew that was the bird for me. I watched him fly around for a little while, and his behavior looked healthy enough so that was my final decision. Andrew ended up choosing a yellow bird. We had to choose a male and a female because if they were both males, they would fight. The Petsmart employee came to take our birds out of the cage. We got lucky because the birds we had chosen were opposite genders. We waited eagerly for the Petsmart employee to go get our birds from the cage. I stared at the cage as she waved her big net around trying to catch our birds, but whenever the net got close to the birds, they just flew away until finally, she caught the blue bird. Then, she put him into a cardboard box. Now she turned her attention to the yellow bird. After a little while, she had caught Andrew's bird too.

After we had the birds, we picked up an oversized cage, food and toys. We loaded the cage and toys into the back of the car. As my mom drove home, we tightly held the box that contained our parakeets trying to cushion the bumps of the road. As we got close to our house, I was feeling pretty nervous not knowing how my dad would react. I was hoping in my head that my dad was still working, but as we pulled up to the driveway, my worst fear came true, because my dad's car was in the driveway. I knew he was in his office, because I could see him through the window. We quickly tried to get everything out of the car and inside without getting him suspicious. Unfortunately, he got suspicious and was yelling out questions from his office, but we ignored them as we rushed into the living room to set up the bird cage. When the cage was ready, we opened the boxes and they were shy because they hesitated to come out of the box, but finally they leaped out of the box and into the cage. We were pleased to see that they looked happy in their new cage even though it was closed. Andrew and I were so happy, because now we finally had a pet that we could train, play with, and keep us company. We also bought a little perch for them to stand on. As I started to get to work building the perch, my dad came rushing into the living room and my heart sank in fear. He peeked

around the corner into the living room and saw the birds. He looked confused and slightly angry at first, but as time passed he became mesmerized by the parakeets. I was almost certain he was going to tell us to return the birds, but he didn't. Instead of telling us to go return the birds, he asked questions like, "What is this?" or, "What were you thinking?"

I could see by the look on his face that he secretly liked the birds. He sat on the couch staring at the birds trying to get his thoughts together, but he didn't know what to think, so he turned on the TV and relaxed. When my dad left, I started trying to get the parakeets used to my voice by talking to them. Since my house was new to them, they were scared, so they did not move much at first. After hours of talking to them and staring at them, we opened the top of the cage and I expected them to fly out but instead they just stayed there doing nothing. Andrew and I put our hands in the cage trying to get the birds to step up onto our fingers, but instead of going onto our fingers they ran away. After a while they finally stepped up onto our finger.

The feeling of his soft belly on my hand was both comforting and exciting.

Their wings were clipped so whenever they tried to fly away, they didn't get very far. Sometimes, when they tried to fly away, they landed on the floor and we would let them walk around and explore the house. When it started to get dark, I was sad because I had to stop playing with them. I was having so much fun. Andrew and I put the parakeets in the cage and then closed the cage. After the parakeets were put to bed, Andrew and I lay down on our beds but instead of just falling asleep, we talked about what name we should give our parakeets. As I thought about what I should name my parakeet, a million different names ran through my head, but after about half an hour, the name Willey came into my head and at that moment I knew his new name would be Willey. Andrew also put a lot of thought into what his parakeet's name should be, and at the end of all that thinking, he decided on the name Kiddy. Life was good, knowing that tomorrow, I would have my feathery companion greet me in the morning.

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Toothless

Suyogya Acharya

“Outlet!” I screamed to Ben.

He passed me the ball. I saw everything moving in slow-motion. My teammates were running up the court. I hit him with a perfect bounce pass. He laid it in sweetly off the glass.

“Get back on D!” I yelled to all of my teammates.

We all ran back as someone on the other team was inbounding the ball to Owen. He sprinted and was about to score. I sped up. I had to block him.

As I was running down to block him, all that was going through my mind was to be like Lebron; run all the way down the court to stop the other team from scoring.

“I’m going to stuff you, Owen!” I screamed as I kept hustling back to save a point.

He was running and I was gaining on him. The whole play would’ve been perfect if everything went like I hoped it would. It didn’t.

I was still running when Owen looked as if he were going to shoot. I jumped at the moment when he should have put the ball up. I realized that Owen had faked me out. He didn’t jump. He put his head up and that was when everything fell apart.

He popped his head up. I was still in the air. I looked down. All I saw was something brown. Then, there was a sudden pain in my mouth. My entire mouth tasted like iron.

“My tooth! My tooth hurts!” I screamed in pain.

“Are you okay?” everyone around me asked.

I was holding my nose and my teeth so my blood wouldn’t get everywhere.

“I’m so sorry,” Owen repeated over and over again.

I wanted to tell him that it wasn’t his fault, but my mouth was in too much pain to speak.

I ran to the nurse with Gabriel and Bryan. I thought she was just going to tell me to put some ice on it. That’s what she usually said. Gabriel got my bag while the nurse called my Dad.

The assistant nurse was putting some pain killer in my mouth so some of the pain would go away. It didn’t.

My dad was calm on the phone so that made me less nervous. He told me to calm down and wait for him. It would take him forty minutes to come to the school. The door opened and Mr. Stephano walked in.

“Hey, Suyogya how is it going?” he asked softly.

I tried to say okay, but it came out like, “Okghhgh.”

“You’ll be okay,” he said. “I had a friend when I was in high school and the same thing happened to him. You will be okay.”

That didn’t make me feel any better. He then left to go back to his class.

The time at the nurse was super boring and painful. Every time somebody would come to the nurse, they would ask me questions. I would try to answer them, but they weren’t able to understand me.

“Hey, how are you doing?” Dad asked me.

I was tired of trying to talk, so I just gave him a thumbs up sign.

He talked to the nurse for a bit and asked her questions. Then he made a phone call to the dentist. I had an appointment at 1:30 and it was 12:45.

We left the school right away. I sat in the car and my dad drove to the dentist. My tooth was an emergency, so people let me cut them in line.

“What happened?” The dentist asked me.

I tried to explain but I couldn’t, so my dad told him instead. The dentist was a good listener. He nodded and said that the same thing happened to him. He showed me his fake tooth. I had never noticed that before. He started to work and look around in my mouth.

“The root is broken, we’ll have to take his tooth out,” the dentist told my dad.

“Okay, do whatever you need to do,” my dad replied.

The dentist gave me eight shots. The first couple hurt, but then everything in my mouth went numb. They gave me a little bit more and took out my tooth.

“Isgh it out?” I asked feeling shocked that I couldn’t say the “s” sound.

“Thuyogya, Thuyogya,” I kept trying to say my name but I couldn’t.

I was bummed, but I knew I would get it eventually.

The dentist told my dad that I would have to get surgery. He told my dad that it would be very hard to find a surgeon willing to take the tooth out. My dad told me to get in the car while he made the next appointment. When my dad came, he told me that we were going to Tufts Medical Center. We drove all the way there. When we got there, I finally realized why we came. I was going to get the surgery.

I felt very sick. My palms were sweaty. I felt like I was going to collapse and throw up. It didn't help that I hadn't eaten anything, so I was also starving.

We got up to the floor and I was shaking. I could already feel the pain. I was scared. My dad talked to the front desk lady. My turn was coming in five minutes. I couldn't sit down. I was walking around and my dad knew that I was scared. He told me in a calm voice to relax. They were professionals and wouldn't hurt me that much. It sort of calmed me down.

"Suyogya Acharya," said the surgeon. For some reason he said my name right. I was shocked. People never get my name right the first time. He said it confidently like he had seen it and said it before. His voice was also familiar. I didn't know why because that was my first time there. Then I looked up at the surgeon.

He was my uncle. No wonder he said my name right. I felt so relieved. He would take good care of me. I went into the room and he told me to sit.

"If anything hurts, just give me a thumbs down," he said. I nodded.

"Ready?" he asked me.

There were a lot of things in my mouth so I just gave him a thumbs up. He put six shots in my mouth. I was counting in my head. I had gotten a total of fourteen shots in one day. That was a lot of shots. After the shots, I didn't feel anything.

"How is it going?" asked the assistant, while my uncle was trying to pull out the root. I gave him a thumbs up. He was using machines and they were making some weird noise. He put a string in my mouth and told me I was all set. I gave him a puzzled look. I thought that I was going to be there for a couple of hours. I was only there for twenty minutes. I was ready to go to sleep.

I left the room and my dad looked surprised as well. He thought the same thing I did. I thanked my uncle. I started to speak a little

bit because the numbness in my mouth started to wear off. I could say the “sss” sound. Then, we left the hospital. The dentist said that I couldn't eat for an hour, but I was starving. We were on the way back home but then my dad drove in the opposite direction. I gave him a puzzled look.

“We are going to pick up your brother,” my dad told me.

I was listening to music on the radio when my dad stopped the car. We were nowhere near my brother. We still had a mile to go. I looked around and saw Coldstone. My dad was heading straight for it. I got excited. I got two cones of ice cream, one for me and one for my brother. He only eats chocolate and my favorite flavor is coffee. I had a huge smile as we went to pick up Manogya.

I ate all of my ice cream before Manogya saw me. Right when he walked in, I gave him a big smile.

“What happened?” he asked.

“I was playing basketball, I hit my mouth on Owen’s head and it hung from my gum. We went to the dentist and he took out my tooth and said the root was broken and I needed to get surgery. Then, we went to Tufts Medical Center and got the root out in five minutes. He put stitches in my mouth. Then we went to Coldstone and got ice cream and here I am explaining the story to you.”

“Whoa, when did this happen?” he asked.

“Around 12,” I told him.

We went home and my mom came. I had to explain the whole story to her. I ran upstairs to the bathroom and looked at myself. I looked a little different. I came out of the bathroom and changed clothes.

“I’m starving,” I told my parents.

