

Unwound

2023-2024



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Introduction: The Arts and Technology

For centuries, the fusion of art and technology has and continues to produce mixed emotions in the many who practice and appreciate the Arts. But never has it been so unprecedented as the rise of Artificial Intelligence. We are living in an age unparalleled: one that will not only shape the Humanities but the world, changing what were once established cultural practices and creating new social conventions – even altering individual perceptions. Yet, as history demonstrates, we must recall that the Arts thrive on change. Without the challenge of the postmodern era, we wouldn't have metafiction or minimalism. The Arts have always been at the head of social shifts, even encouraging their own redefinition. Is it possible then that this novel technology, this unique era, will erase the words from the page of human creativity? Or will it simply offer an additional brush to the painter's palette?

“Eye,” Sydney Flohrs

There is a just undercurrent of fear that plagues the excitement surrounding the potential of AI in the Humanities. These include the immediate concerns regarding the ethical implications of ownership and plagiarism and the far graver alarms sounding, those warning us of cultural homogenization: of sanitized ideas filling the pages of the future, where the exceptional nuances of the human experience are lost on canvases of algorithms. The name itself – Artificial Intelligence – suggests a false intellect, a superficial form of understanding.



“City,” Cassandra Mendez

But there can also be reason for hope. Not only does technology push the boundaries of traditional mediums, but it also introduces new ones – new means for established writers and other artists to express themselves, for fresh voices to break through the racket and be heard. The writer's thesaurus has been expanded, the perspective of the artist increased.

In the annals of human existence, progress marches on. It is not our obligation to embrace it, but it continues regardless of whether we choose to or not. And because of this, it becomes our responsibility to be mindful and critical of it, to mitigate its potential consequences while harnessing its benefits, to carve a balance, a coexistence – to determine how we will *allow* it to shape our world.



We must decide how this ever-

evolving technology will redefine the Humanities – as an extension of creative expression or a replacement for it? None of us know where these roads may lead, but as Robert Frost made clear, it doesn't really matter which one we choose – and yet, it will make all the difference.

Sincerely,

Gillian Singler
Gillian Singler

Introduction to Creative Writing Instructor



“Lost Path,” Annika Jensen

Calling on Adeline

Taryn Lessman

“Field of Dreams,” Jacelyn Braun

Adeline was alerted by a knock on the door. Wiping her hands on the soft linen towel, made from a light blue fabric that matched the sky on sunny days like that one, she made her way to the solid oak door. She placed her fingers on the carvings of olive branches and flowers, wondering who could be standing on the other side. As she peered through the small window in the door, she saw a strange man standing on the drooping step of her rotting porch.



Adeline’s papa had always said not to open the door to strangers, but her mama had always said to never turn away a person in need. However, this man’s pristine condition was nothing like the weary look of others who had come for help. She touched the tarnished brass doorknob and hesitated, remembering her papa’s warning, before opening the door.

She could tell he was not from here. His dark clothes contrasted heavily with the rolling fields of grain. The harsh iron lines on his pants made the puffy white clouds lazily moving through the periwinkle sky feel out of place. The pastel barn, more pink than red after years of sitting in the warm summer sun looked old instead of charming with him standing in front of it. The man’s thick overcoat was so different from Adeline’s thin cotton dress, and the man’s clean, shiny shoes made Adeline conscious of her bare feet, cold against the wooden floor.

“Pardon me, but I believe this is the right place,” the man said, his deep voice echoing into the hallway where Adeline stood. “I am looking for a woman named Adeline. Do you know her?”

Adeline shook her head. “I am sorry, but I do not know who that is. Perhaps you are at the wrong place?” It was a lie, but then again, Papa had said to not open up to strangers. Adeline told herself this was a way to honor both her mama and papa, something she had always strived to do as the sole child of her parents.

The man reached into his pocket and pulled out a cream-colored piece of paper with her address neatly written on it. Adeline glanced at the paper and saw that he was wearing three rings on his tan hand. As he held his pointer finger to the page, she saw the ring there was gold with a deep red ruby set into it. The next, on his slender middle finger was a simple golden band, carved with letters in a language Adeline did not understand. The last dwarfed his smallest finger with a large blue gem, silver vines twisting around it so it looked like a hidden treasure, one Adeline found herself longing to hold.

The man stepped back, examining Adeline’s white house. She had inherited the generational home from her parents, and despite the fading paint and rotting wood, it looked almost the same as the day it was built. Change hadn’t sat well with any members of Adeline’s family, especially Adeline. White outside, blue shutters, big oak door. Adeline had recently planted poppies in the landscaping that added a bold, red color to the yard,

but looking at the man's furrowed brow, Adeline wished she had stuck with the simple green bushes she had considered at first. Was he judging her and her beloved house? And who was he?

"I believe this is the correct address. Are you sure you don't know Adeline?" he asked. His dark hair blew slightly in the wind and Adeline couldn't help but wonder where he had come from. The people who lived around here, like Adeline, had delicate blond hair and light features, so different from the deep-set features and darkness this man had. There was an aura about him that seemed familiar, like he was someone she once knew, but she couldn't place it. "Flowers," Annika Jensen



"No sir, sorry. Would you like to come in for something to drink? I can't imagine you had an easy journey here." Something about this man intrigued Adeline. Her papa's warning slipped through the cracks in her mind as she wondered why this man was looking for her.

The man shifted his weight to his left foot, the porch creaking under him. Adeline cringed, hoping he hadn't noticed the poor state the porch was in. The rotting wood, peeling paint and bowed, uneven surface had long bothered Adeline, but it wasn't at the top of the long list of repairs she had to make. The house had fallen into disrepair in between her parents' ownership and her own, but she was slowly chiseling away the list and restoring her beloved home.

Adeline led the man to the kitchen where she quickly put down the linen towel she was still holding and filled a pitcher with water. As she prepared the lemonade, the man sat, looking around the small, dated kitchen. The kitchen, however, was bright and cheerful, and

the worn tablecloth reminded him of his mother; its delicate flowers were similar to a pattern on a dress she had often worn.

Adeline poured two glasses of icy lemonade and placed a basket of muffins sprinkled with sugar in the middle of the table before sitting across from the man. As they snacked, Adeline tried to work up the courage to admit that she, in fact, was Adeline and the woman he was looking for.

"Why are you looking for Adeline?" she asked, biting into a warm muffin and dabbing her lips with a napkin.

"I'm her brother. I've never met her and I'd like to."

Adeline's stomach flipped and she clenched her jaw before her mouth could fall open in shock. The lemonade turned sour in her mouth and nausea began to set in.

She cleared her throat. "Well. I hope you find her. That's certainly something that I'd want to know."

She bade the man farewell and closed the large door behind him, sinking to the ground, pulling her knees to her chest and sobbed. She should have admitted it to him, she thought, but something had scared her about him. A brother? That's what scared her the most. She had a brother she never knew about. She had wished for a sibling her whole life, and now she had one, but he was driving away.

As Adeline contemplated inside, the man stood outside the door, hand against the wood, realizing he had just walked away from Adeline. He didn't dare pound on the door again, yet he wanted nothing more than to hold Adeline close.

To avoid his heart making a decision his head would regret, he walked to his car, opened the door, turned the key and shifted into gear.

As he drove off, he cursed himself for not knocking on the door and forcing Adeline to admit who she was. He couldn't believe he hadn't realized it sooner. Her wispy blond hair, so much like their mother. Her gentle but serious expression brought back memories of sitting on the floor and playing with toy soldiers while his father poked at the fire and his mother rocked back and forth on her chair.

Back and forth, back and forth. He shook the memory from my mind. This whole idea was a bad one. He'd spent years at boarding school suppressing his parents and sister. His carefully curated life would be shattered if he allowed memories to come flooding back.

He gripped the steering wheel, hands at ten and two, knuckles turning white. He had shed the handsome wool overcoat he bought in London and now fumbled with the top button on his silk shirt. It had been feeling tight, like it was cutting him off from the air and would suffocate him.

Adeline. Mama. Papa. Boarding school. The dark hallways. He shuddered as he remembered his eight years at school. His parents dropped him off one day when he was ten, promising to come back at Christmas to bring him home. He remembered kissing his mama and her swollen belly, saying goodbye to his little sister, Adeline, who he would see for the first time at Christmas. He hugged his father, smelling the spicy tobacco on his wool overcoat.

As he drove, he reached to the backseat and pulled a cigar from his coat pocket and lit it, breathing in the same tobacco his father used to smoke.



He didn't look like his mother. She was light where he was dark, but he thought he looked like his father. The image he had of his parents was fading, and he had destroyed the pictures he had of them shortly after they never showed up at Christmas his first year of boarding school. He had waited for hours, his cheeks growing redder in the cold, his dark hair speckled with snowflakes as they fell.

For two years he had been hopeful they would come back for him. But, by the time the second summer rolled around, he didn't wait to see if they'd show. Instead, he had gone with the other boys with no family to the farm where they boarded until the next term.

His six years of farm work had given him strength and a dusting of freckles over his nose when he spent too much time in the sun. His eight years of boarding school had made him an academic, one who would rather spend hours poring over dusty tomes than working outside.

"Find My Way," Nicolas Espitia

He'd held several jobs over the years, jobs that had paid for lavish houses and designer clothes, but they hadn't been satisfying enough to keep him for more than a few years. He had a reputation in his field as the best of the best, though he never stayed in one place long.

He shook himself out of his thoughts and drummed on the steering wheel. Driving through the country bored him and he didn't want to think about the dust and dirt that were flying up onto his pristine car. Glancing down, he saw a wrinkle on his pants and flattened it.

He slowed as he approached an intersection, the one where he turned from the winding gravel road he'd been on for miles and onto a highway that would take him to the city he currently resided in. It wasn't home; home was the big farmhouse he'd just driven away from.

At the intersection he prepared to turn, but instead of turning onto the highway, he turned completely around and started heading back the way he came. Back onto the gravel, back to Adeline. The sentimentality of the farmhouse had compelled him to go back, to talk to Adeline and to make her admit who she was. He was able to boss around hundreds of interns and other employees daily; surely, he could make his own sister talk.

He sped back, staring at the road ahead, pushing down the pedal and willing his car to go faster. He hadn't felt this out of control for years. A glance in the rearview mirror showed his wild hair and wilder eyes, and his appearance scared him. What was becoming of him?

He pounded on Adeline's door, the sound of his rings on the wood echoing through the yard. When Adeline opened the door again, she looked confused, light blue eyes squinting as she looked up at him. He noticed red rings around her eyes and hoped she regretted not admitting who she was.

"Adeline."

"How did I not know about you?" she asked him, trembling as she lifted her hand to meet his outstretched one.

As they shook hands, he told her the story. The boarding school and subsequent abandonment. The farm. The jobs. Their parents. He hadn't uttered their names aloud for years and they felt sour on his tongue, like spoiled milk.

"What is your name?" Adeline asked when he had told her everything. Their hands were still grasped, held together by some outside force.



Bennett Oberloh, "Bridge"

"William." He swallowed. "But our parents called me Willie."

"Willie. We finished the lemonade earlier, but I might have some tea I could brew. Would you like to come in? I have an extra room you could have for the night."

He smiled, his first real smile since childhood, and pulled Adeline in for a hug. This moment was one he had been excited for since he was ten, and now he could finally hold his baby sister. His Adeline.

The Nursery

Kiara Appel

The air is thick with the smell of sawdust and paint fumes as I make my way through the house, the sky outside getting grayer. This house has been standing for more than a century, keeping its original charm from when it was built in 1901, while witnessing lives coming and going, and experiencing the passing of time. Its timeworn walls have provided shelter for generations of families—through seasons and seasons of laughter, joy, tears, and love. The house echoes with the sounds of renovation as I drift from room to room.

My memories of childhood cling desperately to the fading wallpaper that is being torn from the walls of the living room. The workers, oblivious to my watchful eyes, toil tirelessly, erasing the essence of what this room had once been.

“Talk about tacky,” one of the workers says, as he struggles to rip a section of the wallpaper off.

I scoff.

He looks over his shoulder, abruptly, and pauses for a second, his eyes scanning the room, then continues his demolition, mumbling anxiously under his breath.

I watch as the worn-out couch that stood witness to family photos, light-hearted small talk, and countless nights of deep conversations is carried out the front door, leaving no trace of these memories behind. The sounds of hammers and drills replace the once familiar creaks and moans of the house. The hardwood floors beneath my feet now bear the weight of strangers’ footsteps, drowning out the memories that were once tread upon them. I look down, expecting to see the familiar dent in the floor, only to notice that it has been patched and polished.

Puzzled, I bend to inspect, vividly remembering the day I made the dent, clearly hearing my mother call for me.



“Persephone,” Kymberly VanderZiel

“Dear, could you fetch me that flower vase from the kitchen please?” she shouted from the living room. She’d brought home my favorite flowers – tulips – for my fifth birthday party.