“Everyone in the car,” yelled my dad.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“Somewhere,” he replied.

We all got in the car. My dad drove around the streets and looked for parking. When he finally found it, I knew where we were going.

“Subway!” my brother and I yelled at the same time.

We went inside and ordered. For me, it was the best trip to Subway I ever had. The cheese was perfectly melted. The chicken was warm and the bread was perfectly toasted.

© 2017 Suyogya Acharya

Cat Ear Headphones

Giovanna Fonseca

The headphones were the color of crow's feathers, and had bright LED lights on the sides that came in four beautiful colors: red, blue, green, and purple, and best of all, the headphones had adorable cat ears on top with two little speakers that lit up the same way the headphones did. Sadly, I had only seen them on my bright phone screen; the photo of the headphones were accompanied with a caption that read, "OMG! I want these!" followed by three heart Emojis.

Almost everyone I knew on the Internet wanted the adorable kitty headphones, including me. Luckily, Christmas was around the corner, and I did not really have anything in mind on my Christmas list. So, I went on Google, and searched up, "cat ear headphones." The first result that came up was, "Cat Ear Headphones by Axent Wear." I clicked the link, and it brought me to the main site. I scrolled down and I found out that there was an exclusive version of the headphones that were gold. I was speechless when I looked at the price: \$10,000! I knew that my mom would not buy me something *that* expensive. So, I decided to go with the normal \$150 ones. The hardest part was choosing which one of the four colors I wanted. The green went really well with the black, the red looked fierce, the blue was the most popular, and purple is my favorite color. (Actually, my favorite color is lavender but it's close.)

The next week, I called my sister and told her about how badly I really wanted the cat headphones for Christmas. At first, she wasn't so sure about the headphones because of the way they looked, and my heart sank when she said no. Later, she noticed how sad I was and decided to buy them for me online! After my sister purchased the headphones, she viewed the purchase information. At the bottom, it read: "*estimated day of arrival: 12-25-15.*"

Right on Christmas day! I thought, and smiled.

The next day, I went to school and bragged to all of my classmates about how I was getting my ideal headphones for Christmas. After school, I arrived home and saw a UPS truck across from my house, I ran inside the house as fast as I could, and I stood there behind the window waiting for the mailman to give me the

headphones I had always wanted. I watched him deliver to about five houses. Then I saw the mailman walking to the truck.

This is it! I finally get to have my cat headphones, I thought to myself. As he checked for any more mail to deliver, he proceeded to the front of the truck, took out a small banana from a white plastic bag, and peeled it carefully from the top. He slowly brought it to his mouth and started to chew on the banana like a sloth. I felt like he was trying to mock me. *Just hurry and give me my freaking headphones!* I angrily thought to myself as the postman continued to savor his banana (for about three and a half minutes). After his long delicious snack, the postman dropped the banana peel on the road, and drove off, without ever giving me my headphones. I was internally screaming as I glared at the lonely banana peel.

A week later, Christmas Eve came! That meant that I would get my headphones... *tomorrow!* I spent the whole morning looking out the window for my headphones to come in. But sadly, no luck. I got tired of looking, and went back to my room to do stuff that I normally do on Christmas Eve, eating and relaxing. A few hours later, my dad had to leave the house and get something from the store. When he opened the door to leave, he noticed a small brown box, sitting at our door. Then, he called me at the door and told me to bring the box upstairs. When I laid my eyes on the box, I smiled. I took the box into the kitchen, trying not to drop it. I gently set the box on top of the kitchen table. My mom told me to open the box. I nodded and grabbed the scissors out of the silverware drawer, and I carefully cut the tape off the brown box so I could open it. Inside that box was another box, but the front had an illustration of an anime girl with pink-greenish hair and she was wearing the cat ear headphones. I read the top of the box: *Cat Ear Headphones – The Purrfect Way To Listen To Music, Or share with your friends.* I smiled and hugged the box, then I hugged my mom. It was the best day of my life.

“Can I open the box?” I asked excitedly. My mom sighed, and nodded. I screamed with happiness and ran to my room. I sat on my bed with the beautifully decorated box. I opened it up from the top. In the box was another black box, but it was more like a case. I looked for the zipper, and unzipped the case. Inside the case was the headphone jack connector, the USB charger, a detachable mic, and best of all, the beautiful cat ear headphones. When I turned the

headphones on, the lights went from a normal purple, to a bright and beautiful shade of purple. I gazed at the mesmerizing lights as I connected the headphones to my phone. I put the headphones on, and stared at myself in the mirror. I looked like a cybernetic purple kitty. I opened the music app on my phone, and played music. The headphones made the music sound clear, loud, and beautiful, just how I like it.

I spent the rest of my winter holiday listening to music with my kitty headphones. My mom was getting annoyed every time she needed a favor from me, since I couldn't hear her from the sound of Gerard Way singing the words to "Helena" coming from my headphones, on full blast.

On the last week of vacation, I was forced to go to the grocery store with my mom because she thought that I needed to go out more. I decided to bring my headphones so I wouldn't bore myself like last time when I started reading the expiration dates on every product my mom put in the cart. Everything went like normal, just like I was not wearing the headphones at all, until a little girl pointed at my headphones and screamed with laughter, and an old lady looked at my headphones with a face that looked like she had just eaten a sour grape. She started to move her lips like she was saying something, but of course I didn't hear what she was saying.

Winter break ended and I had to get ready to go to school. In the morning, I asked my mother if I could bring my headphones to school, since I wanted to show off to my friends.

"You may bring them to school," she exclaimed. I smiled, then tried to make a neutral face since her tone was extremely serious.

"*But* you cannot listen to music with them on your way to school, *and* you are only able to bring it to school once," she ordered. (For as long as I can remember, I brought it to school twice.)

Of course I didn't listen and I walked to school with my headphones on. When I got to the crossing guard, she looked at me with a weird face and complimented my cat headphones. At least I thought she did. I wasn't able to hear her over my music, so I just nodded and continued to walk to school. But right before I arrived, I had received a notification on my phone. Someone had commented on my picture of me and my headphones. The comment read, "Me too."

Ugh I thought to myself as I found out that a person that I despised had the same headphones as me, and they were purple just like mine. I nearly threw my phone. Not just because he's someone I really hate and I want to throw him in a pit of fire. It was because I did not want to match headphones with him. Then, I wondered to myself if he was going to bring the headphones, just like I did. Luckily, I saw him, and I sighed with relief.

Putting my problems aside, my friends really enjoyed putting my headphones on their heads, and I may have gotten in trouble once or twice that day for bringing them in. But the worst part was having to bring the headphones' ridiculously huge case in my small backpack. I guess that was my fault since I myself decided to bring it with me. The thing is, I never really *resolved* my issue with the person who decided to get the same headphones as me. We actually ended up agreeing about how the speakers on the cat ears have a really bad quality.

Anyway, that's my story. I bet that after reading this, you're going to google "cat ear headphones" and then you are going to want to buy it, but If you *do* plan on buying it, *don't get the purple ones!*

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Death

Marina Pereira

10:11 p.m. "No dad! Please don't do that anymore!" I could hear my best friend, Cecilia, crying to her dad through the phone. Her family was really close to my family, especially her dad. I always called him uncle. He was an alcoholic, and couldn't stop drinking. I suddenly froze and didn't know what to do.

Should I say something? Then my phone screen shut off. I noticed she ended the call. I was scared and curious to know what had happened.

Should I tell my mother? My parents and her parents were very close friends as well. Maybe my mother knew what to do if I told her.

I was halfway through my room when I got a text message from Cecilia. I froze midair to read it. "Please don't tell anyone about what you heard," the text itself looked scary to me.

Should I still tell my mom, though? If I did, Cecilia would probably never talk to me again, so I decided not to.

The next day, I woke up scared. I regretted not telling my mom about last night. I felt selfish for not telling anyone what happened. So the whole day in school, I couldn't focus on anything. I just couldn't wait to get home and see if everything was okay.

After sprinting home from school, I went straight to my room and called Cecilia again. The phone rang about five times before she picked up. "Hey, how is everything?" I asked curiously.

"I'm fine, everything's fine." She sounded different, but I was too afraid to ask why.

We talked for a bit, just about our school day but she never mentioned anything about her dad. We talked for about ten more minutes before she ended the call, because she had homework to do. I felt like she was hiding something. I had a feeling something bad was happening.

Two weeks passed, and everything was going well, except when Cecilia called a couple times saying that her dad was still drinking frequently. She told me not to tell anyone, so I kept my mouth shut, because I had no choice.

May 9, 2014, one of the most tragic days of my life:

It was a Sunday morning, gloomy and cold. I was doing my hair to leave to my dad's house and everything was going great until I heard my mom's phone ring.

"Marina, can you get that for me please?" she asked.

"No, Mom, I'm in the bathroom!" I shouted so that she would hear me. I could hear her footsteps from the bathroom running toward the phone that was all the way in the living room.

"Hello?" she asked curiously. *Who must be calling this early in the morning?* I was trying to figure out who it was, but all I could hear from the phone was crying and mumbling.

"Woah, woah, slow down! Wait what? How?" I wondered what had happened.

"Mom? What happened?" She didn't answer and I started getting worried.

"Mom," I repeated "what's going on?" This time the worry in my voice was noticeable.

“Your uncle. He died!” I was straightening my hair and I dropped the straightener on my foot, but I didn’t even care. All I could think about was what my mom had just told me.

“What? How? When?” At that point, I didn’t know what to do anymore. I could barely think straight. I was speechless. My mom sat on the couch with the phone in her hand, crying a river.

“The doctors said he had died from drinking too much. He had a heart attack in his sleep.”