I grabbed the vase and made my way to the living room, tripping over the edge of the rug and sending the vase flying. It landed with a *thump* onto the floor. To our surprise, the vase was fine. The floor wasn’t.

I glance again at the newly polished floor and wonder where that invincible vase ended up. I step into the kitchen to look for it, to search for anything familiar. But it’s not the kitchen I once knew. The air is filled with the overwhelming smell of fresh paint. The quaint, sage-green cupboards, with their chipped edges, have been sanded and painted a bright white. Even the loose handle on the drawer by the fridge has been tightened. I stand, dumbfounded, in the place where the dining table used to be, remembering the warmth of family gatherings, the laughter and lively conversations shared.

Disoriented, I wander into the hallway. But it is different here, too. The walls, once covered in family portraits and artwork, now stand bare. I try to remember where each frame on the wall had been, but I watch as new photos – pictures with unfamiliar faces, photos of a life I don't recognize – are now slowly being put up, making it impossible.

I make my way up the staircase, which no longer creaks under the weight of my feet. The wooden steps, once worn smooth from continuous use, are now silent and brand-new.

Upstairs, the bedroom that used to be mine is stripped bare, and I feel as though the memories created in the room – the whispered confessions, the sleepless nights, the laughter, the dreams, the stories told – have been stolen from not just the house, but from me as well. The walls – once covered in a floral wallpaper that I picked out as a child – are bare and painted a dull shade of gray. My gaze wanders to the corner of my room where a bookshelf used to stand, its shelves filled with beloved classics and cherished mementos. The familiar titles of my favorite books have been boxed away; the bookshelf sent to the thrift store.

In the attic, a collection of dusty boxes of forgotten treasures have been tossed aside; their contents scattered like memories lost to time. Inside of a box labeled “donate” is a stuffed bear, along with the invincible vase. I reach for it, but stop, knowing there's nothing I can do.

I turn away, but there are still more boxes, all of them filled with things that are no longer mine. One contains an assortment of old photos, and I can't help but bend to look.

My eye is immediately drawn to a particular one: Me at my fifth birthday party. I'm sitting on the worn-out couch that I just watched get carried out of the house, holding my stuffed bear in one hand and a cupcake in the other, a big grin plastered across my face.

I can still hear the smile in my mother's voice as she scolded me gently.

“Don't you dare get frosting on our nice new sofa, young lady,” she told me, brushing the hair out of my face. “Now smile big for the camera!”

Another photo: My dad and a ten-year-old little me, standing in the kitchen, each with a paintbrush in our hand. That was the day we painted the kitchen cabinets green.

“Green? I don't know about that,” I remember him telling me as we stood in the hardware store looking at the selection of paint colors.

“But it's my favorite color,” I told him.

“How about this light green? It's not so obnoxious.”

“I guess so,” I sighed.

We spent all afternoon painting those cabinets, laughing, and making up our own songs about making this house our home.

“We'll build a little nest, you see, a home where we can share our dreams,” my dad sang. “A little nest for just us three, with walls of love, and memories.”

Another: Me, about nineteen, sitting on my bed, clutching the book *Little Women* in my arms.

I remember opening the neatly wrapped gift on Christmas morning—labeled: “With love, mom.” It was the first Christmas we had celebrated without her.

“From mom?” I asked, turning to my dad.

“She got it for you before...you know. She wanted me to give it to you,” he said. He hadn’t said much at all since her untimely death just a few months earlier.

Next: A photo of me in a white dress, laughing and holding up my hand towards the camera. It was my wedding day. I had turned twenty-two just four days before.

“Wow, I’ve never seen anyone so beautiful,” my husband said to me when I first stepped out wearing the dress.

“Let me take a picture.”

“No!” I laughed, holding up my hand as he pointed the camera at me. “Not just me, you have to be in the picture too.”

Then, my attention is drawn to a photo I haven’t seen before. One of a young girl sitting on the front steps of the house. There is something familiar about her. She has dark wavy hair and a dimpled smile, just like mine. She is holding the stuffed bear.



“Peace,” Paul Troe

Without realizing, I begin to hum rockabye baby quietly to myself, a tear rolling down my cheek.

I stare at the photo, scattered with the others, all of them callously relegated to donation boxes, discarded without a second thought. These pictures – stories of my life – mean nothing to the people moving in.

I leave the attic and reach the upstairs hallway, still thinking about the young girl in the photo. There’s something about her that beckons me to door at the end of the hall.

I pass my childhood bedroom without a glance. Focused ahead, each step becomes more hesitant. I want to stop, but my feet continue until I reach the door. Here, I stop. The door is ajar, but I hesitate, as I once again begin to hum. *Rockabye baby, on the treetop...*

The photo flashes to mind, of the familiar child.

...when the wind blows the cradle will rock, when the bow breaks, the cradle will fall...

I slip through the doorway, as my eyes grow wide, remembering suddenly.

...and down will fall baby, cradle and all.

It's a nursery.

My baby's nursery.

I glance over to the settee where I held her for the first time.

And the last.

My breath stalls in my chest as I wonder about the girl in the photo.

I hope she did okay without me, my only thought.

The room that beckoned me is now suffocating, as the memories come flooding back.

I rush from the room and frantically descend the staircase, looking for my daughter. I no longer recognizing my surroundings. The life I lived in this house is vanishing before my eyes, taking my

memories – and those of my daughter – with it.



“Flowers,” Kenia Jimenez

Where is she?

I rush to the front door, but there's nowhere to go. I turn back and watch helplessly as the house I used to call home loses all its familiarity.

“Where is she?” I shout at the workers in my living room.

They say nothing, as they pass by, hauling the old boxes from the house, out onto the porch.

I cannot follow.

After all, I am only the ghost that is haunting this house. There is nothing left I can do but watch as my home becomes someone else's.



“Pointing the Way,” Kenia Jimenez

The Escape

Addison Olson

I leap from the fence and my feet hit the black, cold ground. I feel the damp, October night air on my face as I begin to sprint. The prison looms behind me like a ghost haunting me. I know I must go fast and find a way to melt into the darkness to avoid being seen. The cast of the light from the full moon has me feeling nervous. I hear the loud, screechy prison alarms in the distance and I know it is only a matter of seconds before they are looking for me.

In just a couple of minutes, I have reached the lush forest outside the prison and I start to feel comforted by the autumn trees. My sprint has turned to a light jog as I feel the quietness of the dark forest surrounding me. The air smells fresh and gives me a sense of freedom. I look down and notice my orange jumpsuit is nearly torn in half. It must have ripped on the barbed wire fence when I escaped.



“Path,” Moyses Espinoza

My feet are aching and are covered in thick, heavy mud and I can feel the pain of all the deep cuts on my bare feet from walking through the forest. The prison alarms have become a distant thought in my mind as the ache of my heavy legs and sore feet take over my thoughts.

I begin to feel tired both physically and mentally. I hear the sound of a little, shallow stream ahead of me. When I get to it, I decide to stop and take a long, well-needed drink. I dip my hands into the cold water and begin to drink from them. The water is refreshing, but makes my body shiver. I move to slide my muddy feet into the stream to relieve the pain of the cuts. As I wash my feet off, I begin to feel lonely. The silence of the forest surrounds me and I feel like it is closing in on me. I have to keep on moving to shake these feelings and continue to put space between myself and the prison.

After what seems like hours of running, I reach the end of the tree line and I take in my surroundings. The quiet forest stretches behind me like a safe blanket. I know I cannot stay in the forest. The city ahead of me is large and well lit. It smells of garbage and makes me feel anxious. The lights of the city feel scary and cast a glow onto me that makes me feel seen.

I realize if I want to remain hidden, I will need to find new clothes. I creep through the shadows of the large, family homes where I feel I do not belong. Every time I hear a dog bark viciously or the loud rumble of a car engine, I dart into the darkness of the neighborhood. After some time, I stumble upon a clothesline full of dry clothing. I grab a thick cotton sweater, dark wash blue jeans, and a pair of white, long socks. Of course there are no shoes to be found, so I am forced to stay barefoot, but at least the pair of socks will cover my cuts. I am beginning to feel calm, but then I hear the intrusive sound of a loud chopper in the air. I see his bright, luminescent light shining down on the city. My stomach starts to feel queasy and my knees feel like they are going to give out. I know if I do not want to get caught, I need to get out of here as soon as I can.

I move quickly through the long, narrow alleyways trying to stay hidden, but the dark shadows amplify my fear. I scan my surroundings for a place I can hide out for a short amount of time while the chopper makes its way through the city. The alleyway is dark, but it does not provide much cover. My only choice is to crouch between a brick stairway and a green, overflowing dumpster that reeks of old food. I try to make myself invisible as my heart beats fast in my chest. My socks are wet from running through the alleyways, so I hang them up on a tiny, metal hook sticking out of the dumpster to allow them to dry. I know I will be here for a while.

After some time, I no longer hear the sound of the chopper blades spinning in the sky. I am beginning to see the first signs of day break, and I know I have to get out of the city before the sun comes up. I slide my now dry socks onto my cold, hurt feet. I crawl out of my hiding space and continue down the narrow alleyways. The sun is rising quickly and making it a lot harder for me to stay hidden. I try to look normal as I walk fast through

the waking city. I am worried my shoeless feet are going to give me away. There are no dark yards or alleyways I can hide in anymore, so I need to find somewhere more secure.

The lighter it gets the faster I begin to walk. I finally reach the edge of the buzzing city. I feel relieved to know I will soon be out of here. Large, vast trees stretch out in front of me and I feel the urge to run to them, but I do not want to draw attention to myself. As I walk to the treeline, I begin to feel happy and free. The falling leaves on the trees make the forest feel big around me. I enter the trees on a paved bike path, and as soon as the trees are covering me completely, I dash into them for safety. I suddenly feel comforted by the embrace of the forest. I continue to move away from the bike path and any chance of people recognizing me.

As the day goes on, I begin to feel alive. I spend the majority of the daylight hours hiking deeper into the thick, pine forest. The bike trail is long gone and my fear of being recognized has gone away. As the glowing sun begins to go down, I finally see the silhouette of a small, abandoned structure.

“Camping,” Ian Barber



I make my way to what seems to be an empty cabin in the middle of the forest. The trees around me make me feel hidden. The air smells of pine and feels cold against my skin. I hear the faint sound of flowing water near me.

I make my way to the cabin. With every step I take, the autumn leaves crunch under my feet. When I make it to the door, I realize it is cracked open already. I rethink my decision as to whether I should enter the cabin or not. I slowly push the door open, my heart is beating faster than it ever has. The strong smell of fish and smoke hits my nose. I realize that there is no one here and a sense of relief washes over me.

I take in my surroundings. There is a small bed sitting beneath a window to the right of the door. In front of me I see a kitchen with little counter space, an old, rusted out stove, a sink, and an average size refrigerator. Above the counters there is a shelf filled with an assortment of canned food and dishes. To the left of the kitchen is a two person dining room table. There is a plate with what looks to be a piece of fish on it. By the dining room table, in the corner, there is a fireplace. The fireplace looks like it has recently been used.

I walk around and touch everything in sight. I have not been able to walk around freely in years. All of a sudden I hear the sound of leaves crunching outside the door. I try to find a place to hide as quickly as possible. I am worried they have found me. I make it under the bed just as the door creeps open. A tall, young man, about 6'2" and muscular with blonde hair and a baseball cap on, walks through the door. He has a tackle box and a fishing pole with him, so he must have been fishing. I feel relieved that it was not who I thought it was.

The tall man sets his fishing pole by the door and his tackle box on the dining room table. He makes his way to the kitchen and grabs a can of corn. He turns the stove on and flames ignite from it. He puts a small pot over the flames and pours the can of corn into the pot. I realize he is only cooking for one person.

While the tall man waits for his corn to cook, he goes over to the fireplace and puts some wood in it. He takes a box of matches out of his pocket and lights one. He throws the match into the pieces of wood that sit in the fireplace, and little does he know there is someone watching him do this. When his corn is done, he takes a

bowl from the shelf and puts his corn in it. He goes and sits down in the chair at the table facing the bed. As I continue to look at him, I notice he looks familiar. Then it hits me.

Will Brown. The tall man's name is Will Brown. I remember him from prison. He was in the cell next to me and nobody ever heard him talk. He always was a loner, until I came along. Him and I would eat our meals together and spend our free time together, and finally he told me his name. Will Brown. He looks different now, healthier and cleaner. I decide, confidently, in that second that it is safe for me to come out from under the bed.

I begin to come out from under the small bed slowly and quietly. Will notices me almost immediately. "Charlie, I have been expecting you," he says with no surprise in his voice.

"You have?" I say with a confused voice.

"Yes. When I heard you escaped, I knew you would run for the woods."

"Discovering," Hannah McNab

"I did not expect to ever see you again."

"I have been hiding here since I escaped almost three years ago now."

"And they still have not found you?"

"They closed the case on me after three months."

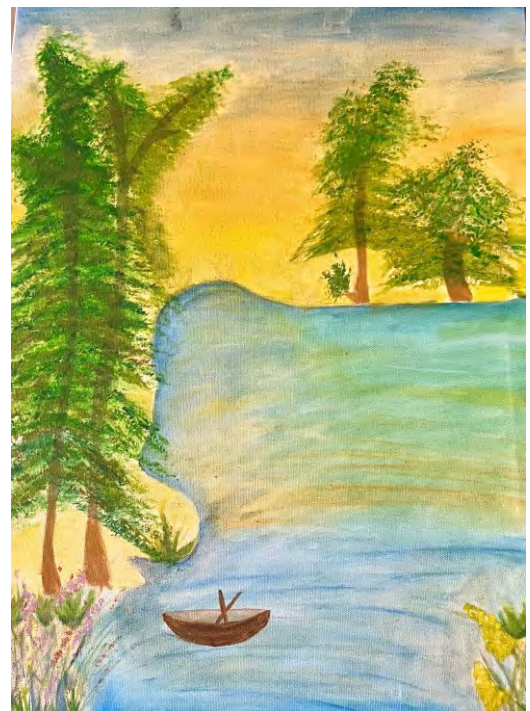
"And you have been here ever since. I see you fish now?"

"Yes, that is what I eat most of the time."

"Could I join you?"

"I can teach you everything I know about staying hidden."

"Cool," I say, trying not to sound too excited to have found Will again, even though I am relieved it is him.



The next morning, Will takes me fishing. The river is about a five minute walk from his cabin. He has a small fishing boat sitting on the edge of the river tied to a tree. He unties the boat and tells me to get in. He pushes us out into the water and we go with the current down the river. It feels refreshing to be able to be carefree again. After about fifteen minutes, Will finds a tree and ties the boat up to it. We continue to spend the entire day fishing and catching up with each other. At the end of the day, I think to myself, "They are never going to find me now."

The Death of Me

Melissa Barber

“Spencer! Spencer!”

I vaguely hear my name echoing around but I don’t know where it’s coming from, the voice is familiar but. . . whose is it?

“Come on Spencer! You have to get up you’re going to be late!”

That voice again but. . . late? Late for what?

I spring awake as a memory from last night comes rushing back.

A man shrouded in darkness, slowly, lazily, making his way to me. We played a game; all I had to do was guess the color on the card he was holding: red or black. If I guess correctly, I win and I get to live. If I guess incorrectly, I lose, and he would kill me.

I rush to the bathroom and turn on the light, the electrical buzzing already coaxing a headache out of me. Tearing my shirt off, I study my chest. It looks normal enough but there’s something different about it. My chest usually has some dark hairs here and there, which blend nicely with my tan skin. But today my skin looks pale, and kind of sweaty, my dark chest hair really pops against it. If I didn’t know better, I would think I was sick.

And right in the middle of my chest, is a big red blotch. Seeing the mark triggers another memory from last night.

“Moon Night,” Axell Montero Espino



The man lunging at me and stabbing me directly in my chest. My blood soaking into my light blue tee shirt, the last thing I see before I pass out is the man walking away.

“Spencer, this is the last time I’m yelling up these stairs. Get. Up.”

My mother. That’s who the voice belongs to. Wow, I was really under if I didn’t even recognize my own mother’s voice.

“I’m up, Mom. I’ll be right there!” Does she not know? That there was someone, something, else in the house last night? Did it leave right after stabbing me?

Thinking back to last night’s events, I try to remember if there is any hint to who the man could be. I remember there being very little light, which was coming from the window above my bed. It was a full moon last night; it shone brightly in the sky easily casting light into my room. The figure was across the room, I could see him as I lay in bed. He was next to my chair, which had a suspicious pile of clothes on it; you know, the one that looks like someone is in the chair. In the diagonal corner from me was my door, which was slightly ajar? I don’t remember opening my

door; I guess it makes sense because my brother could hear me. I had questioned the figure, thinking it was my brother, but as I was telling it that his prank wasn't funny, I heard my brother yell from down the hall. There wasn't much that I could get from him, other than he had a deep voice, and he was decently tall.

Deciding not to focus on it, I start to get ready for school. After all, other than the sore red mark on my chest, I'm fine.

Eventually, after putting on some blue jeans and a red hoodie that reads, "Home of the devils" on it, I make my way downstairs to the kitchen. That's where I find Mom, running around as usual. She's a nurse so she rarely gets to be at home, and when she is, she's always rushing around to grab things and hurry back to the hospital.

"Do you know where my keys are, Spencer?" She asks not even bothering to look if it's actually me.

"Yeah, I think I saw them on the counter." Still watching her I see as she turns around and freezes, looking at me like I have two heads or something. "Mom, what is it?" I ask, slightly worried.

She walks over and puts the back of her hand to my forehead. "Spencer, do you feel okay? You look so pale, and is your hair wet?"

"What do you mean is my hair wet? And yes, I feel fine, Mom." My hair is usually a dirty blonde, but I did notice earlier in the mirror that it looked more brown today. Maybe I just got a little sweaty in my sleep.

"Spencer, your hair is dark brown. It must be wet. Unless you dyed it without permission." My mom has a big thing against dying hair; she says that something capable of changing my hair color is capable of changing my brain. Meaning it could mess up my brain somehow.

I don't know what could be making my hair darker; maybe it's just genetics, so I say, "It's probably just bad lighting, Mom. Don't worry about it. I did not dye my hair. Anyways, I'm headed to school. I'll see you when you get home from work."

"Ok, sweetie. If you don't feel good, call me; I'll come get you."

Grabbing my bag from the table, I head out the door. Halloween is in a week, so fall is in full swing. Every house in town has at least one Jack-O-Lantern or some sort of other decoration. My town takes Halloween and fall pretty seriously; New Hampshire is known for having beautiful falls, so we try to live up to it.

Leaves of every fall color blow across the street with a chilly autumn breeze. I'm glad I grabbed my jacket. The walk to school isn't too far but it gives me enough time to think. As the sun lights up my small town, I can't help but think of when the sun went down last night. My mind flashes back to the sight of my blood soaking into my blue tee shirt, the cards on my bed, the stranger walking away, and was he. . . laughing?

"Pumpkins," Olivia Hayenga



Next thing I know, I'm in front of the school. I don't remember most of the walk, but I was really focused, I guess. The fall air really does help me think.

"There you are!" I turn around to see where the voice is coming from, but I don't need to see the face to know who it is. I would know who the voice belonged to even if I was blind folded. My best friend Tony is a hard person to forget.

Tony is tall with the build of an athlete, probably because he is an athlete. He's the captain of the lacrosse team, and no one could ever figure out why he chose me as a friend. Besides his god like physique (I like to tease him by telling him he has a god like physique); he has curly dark brown hair and dark green eyes. He really got the best features from both his parents.

Tony jogs over to my side. He is about a foot taller than me, and his arm muscles are the size of my face. No high school kid should be built like this, but I know how hard Tony works to be good at lacrosse, and that has some side effects. Good side effects.

He wasn't always so fit; he used to be skinny and lanky. I'm not exactly sure what happened, but I know something bad happened one night between his mom and dad. His dad had been drinking and was yelling and throwing things. Tony tried to step in and help his mom, but being about a hundred and ten pounds, his dad beat him up pretty badly. After that night, Tony decided to protect his mom if that were to ever happen again. And it did, multiple times. With this new plan in mind, Tony was constantly in the gym pushing himself to do things he never could before. Never stopping at a healthy limit, he just kept pushing. It worked though. He built up so much muscle that his dad could no longer beat him, or his mom, up.

But it did have its side effects. Tony pushed himself so much that it made him physically sick. He was in the hospital for a few days with some unknown illness that he refuses to tell anyone, even me.

"Dude, are you okay?" Tony asks, looking at me with concern obvious in his eyes.

"Of course, why wouldn't I be?" For a second, I don't know what he is talking about, but then I remember that I look like shit.

"Spencer, you look like you just came back from the dead."

I freeze. He doesn't know. He can't know. There is no way that he would know, unless. . . no, it couldn't have been him; he wouldn't have killed me.

"Spencer? Dude, are you okay?"

Tony did always have a bad habit of overusing the words "Dude" and "Man" too much.

"Yes, sorry, I just woke up feeling a little under the weather today," I lie. I can't go around telling people that I was murdered last night and then woke up from it.

Tony doesn't question me; that's one thing I've always liked about him. He doesn't push. I can't tell if he just believes whatever you say, or if he can tell when you don't want to talk about something.

Walking into first period, I get this overwhelming feeling. I'm not sure how to describe it. At first it starts small, but I can feel it bubbling up more and more until it just feels like complete and utter rage. The kind of burning rage that makes your vision blur and insides churn. I feel like I have to act on this rage. But how? Scream? Throw something? Kill someone?

When my vision finally clears up, I'm no longer in first period. I look around to see where I'm at. I'm in the boy's locker room; it's dark, but I can still make out the shapes of the lockers and I can see the benches.

I start to get this unnerving feeling that I'm not alone. Turning around, I see it. A figure in the darkness. A figure made out of pitch-black shadows. Slowly, I start to back away, feeling for anything to grab on to. Something I can defend myself with.

"Spencer." It speaks. How does it know my name? A memory flashes quickly of me asking that same question last night. But something is different this time. I recognize that voice.

"Tony?" I question, but I already know the answer.

The lights turn on, and sure enough, there Tony stands. He doesn't look like he was about to kill me. I actually can't place the look on his face.

I'm able to place it after the next thing Tony says.

"Spencer, are you okay?" That same question again. Why does he keep asking me if I'm okay? It's pissing me off, so much so that I want to kill him.

Wait. Kill him? Why do I feel like I want to kill my best friend when he is just trying to check up on me? He just cares about me.

"Photo," Bennett Oberloh



Fear. That is the look on Tony's face and evident in his tone. I'm not sure why Tony is afraid right now, but I calm myself down before I speak.

"Of course I am, Tony. You just asked me that a little bit ago."

"Yes, but that was before I walked into first period and found you with your head down and breathing heavily. When I walked over, you had a knife in your hand." Tony slowly inches over, like I'm some animal he needs to be afraid of. That only brings the anger back.

"Tony, our first period is foods class." He really wants to question me using a knife to prepare food?

"We weren't using knives in today's lesson. Plus, the second bell hadn't even rung yet." Still slowly inching closer, as my anger slowly boils up.

"When I stood right next to you, you were glaring at Vanessa Diamond like you were going to kill her. With the knife." He's right in front of me now, and I want to punch him. I want to show him what I would have done to Vanessa Diamond with that knife.

“I think you should go home, Spencer. Obviously, you aren’t feeling like yourself today.”

Not feeling like myself? How would he know if I’m not feeling like myself? My hand curls into a fist and I’m about to punch Tony, when I stop to think about what I’m doing. I’m about to punch Tony. For just trying to help me.

“Maybe you’re right. I am feeling a little irritable today. It’s probably because I don’t feel good.” I remember my mom telling me that all I have to do is call her and she will come get me. Honestly, I feel fine, but if I’m getting so upset over these little things, maybe I shouldn’t be around people today.

Tony’s shoulders seem to drop a little bit, as if he’s finally relaxing them after this conversation.

“Do you have anyone that can get you out of school? I know your mom works as a nurse and probably can’t come get you.” Tony’s concern is really starting to irritate me. Why does he have to push his way into my life and make me go home? No. I am not doing this. I’m calling my mother; I’m not going to be angry at everyone today.

“Actually, my mom noticed I didn’t look good this morning as well; she told me that if I call her that she will come get me. Thanks for your concern, man.” I know I’m feeling this burning anger toward him right now, but I refuse to acknowledge it. I’m better than that especially if it’s all because I don’t feel good.

“Good. I don’t think you should be here if you’re wanting to go around hitting people. Yes, I saw your fist.” And with that Tony walks out.

I grab my phone out of my pocket and hit call on my mom’s name. “Hey Mom, I need you to come get me.”

Walking up to my front door, I watch as my mom drives away. She was only able to get me and bring me home, she didn’t question my call because she had been “waiting for it.”

I close the front door, locking it behind me. I should probably take a nap; I typically only get this upset when I don’t sleep well. Not that I can say I ever get *this* upset, but I wonder why I didn’t sleep well. Oh, I know, maybe it’s because someone murdered me last night. Yep. I definitely need a nap.

As I pull my comforter over me, I feel something cold and wet against my skin. I rip the comforter back off. What if it’s proof of what happened last night; what if my blood stuck to my comforter? But as I study the blanket, I find nothing. I truly am losing my mind.

I pull the cool blanket back over myself, and I quickly feel myself drifting off to sleep. When I wake up, I’m in an unfamiliar room. The room is light purple and there are clothes everywhere. I try to look around to see where I am or find something that could give me a clue as to whose room this is, but my body won’t listen to me.