Why him? I thought. Then suddenly I felt regret. I should have told someone what was happening. He was such an amazing, caring man, full of happiness and life. I could always count on him for advice. He was always there for me. I even called him my uncle. Then it hit me: he’s really, actually gone. I felt tears running down my face but the tears that I was letting down were solid meaningful tears.

We sat on the couch, hugging each other, crying real tears. I was mostly crying because I felt I was to blame. I could have done something. I always wondered what heartbreak and losing something so precious felt like. Well, now I knew, and it was the most pain I’ve ever felt in my life.

I got up from the couch and ran to my bedroom. I didn’t know what to do. I wanted to stop crying, but tears just kept rolling down my face. Then, I remembered how my best friend must be feeling right now. God, if I were in this much pain, I couldn’t imagine how much she was hurting.

I stumbled out of my bed, still crying, and called her. The phone rang four times before she answered.

“Hello?” I was surprised she even answered. I could tell she was crying also, and then that made me cry even more. We just stood there on the phone for at least three minutes just crying with each other. I was scared to say anything. I thought she might be mad at me for not doing anything.

“Are you mad at me?” I asked.

“What? Mad at you for what? I told you not to tell anyone and that’s what you did. I’m the one who should’ve done something. Thank you,” she paused for a moment, “for being my friend, and listening to me.”

I started crying again.

Then she ended the call, without saying anything else. I figured she needed some time alone.

I could hear my mom crying in the living room still. I walked over to her. She lifted her head up and cried, "He's gone. He's really gone." I handed her a tissue from the coffee table beside me. I sat next to her and hugged her very tight. I knew how hard this was for her. I put my face against hers and I could feel her cold tears rubbing on my cheeks.

"We're going to be fine." I told her.

My mom and Cecilia's mom talked a couple times after. My mom comforted her, telling her everything would be okay. Sometimes I could hear both of them crying together on the phone.

That night, I barely slept. I kept seeing pictures of him in my head and remembering all the fun and happy times we had together. I felt like time was going by so slowly now. I couldn't focus on anything anymore. But I had to stop feeling this way. It was selfish of me, because I knew he was in a better place now, and he wouldn't suffer anymore.

A couple of days passed by, slowly, but we got through it. My mom went to their house a couple of times to see if they were okay. They looked like they were fine. One day, my mom came home from their house with a look on her face. I asked, "What's wrong?"

"I could see the sadness in her eyes. I know she is depressed." I could see a tear coming from the corner of her eye.

"Well, yeah Mom, I mean, her husband just passed away. She's going to be fine Mom. Just give it some time." I realized that kind of came out rude, even though I didn't mean it in a rude way, so I got up from the couch and gave her a hug. I knew this was hard for her because they were all really close friends.

One week later was his funeral. My mom asked me if I wanted to go. I thought about it for a while. It was going to be an open casket funeral. I couldn't bear to see him lying there, without my being able to do anything anymore. I couldn't go. I would feel guilty again. So, on his funeral night, I sat there at my house alone thinking of him.

I called Cecilia the next day. We talked for a bit. She seemed better. I was happy to see her feeling better. Even though I know it will never be the same without him, life had to go on. I knew he wanted to see us all happy, and not sad. Though he was gone, he will never be forgotten.

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Fear

Sarai Umana

Friday, July 25, 2015. On this day I felt my life was going to end, my biggest nightmare was going to become reality. I was up at 3:00 A.M. waiting to be driven to the airport. My hands cold and my mind running, I was wondering and worrying about every single risk that could occur. I was even worrying about things that weren't likely to happen, but in my mind they were all possible. My grandma always used to tell me "Stop letting your thoughts overtake you." She knew the kind of person I was. She always tried to be calm around me when there was something bad going on. I stared at the clock to the point that I felt like minutes had turned into hours.

The clock reached 4:00 A.M., my dad grabbed the car keys and we all followed him outside into the parking lot.

As we drove, the weight that the car was holding was heavy because of our luggage. In total we had twelve suitcases. Each one had to weigh exactly fifty pounds and no more than fifty according to our airline policy. Which was something else to worry about.

What if one of the suitcases weighed more? What would happen then? The drive to the airport was not too stressful until we got there. Not only was I nervous, I was also falling over because of my tiredness. It was very early in the morning and I just wanted to be under my covers sleeping until I felt like getting up. Instead, I was up in the airport waiting to get into the plane.

"All passengers adjust your seat belts, we're ready for takeoff," the flight attendant announced. I was in my seat next to my mom, with my seatbelt fastened all the way. My eyes remained closed while in my mind I thought of my fear of heights. I took my water out and popped my nausea pill in my mouth and swallowed bitterly. The only thing I had in my stomach was the pill. I wasn't allowed to eat anything, because if I did, I wouldn't keep the food that I ate in my stomach for too long. The airplane felt as if it was winter already but that didn't bother me.

At this point the airplane was as if it were a car on the highway, I could hear the loud noise of the airplane's wheels running against the asphalt. All of a sudden the airplane went up into the air. As it went up I could hear a loud noise and I had a weird feeling. I felt

excitement and nervousness at the same time. *This isn't too bad*, I told myself. I could feel the airplane going higher and higher as it went forward. I decided it was best to keep my airplane window shut and not look out of it for even a second. I finally opened my eyes and looked over at what my mom and grandma were doing. My mom was reading and my grandma, of course, was already knocked out. I wish I could sleep through everything as she always did, but even if I tried to do that, it wouldn't happen. I decided to listen to music instead. Although I thought I wasn't going to fall asleep, I ended up sleeping for a couple hours; it was easier to fall asleep now that I was more relaxed. My flight was going to be long and boring. It was four hours from Boston to Miami and four hours more from Miami to El Salvador. I woke up and there was only an hour and fifty minutes remaining until my first flight was over. There was a smile on my face when I realized there was no more than two hours left. Little did I know I was asleep for the last hour, and this time I woke up to my mom tapping me on the shoulder and telling me we were about to land in Miami's airport. I was excited, and when that flight was over, I wasn't nervous or scared anymore; at that point I thought I loved flying, but this feeling wasn't going to last too long.

Our next flight was in two hours so we had time to do everything we needed to do. My mom asked me how the flight was and I responded with a smile, "It was cool." She then asked me what I wanted to eat or if I wanted to eat. She and I both knew that I wasn't supposed to eat, but now that she saw that nothing occurred on our flight, she wasn't really concerned about what could happen. I wasn't either. So I ate until I was full, not thinking of any possibilities of what could happen. I felt like I was the most relaxed and calm person there was in the entire airport. Miami was pretty and everybody seemed to be nice. I was surprised I wasn't on my phone that much, I didn't even know where I had put it. I searched through my bag and there it was lying in the smallest pocket. I took it out and started going through it. I still had my connection. I used my phone for one hour. I looked at the clock and there was one hour left until we were going to board the plane. I decided to explore around the airport for a little until it was time to leave from Miami. The lady on the loudspeaker called each person to board in groups. We were in group 3.

“Group three, you may board the plane now,” she finally announced. Going into this airplane, I felt calm and ready to fly. I wasn’t nervous, not even one bit, because I felt confident flying on that airplane.

I sat down on my seat. Once again, I was next to my mom and put my seatbelt on but this time not as tightly fastened. Now was the time to take my second pill but I thought why take it if nothing will happen it didn’t happen on the last flight and it won’t happen on this flight either. You could say I was a little over-confident. As we waited for the airplane to move around and get in position for takeoff I was already falling asleep. Suddenly the airplane started to run and then boom, we were off into the air once again.

I decided I was going to sleep through this flight as well, so I did but only for a while. I woke up to the captain on the speaker. His words loud and clear in my head and until this day I can’t forget.

“I’m going to need everybody to keep calm and stay in their seats for right now.” I was very confused at this point. *Why did he want everybody to keep calm and to remain in their seats?* Everyone had a scared look on their faces and I also had a scared look. Next thing you know the airplane started moving tremendously fast but not in one direction but in all directions that you could name. I was scared to death; I held onto my mom’s hand very hard and shut my eyes as tight as possible. I could hear my mom whispering to me,

“Everything is going to be fine, it’s just a little turbulence because there’s a lot of wind outside right now.” I wish I could believe her and what she was saying but a “little turbulence” seemed a joke to me. In the corner of my eye I could see my grandma getting out her Bible and everything she brought related to our religion. I was very scared but suddenly when I thought it wasn’t going to get any worse I felt the airplane move as if we were in a bouncy house full of rhinoceroses. When this occurred my scared feeling changed into this-is-my-last-minutes-of-life type of scared. When I thought things couldn’t get any worse, I felt all that food that I ate earlier come up and out of my mouth. This was my actual fear. I could feel each beat of my heart go by and I could also feel my mom’s hand rubbing my back as I reached for the bag that the airplane provides for certain kinds of disposals. The captain came back on the loudspeaker, but it was unclear what he said, due to all the people on the airplane screaming in fear and disgrace. All I heard was,

“Remain seated,” and the rest seemed like he was speaking in another language. I thought back, *I should have not eaten and should have taken my pill once again*, but now it’s too late.

I threw up again, again, and again until the turbulence was more calm. Landing was the worst part, because I had already thrown up all the food I had eaten and now what was left, just pure air. As we finally landed I was weaker than ever; I felt like I couldn’t stand up.

We landed, and everybody cheered, children waiting to get out as soon as possible and adults too. The captain apologized about all that had happened and I realized it was over. I thought back to myself. I take back what I said about, “I love flying,” because that was never true.

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Tears

Sabiha Miahjee

“Beeeeeeep. Beeeeeeep. Beeeeeeep, Beeeeep.” Then went my fifth alarm. I shut it off. Then someone jumped on me.

“Wake up!” It was Mohammed. He shook me until I was fully up.

“Get off me, you ogre!” I was angry and tired.