Slowly I start to move forward and that’s when I see it. A body in the bed. Shit. Did I kill someone? I know I was angry today, but I didn’t think I was capable of murder! I start to panic internally, as my body still won’t listen to me, that’s when I see the body start to move. Slow, paced beathing. Breathing that I want to take away. What? No. Before I process what is happening, I grab a knife out of my back pocket. The knife feels heavy in my hand, heavy with sins.

My hand starts to quickly move up and down as I start to stab this girl in her bed. Why am I doing this, and why can't I stop? Most importantly why do I like it?

I feel a smile form across my face as blood splatters against it as I continue the motion. This is sick, but I can't stop. I won't stop.

Blood covers my face and clothes as I quicken the movement. I watch as the splatters begin to paint the wall. It's only then do I stop and take a step back. Satisfaction taking over my body.

Who is this girl? Who did I just murder? I'm still unable to control my body but it's almost like my body heard me because I step forward again and slowly turn her body, to get a look at her face.

It's Vanessa. Tony was right.

"Light the Way," Cassandra Mendez



I startle awake in my bed. *My* bed. Oh my god. It was just a dream. Of course it was. Now it makes sense why I couldn't move my body.

What time is it? I couldn't have slept all day. Grabbing my phone, I check the time, which reads seven fifty-eight AM. Shit. I did sleep in all day and of course now I'm going to be late for school.

I quickly rush to put on clean clothes and grab my backpack. I dash out of my room and turn to close the door behind me; doing so, I see a shirt with some red substance on it. I don't remember putting that there. I don't have time to think about this. I practically run to school and arrive as announcements are being made over the speaker system.

I usually ignore the announcements as they usually pertain to sports and other activities that I don't participate in but today our secretary, Jordan, says something that catches my attention:

Vanessa Diamond was found brutally murdered in her home.

A Second Chance

Payten Gudahl

Kayden Salazar stormed through the emergency room doors of Harborview Medical Center in Washington. A cold chill ran down his veins as he entered. He could barely hear himself think with all the buzzing around him. His car had broken down on his way to the hospital, which left Kayden with no choice. He sprinted the two miles to the hospital with his wife in his arms, huffing and puffing as he called out for help.

"Help, someone, help! It's my wife, and I need someone to help her and the baby," begged Kayden.

Monica, a healthy woman who always wore a polite, inviting smile, was overtaken with a ghost-like complexion from head to toe. The doctors quickly took her out of her husband's arms and brought her back for closer examination. It was hard for Kayden to move; the room was spinning, and his mind was blank.

Kayden grew up in a poor community, and he promised himself that he would never give his future child the life he once had. He never experienced having a room to himself, meals on the table every night, clean and fresh clothes, or even shoes without holes in the toes. He was determined to change his life around. He earned straight A's in school, received a scholarship to attend the University of Washington, graduated college with a degree in business, and was hired at a good-paying job just down the road from his newly purchased two-bedroom, one-bathroom home. Soon after buying his house, he met the love of his life, Monica. They met in the coffee shop right across the street from his office. After a year of being together, they decided to get married. After struggling with infertility for two years, they finally got pregnant.

It was a beautiful summer afternoon in Seattle; the sun was high in the sky with no clouds in sight; the trees were sashaying, blowing the rose-smelling air around. Kayden and Monica strolled along the shop-filled main street. They stopped as they approached a store called "The Baby Place." Completely intrigued, Kayden pushed the doors open. His jaw, now as long as a meter stick, hung open as he entered the store. He looked left and right, completely unaware of how much stuff they could buy their future child. He remembered the promise he made to himself as a teenager and brushed away the crocodile tears in his eyes. They walked toe-to-toe, scanning the store like FBI agents, amazed by the eight-foot-tall shelves that filled the entire store.

"Monica, are you okay? You seem extremely tired."

"Something is not right. I think I am having this baby now!" Monica huffed.

Together, they rushed to their car, hoping they would make it to the hospital before the baby arrived. Kayden had no choice but to put the pedal to the metal. Monica urged him to slow down, but something told her that she could not say anything to stop him. With his driving, people could have thought he was in the movie *Fast & Furious*. Coming up to a busy four-way intersection, with no time to stop, Kayden blew through the traffic light.

"Look out," screamed Monica.

A Ford F-150 truck crashed into the passenger side of the vehicle.

"Monica! Wake up, wake up, wake up!"

Kayden tried to start the engine back up again but had no luck. He ran to the passenger side of their car, picked Monica up, and sprinted towards the hospital. His once bright and joyful eyes went dark, and he drowned out everything around him, solely focusing on Monica.

The doctors took Monica away, leaving Kayden alone in the dark waiting room. Soon, two police officers joined Kayden to ask him some questions. Time passed slowly, and the light of day had vanished; the darkness outside matched what he felt inside.

After the police officers left, Kayden paced back and forth like a grandfather clock until Monica's OBGYN doctor, Dr. Carr, walked through the doors into the waiting room with no expression on her face.

“What is going on Doc? Are my wife and baby going to be okay? I need answers!”

“Kayden, the damage to your wife was significant; she suffered from internal bleeding, and she coded multiple times in surgery. We had to put her in a medically induced coma so her body would stop working so hard. We cannot predict if and when she will wake up. And as for your baby, congratulations, you have a healthy and strong baby girl. I can take you back to see her now.”

Kayden’s feet felt heavier and heavier with each step. He limped to the nursery where he found his stunning, seven-pound, eight-ounce baby girl. He stared into her bright blue eyes, seeing his wife in every inch of his daughter, questioning if she would ever meet her momma. On the other hand, in Monica’s hospital room, there was a smell of sterile wipes and an overpowering mixture of antiseptic and deodorizer.

It had now been close to two months since Monica had been conscious. The guilt Kayden had been carrying on his shoulders was taking a toll on him. He had lost ten pounds and barely slept anymore. Every time he closed his eyes, he would remember Monica’s pale skin, his hands full of her blood, and the tightness in the pit of his stomach.

“What should I do, doc? This is the hardest thing I have ever been through, and I can’t find the answer,” Kayden sighed.

Dr. Carr spoke quietly but assuredly, “Kayden, you just need to ride the storm. Today will not last forever, and you are stronger than you think. Do what you feel is right in your heart.”

Kayden sat at his wife’s side and held her small white hand. He ran his hands over the thick stack of papers that read “advance directive,” not knowing if he should give up on his wife. He buried his head into her chest; he found the warmth of her body so comforting. He began to weep at the thought of losing his wife for good when suddenly he felt her hand twitch. He cleared his throat and sprung up, his heart beating a million miles an hour.

“Is she waking up? Please, please, please let her wake up,” Kayden begged.

Dr. Carr did a quick examination and concluded, “She is a fighter; she should be awake within the hour. Remember, Kayden, she may not be the same person you fell in love with.”

“I’m not worried about that; all that matters is that she is waking up!”

After what felt like an eternity to Kayden, Monica opened her eyes slowly. She looked to her right and found a man with big brown eyes, short blonde hair, and a stubbly beard, but she had no recollection of who he was. However, Kayden had never been happier to see his wife’s bright blue eyes. On her left side was a girl in a long white coat who appeared to be a doctor. She wore glasses as thick as a 2x4 piece of plywood, but she was gorgeous nonetheless.

“Monica, can you hear me? It’s me, Kayden.”



“Beauty,” Anaka Wede

“Huh? Who are you?” she replied with a shaking voice.

The woman cut in, “Monica, you’re okay. You were in an accident with your husband and your baby—”

“Husband? Baby? What are you even talking about? I don’t have a husband, and I sure don’t have a baby.”

Kayden shook his head and grabbed her hand, “No, I’m your husband. We were in a bad accident rushing to the hospital because you were in labor! Look, we have a healthy baby girl,” he gestured a picture towards her.

Uh— You’re mistaken; I don’t know you.”

“All right, Kayden. Let’s give Monica some space.”

Kayden and Dr. Carr left Monica’s hospital room. Monica watched Kayden closely, studying the careful and gentle way he looked at her. She could tell he was trying to mask his emotions, but she didn’t know why. Maybe it was easier for him to pretend this wasn’t happening.

The glistening sun had left the hospital room, and Monica decided to close her eyes; she soon fell into a deep sleep.

It was a crisp day in September 2015; the air was fresh, and the breeze was perfect for an autumn day. Kayden and Monica were outside on the porch, sipping their morning coffee. They loved days like this. The air smelt of honey-crisp apples and fresh cider. They sat there with very few words spoken, but that was okay for them because all they needed was each other.

Kayden leaned over and whispered, “Go get ready; I have a surprise for you.”

Monica sat there for a second before vanishing to the bedroom. When she walked to the living room to find Kayden, she instead found a note that read, “You look gorgeous, and now it is time to play a little game. Go to the spot where you grew up.” Monica quickly grabbed her purse and headed out the door, going straight to her childhood home.

Her parents greeted her at the door with a note in hand. This card read, “Having fun yet? Go to the spot where we first met.”

“Mom, what is this all about? This is all just so silly.”

“Honey, just enjoy this moment. We love you so much,” Monica’s mom expressed.

She hurried to her car and drove to the coffee shop where they first met. She had to promise herself that she wouldn’t build her hopes up.

“Are you Monica?” asked the coffee shop worker.



“Diner,” Aaliyah Schaffer

“Uh, yes, how do you know that?”

“From the description, Kayden left. Here, Kayden left this for you.”

She grabbed the card and opened it, and her eyes instantly filled with tears. “I love you so much, Monica. I want to spend the rest of my life with you, and I know we are just starting to know each other, but I want to spend the rest of my life finding out everything about you. I now need you to go to ‘our spot,’ I will be waiting for you.”

She hurried to the beach, where she found a trail of roses leading to the sand. At this point, she was on the verge of blubbing. She came around the corner to find Kayden on one knee.



“Pressed,” Kenia Jimenez

“Monica, I want to grow old with you, create a family together, and watch our kids become parents. I have never felt this way about anyone before; I love you. Will you marry me?”

Everything inside of her screamed yes.

“Yes, of course I will.”

From that day on, neither of them regretted that choice. Kayden and Monica will always be meant for each other.

Monica woke up from her slumber with the thoughts of her favorite memory lingering in her brain.

“Why are you awake, Monica? Should I go grab Dr. Carr?”

“First, do you remember the day we got engaged? I can’t believe that was five years ago already. I remember that day like it was yesterday, and I thank God, over and over again, for my life with you.”

“Tree to Find,” Maddison Haken

“Wait, Monica, you remember that? You remember me?”

“Oh my goodness! I do!” exclaimed Monica.

Kayden went out to get their baby from the nursery. When Monica saw her tiny, blonde short hair, bright blue eyes, baby girl for the first time, she was taken aback that she had almost forgotten about her. She questioned if she would ever be tested like this again. She was given a second chance at this life, and she will never take her life for granted.

Kayden paused, “Don’t be mad, but I held out hope that you would wake up, so she still does not have a name. I wanted to do this together, as a family.”

She looked at Kayden and whispered, “That’s a good thing because I have the perfect name for her. Let’s name her Autumn, so we are reminded every day of the love we share.”



Minnesota West Theater Production

Dial M for Murder

Written by Frederick Knott

Directed by Eric Parrish

Performers and Crew

Selma Almodovar Jose Flores
Ryder Henning Isaac Ramirez
Gabe Kooiker Elizabeth Martinez Castro
Vance Hayenga-Johnson





The Corpse

Keyra Avalos

I open the door of my house with difficulty, an old apartment on the fifth floor of a building in London. It is the same as the rest of this street. Kitchen and dining room together, a living room that consists of a small TV and a dirty armchair, and a cold room at the end of the hallway. I trip over an object that lies on the floor, but this is often the case. When I finally get inside, the only thing I can think about is how exhausting and monotonous today is. The nauseating green of the tapestry on my wall contaminates the darkness of my room, a small bed in which only I fit, a piece of furniture that is missing a drawer, and a closet without a door, my own castle. I huff and lie down.

I cast my gaze on the ceiling, gray and cracked; my bed could easily be mistaken for the ceiling. I carefully recreate today in my head. Nothing special: I wake up, go to work, on my lunch break I go to the cafeteria next to my work and buy a tuna sandwich, I go back to work, and at the end of the day I come home.

My hopeless life would make even the happiest person in the world sad. I am used to it by now. The black spots under my eyes and my mind that is always working non-stop have already become a habit.

Already tired of going to bed without being able to sleep, I get up and go to the window. Blue and grayish tones cover the night sky. The stars are brighter than the city lights. It saddens me to see that beautiful sky above a place ruined by the advances that human beings have made over the years. Humans are greedy beasts; we look aside and ignore the resources and gifts that nature has given us from the start. I clear my head of these thoughts and focus again on the sky, a mere beauty.

“Through the Night,” Faith Baker



A cloud moves with the wind, revealing moonlight. My room suddenly lights up. What was once cold desperation turns into warm light.

I close my eyes as I notice a growing ray of light, and when I open them again, I find myself facing the most beautiful being I have ever seen. A woman with white skin and honey eyes floats outside my window. I cannot believe what my eyes see, the lights and stars seem off next to this beautiful being.

“Looking,” Cassandra Mendez

I ask her who she is and what she is doing outside my window, but she does not say a word; instead, she holds out her hand waiting for mine. I should be afraid, but the warmth of her image chases away all my rational thoughts. I approach following its light in search of protection. I climb onto the window frame and take a step of faith. I close my eyes and trust.

The wind hits my face while a pressure in my chest indicates that my heart is going to burst out of my chest at any second. However, my insides feel warm. Somehow alive. My brain is silent while my heart screams with joy. I find the peace I have always longed for.

“Confused,” Bennett Oberloh



I put my hand to my head as I open my eyes. I smell an intense smell of chlorine and gasoline, the lamps make me remember the horrible color of the walls in my room and the robe I am wearing is too thin to stop the cold; this room is not so far to my bedroom. I try to get up, but something stops my ankles. I lower my eyes to identify what it is, the blood runs down to my feet when I discover that my ankles are tied to the sides of the stretcher on which I lie. Terror makes me quickly regain my senses. I start to move my feet frantically. I sit up to be able to untie myself, but I cannot find an opening or strap.

The sound of approaching footsteps distracts me from my struggle to free myself. A middle-aged man opens the door and walks up to where I am. I try to scratch him, but he has stopped far enough away that I cannot reach him. The man, while looking at me with tenderness and a strange smile, takes out what looks like a gun from the pocket of his robe and points it at me. I cannot say a word. When I hear the unmistakable sound of a gun being discharged, I close my eyes fearing that the man will kill me a second time but instead an energy runs through my body. When I open my eyes, I see that the weapon is not a gun, it is a blazer. When the download

ends, I no longer have the strength to open my eyes. The scientist takes my head and turns it so that I can see him; I open my eyes exhausted.

“How beautiful you are, my little bird,” his hoarse voice petrifies me. “You are my best creation so far. I am so proud of you,” the doctor congratulates me as he pets my head gently.

I do not understand what is happening. *What am I doing here? How have I gotten here?*

But I am sure of one thing, I have to flee from that place as soon as possible.

I try to speak but my mouth is dry, instead I shake my head to free myself from his grasp.

“Are you thirsty my little bird? I will bring you a glass of water” the doctor leaves through the same door he has entered through. His steps are careless, and his back is hunched, and it is evident that his graying, cracked skin has not touched the light of day for a long time.

I take advantage of the fact that my kidnapper is gone, so I can try to free myself from my anklets once again. The ropes that keep me tied are too strong to be able to pull, so I start looking around for a sharp object that I can use as a knife and it is then that I notice my surroundings. My stretcher is right in the center of the room; the floor is covered in blood stains. To my right are some glass containers containing a neon green substance. It is empty. I turn to look to my left. Right next to where I am, there is a metal table on which several surgical utensils rest. These also covered in blood. I take a scalpel and begin to work on my escape.

When I finally get rid of the ankle braces, I stand on the edge of the stretcher and have one foot on the icy floor. When I try to take a step, my legs stop working and I fall, my palms and knees-stained crimson red. My eyes begin to water from the smell of chlorine combined with the smell of blood. I get up from the ground using all the strength I have left, walk to the only door, and start running. I haven't gone five steps when a sharp pain attacks the left side of my ribs. I lift my shirt to see what has caused it: a scar crosses my entire abdomen; the stitches are terrible and there is blood dripping out. As soon as I see the scar, I understand that the blood in the room I am in is mine; that crazy man has opened me and revived me. I cannot understand how this is possible, but I do not have time to think about it. I have to escape from that place. I continue running trying to ignore the pain. I run until my lungs feel like they will burst, but I cannot find a way out. The hallways are endless: every time I enter a door, I find more hallways that lead to other doors. I am lost and desperate. I stop to get a breath of air and then I hear it.

“Where are you my little bird? Do you want to play?” He is humming, I cannot perceive where the voice is coming from. There is silence and suddenly I hear it again. I feel his breath on my neck as he says, “I found you.”

My breathing is labored. I turn around expecting to see him behind me, but he is not there. A paranoid laugh begins to echo through all the walls. I run even faster than before. *Why is this happening to me? What have I done to deserve what is happening to me?*

I turn into a hallway and at the end of it there is a door, but it is different from the others: this one is red. I run towards this with the fear that something will stop me, but it does not. When I am ten steps away from touching the door, I hear how the laughter stops and becomes a disconsolate and high-pitched scream. I turn the knob and push; it is just as gray outside as inside, but the air is lighter.

Even though I am outside, I continue running. When I think I am far enough, I stop to look around and manage to recognize where I am, but it is easy to get lost in this city, all the streets are equally dirty and dull.

From the moment I jumped off my balcony, nothing has been the same. I have never found the peace I was looking for by committing such a sin. Instead, God punishes me by giving me over to the mercy of a man with questionable values, but I am not going to sit here waiting to be tortured without an end. I have escaped from that hell. My mind is no longer convinced that I should wait for the day when I have eternal peace; instead, I will create my own peace and change things to how they were before, to that moment when everything was alive, when every Being had a spirit and a duty. A perfect world.

Never Leave

Rylan Storbeck

Cordon Walters woke up to the bright, yellow sun beaming into his eyes. Waves crashed into him as he lay half in the water. He sat up and raised his hand to cover his eyes from the sun. He sat there listening to the birds chirping and the waves crashing in disbelief that he had survived the plane crash.



“Ocean Thoughts,” Sahyra Talamantes

On January 23, 2009, Cordon and his wife, Monica, scrambled around their house, preparing for their dream vacation. It was 6:42 in the morning, and they had to leave for the airport around 7:00. Cordon was just finishing some last-minute packing as the coffee aroma lingered in his bedroom. The sun barely peaked over the horizon as they pulled out of the driveway.

When they arrived at the Atlanta International Airport, they parked their car in the red circle section numbered 187. They unloaded their luggage from their vehicle and walked towards the airport. They found their airline bag drop and waited in line. After checking their bags, they got through security swiftly and found their gate.

“Monica, should we grab more snacks and water for the flight?”

“Yeah, we should. I’m not sure how much we’ll need, but it’s better to have extra.”

Monica and Cordon’s flight to the Maldives was almost 25 hours. They grabbed Chex Mix, licorice, and two bottles of water. When they returned to their gate, boarding had started. They did not want to sit on the plane longer than necessary, so they boarded as late as possible. Once on the plane, they organized their spots. Monica started to read her book, and Cordon watched a movie.

Three hours later, the flight attendants went around serving lunch. Monica had a salad with ranch dressing, carrots, shredded cheese, tomatoes, cucumbers and croutons. On the side, she had a small meat, cheese, and cracker tray. Cordon enjoyed a turkey sandwich with mayo, tomato, lettuce, cheese, pickles, and chips on the side. They also ordered fresh fruit to share and mimosas to drink.

Nineteen hours into the flight, the Captain said, " We will be experiencing severe weather. There is a large storm that we have to go through. Please wear your seatbelt and be prepared for turbulence.”

This announcement worried Monica. She was not a massive fan of flying, and now they were flying through a storm.

“Cordon! Wake up! The Captain just said that we were flying through a large storm. I’m scared. I don’t have a good feeling about this.”

“We are going to be okay, Mon. These pilots are trained for anything.”

“You’re right. I’m just nervous.”

Monica sat wide awake, terrified to close her eyes. The plane shook and rattled as it passed through large storm clouds. They heard thunder and the rain pattering on the top of the plane. After a large bang, the plane vigorously rocked up and down. In an instant, the plane plummeted. People flew from their seats, hitting the ceiling of the aircraft. Oxygen bags dropped from the ceiling of the plane. Passengers were frantically screaming and yelling for help.

“Is there a doctor on the plane? My mother hit her head and is bleeding! Please help us!” screamed a passenger.

“Please help! My son hurt his wrist,” yelled another.

Suddenly, the Captain spoke, “Please, everyone stay calm. We have been hit by lightning and have decided the ocean is the best and safest way to land. Our flight attendants are prepared for this.”

Cordon and Monica raced to put on their life jackets and prepare for the landing. Quivering with fear, Monica looked at Cordon; tears filled her eyes.

“I knew something didn’t feel right.”

Cordon hugged Monica tight. Tears rolled down his cheeks.

“I know, Mon, I’m sorry. I love you so much.”

“I love you too, Cordon.”

The plane descended very quickly. Their hearts pounded, and their stomachs fluttered as they plunged towards the water. Their knuckles were white as they gripped their seats. The pilots did their best to hold control over the plane. The thunder roared, and the sky lit up with lightning. Then the plane crashed into the water. Cordon and Monica pushed off the seat before them, attempting not to hit their heads. Monica screamed in pain as her wrist cracked. Pain shot up and down her arm. The flight attendants opened the doors and pulled the lever for the inflatable slides. The plane started to fill with water instantly. Parents held their children in an attempt to get out of the plane.

Cordon and Monica barely made it out of the plane. They jumped into the brisk ocean water, but the strong waves made it difficult to swim. The rain was so thick that they could hardly see. The flight attendants already had life rafts blown up. Both rafts were full, and there was only room for one more person. Cordon insisted that Monica go on the life raft, and he would swim behind.

The next thing Cordon remembered was waking up on the beach. The sun shined fiercely. The water that was once freezing was now aiding the heat coming from the sun. Cordon sat up and lifted his hand to cover the beating rays of the sun from burning his eyes. Cordon looked around, expecting to see the other passengers, but he was alone. Filled with curiosity, Cordon wondered if he was the only survivor, where his wife was, how he got to the island, and many other possibilities. He removed his life jacket and walked up the dirty beach to a shaded area.

The water was icy blue and completely clear. He could see every small ripple in the sand beneath it. The beach was filled with brown seaweed, soft sand that filled the holes between his toes, and seashells like nothing he had ever seen. Once he reached the trees, he heard monkeys, birds, and wild boars. He was surrounded by everything he imagined his vacation would be. The only difference was that he had no idea where he was.

Cordon began working towards survival. He collected wood to build a small shelter for the night and a fire. He started to make a fire first. He made a small fire teepee out of large branches and small sticks. He found random straw pieces and leaves while searching and added them to the base of the teepee. He began to rub two sticks together, hoping the friction would create enough heat to spark a fire. He lay one stick on the ground. He grabbed the other stick on both ends and then began to push and pull the stick along the other on the ground. He felt the heat coming from the friction. He kept trying, hoping there would be sparks soon. Moments later, sparks flew. He picked up the sticks and continuously rubbed them together.



“Dreaming,” Jacob Luft

“Come on. Just one spark needs to hit. Come on!”

Then, one spark hit. He had a small flame. He put his body around the teepee, wanting to guard it from the wind. He blew softly on the small flame, aspiring for it to grow. The flame only grew more assertive. Since he had an intense fire started, he headed back into the woods to grab more branches and sticks.

Cordon only planned to stay at this spot one night. He needed to build a small shelter to aid the night’s cold. He began by taking the more giant sticks and holding them to a point almost directly above the fire. He wanted to make a shelter that would resemble a teepee. Not only was this an accessible shelter, but Cordon could also have his fire inside, and the smoke could go out of the top. He used large sticks until the teepee was sturdy. He then grabbed small sticks to fill in any holes. He left a small section of the teepee open so he could enter and exit.

The sun was setting when Cordon was done with his fire and shelter. His stomach rumbled with hunger. His hands and feet were raw from working and walking back and forth all day. He grabbed some rocks, more sticks, and a few palm tree branches that fell. He needed to do one last thing before relaxing for the night. He needed to make a spear so he could hunt for food. He searched for a rock that resembled a spearhead to sharpen it easier. He found one similar to a spearhead and made it work. He grabbed a coconut from the ground, used the rocks to split it open, and drank the refreshing coconut water. He grabbed all his materials and sat in his teepee to work on his spear.

Cordon sharpened his spear until it was sharp enough to puncture a fish. He took some sturdy sticks and tied them to the speared rock with the palm tree branches. He stabbed the sand to ensure it was sturdy enough to withhold the force to spear a fish. He made a small pillow with the remaining palm tree branches. With the warmth of the fire, Cordon dozed off into a deep sleep. He woke up periodically throughout the night to add wood to the fire.

The following day, Cordon grabbed his spear to go fishing. He had not eaten anything for over a day, and his stomach hurt in ways he had never felt before. He had to find something to eat, no matter what it was. He saw

two small crabs and returned them to his fire to cook. Once he finished eating, he grabbed two coconuts and started the search for others.