“We’re late. It’s all your fault. You were supposed to wake me up. It’s eight o’clock. Why didn’t you wake up to your alarm? You sleep too much.” He was getting really annoying. I just got up and ignored him.

Mom was still sleeping and Sal was in his room probably still sleeping, too. I raced Mohammed to the bathroom.

“Ha! I got here first.” I slammed the door in his face.

I turned on the sink. As the warm water was running, I took out my little toothpaste and toothbrush. Holding my toothbrush, I squeezed the toothpaste on. Just enough. I put the toothbrush under the water for two seconds and started brushing. Minty. I was already late for school, so there was no point in rushing. After I was done, I rinsed and wiped my mouth.

I headed to my room, rummaged through my drawers, and found an outfit. Looking in the mirror, I wished my hair were a lot longer. At least down to my back, like before. But my hair was up to my ears.

When I walked to the kitchen I saw that Mohammed was ready to go. He had his shoes and backpack on. His hair was to the side, and he was ready to leave, but he waited for me. I quickly toasted two pieces of bread, and buttered one for me, and put Nutella on the other for Mohammed. I handed him his and ate mine.

“Thank you.”

“No problem,” I replied.

“Now hurry up, you take forever to get ready. We’re already late,” Mohammed nagged.

“You’ll be fine,” I told him.

“Yeah, but I’ve already been late three times,” he complained.

“And who’s fault is that?” I asked. He didn’t say anything.

“Besides, we’re already late and so it won’t make a difference.”

As I was putting on my shoes, there was a knock at the door. Who could it have been? Mom and Sal were still asleep, so I didn’t think either of them were expecting someone.

I opened the door slowly and peaked through the crack. When I saw who it was, I opened the door all the way.

I felt a lump in my throat, trying not to cry. Water filled my eyes and my face scrunched. A single tear ran down my face. The next thing I knew, I was bawling.

It was Milar. The second eldest out of all of us. His real name is also Mohammed, but we call him Milar.

I gave him a big hug and held on tightly. I couldn’t hold it together. I hadn’t seen or spoken to him in three years. My stomach hurt. I was drowning in tears.

Mohammed was speechless. He didn’t know what to say or how to react.

“Shhhhhh. It’s okay, stop crying,” he pushed my hair back. I hadn’t heard his voice in so long. He was at least a foot taller, and his voice was deeper.

I took a few deep breaths and eventually stopped crying.

Mohammed looked just like him. It was kind of weird how similar they looked. Milar closed the door behind him.

“So how are you guys?” he asked.

“Good,” Mohammed and I said in harmony. My voice was a little shaky.

“Where’ve you been all these years?” I was trying not to sound mad. I was happy to see him but I never knew why he left. He left

before I went home from school. I hadn't even gotten the chance to say bye.

"I'm living with a friend and his family," he replied. "Why aren't you guys at school? It's 8:30."

"We woke up late," Mohammed told him.

"Ahh okay." He turned to me, "Your hair is all gone!"

"I know," I muttered.

"I like it," he said.

"I don't."

"It's okay, it'll grow back," Milar replied. "Can you let Mom know that I'm here?"

"Sure." I went to Mom's room and closed the door behind me. I lightly shook her to wake her up.

"Ma, Milar is here." She didn't look surprised.

"Why aren't you at school yet?" she asked.

"We woke up a little late. Sorry, it won't happen again."

"Okay, it's fine for today," she was really tired. She got up and opened a drawer. She took out a passport and a green card.

"Give these to him." She seemed upset, so I didn't ask any questions. I went to the living room and handed them to him. I knew he wasn't staying.

"Why are you so upset?" he asked.

"This is all you came back for? I thought you came to stay."

"I'll come back to visit. For your birthday. Here, take my number." He smiled. I cheered up a bit because he was going to come back. He gave Mohammed and me a big, tight hug.

Milar exhaled through his nose heavily, sort of almost a laugh, "I missed you guys so much. It may not seem like it, but I have." I didn't want to believe him. He was gone so long, I thought he forgot about us. I pushed back the tears.

"We missed you a lot more," I finally replied. Milar grabbed Mohammed's backpack and handed it to him, and I grabbed mine.

"Let's walk downstairs together. You guys have to get to school."

"Thank you," I said.

"For what?" Milar asked.

"For coming, even though it wasn't for us." He looked at me not knowing what to say.

"I'll visit. I promise."

When we were walking downstairs, I thought I saw a tear go down his cheek. I had never seen him cry. He never had emotions; at least, he was good at hiding them. We shared one last hug and walked separate directions. I wondered, if we weren't late to school, would we have ever seen him?

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Losing my Favorite Toy

Lizabeth Alarcon

A toy that I absolutely loved when I was younger was a little stuffed pink dog that had two bows attached to both ears. I loved it so much because it was so fluffy and soft. My parents told me that my aunt had given it to me when she had come over for a special occasion. I was about two or three at the time.

After that day I never let it out of my sight and had it at all times. I would even sleep with it close to my chest and play with it all day. I would also take it everywhere I went. To the store, the park, to any other family member's house, or even if I was just hanging out in my dad's car.

My mom once told me that even if someone touched it slightly I would get really angry. That especially would always get on my big sister's nerves. Many people said that I had gotten way too attached to it.

After having it for a couple of years, I had gotten less attached to it and I wouldn't keep my eye on it that often. Sometimes I would leave it on my bed or the kitchen table. One day, I had left it there before I left for school. My dad was in the kitchen and I guess he saw it and thought it was time to throw it away because of how old and worn out it had gotten.

Hours later, I was back from school and I remembered that I had left it there. So I went to the table to go get it but it wasn't there. In my mind I had thought maybe I had moved it somewhere else. I looked in my room and it wasn't there either. In my mom's room there was no such luck. This is the point where I started to panic. I searched every room in the house. When I couldn't even find it in the basement I decided to ask my mom and my sister where it was but they both said they had no clue where it had gone.

I was so devastated. I was also beginning to get angry at whoever moved it from where I had it. Later on that night, I couldn't go to sleep. I never realized how attached I was to this little stuffed dog until I lost it. The next morning I woke up really tired. When I got up and looked at myself in the mirror I was horrified. I had under eye circles and my hair was all messed up from tossing and turning the previous night.

When I finally got home from school I was watching TV in my living room when I heard my dad's keys open the door. He had just come home from work. We greeted each other and he was about to head into the kitchen when suddenly he turned back around and studied my face. He must have seen how sad I looked. Then he asked me, "What's wrong?" in a concerned manner. When I told him everything that happened his face completely fell. He sat down next to me and muttered, "Uh oh. I'm really sorry but I sort of threw it away," he finally said nervously.

I felt my entire face immediately drained of color. "What!" I exclaimed. I quickly stood up and went to my room before he could follow me. *I can't believe it*, I thought. *He was the one who took it*. I sat on my bed for a long while trying to process what had just happened. I was on the verge of tears. For the next day or two I completely ignored my dad. As you can see I was a bit over dramatic when I was little.

Eventually, though, I accepted the fact that I didn't have my stuffed animal anymore. I was even starting to sleep better at night without it. I finally decided that I couldn't ignore my dad forever and started to talk to him again.

Even though many years have passed since then, my dad still has the same bad habit of throwing away things before asking anyone if they still want it or need it. I guess he still needs to work on that.

Stronger than ever before...

Taylor Machado

It was a sad day in sixth grade. I felt like I didn't have any friends. My two best friends and I were mad at each other. I was being picked on. All in all, I felt pretty alone. I was sitting, waiting for one of them to make the first move but I knew it wasn't going to happen. "This is the end of the friendship," I thought. I looked at both of them. "Daniel, Armand, and I are best friends! How did we let this happen?" They sat on opposite sides of the room as I figured out what to do. Wait... you've never heard this story before? Well then, let's start from the beginning of the great silence.

It all started that cold and rainy day in Mrs. DiNardo's classroom. Everyone was in a bad mood that day. It was snack-time in class and I was sitting with my best friends Daniel and Armand. Daniel seemed pretty upset about something so I passed him a note asking if he was ok. He replied "No, I'm not. Just leave me alone. I don't want to be friends with you and Armand anymore."

"Wait! Daniel, why?! Daniel, you're our best friend"

"Just leave me ALONE!"

My heart sank. I felt like everything I knew was falling to pieces. Daniel and Armand were both my best friends, but Daniel was the only person who truly understood me. The thought of him not being there really hurt my heart. He walked away without a goodbye. I felt myself slowly letting tears rush down my face as he left. I was sobbing at my desk. Armand rushed to try to get him back to the table to explain himself but it was no use. He was already gone. A girl who used to be my friend and then started to pick on me came up to me and said, "See, now you really have no friends."

It was the next class. I stopped crying and I was getting angry. "How could he do this to us!" Armand said angrily. "I don't know what's wrong with him and you know what? I don't care anymore! Sorry Tab, but I don't think we'll ever be the same again," he said in a depressed tone. "This can't be happening! Daniel just came back from the West Somerville almost 2 years ago and after all of this the three of us aren't going to talk to each other again?! NO! This can't be the end!" I thought to myself.

That was the last time any of us talked to each other until the last Friday in March. We were miserable. Our other friends got worried about the three of us. Some of the girls in the class tried to cheer me up but nothing worked. Sometimes I would sit alone and think and tears would roll down my face. Most times I blamed myself for what happened. I couldn't remember the last time I had smiled. It was all just a big blur of sadness. We weren't ourselves. In my heart I know none of us wanted to be mad at each other but things kind of blew up between us. We didn't know how to repair the friendship and we were all kind of scared. At one point I started losing hope. "Why should I try if they're not going to?" But, a little piece of me still believed we could be friends again. Yes, we weren't talking, but that wasn't worth ruining a friendship over. This was too important for me to lose.

It was the last Friday in March. I was getting really upset at the fact that we hadn't made up yet. I wrote a note to both Armand and Daniel telling them to meet me outside at the giant sand chair. I'd had enough of this and we needed to make up.

Recess came and went and Daniel wasn't there. He was sitting in the soccer field. I got up and ran to him. I was really mad. "Daniel! What the heck dude?! I'm trying to get our friendship back together and you have the nerve to not even show up! This isn't the Daniel I know. I want to know why he left and where he went because I'd like him back." He didn't respond. Instead he walked away and left me standing alone like an idiot. I couldn't believe what just happened. We all continued not talking to each other for the rest of the day.

The next day, I asked Armand to talk to Daniel because my attempts at talking to him had failed. He said he would talk to him... until he didn't. When I found out Armand never talked to him I was extremely angry. This friendship was so important to me and they weren't even trying to help fix it. I felt so alone. Those two were the best friends I'd ever known and now they were gone.

It was the next day at recess and I'd had enough of this feud. I took matters into my own hands. Again he was in the soccer field. I brought Armand with me to go talk to Daniel. This time I wasn't backing down. I was prepared to fight 'til the friendship was repaired.

We walked up to Daniel and asked why he wasn't talking to us and why he was sad. At the time he hadn't given us an answer but I know one thing for sure. We really missed each other. We all group hugged and made up. I could see Daniel was still upset. He was acting different. He was much quieter than usual. I never said anything to him so that this situation wouldn't happen again but I definitely took notice.

For the next two weeks, the three of us were inseparable. We did everything together. We were all trying to be supportive of one another. After those weeks Daniel was back laughing and making jokes like he used to. I had missed this. I had missed us all being together.

We're all still best-friends to this day and I understand why this happened. This experience showed us how much we care for each other. That was the WORST experience of my life and I never want it to happen again. Only true friends can be put to the test and still be friends after everything. Armand and Daniel are the most true friends I've met and I know we'll still be friends even if we're far apart.

Our friendship was stronger than ever and nothing was going to change that...

Until the end of seventh grade...

"True friends are never apart. Maybe in distance but never in heart."—Unknown

© 2017 Taylor Machado

Passed away baby cousin

Aida Loja

It was a gorgeous day. I had to walk to school with my brother. My school was in Brockton and it's called "George School." I was in 4th grade. I used to live in Brockton. When I got to school I went to the cafeteria to eat breakfast with my friends and my brother went to play outside. The bell rang and my teacher, Ms. Higgins, came to pick up my cousins and me. Our subjects were science, math, ELA, and social studies. I was very happy.

Then a teacher came to pick up my cousins and me to play board games. Her name was Ms. Penia. She was a kind and respectful teacher. That day we played Candy Land. We had fun with her but then it was time to go back to class and then to lunch. Lunch was chicken nuggets and fish sticks with strawberry milk, chocolate milk and plain milk. My school was different from other schools because we got to choose what kind of milk we wanted. My favorite milk was strawberry milk. Then our principal said that in 10 more minutes we can go outside if we want or go to the gym to play. So when my cousins and I were finished eating we went outside. It was so sunny and fun. We played outside for 40 minutes. When the time passed our principal blew the whistle and our teacher came to take us to specialist. I had art with my cousins. We had 20 more minutes until school was over. Time was passing and then we had 15 more minutes and then 10 more minutes and then 5 more minutes and then the bell rang. I was so happy to go home. Our teacher came to pick us up and took us outside so our parents could pick us up.

I was waiting outside with my cousin William and my brother. It was taking so long and we were wondering why was it taking so long to pick us up because they usually pick us up on time and our teacher said, "Why are your parents taking so long to pick you up?" and we said, "I don't know." My cousin's mom came to pick us up but my teacher didn't let my brother and me go with my aunt. I asked her why and she said because she needs permission from my parents. My cousin and my aunt left my brother and me with the teacher.

Suddenly I saw my dad in the car with a lot of tears. My brother and I asked him why he was crying. He couldn't even talk because he was crying and my brother and I started to get worried.

Then I asked my dad, "Where are we going?"

He said, "We are going to aunt's house." I said, "Why, is something going on?" He said, "Your baby cousin John Mike is gone."

I was so confused I started to cry. Then we got to my aunt's house. I went running to hug my aunt and when I knocked on the door my mom opened it and I hugged my mom so tight. When I saw my aunt she couldn't breathe. She was shaking. She wouldn't stop because she wasn't herself that day. My aunt was crying a lot

and then I asked my mom, where is my cousin Jenny? She said, “She is in her room with Anabel.” When I went to her room she was there crying, wanting to see her mother and her brother. When I got inside my cousin asked me where her brother was and her mother and what was going on and I said, “Your brother is gone with God so don’t be worried and your mom is in the kitchen crying,” and Anabel told me to come so she can hug me.

Anabel was a lady that was helping my baby cousin to start talking. I asked her “how did this all happen” and she told me my other aunt was taking care of him and then my aunt came to leave food for the baby so then she went to an important meeting and my mom was helping my other aunt to put food in the refrigerator then my cousin Jenny went to her mom’s room to see her brother, then your mom went to take her out of the room so the baby can’t get up because the baby was sleeping and your mom said to Jenny to get out of the room so he can sleep then your mom went to check on him and your mom saw him that he wasn’t sleeping so your mom tried to help him and she yelled for help and my other aunt came and she said what is going on and then your mom said that the baby can’t breathe and your other aunt called the ambulance so they can come and she also called your aunt and your aunt came as fast as they could and when the ambulance came they said that the baby’s nose got stuck in the couch bed, that’s how everything started. I said to stop talking because I couldn’t listen to more so I hugged her with all my tears. It was so painful. Everyone was crying at my aunt’s house. The doctors said that they will try to save him but at last she came out and she said “sorry, I tried,” my aunt was crying that moment when the doctor said that.

My day was awful and I thought it would be a happy day but it was the other way around. Finally all of it was over and I wanted to go home and when we got home I ran to my room and closed the door and I wanted no one to get in my room and then I turned off the light and I tried to sleep but I couldn’t so I decided to stay up all night because I was thinking so much about my baby cousin.

The Runaway

Alena Thalput

It was January, and the frost was covering the bus stop, slowly creeping up the sides of the plastic walls that surrounded the bench where I was sitting. The moon rose above the trees slowly and when I listened, all I could hear was a lonely cricket. I was wrapped in the blanket my real parents gave me before they died all those years ago. For several years I've been moving from house to house, never staying somewhere for more than six months. Every house sent me back to the orphanage, every house gave me up when they learned, who my parents were. I hated all of the people who took me in. They were too nice or too fancy, or just plain annoying. I couldn't stand any of that anymore, so I ran away. That's why I was sitting at that bus stop in the middle of Nowheresville, Pennsylvania.

That first day, of being free, was a year ago, but it was still fresh in my mind. I was celebrating, the most exciting year of my life. I'd had some close calls with the cops, but I was always prepared. I stole some great things for today, including candy, soda, and I'd even snuck into someone's house to take a shower, which I barely ever took. I grabbed a coke from my backpack and twisted the cap open. The bubbles fizzed as I raised the bottle to my mouth. I sipped it slowly, trying to taste every flavor, and feel every bubble. Oh my god it was so good. I slurped up the rest of the bottle, and smiled grandly.

I tear open a cherry Airhead, and bite off a piece, yum. I don't even notice the bitter air surrounding me, like a pack of wild dogs. I stop smiling, as a memory flies into my brain. The last time I had an Airhead was the day my parents died.

It had been the first real springy day of the year, April 17th, my birthday. My parents couldn't just walk into a store and buy me a present since their names had been plastered on every telephone pole and every store in many cities. So they stole me a present. They told me to wait in an alley, which wasn't new for me, we've even lived in one before. They'd run into the store and grabbed

some Airheads, then sprinted out and to the alley where I hid. Before the storekeeper came to the alley to find us, my dad had pointed up. I looked up, and smiled, above us about 6 feet up was a fire escape. We did this all the time. My mom leaped up and grabbed the edge before pulling herself up without any effort. My parents were very strong, but I suppose I was too, because quickly after, I leaped up and grabbed the edge of the fire escape. I pushed myself up with sheer arm strength. I got my leg up and then quickly pulled the rest of my body up after it. I moved out of the way as my dad swung up.

We climbed up a couple stories, so if anyone looked up they couldn't see us. When we got high enough we let out a sigh of relief and smiled to each other. My mom took an Airhead out of her pocket and handed it to me with a big smile on her face. "Happy Birthday!" my dad and mom exhaled simultaneously. I couldn't stop the grin from spreading over my face. You might not think this is a big deal, but for me, I couldn't have asked for anything else. I only got candy once a year, so I maintain my health and fitness. It sounds stupid, but my family's had so many close calls with the cops, that it was a miracle we were still together.

* * *

That moment still makes tears come out of eyes. I barely cry, so I'm surprised that I let myself become so vulnerable. That was one of my last memories of my parents besides the gunshots I heard from the vents where I was hiding and their agonizing screams. I turned nine that day and now I'm fourteen, but everytime I close my eyes I hear their last screams.

I wipe the tears out of my eyes and think, this is supposed to be a good day, I'm only alive today because my parents taught me to survive. I'm sitting on an abandoned, ratty, green couch in Alabama. I've been here for a week, stealing from a different gas station every time I need something. I'm surprised the police haven't found me yet. They usually would've caught up to me by now.