Sweat beamed down his face, back, and stomach. The sun blazed on him as he walked through the unbearably hot sand. The cool, salty breeze and the fresh coconut water were the only things that kept him going. Cordon's feet were raw and ached with every step. He decided to take a small break. When he sat down, he noticed the beauty of the island. Sitting there, he saw turtles, crabs, fish, and dolphins. He closed his eyes and could hear the birds singing and the monkey talking, just like the day before. He drenched his shirt in the water, hung it over his neck, and continued.

Off in the distance, Cordon saw a blurry orange figure. It was flat and round. When he got close, he noticed that it was the life raft from the plane crash. A slow smile appeared on Cordon's face. Collapsing into the sand, Cordon sat and thanked God. He knew that he was not alone. The others made it to the island. All Cordon had to do was find them. He looked for any indication of where they went. He saw a few filled-in circles going towards the jungle.

The sun was beginning to set. Cordon knew it would not be wise to travel through the jungle in the middle of the night. He started a fire and then hunted for food. He got two small fish and one crab. He cooked them on a large rock above the fire and ate them. He set the life raft against trees to lay on. He was comfortable while getting the warmth from the fire. With a full stomach, he drifted off to sleep.

The next morning, Cordon did not hesitate to look for other passengers. The footprints were going straight into the jungle. Cordon's feet pounded with pain. With every step he took, he could feel his cuts deepening. He refused to stop looking, no matter how much pain he was in.

A few hours into searching, Cordon started to lose hope. He sat with his head between his legs, tears filling his eyes and his heart hurting. All he wanted was to see Monica and never leave her side again.

Off in the distance, Cordon heard something. He stood up and walked quickly, trying to hear where it came from. He could hear something similar to the mumble of voices. Adrenaline ran through his body as his feet pounded the ground. He ran and ran and ran. Charging through the trees he suddenly stopped in his tracks. There she was. Monica sat on a wooden plank, chatting with peers around her. The sweat on her cheeks glistened in the sun. She smiled a fake smile, hiding her sadness.

"Monica! Monica!"

She heard Cordon's screams, and they locked eyes. Cordon's vision blurred, and tears rolled down his face. They raced towards each other and fell into a desperate hug.

"I will never leave you again, Monica. I promise."

Home Sweet Home

Ella Carlson

A loud crash woke up Toby from his sleep. He slowly walked over to the door and tried to turn the handle.

"Ouch!" he yelled.

It scorched his hand. He saw the bright yellow and orange light from underneath the crack in the door. He ran over to his window and opened it forcefully, and when he did, he saw the red and blue lights coming down the street. Within a matter of seconds, the ground beneath him was filled with men in yellow hats and black heavy suits. They had laid out a mattress right below his window.

A fireman yelled at him, “Jump!” and without another thought, he let go.

When Toby woke up he was scared. He did not know where he was, or what had happened. There were beeping noises, people in blue scrubs with clipboards all standing around him. There was a tube going down his throat helping him breathe. He did not know what was going on.

One of the doctors came over and said, “It is all going to be alright.”

He felt his eyes fall back into his head and he was out before he could think about anything else. As he woke up for the second time, he overheard the doctors whispering about his family,

“None of them made it.”

He could feel his heart drop,

“No one made it?”

He repeated what they said over and over again. Until the doctors walked up to him. They told him he was in a terrible accident. His house had caught on fire, and by the time 911 was called, it was too late.

“You were the only one who was able to make it out.”

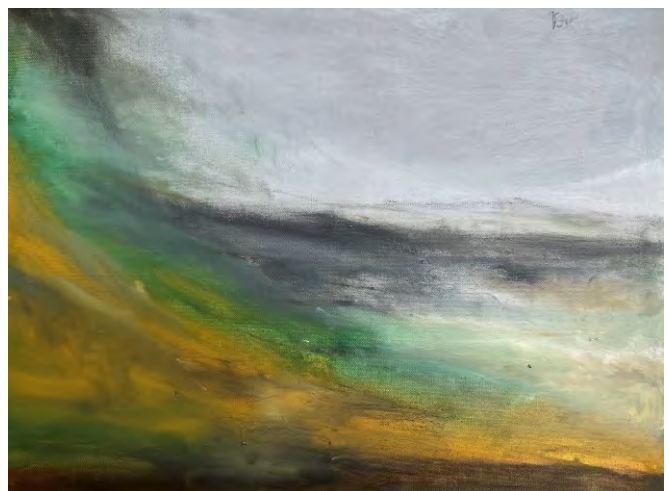
The doctors explained that he was flown to this hospital in Seattle Washington. He had broken his neck, jaw, and collarbone when jumping out of the window. He sat in that hospital bed for many days. Eating the sad mushy Jello, because that was all he could eat and he rewatched the last episode of “Friends.”

He was heartbroken, when they told him no one made it. His mother and younger sister. “*How could they both be gone?*” It was a horrible feeling, but thinking of them, he knew that they would want him to be happy.

“Forged,” Fernando Santana Marte

The doctors released him about a week later, and as he walked out of the hospital with no money, house, or family, he hung his head, realizing everything he once had was gone in an instant.

The clouds slowly moving, and the color of the sky a sad gray color, reflecting exactly how Toby was feeling. He continued walking, slowly down the street, and as cars drove by and they splashed up the muddy water onto the lost and found clothes he was wearing.



He was not even really sure what to do. He did not have any family, nowhere to turn to. *Walk*, he thought, *just walk. There will be something along the way where I can stop and get help, or somewhere to stay.* So that is what he did, he walked. He walked along the bridge that overlooked the bright blue waters, and the blinding sun that reflected off of it. The cool breeze that flew through his loose, baggy clothes. The long brown shaggy hair got in his face, because it clearly hadn't been cut since the accident. He stopped at a gas station somewhere along the way, used the restroom and stole a couple waters and some beef jerky. It was not much but it would do. He walked down the street to a park, with big oak trees and a huge gazebo in the middle.

He found a bench in the gazebo and laid down. It was hard, cold, and uncomfortable, but for the first time since he had stepped out of that hospital, he felt at ease. Toby woke up to the sound of birds chirping, and the sun rising shining directly in the direction he fell asleep in.

He yawned and stretched and just wanted to lay there for a minute and soak up all the sunlight before having to walk all day again. As he sat up, he heard the jangling of keys on a belt and the heavy steps of a security guard. Toby slowly turned his head to face the guard, and when the guard started to yell, "Hey, what are you doing here?"

Toby got up and sprinted. He ran as fast as his feet could carry him. He ran through the leaves and branches, through the dewy grass, and the mud puddles. He knew he had lost the security guard but the fear that overcame him was still overpowering. His fight or flight had kicked in and he was not sure how to turn it off, or if he wanted to.

Months it must have been since the hospital. Toby had been wandering through Tacoma for about a week now. Been stopping here and there at some gas stations stealing food and water, and he felt bad doing it. *They would understand, right?*

He has not gotten caught yet though, which is surprising since he is not hard to find, because he has been walking everywhere. One night about two weeks ago, he met a homeless man. His name was Antonio. They end up sitting at the same bench and he had asked Toby where he was from. Toby explained how he had been in a house fire and he had lost all his family. Now he was just wandering looking for a place to stay. Antonio was slightly older, in his late 50s, at that. He told Toby his story about how he was an alcoholic.

Antonio explained that the reason he was homeless and in this whole mess was because of himself. He said he would spend most nights after work at the bar or in the garage by himself. When he would come home, his wife had already put their little girl Penny to bed. He would crawl into bed and Macy, his wife, would yell at him. About how he reeked of alcohol, how he was not being a good father to their daughter. That Penny would ask for him every night, and every night her mother would have to turn her away. He would cry to his wife, and beg her to give him another chance. He promised he would change. He would start to be there for Penny, on her birthdays, first day of school, sports games, everything. Every single time Macy would believe him, she had so much hope and pride in him, she could never truly send him away.

He took advantage of this and continued on his path despite what he promised to his wife and daughter. He had gotten a DWI, 4 times over the legal limit. Antonio went to jail for a month and that's when Macy knew she needed to do better for herself, and for her daughter. He told Toby that he would do anything to get them back and prove to them he is better. Toby was also willing to do anything for some cash and a place to stay. As they sat together and talked, they came up with a plan to rob the bank that was across town. Only the rich people used this bank. They had a foolproof plan. No one was going to get hurt, they just wanted some cash to help get them started. They had planned to meet back on the bench the following night at 11:30 p.m. sharp.

As Toby walked away from Antonio, he rethought this plan, *“What if we were to get caught?”*

He would go to jail, but at least he wouldn't be on the street. So really what is the absolute worst that could happen? Neither of them had anything to lose. He kept trying to convince himself, but somewhere in the back of his head he still had a bad feeling about all of this. He showed up at the bench the next night at 11:30 p.m. sharp like he and Antonio had discussed. Antonio was already there waiting, he had mud all over his face to cover-up his identity. He found bobby pins on the street, and luckily he was good at picking locks. They found plastic bags in the trash can outside of the grocery store and Antonio knew exactly where the cash was, how fast the police would get there after being called, and how much they would need to escape. Clearly Antonio had thought about doing this before, he just needed someone, someone like Toby, to be his partner-in-crime.

As they made their escape and started running their separate ways as their plan intended, the flashing red and blue lights made Toby's shadow very clear. The sound of the sirens could have broken glass. Toby knew he had to run, so he did. All the way out of town and into the forest. Dodging tree branches and jumping over stumps of old ones. By the time he slowed down the police had already given up on chasing him. His fast pace came to a walk. His breathing sounded like a cat trying to cough up a hairball. His skin cut up with so much dried blood you could not even see his skin. The strong winds flowed through his open shirt and cooled him down like stepping outside in the middle of January. His hair soaked from sweat as if he had just gotten out of the shower.

“Ruins,” Kymberly VanderZiel



In the near distance, he saw an opening where he thought he could take a break. As he drew closer, he could see the outline of an old rickety abandoned house. It was a miracle, like the house was there, just for him. He walked up what was left of the driveway. Chipped paint and lost shingles, and windows with no glass. As he put his weight fully on the stairs and started walking up, they creaked like a door with no oil. The door was already cracked open but he turned the knob anyway. Inside there was ashes everywhere, very dusty and when he opened the door flew everywhere like the mist of a sprinkler in the summer. The moonlight shined through the windows so Toby could make out the furniture that was left from whoever the previous owner was.

This was perfect, he thought. Someone was looking out for him when they left this house standing. He closed the door behind him and found an old crusty blanket and cuddled up. He fell asleep like a baby being rocked by their mother. He was exhausted from the night and the last couple months in general. His eyebags dark, like the night sky. He woke up to the warm sun on his skin, and the light breeze coming through the holes in the walls. He walked outside and looked out towards the sun. He could see the mountains, and a small little valley in the distance.



This view looked awfully familiar, he thought. Even with the garage being burnt down, the paint half off, and many missing shingles, it weirdly felt like home. He knew he was supposed to be here.

The many memories he had with his family in this house before that tragic night. All those feelings from that night came rushing back. They hit Toby like a truck crashing into a brick wall. His subconscious mind knew this felt like home, but truthfully it was his home. His childhood home where he grew up. The yard he used to run around in with his sister and his yellow lab. The bell on the porch that his mother used to ring when it was time to come in because it was getting too dark. It was his home. Home sweet home.

Warning: The following story contains content that some individuals may find distressing.

The World Continues to Spin

Olivia Clarke

A loud ringtone from my alarm shakes me awake on my white and gray-striped sheets. I know I have to get up and start my day before I'm late for the Catholic retreat with a few of my classmates and my cousin, Molly. *Should I even go?* This retreat is going to be so long, but then I remember I have to pick up my friend, Gracie, as well. Laying in my big bed, which seems impossible to get out of, I decide to go. I slowly make my way out of bed, which seems like the hardest thing to do, and make my way downstairs. As my feet touch the cold hardwood floor, waking me up more and more with each step, I push myself to get ready for the day. I make my way into the kitchen to say good morning to my parents. I see my mom and dad sitting at the dark-stained table, sipping their morning coffee.

“Good morning, sweetheart,” I hear the synchronized comment from both of my parents. I then make my way into the bathroom to start my shower. As I turn on the water to warm it up, I connect my phone to my speaker to get some good music going. Hearing my favorite song playing while I am in the shower gets me excited for the day.

Analyzing my closet on what to wear is a tricky decision. It is a hotter day than usual, so I pick my favorite green corduroy shorts and a soft black shirt. As I look in the mirror, loving the outfit I have on, my phone lets out a loud “buzz” on my bed.

As I answer the call, I loudly hear, “Where are you?” Gracie says in a direct tone. “We have to be at the church in 10 minutes.”

I quickly hang up the phone without a second thought, grab my car keys, fly down the stairs as if I had wings, and rush out the door. As I speed into town, as if I am a NASCAR driver, I worry that we will not make it to the church on time. Speeding down the gravel roads, I’m excited to see my classmates, especially Molly. I didn’t get to see her much over the summer, so I couldn’t wait to hear her bubbly laugh that could make a whole room smile. As I pull into Gracie’s driveway, she texts me to come inside to help her look for her purse. I put my car in park and walk into her bright yellow house. As soon as I make my way inside, my phone buzzes in my back pocket. I get a text from my friend, Irish, who also is going to the retreat. I look down at my phone in confusion as I see: “Olivia, I am so sorry, are you okay?”

Gracie comes flying down the stairs, her feet barely touching each step, clasping her small, blue purse with big shiny pearls yelling, “We have to go now!”

As I watch Gracie fly down the steps, I have no time to respond back to Irish. We speed out the door, jump into my car, and start to make our way to the church. While on our way to the church, I hand Gracie my phone with the text from Irish, asking her if she knows what she means. Gracie gazes at my phone with her big, dark brown eyes, lost in confusion trying to figure out what Irish meant.

Driving up to the church, I see Irish sitting on the sidewalk clasping her hands together as if she was praying. I park my car. Gracie and I walk up to Irish to see if she is okay. The closer we get to Irish, the more she avoids looking into my eyes, keeping her head facing towards the pavement, as if she was keeping a secret from me. *What was the text about? Is everything okay?* In that moment, a loud silence passes through outside; the birds are no longer chirping, the tree branches no longer brush against each other, and I begin to feel an overwhelming sense of fear fill my body. Irish slowly stands up, her eyes dreary and filled with tears. She reaches out and grabs my arm, pulling me away from my classmates. Out of the handful of them, I don’t see Molly. As we make our way over to a private area, Irish’s mom comes over to me as well, with her makeup slightly smeared around her bright blue eyes, her eyes puffy and red. As I look at them with fear rushing throughout my body, my heart begins to beat out of my chest, and my mind thinks a million thoughts at once. Irish and her mom look at each other with this dreadful look, debating whether or not to tell me.



“Sunshine,” Erin Langendorfer

I can’t handle this overwhelming feeling anymore, the words “What’s going on!” spew from my mouth.

Irish’s warm, clammy hands grab mine, she looks me in the eyes, and says the cold words: “Molly has been in a really bad accident, and we think she’s gone, Olivia,” stutter out of her quivering mouth.

My legs stiffen, my heart drops to my stomach. No emotions are in my body, and my mind has no thoughts. I hear multiple classmates say: “I’m so sorry, Olivia,” but at the same time, I can’t do anything, I can’t feel or say anything, my body has shut down on me.

I see Irish's mom walk up to the church to go get my sponsor, Peg, to bring her to me. I continue to stand on the bright grass, as the warm sun beams down on me. I have no feeling in my body until Peg hugs me, her arms squeezing my body tightly, as if she hadn't seen me in forever. As she pulls away from the hug, tears flow down from her cheek. She tightly grabs my shoulder with her shaking hand and walks me into the church.

Stepping into the silent church. I am in disbelief over what I have just heard. My classmates' eyes all beam upon me, looking at me as if I was someone they had never seen before. Peg ushers us into the cold, dark, and silent church and tells us to sit down and pray. The bottom of my legs touch the cold, hard, wooden pew as "Hail Mary, full of grace" echoes throughout the church. There I sit. I can't pray. I can't cry. I look out the colorful stained windows, as light shines in, with no feeling in my body.

My brain is like a record player, rewinding all the memories I had with Molly. Watching each other grow up, seeing each other every day in school, going over to each other's houses to watch Yogi Bear, getting each other in trouble for being too loud during class. There are so many quirks about Molly nobody truly understood: her love for God, her passion for farming and running. For the entirety of my 17 years I've known her, she never got mad at anyone or anything. She only has love in her soul. She was sweeter than honey, and loved all, no matter the wrong they have done to her. I am lost in thought until I hear my phone loudly buzz on the pew. It's my dad calling. I walk over to the back room of the church.

"Dad, is it true?" I say as my voice begins to shake and crack, as tears slowly form in my eyes.

"We will talk when I get there, I'm coming to pick you up," my dad says as his voice cracks and stutters as he hangs up. A tsunami of emotions all hit me at once. My brain and body were not prepared for that response. I burst into screaming tears, realizing that she's truly gone. My wails echo throughout the church. Irish's mom and Peg carry me outside, my body and legs stiff as a board, not allowing me to walk. The scraping of my shoes on the pavement leads my eyes to see my dad sitting in the driver's seat of his big gray pick-up, with tears in his eyes. My dad clasps my hands so hard his knuckles turn white.

I look him in his tear-filled eyes, the struggling words, "She's gone, sweetheart," slowly come out of his mouth. "I know," I say, struggling to catch my breath.

"Let's go home now," my dad says, slowly putting the car in drive.

The second I get home from the church, I begin to make my way inside, with no feeling in my body, almost as if I was completely numb. My cold hand reaches for the doorknob, but before I can grab it, there my mom stands, opening the door for me. As I slowly look up at her, I see her saddened face, her baby blue eyes full of tears. With no words spoken, she pulls me in for a hug, her shaking hands rubbing my back as she digs her face into my neck. In that long moment of silence, I feel as if there was so much spoken at the same time. "We should go over to her house," my dad says as he looks up from his phone. My dad then slowly approaches me, grabbing my shoulder to help me to the car, as my mom follows. My mind keeps spiraling with a million thoughts the entirety of the ride to her house. Our world continues to spin, but it feels for me as if the world has stopped.



“I can’t imagine how the family is feeling,” my mom says as she grabs another tissue.

As we slowly roll into Molly’s driveway, all my relatives’ cars are neatly parked, filling up the entire yard. While my parents and I walk up to the sorrowful house, I can’t wrap my head around the thought of Molly not being here. *Why isn’t she at her own house?* I slowly open the door, the whole house of puffy, teary-eyed relatives looks at me. One by one, multiple family members come up to hug me. The loud cries fill the house, a constant stream of warm tears stains my shirt, as the cries begin to get louder. That day is filled with loud cries, suffocating hugs, uneaten food, and a sleepless night. Most of my relatives decide to stay the night to be there for Molly’s parents, Dough and Katie, and her sister, Mara. Multiple days pass, it feels as if I’m living the same day over and over again. I glance upon my missing assignments, knowing that I do not have enough strength to do them. Staring at my messy room, which you can barely see the floor. My phone lies on my unmade bed, with multiple unanswered phone calls and texts.

Before I know it, the day I was dreading finally arrives, Molly’s funeral. I wake up with an unbearably heavy heart. I just want to go to sleep and hopefully still be convinced it’s a dream. I make my way out of bed dreadfully, throw on my long black dress, along with small black flats. I brush out my greasy, snarly hair. I try doing my makeup, but I just can’t stop the constant tears rushing down my face. I rub my red puffy eyes to get myself to stop crying, but no matter how hard I rub, I just can’t do it. Soon, it is time for my family and I to leave. We have to be there early, to get one final goodbye. As we make our way to the car, I listen to the tapping and scraping of our shoes on the gravel. The car ride is silent, the only sounds made are the loose gravel hitting underneath the car, the sound of the blinkers, the birds chirping, and tissues pulling from the box. As we arrive at the church, we can hardly find a parking spot due to the size of our huge family, but soon we find one at the very back of the church. I take my time leaving the car. I can’t bear the fact this was my last time seeing her. I won’t see her at school, family reunions, her house. I will never see her again.

Approaching the church, I see family members sobbing into each other’s arms as they talk about the memories they’ve shared with Molly. As I enter the same cold church, I feel all the feelings of that day hit me. Hundreds of pictures of Molly fill the church walls, seeing her in each and every picture digs into me, the more and more I continue to walk closer to her casket. I begin to break. As I reach the front of the church, there she is. Her face is purple and bruised from the accident. I can tell they tried to cover it up with makeup, but she looked nothing like herself. Tears swarm my eyes, making everything blurry and hard to see. Falling from my eyes, slow droplets begin to saturate the silk lining of her casket. I try not to look at her for too long. I don’t want to see her like this. But I can’t stop myself from looking at her. I can’t say goodbye yet. I grab her cold, blue, stiff hand to hold, as I struggle to catch my breath. Behind me, I feel someone tightly grab my shoulder. I slowly turn around, struggling to gasp for air.

“Will you put this on her, please?” my aunt says, as she hands me a bright silver necklace with a red diamond heart. My tear-soaked hands slowly grab the necklace. Before I put it on Molly, I take a minute to truly admire how beautiful the necklace is. My slow, shaky hands unclasp the necklace. My aunt lifts her head up for me, as I struggle to put it on her.

Struggling to clasp the necklace, I feel her ice-cold neck against my hand. I know I could sit here and look at her for hours, but I need to let her go. I give her one last kiss on her small forehead, as tears fall upon her face. “I love you. I always will, Molly.”

“Together,” Keytin Elser

Every waking moment since her passing, there is a bright red train that circles my brain. Never-ending thoughts circle the tracks, round and round. I am a teenage girl with my brain on fire. Letters composed of smoke slip out of my ears, spelling “tired.” The smoky letters signal for help. I am tired of grieving loved ones who line up to exit my life. I am tired of waiting for change, even though that seems to be the only thing that exists in my life. I am tired of watching the bright-colored leaves change and slowly fall to the ground. I am tired of watching the world change around me, but I appear to be the only person who isn’t changing.



As I watch the dark brown dirt that coated Molly’s grave begin to have grass flourish to the surface, I know now I have to change. Vibrant green grass rises, then begins to die, and then is covered by heavy mounds of snow. Each day passes as if I am pressing a “fast forward” button, but I am not moving. I am feeling the weighted sadness in my heart, while the rest of my body cannot catch up. My favorite bright purple sweatshirt begins to fade into a washed-out violet color. My classmates appear to be healing, but why can’t I? The bright red train in my brain begins to circle around the track at a speed never reached before. I can feel the tracks begin to loosen, screws and bolts fly from the tracks. Sparks fly as loud: “Choo-Choo’s” shake my brain.

“I have to do something to stop the train.” I begin to load small bullets into the matte black Smith and Wesson. Unsteady hands cock the small gun as warm tears drop from my eyes. The barrel of the gun approaches my head as the train begins to spin off the tracks. My shaky hand can barely keep the small gun in line with my head. “Goodnight, Livy, we love you!” echoes throughout the hallway up to my room.

“Darkness,” Kiara Castaneda



“Olivia?” My throat begins to swell up, blocking all words from passing through. Loud thuds rattle the small steps up to my room. A loud creak spills out as my dad opens my door. My throat finally opens as a loud wail spews from my mouth. The small gun slowly drops from my hand as my dad lunges out to hold me. Tears soak his gray shirt as I wail out for help. The red train finally comes to a halt. With the tender love and sorrow that cradles me, my world begins to spin again.

“I will get you the help you need, you’re in there somewhere, we just have to find you again, Olivia.”

Multiple therapy sessions after another, countless mental health days, and many bottles of antidepressants fill my bathroom counter as if they were trophies being displayed. Heavy mounds of snow begin to melt, bright vibrant leaves begin to flourish, and the world feels quiet again. I can now tolerate opening my laptop to look at

my homework without worrying about seeing the bold “D” above each assignment. My perspective on life switches like a light switch, I finally have control over the light coming in. The warm, bright beams of sunlight dance on my skin, slowly creeping up into my soul, as if my body had a “reset button.” I’ve been living this whole year in misery worrying about “living,” but now, I finally get to spend my final teenage years “alive.” I may not have myself back fully yet, but I am happier.

As the school year finishes out, I am at peace with who I am. I am content. The last month of my junior year is slowly coming to an end. I have my last band concert of the year, prom, and figuring out my summer plans. As I get myself ready for the spring band concert, I can’t help but stare at all of my classmates admiring how quickly we all grew up and changed. As my eyes dance across the room, they lock with my old friend, Hailey. With my cool baby blue eyes interlocked with her warm dark brown eyes, my legs slowly guide me over to her. As I slowly approach her, she welcomes me with her bright white smile, making all the nerves in my body float away. I’ve known Hailey ever since we were in kindergarten. She has this beautiful dark skin, long brown hair, and such a beautiful face that can attract the eyes of anyone. I know the last thing she could ever be was intimidating, but for some reason, I am so nervous to talk to her again. Excited “hi’s” come flying out of both of our mouths at the same time. Our conversation is going smoothly, we both are catching each other up on our day-to-day lives, and occasionally cracking jokes.

“All band members line up in the hall” cuts us off from what we are talking about.

“We should definitely talk more, Olivia. I’ve missed this.”

“Yeah, me too, Hailey.” I slowly walk away from her, a smile so big grinning from ear to ear.

Later that night, I hear a loud “buzz” shake my desk. I close my laptop and pick up my phone without thinking another thought. My eyes glisten upon the bright name “Hailey.” The light fills my face, which is followed by a bold smile.