I grab a paper that I took down from a gas station, yesterday. I almost laughed at the sight. There was a picture of me from when I was 12. My hair is a little past my shoulders. I'm wearing a rosy colored dress that looks like it was ironed several times, which it probably was, in this case. I still remember the putrid smell of it,

shea butter. I look below the picture and read, "If you see this girl, call 911. Her name is Jasmine Mills and she's been a runaway for a year." I look back at the picture and frown. If they were going to put a picture on here, they could've at least put one of me when I actually looked like myself. I crunch up the paper in my fist, and whip it at a telephone pole next to my couch. It hits the pole with a satisfying thump and bounces off onto the ground.

I glance at my watch, which is stolen of course and see that it's time to do some exercises before I go on a 5 mile jog. I have to do this everyday so I stay in shape. I spring off the couch, and almost fall down, since I've been sitting down on my legs for an hour or so. It takes me a second to focus on the task in front of me. I do several stretches before starting up a brisk pace. I don't know where I'm going, but it doesn't matter because my only goal is to find a forest, which are everywhere in Huntsville, Alabama. I continue running picking up my pace a little, getting faster and faster every second. Colors start blurring together, and I release a big grin, because this is paradise. I know I can't continue this pace for very long, but I'll carry it out as long as possible. Every time I went to a new house I requested to join a local gymnastics team or a parkour class so I could keep up my skills if I ever needed them again. I started slowing down, making sure I didn't come to an abrupt stop which would jar my muscles. I was approaching a small walking path which snaked into a dense forest. I jogged into the forest; after going a few steps I noticed how the trees had big branches, perfect for climbing.

I thought of a day years ago, when I was about seven. It was around six in the morning and the sun was just rising in the east. My parents found an ancient cedar tree and I remember looking at it, and instantly seeing a path to get to one of the highest branches. With a running start I had jumped and grabbed onto a branch. I spun myself up onto the branch with a technique I learned from my mom. I love getting as high as possible and then leaping down with a double or triple flip and landing at the end with a roll. I've never gotten hurt, except for a few scrapes and bruises.

I find a tree that's suitable for climbing; it looks like a field elm, but I'm not sure. I've gotten taller in the last couple months and it's helped me with my tree climbing skills. I leap for a branch about 8 feet above the ground. My hands grasp the branch, I create some momentum by swinging myself back and forth. I use the momentum to swing myself up and landed onto the branch. I moved like a cat. I grabbed my Swiss Army knife from my pocket and carved my initials J.M. into the trunk of the tree. I did this to every tree I climbed so I would have a lasting effect on this earth, even after I die. After I put my knife back in my pocket, I grab the branch above me and pull myself up, much like someone would do a pullup, but I actually pull myself up somewhere. I look to the other side of the tree and notice that there was almost a stairway of branches, going to a very high branch. I leap about four feet to a branch across the tree. I land nimbly, without even stumbling, which is a good thing, because I would have fallen twenty feet onto the ground. I follow the branches up the tree and step carefully on each branch, making sure none of them will crack under my weight.

I get to the top of the tree, and stare out at the landscape. My mouth drops, and my eyes widen. I try to take in every single thing at the same time. I can't stop staring at the huge eye that takes up the whole sky. It stares back at me, almost smiling. I realize all of a sudden that it's a total eclipse, and I think my jaw falls even more. It's the most amazing thing I think I've ever seen. I can't tear my eyes away the whole time, it is hypnotizing me. I have no idea how long I'm there, but the eclipse slowly disappears. I want it to come back, but I know it won't. It takes me about ten minutes to completely shake the feeling of awe, and then I realize I'm stuck in a tree and it's almost pitch dark outside. I look at the ground, trying to see where I can jump to. I find the path, and focus on landing, so I won't die. I leap off the tree and spread out my arms, like a flying squirrel. Then I curl into a small ball and do one, two, three flips. Then I land on the ground and without hesitating, roll to spread out the impact of the fall.

I start to jog back home, still thinking about the huge black eye. I finally arrive at my couch and realize how exhausted I am. I grab a handful of almonds from a trail mix bag I stole. Then I lie down on my couch and cover myself with my blanket. I'm quickly taken over by drowsiness.

I spring awake as I hear sirens in the distance. In a small town like this, there aren't very many crimes so I'm instantly suspicious. I need to get to higher ground so I can see what is happening. I have one building in mind, the Times Building, it's the tallest building on the Huntsville skyline. I shove a few snacks and my blanket into my backpack in case I can't come back. I sling it over my shoulder and snap it in place, so it doesn't fall off me, if I do high maintenance climbing. I start jogging towards the busy part of town, making sure not to be spotted by anyone.

I arrive in downtown Huntsville, and see people everywhere. I slide into a side street and look up at the buildings, seeing how they're connected and if I can get to the Times Building by jumping from building to building. I leap up, pulling myself up onto a fire escape. Then I walk quickly up the fire escape hoping no one will see me from their windows. The fire escape leads to the top floor, but not the roof. I balance on the thin handrail, then leap up, landing in a cat leap on the side of the building. I pull myself up. Landing on one, then two feet on the roof, I look towards the Times Building which has an art deco style, from the late 1920's.

I look across a ten foot jump, to where the next building stands. I back up a few steps to create a running start. I leap almost like Spiderman across the jump, clearing it easily. I only have one jump to go before I have to jump to the Times Building. I smile at the pathetic jump before me, of about six feet. I leap across the gap easily and use my momentum to keep running so I can jump onto the Times Building. I realize I'm going to have to hold onto a window ledge or something like that, if I want to make it to the top of the building. I leap about fifteen feet and grab the edge on a window, successfully. Ow, they use the type of stone that hurts my hands. A normal person would have let go when they felt this pain, and drop almost one hundred feet to their deaths.

I use all my mental strength to pull myself up, and not let go. My hands are pushing into the pointy gravel, I want to curse, but I didn't dare because there were people below me who would look up and see me. I feel the gravel digging into my hands. I pull my feet up onto the window ledge while my hands grab the ledge above it for dear life. I notice there was a small balcony on each window next to me. I leap about five feet to where I could hold onto a small railing. I look down at the ground hoping the noise wouldn't alert the

pedestrians below me. I grab the rail above the balcony. I climb up each balcony 'til I make it to the top. I land on the twelfth story with ease and pull myself onto the roof.

I gaze out onto the scenery and look at the Tennessee River that snakes through the center of town. I can even see NASA's rocket launch from here. I remember the real reason I came up here. I listen carefully to the city life and hear the sirens; they seem to be coming closer and closer. I realize how close they actually seem, like they're below me. I walk carefully to the edge of the building and see three police cars at the entrance to the building. My stomach drops, and I instantly feel queasy.

I hear men's voices and heavy boots running up the stairs. I freeze as the doorway to the roof opens up and four men and a woman form a semicircle around me. They point .40 caliber guns at my chest. My breath is caught in my throat and a lump forms there, which makes it hard to breathe. The only way out of this was to be taken to juvy, which I couldn't do, because my mom told me once a long time ago, to never go to juvy. Anything is better than juvy. I knew what my only option was. I think of my parents' smiling faces, and all the lessons they ever taught me. I thank them, and before the police officers could even react I turn around, and leap off the side of the building and fly, stretching out my arms for the last time.

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Dream School

Ben Buchheit

I was so excited. I had always planned on going to college, but never to a school like this one. The day the letter came in the mail, my parents held a big party with all my high school friends. The last week of high school was a blur of hugs and goodbyes. Then, I had the summer to pack and get ready. I was very excited about college, but I was sad to leave my parents.

My parents were my favorite people in the world. I had been with them every waking moment of my life, except for when I was at school. I never went to sleepovers or to other friends' houses, and I never went to sleepaway camps in the summer. The thought of being alone was scary to me. My parents never knew this. When I got to high school, I'm sure they found it strange I never went

anywhere, but they never pushed me about it. My mom, Janette, was the perfect stay-at-home mom. She was a great cook, and had an even better personality. She could always think of something funny to say.

My dad was also perfect. He was a successful investment banker, and a great athlete. When he wasn't out running or spending time with mom and me, he was playing golf with his friends. Every Sunday, he took me to the driving range and watched approvingly as I hit ball after ball. Then he would take me to lunch at the country club and we would go swimming. My dad also loved to hike. Every fall, just at peak foliage, he would take me to Vermont and we would spend a weekend hiking through the Green Mountains. Those weekend trips hold some of my fondest memories. My dad was a faster hiker than me, but I knew I could count on him to be waiting at the top of the mountain, always smiling. Then we would run down the mountain, jump in our car, and drive back to our lakeside cabin. At nights, we would sit around the brick fireplace, roast marshmallows, and talk long into the night. Then we would go to sleep and be ready to do it again the next morning.

The school I had been accepted to was also in Vermont, not too far from Jericho. On the morning of my departure, I leapt out of bed and ran downstairs. All my bags were packed into the back of our car, and my room was almost empty. I ate the eggs that my mother had made, and then said my goodbyes. I hugged my mother, and we both cried a bit, and then I hugged my younger sister. Then my dad and I got into the car and sped off down my street.

"I'm gonna miss you," my dad said after a while. "The house is going to be much quieter without you around."

"I'll miss you too," I replied.

"You'll come back and visit, right?" Dad asked.

"Of course," I responded. "Will you and Mom come to visit me?"

"We can try," Dad replied. "But will we embarrass you in front of all your cool college friends?" he teased.

"Of course not," I laughed. For the rest of the ride, we sat in silence as the pretty Vermont scenery flew past us. We stopped for lunch at a nice restaurant in Montpelier, and Dad bought me a teddy bear. From there, it was only another hour to the school. We

pulled onto the dirt road that wound up to where the school was perched, high in the mountains. The school building itself was a sprawling gothic mansion, complete with ornate windows and spires.

“Wow,” exclaimed my dad. “What a beautiful old building.”

“I know,” I responded, although not enthusiastically. To me, it looked more like a vampire castle than a school. The school was in a large clearing, and through the woods, I caught glimpses of what appeared to be dormitories. There were several paths leading in the direction of the dorms, and others leading up the mountain. In the distance, I could hear a waterfall. In that moment, a cheery looking girl, probably a senior, came running down one of the paths. She had light brown hair and golden colored eyes. She was very pretty.

“Hi, I’m Andrea,” she said in a cheerful voice. “You must be Marin.”

“That’s me,” I replied.

“And you must be Marin’s father,” she said to my dad.

“That’s right,” replied Dad. “Can you help us find dorm D?”

“I’m in dorm D, too!” she exclaimed. “Follow me.”

We set off down a path into the woods. I had my bag of personal belongings, and my dad was carrying my clothes. While we walked, Andrea listed off all the great things about the school, and everything it had to offer. I was barely listening. I was more focused on the fact that besides Andrea, I had seen nobody else on the campus.

“Where is everyone?” I interrupted. Andrea was in the middle of a long monologue about how important the environment was and how the school was doing its part to help save it.

“Please don’t interrupt, honey,” said Dad.

“It’s okay,” Andrea said quickly. “You are one of the first freshmen to get here. The rest haven’t arrived yet. As for the other years, the sophomores are on a day hike right now, and the upperclassmen are all in classes right now.”

“Okay,” I said, satisfied with the response. At that moment, we arrived at the dorm. Its facade was made from mud-red stone, and had a giant circular window about halfway up that was made of stained glass. We walked up the stone stairway and opened the heavy wooden door. As we stepped inside, I gasped as I saw the large front hall. It was huge, and had a large sweeping staircase descending from a landing above, and the walls were lined with statues and tapestries. Ahead of me, I could see a hallway leading

into a common area of sorts. Its walls were lined with bookshelves, and a large moose head hung over the huge stone fireplace. The floors were all covered with carpets, and a few armchairs and couches were dotted around the room.

“Welcome to dorm D,” said Andrea. “The common room is across the hall, and the dorm rooms are upstairs. We followed her up the long flight of stairs to the next floor. “You’ll be sharing a room with three other people,” she explained. “This is the floor reserved for freshmen and sophomores. The juniors and seniors sleep upstairs on the third floor.”

“Nice rooms,” I said to my dad, who nodded in return. The room was of a medium size, and separated into four cubicles by some type of divider. Each cubicle had a plain desk with a lamp and a chair. On the desk was an array of pencils and pens, as well as paper and other stationery. I had also brought along my own share of pencils and pens, which I stashed in one of the drawers. There was also a small bed and a chest of drawers.

“I’ll leave you guys alone now to unpack and say your goodbyes,” Andrea said. “Your schedule is on top of your desk. Dinner is at 6:30.”

With that, Andrea left the dorm. “Well,” said my dad, “I guess this is it.” Tears welled up in my eyes, but I held it together.

“Yeah,” I choked out. “I’ll really miss you.”

“Me too,” replied Dad. “Do you want me to help you unpack?”

“I think I’m okay,” I said. Then I threw myself into his arms. After a few more minutes, he left, and I don’t think I had ever felt more alone in my life. One by one after that, more students trickled in. The three other girls in my dorm, Isabelle, Sophie, and Ella, all arrived together. They knew each other from high school, and spent the evening chatting in Isabelle’s cubicle. After several attempts to make friends with them, all unsuccessful, I went down to the common room to read. That night at dinner, I sat down at a random table. The girl sitting across from me introduced herself as Silvie, and also introduced me to her boyfriend Dan. They were both very nice, and told me all about the school. Silvie was in dorm B, which was a five minute walk from my dorm. She was a very small girl with short black hair and tanned skin. She was from California, and was a junior. Dan was also from California, and looked it too. He was your stereotypical surfer dude with long blond hair, a perfect tan,

and blinding white teeth. He had a good sense of humor, and soon had everyone at the table cracking up. Amazingly, I felt very at home. That night, I fell asleep, excited for classes the next morning.

The next few weeks were all alike. I went to classes in the morning, and spent the afternoons with Silvie and her group of friends, hiking and exploring. At nights, I studied in my cubicle or read in the common room. One night, there was a huge storm, and that's when it all started.

It began as a normal day. I went to my normal Thursday classes, and ate lunch with my normal crowd. We had planned our normal hike for the afternoon, but upon consulting the weather forecast, we deemed it impossible. The area was expecting a large amount of rainfall, and high winds. We were all advised to stay indoors, and keep the windows closed. My first warning that something was wrong came at around five o'clock, when I was hanging out in Silvie's dorm. The winds were already beginning to pick up, and a light rain was pattering against the windows. We were in her common room, chatting, when all of a sudden, over her shoulder I perceived a dark figure in the woods. It was moving slowly, and was half shrouded in fog. I was sure that it was a human. I didn't bother pointing it out to Silvie, because I couldn't even be sure if I really had seen it.

The second warning I got was around eight-thirty, when I was using my computer in my cubicle and all of a sudden, the Internet shut down. I had no Internet connection. I tried my phone, and it was the same story. My cell data was also gone. By this time, the winds were howling, and rain was pelting the old building. I peeked over the edge of my cubicle to where Isabelle, Ella, and Sophie were sitting on a bed. "Do any of you have Wi-Fi?" I asked.

"No," Isabelle responded, "do you?"

"Nope," I replied. "What about cell service?"

"Same story," she replied.

"Funny. I bet the wind took down a cell tower or two."

"Yeah," responded Isabelle, although she didn't sound convinced. All over the building, people were beginning to stir. Andrea came down to ask us about Wi-Fi, and we all replied the same. People were definitely becoming uneasy. Before long, everybody was congregated in the common room. Somebody put on some music, and slowly, the mood grew brighter. Before long,

some people started dancing, and a roaring fire was lit in the hearth. I was having a grand time until something at the window caught my eye. I couldn't be sure, but I thought I saw a face, staring in. I tried to comfort myself by saying it was a figment of my imagination, or that it was probably some pervert from a boys' dorm who had come to spy on the girls, but I could not shake my terror, and the sense of being watched.

At around ten, the whole party was stopped by a loud knock on the door. Immediately, everybody stopped dancing. It was deathly silent in the room, apart from the music coming from the small speaker. Everybody looked at everybody else. Who was going to open the door? Finally, I stepped up. I walked to the door, undid the latch, and opened it.

Before I could see who was behind the door, I heard a loud bang and the power went out. A huge gust of wind blew through the dorm, and scattered the embers of the fire around the common room. I heard screaming, and the smell of burning wafted through the air. I felt a spray of something wet on my face, and I knew that it wasn't rain. I hit the floor and began crawling towards the door. The initial gust of wind had knocked me back several feet, and I had only the vaguest idea of where the door was. As I began to crawl, my hand touched something warm, surrounded by a puddle of warm liquid. I could see in the dim light from the burning common room that it had arms and legs. I knew immediately what it was, but I tried to ignore it. I put my hand on top of it, to try to crawl over, and my hand sunk into a deep gash. More warm liquid spurted out. I began to panic. I suddenly became aware of the screams around me. I looked up and saw the silhouette of a person, stumbling around, and I couldn't be sure, but she appeared to be holding a part of an arm, perhaps her own, in one hand. Then, a dark shadow flew in, and she went down, all very silently. By now I realized my own peril. Some people were trapped in the common room, surrounded by flames, with nothing to do but wait to be consumed by the fire. Others were running around the main hall, and up and down the stairs. I watched as one by one, each of them went down. I saw Isabelle toppling off the railing, with her internal organs trailing behind her, while her friend Ella screamed for help, as she was trapped under a burning timber. With this, I bolted out of the door and into the night.

I felt like I ran for hours. I just wanted to get away from that burning dormitory. I ran down the path to Silvie's dormitory. The place looked very serene from the outside. There appeared to be a fire in the hearth, and people sitting in the armchairs. The door was unlocked, and I ran in and slammed it behind me. "Guys quick there's..." I stopped. The whole place was deathly silent, except for the merry crackling of the fire. The people sitting in the chairs were all motionless. "No...No..NO!" I screamed. I ran into the room and gazed into all the unseeing eyes of the dormitory's prior inhabitants. Compared to the bloodbath of my dormitory, this was all very neat. All of the necks were neatly slit, and they had all been neatly arranged.

I sank to the floor in horror. Here I was, presumably all alone (for I assumed that other dormitories were in the same condition or worse) with one (or several, for all I knew) psychopathic killers on the loose, with no contact to the outside world. I knew I had to get away from the campus. I recollected that Silvie's boyfriend Dan owned a dirt bike, which he kept behind her dormitory (the one I was in right now). I had never ridden a motorcycle, but it couldn't be too hard. I resolved to ride the bike down the mountain, away from the killer, and find the nearest farmhouse and call the police. I ran around the back, found the ignition key, and started the bike. I turned on the headlight and zoomed off down the mountain.

It was hard going. The road down was turned into a river by the rain, and the winds threatened to push me off the bike. Nevertheless, I made it down, and pulled into the driveway of a cheery looking farmhouse. It was about midnight, but the lights in the house were on. I knocked on the door and yelled. Soon, the door was opened and a man ushered me in.

"What are you doing out so late?" he asked.

"I go to Greenleaf College, up the mountain, there was a—"

"Do you really?" he asked, an evil grin spreading across his face. For the first time, I noticed his incredibly white face, his black clothing, and the bloody machete lying on the counter. I sank to my knees, and never got up.

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The Closet

Owen Thompson

I sat sprawled on the floor of my room, next to the bare mattress and my small dresser. I strummed a few chords on my guitar, not in any particular order, just going with the flow of my thoughts. A cool fall breeze blew in through the open window, and the sound of cars racing by outside threatened to drown out my guitar.