“Lights,” Olivia Hayenga



“Hey, girl! What are you doing?” Before I even know it, 7 p.m. turns to 8, which then leads to 11 p.m.

Hours of us talking fly by. I had no idea time could fly by that fast. Day after day, it is the same cycle, except we are talking consistently. Texting turns into hangouts after school, which soon leads to sleeping over at each other’s houses every single weekend.

The school year finally comes to an end, and summer is finally here. Hailey and I begin spending each day together, shopping trips, road trips, countless sleepovers, you name it, we are glued to each other’s hips. The year full of agonizing sorrow and grief completely fades the second she walks into my life. Every hangout is filled with laughter, happiness, and love. She makes me the happiest I’ve been in a very long time. Sometimes when I am alone, I feel the grief sitting in my heart, but I know, it’s time for me to let go. I feel like me again. I never would have thought I could be this happy. I never imagined myself making it to 18 years old. Hailey walked into my life and fixed a broken heart that she didn’t even break. Hailey held me together when the loss of Molly completely ripped me apart.

Who Are You?

Kay Avalos

In the city of Alkar, it was cloudy; the forecast had announced that there would be heavy rains throughout the week. All the people were in their houses sheltered, not only from the rain but also from the “faceless villain”: that person who had the entire city in fear. He was known as the faceless villain since he always wore a very long, black toga that covered his head along with a completely white mask. The faceless villain robbed stores and banks; no one was quite sure what he did with everything he did stole. The city was in desperation and the robberies continued without stopping for a long time, until one day a new person arrived in the city. He was their new hero; only he could face the villain who was frightening them so much. They fought for a long time, but nobody won completely; the villain now had more detailed and subtle strategies to steal so he wouldn't have to deal with the hero.

“You never think of giving up?” The hero asked aloud from a rooftop when he saw the villain sneaking onto a bench. He sighed tiredly, moving his shoulders in circles, trying to relax his muscles due to fatigue and desperation when seeing the villain. He headed to the bank to fight for the hundredth time, but when he arrived, he did not expect to see the villain on the ground with his hands on his head along with everyone else on the bench. The shocked hero approached the villain and immobilized him, preventing him from escaping.

“What are you doing?” The villain asked the hero trying to fight. “Don't you see that it's a robbery?” He questioned the hero for the second time.

“What are you talking about? You are who is robbing the bank.” The hero tightened his grip, becoming impatient and making the villain more imprisoned.

“Of course I'm not robbing the bank. I would never take hostages and you know it. I only come for the money, not to hurt people.”

The hero was surprised. It was the first time he said more of two sentences in a row and although he had that pang of curiosity, he still had to catch a villain even if it wasn't the usual one. He slowly got up to look for the handcuffs for the villain and the next thing he knew was that he was with his face on the floor handcuffed with his own handcuffs.

“What's wrong with you, faceless villain! I must fight that villain; he can hurt people!” The hero shouted half loud from the floor.

“Not if I stop it,” said the faceless villain. “You would only hinder me, and when I'm done, I can take all the money I want,” he added, looking from above at the hero who was lying with him on the floor without being able to turn around.

“Bye. Oops! One more thing, don't call me the ‘faceless villain.’ It's too long for a name, I already told you to call me *White*.”

The villain said goodbye with a relaxed tone and a smile, heading to the vault where he had seen the other villain taking the hostages. “I can't believe that he used such a bad strategy, that he doesn't know he is cornered inside a vault?” White thought out loud as he walked at a slow pace looking for the vault, until he felt a hand covering his mouth and slamming him into the nearest wall. White reacted quickly by hitting his attacker, realizing that he was the hero.

“What are you doing here? I left you immobilized at the entrance,” White said to the hero, watching as he ran his hand over his face, rubbing the blow he had received from the hero moments before.

“You really thought you were going to be able to immobilize me with handcuffs?” The hero asked with a sly smile.

“How humble,” White said sarcastically as he looked him up and down. “Well, why did you cover my mouth like that?” The villain asked him, putting his hands on the sides of his hip waiting for an answer.

“Because you were going to give the villain more ideas. He is seeing and hearing everything through the security cameras,” he said pointing to a camera in the corner of the hallway. “Besides, you deserve it for wasting my time with you instead of catching the robber,” he mentioned as he walked to the end of the hallway to turn around and get out of White’s sight.

He couldn’t believe how shameless the hero could be. Repeating with his hand what the hero said but with a shriller voice, he followed him to the end of the hallway.

When he took a step to advance to the other hallway, he had to dodge a bullet that almost hit him in the forehead. He did not expect that they had already started fighting without him. He lit his hands ready for action, positioning himself next to the hero while he fought with his great force against the enemy while dodging the bullets. Not only had he brought weapons, but these were modified so that the bullets would explode if they touched a surface like grenades.

After a big fight, they were able to catch the robber and get the people to safety. A moment later, the hero turned around looking for the faceless villain, his eyes seeing that he was escaping with a bag full of money. “I can’t believe it. After fighting crime together, he goes and steals a bag of money. Why does he want that money so much?” The hero thinks a little angrily as he follows White through the alleys.

The villain ran and snuck very quickly, while the hero tried to keep up with him at a safe distance. *Where was he going in such a hurry, and why was he so far from the center of the city?* He was even more confused when they reached the outskirts of the city, more specifically in the destroyed and abandoned town.

What is he doing here? The hero wondered as he saw the villain slow down and approach the rubble of a building full of grass. The villain raised his hand removing the grass and revealing a passageway that led into the building. He very confidently entered and disappeared from the hero’s visual range. He tried to get closer to the grass to try to get in too, but the moment he touched the grass, his eyesight began to fail, and he became dizzy until he fell unconscious to the ground.

He woke up in a bed, without remembering where exactly he was. Looking around, trying to figure it out, he saw White standing next to him with a wet rag in his hands. The startled hero tried to fight when he felt a stab of pain in his head and fell back in bed.

“Don’t worry, the symptoms are going to go away quickly,” said White, with a hint of anger in his voice. “Why did you follow me? You know you shouldn’t leave the city.” The villain reproached him as he abruptly placed the damp cloth on his forehead.



“What happened?” the hero asked, confused, while trying to stand up for the second time, but this time more slowly.

“You touched the herbs without gloves; they are poisonous, and you became intoxicated,” the villain calmly explained, with a small mocking smile, while resting his hand on the opponent’s chest, making him lay down again easily due to the little strength the hero had.

“Theo, don’t make fun of the unfortunate events of others.” The two turned to the origin of the voice of the woman who had reprimanded the villain.

“Yes, Nina,” White quickly responded, as he prayed that the hero hadn’t heard his real name.

“Who are you, darling?” Nina asked the hero, who was still



“Woman of Value,” Cassandra Mendez

lying on the bed while observing the entire scene in silence.

“Don’t you recognize me? I’m the h. . .” the hero responded, confused, but Theo interrupted him before he finished his sentence.

“He’s a citizen who just came to visit,” Theo interrupted quickly and a little nervously.

“Oh, I see,” the woman responded while staring at the hero.

“My name is Al,” the hero responded confidently, while Theo looked at him, surprised.

“Nice to meet you,” Nina responded kindly, with a smile on her lips.

Nina told Al her story about how she had ended up in that place and how Theo brought money or sustenance to those forgotten lands.

“It’s amazing what they’ve done with this place,” the hero commented without taking his eyes off all the people who were there.

“When I questioned what you were doing with so much money, I didn’t expect you to invest it here,” Al said to Theo when they finished the tour.

“I’m not investing it; I’m taking care of my people since no one else did,” the faceless villain responded a little seriously as he watched the sunset, sitting on the rubble of a building that was still relatively stable.

“I understand your reasons, but there are better ways to do it,” the hero told him, sitting next to him.

“You do your things, hero. In the end, we are enemies and we don’t have to agree on what we do to live,” he commented, thus ending their conversation, and returning to the building.

The hero and villain followed the same routine as always: they fought, someone won; though, they didn’t meet again until the next day.

Most days, the Faceless Villain wonders if he really is the villain or just another person trying to survive, or if the hero really saves people or just pretends.



“Voice,” Tom Avery

What Ever Happened to Alicia?

Jesus Flores

“Spring,” Paul Troe



The sun had not begun to touch the horizon to expose the intense hues of the neon blues and warm reds of every giant machine’s vibrant lights. Music played in the background to complement. I heard the latest music from famous bands at the time, from the Eagles to Metallica. And so, the children gallop like wild mustangs from the grasslands. New couples sat timidly across from one another, afraid to invoke a conversation. The smell of all-too-familiar foods made a person only pretend to justify its cost. The ambiance of the setting was alive and growing, never-ending. People rushed in like a bird flock, migrating to a temporary new stay.

The annual fair was the one thing people from the town all engaged in. The city was quiet, and everyone kept to themselves. But everyone knew each other back then. Every good deed and every sin. There was no such thing as a secret. The typical small town passing along when we didn’t have phones and communication was at its earliest stages.

Alicia was a girl from a small town, just like I was. She was beautiful, and no one would tell you otherwise; her skin was softer than her feathers. Who spoke mutely and elegantly but was confident. Her eyes were dark and gave off a warmth like a slow-burning fire. I was the opposite; I wasn’t confident or brave; I spoke rarely; she had friends, I didn’t; she was my opposite. She needed to approach me first. My mind would never allow my mouth to say the words I wanted to tell her.

But it had been a week since we agreed to meet at the fair. So finally, after waiting for her to show up, she arrived. We made eye contact, and she looked up to her parents for confirmation before approaching me. I had felt like a stone, cold and rigid, afraid to say anything. She then tapped me on the shoulder and raced off like a train. And it was so; the chase was on.

Everything was dull. I could no longer recognize the people around me, the smell of corndogs or the smell of barbeque. She was my only focus.

She was quick – a little too fast. Her parents were yelling at her from behind, but we kept creeping more profoundly and deeper into the crowd despite their plea for her to remain close. We were only focused on the objective at hand: whether to tag them or not to get tagged at all.

Her hair was being guided by the hands of the wind. She pushed and stretched her legs far in front of her, not deviating from her original pace.

She ran confident and unafraid with a bit of caution, diving into the crowd like a seal. And then, in an instant, she struck an adult, pushing him to almost fall. He stumbled, but just as quickly as she hit him, he recovered the same.

Rather than looking immediately, he stood there as if he were still processing what had happened. Then, he tilted over her like a tower as he slowly pans around. He smiled at her in a way that was only slightly uncomfortable. His mouth's corners stretched from ear to ear, giving the appearance that his entire face was made of rubber. Though he smiled with his lips, his eyes were not. Grudgingly, we retreated, fearing that any consequence would soon arrive. Then she simply shot off, and I trailed behind.

The excitement in the air dissipated quickly because I could only think about the guy we had seen. I could not help but see him in my thoughts, with his disheveled, unkempt style, corrupt smile, and yellowing teeth. She was ahead of me, so I called her name. Was she thinking back on what had occurred? I was ready for the play to end so I could look for refuge in an adult. It scared me, and I didn't want to go on.

Just a few minutes had passed since we began to play. The sun had already set considerably, the adults were out of work, and people were arriving in large numbers. Now, the somnolent little town appeared to be more significant. Her muffled laughter was still audible to me. I was getting more exhausted as she outlasted me considerably, and I was losing speed as she was getting faster.

Then, on the right of my peripherals, he was there again. Watching her run. His grin was gone, no longer smiling; his eyes were pierced like a hawk waiting for its moment to strike. My heart stopped, and I felt like I froze for a split second in midair.

I then heard her parents' cries and howls as I snapped my head toward them. "Alicia, where are you? Where are you, baby?!" I glanced back and found that I could no longer see her. She was gone, swiftly drowning in the throng of people as they passed in endless waves. Strangely enough, he had also vanished.



"Lost," Ji Dupree

Minnesota West Community and Technical College's Humanities and Fine Arts Programs

The English Transfer Pathway AA offers students a powerful option: the opportunity to complete an Associate of Arts degree with course credits that directly transfer to designated English bachelor's degree programs at Minnesota State universities. The curriculum has been specifically designed so that students completing this pathway degree and transferring to one of the seven Minnesota State universities* enter the university with junior-year status. All courses in the Transfer Pathway associate degree will directly transfer and apply to the designated bachelor's degree programs in a related field.

*Universities within the Minnesota State system include Bemidji State University; Metropolitan State University; Minnesota State University, Mankato; Minnesota State University Moorhead; Southwest Minnesota State University; St. Cloud State University; and Winona State University.

The Liberal Arts Program leads to a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science degree. This program provides students an opportunity to test several occupational areas before making a final decision by acquainting them with all the basic fields of human knowledge. The program meets the requirements for the Associate of Arts Degree and Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC).

The Associate of Arts degree can be used to fulfill the freshman-sophomore general education requirements at all state universities and most four-year colleges and universities in other states. The degree is the basic graduation award toward which most students will work if they intend to transfer. It emphasizes a broad general education.



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