Having a fall birthday was nice. The weather wasn't too hot to do anything or too cold, but I always end up staying home anyways. My mom doesn't get home until nine so I would have to make myself a cake. My dad was in the army reserves, so he was always away. He usually sent me a card, but this year he forgot.

I opened the door to the porch outside just enough to reach the newspaper. I have a weird tradition of keeping the newspaper for every one of my birthdays. The first fifteen were extremely dull, all about politics or taxes. This year I was surprised to see my city's name in the headline. There was a picture of a kid about my age, and the description said he lived near me, but went to a nearby private school. The police found his body floating in a river two days ago, riddled with bullet holes. The description also said that all of his fingers had been chopped off. I was quite disturbed by this, considering that this kid had probably lived a similar life to mine, and I wondered what he could have done to deserve this.

The water in the shower was still cold after I let it run for a minute. I let out a huge sigh, my mom had forgotten to pay the water bill again. I let the freezing water run through my hair, it reminded me of the Ice Bucket challenge that I did last summer. I got it over with as fast as possible, and got out to brush my teeth. Then I got dressed, grabbed my bag and started the walk across town to the high school.

My first class was the dreaded biology. I think that we should get to choose our own classes on our birthday. My favorite class is English, even though I have already read all of the required books. In biology, the teacher started talking about plants, so I tuned out. I noticed a new girl sitting in front of me, but no one else seemed to

realize she was new. She didn't act like it either. She had a certain swagger, almost like she owned the place.

The day continued on, almost like a blur to me. I couldn't stop thinking about that girl. Even in English, I was called on and didn't even respond, because I was so lost in space. At lunch, I sat alone as usual, and ate, free to think. I looked around the lunchroom for the girl, but could not find her. By the end of the day, I had almost forgotten about her.

After school, I went to Frisbee practice at a nearby soccer field. We practiced some new types of throws and made fancy plays. I asked around the whole team, and no one else had seen or heard of this girl. I even asked the coach, who was a teacher at the high school, and she said that she hadn't heard about any new students.

Practice ended, and I went home to bake my cake. I found a funfetti cake mix in the cupboard and started baking. While the cake was in the oven, I found the newspaper under a pile of clothes and read more about the murdered boy. The police found him on Monday, but they estimated that he had been in the river for almost a week. A chill ran down my spine. I went for a walk by parts of the Mystic River, where the body had been. I was buzzing with anticipation, like someone was going to appear out of nowhere and murder me too. Nothing like this ever happens here.

DING! The oven warned me that the cake was ready, so I got up and rushed over. A few years ago I had left the oven on while I was outside, and the house nearly burnt down. My mother doesn't make enough money for us to afford another house.

I grabbed a spoon out of the silverware drawer, mostly filled with broken utensils. Then I dug into the cake. The rainbow sprinkles got stuck in my teeth after every bite. I sat on the couch watching cars go by. Once again, my mind was lost in space. I told myself that tomorrow I would try to talk to the girl.

The next day, I woke up and did my usual morning routine. Shower, get dressed, eat breakfast. Then I went off to school, excited to talk to the new girl. I sat down in biology and took out my notes. The girl wasn't there yet, and the bell was about to ring. I started to get worried that she wasn't coming. Finally, just as the bell started to ring, she walked in and sat down in front of me.

Class was boring as ever, until the teacher told us that there was a test at the end of the week. I started to listen then, and made a mental note to study later that night. The bell rang, signaling the end of our torture, and I rushed out to catch up with the girl. She was walking very quickly, and not in the direction of my next class. I decided to follow her anyways. We got to the west staircase, and then the crowds cleared out. She sprinted up the stairs, which led me to believe that she played track and field or some other athletic sport. At the top, I felt a cool rush of air. She had gone outside. I decided against my gut to follow her.

“Hey,” I yelled. “Where are you going?”

“Home,” she replied, seemingly annoyed.

“Can I come?” I asked.

She turned around and gave me a weird look. I didn’t like it. She looked me up and down as if she was evaluating me for something.

“I suppose,” she eventually answered.

We walked in total silence, neither one of us acknowledging the presence of the other. Finally, after about three blocks, we stopped at a tall, gray townhouse.

“This is it,” she said. Her voice was cold, like she was very angry. Once we were inside, she offered me a drink, so to be polite I asked for a water.

While she was in the kitchen, I went around to explore the house. There was no sign of her parents, so I assumed that they were both at work. I crept up the stairs nervously, but I’m not sure why. None of the doors were decorated, and there were no family pictures up on the wall. I found this pretty strange. One of the doors was ajar, so I went inside to check it out. The walls were barren, and the plaster was beginning to peel off. The only furniture was a mattress. There was also a closet in the back of the room. I decided to search for information about the girl in there. I opened the small door, and flinched when it let out a loud creak. The only thing inside was a small shoebox. I heard the girl open the door to the room behind me.

“Open it,” she said, very coolly.

I lifted the top off of the box and peered inside. Fingers. The box was full of them. Some were severed, and some were whole. I turned around and saw the girl smiling.

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“I DANCE TO BE FREE”

Emma Fitzsimmons Brann

What is it that inspires me to dance?
I dance to forget about all my fears
I dance because I think I have a chance
I dance to try and be free of my tears
I dance to feel the good pain every day
I dance to learn and succeed and conquer
I dance to make my weekdays be less grey
I dance to feel that I am much stronger
I dance with friends, and wonder if they feel
That if they keep on dancing, will they know?
That when you are dancing, you can't conceal?
When you're dancing, you have to feel the glow
Of your body moving across the dance floor
Dancing to your own music and seeing
Dancing can make it better; and you'll just soar
Dancing can make you believe you're freeing
The dancer that was in you all along
That came out of you from just a good song.

© 2017 Emma Fitzsimmons Bran

Abriella M. Staggs

How does one know if life is real or not?
You can hate and hurt, that's the part that's real.
How does one know if life is just a thought?
Maybe life is something that is not ideal.
I can love and touch, why is it this way?
I can taste, I can hear, I also have fear.
I am living life, that's what people say
I don't know if it's true, that's what's unclear.
I can laugh, I can think about the past.
I sleep, I cry; am I really alive?
I am not really sure if it will last
I don't know if I keep going, I'll thrive.
But I will keep going because it still seems,
That this life is nothing but a long dream.

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Shakespearean Sonnet

Justin Millette

What if this is all a simulation?
A massive computer fully online
Solving the endless computation
To graphically recreate the sun's shine.
Decoding the codes of love and hatred
Creating the waves of beautiful noise
Coloring the world blue, yellow and red
Making Earth as it is, filled with alloys
If this is true, who is controlling It
Aliens? God? Me? You? My kitten?
Or it's just one of us taking a hit
Waking up in an abyss, IQ smitten
Anyway, simulations would suck less
Than the US now, under Trump's congress

© 2017 Justin Millette

How True is Sight?

Ben Buchheit

Are the things that we see with our eyes real?
Or are they illusions, a fake, a scam?
Ev'ry last thing, ev'ry flower, book, meal.
Even the cat, sitting on the tin can.
Or what if our vision really is true?
And our world is just as we perceive it.
The forests are green, the ocean is blue,
And life is a boring game of cricket.
These are questions philos'phers strive to answer,
And our greatest minds cannot decide on.
Why? You ask can we not find the answer
Which is itself an impossible question.
A question that persists, just like cancer.
A question I fear, that has no answer.

© 2017 Ben Buchheit

Why Are We Sometimes Attracted to Jerks?

Sabiha Miahjee

Why are we sometimes attracted to Jerks?
We don't realize how compelling they are.
I don't think they really have many perks;
Don't you think that feeling is just bizarre?
Are we attracted because they look good?
Maybe it's something 'bout attractiveness.
We like hot people even though we could
See who they are but instead we transgress.
Maybe because we like their confidence?
They make us more important to others.
They make us feel we have more relevance,
E'en though they try to hide our true colors.
In reality, people are just dumb,
Falling in love with jerks make us all numb.

© 2017 Sabiha Miahjee

Death

Suyogya Acharya

What will happen to us after we die,
Shall we go down to hell, or d'we go up
Or shall science tell us to say goodbye
And we shall go to the body pileup,
Shall I meet Satan in fiery hell,
Or will I just fall for eternity
Or shall I go to heaven to do well,
Up in Heaven, I shall live perfectly
But science says that we shall remain dead,
We shall lose the wonderful life we had
And lay in the casket that is our bed,
So in your life, make sure you don't do bad
What happens to me, I will later see,
Whatever happens, I shall rest in peace

© 2017 Suyogya Acharya

C'est La Vie

Aline Mukadi

If I breathe does that mean I am living?
I eat, sleep, and breathe, but is that enough?
I feel so relieved when in bed sleeping
An escape route from the world, oh so tough
I live life on repeat like a robot
A preprogrammed reality, so dull
Trust and obey was all that I was taught
Just sit and smile like a sweet precious doll
One wrong move and it's over, c'est la vie
Replied with an empty smile, oblige
Only ever in my dreams am I free
Will I know what it means to live someday?
What in the world is the meaning of life?
A question asked by all, but left in ice

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by @the Park

Overcast

Look at those big clouds
Threatening the sun today
looming overhead

Return to
<http://www.12zine.com>

Sailing

On the horizon
a small boat sails, on a journey
to a far off land

Attempt

I'll write a poem
But what shall it be about?
Oops, ran out of space

Pear Juice

When life gives you pears
Make pear juice, or maybe don't
That would be gross

© 2017 @the Park

Kickball

Maya J. Jaugust

Kickball. In gym class, and in line.
It's everybody's favorite game but mine.
"Don't kick with your toes, don't kick with your nose!"
(Ouch)
I try and I try but I just can't make it—
Maybe I could fake it?
To the left, to the right, never in a straight line.
If only I had other feet but mine.
And when gym class is done, the others have won.
All because of me.

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