

Messiah College

# 2014 Young Writer's Workshop



# Student Poetry



*Anna Marie Fostik*

**It's A Bird! It's A Plane! Wait, No, Its Just Me.**

On top of the roof I sit perched ready to fly,

to imitate that of the birds passing by in the sky.

I have no wings made of feathers, or a beak as strong as steel,

but I do have flying goggles and a parachute which is ideal.

I stand on the sun-baked tiles eager for a try,

to feel the wind sweeping over my skin, sunlight in my eyes.

I look back briefly to say my goodbye

but am caught off guard by the next surprise.

The wind so strong and I so light,

there was no way I could put up a fight.

The wind catches in the fabric of my parachute,

dragging me, pulling me, whipping me around;

it is only when I slam into a tree trunk that I frown.

### **The Me I Once Was**

She stared in the mirror,

dazed and confused.

"Why me?" she asked.

"Why me?", she looked down in dismay, of who she had become.

She had lost, all hope in who she was,

the old her was nothing,

but a memory of the past.

She had changed for the worse,

but would God still forgive her.

### **Friendship**

Friendship is that special bond,

that sticks two people together.

Better than glue ever would,

and ever could. Friendship is a roller-

coaster, so, I hope you're ready,

for the ride. It goes up, and down,

and all around. There are even, friendships that fall off the tracks.

Friends can be fake or real,

your greatest joy or deepest fear.

True friends are the ones,

who never let you do stupid things,

well at least not alone.

Just remember this,

and do what it takes, to be a true

friend to all in need.

Well, because everyone can use a good friend.

## **A Fathers Love**

From day one he's been here

So many times he has wiped away countless fears

Love for his young daughter, so sincere

When you think about a father's love, oh so much comes to mind

Of course there's no perfect dad but I'd say mine is pretty close

Of course we fight everybody surely knows

But a special love like this is worth fighting for

No other love can come to mind or compare to that special love from father to daughter

## **Writer's Block**

When I sat down to write today

A cube of wood got in my way

It plopped itself down on my blank page

Needless to say I felt enraged

I then tried to type on my laptop

Using the new keyboard I just bought

The cube came back and smashed in the keys

I shouted "Go away dammit! Please?"

Then i saw a name tag, stuck on the block

It read only "writer's" and, uh...hhhmmm

\*BANG\*

It's back!

## **Crazy For The Call Of The Void**

Setting: a cliff in Jamaica (stage) standing high above a rocky walking path crowded with people (audience)

Scene: girl stands at the edge of the stage (cliff) and begins first talking to herself and then eccentrically yelling to people below her.

“l’appel du vide, yes, there is a word to describe the feeling, my favorite feeling. L’appel du vide is a french phrase often used by wanderlust ridden adventurers when found in high dangerous places. It can’t be translated exactly in the english language but the closest option would be “Call of the void”. It is described as the sudden want to jump from high places or swerve your car off the highway and down in the river. Oh but I assure those wondering that it is not out of suicidal contemplation. But rather brought about by your brains subconscious saying that jumping off this cliff is the strongest choice action you can make in this particular situation. Swerving into the river or diving to a rock floor will affect your life more than any choice you could make then. It is also said that some of the humblest people you meet may experience it the most, or at least more than those who are found in a position of power elsewhere in their lives. It goes to show that somewhere deep in us all there is a hidden craving for power and dominance. Though the quiet underdogs may not lead or direct peers in their lives they will then hunger for control of a large outcome in their personal lives. L’appel du vide has nothing to do with those wanting to end their lives. yet it is often misunderstood by society as such a state of mind. I was only 8 the first time I remember having this sensation, almost being pulled by an invisible force toward the crumbling edge of an unfenced section of the Grand Canyon. I’m pretty sure if it hadn't been 106 degrees i would've had goosebumps. But enough about me already! thats not what I’m here for, I’m here to encourage all of you to be exposed to this phenomenon, to become not only an acquaintance of it but a dear friend to adore each time you meet! please come one come all! Stand on the edge of the cliff! Lean your torso over the rim! And feel l’appel du vide!

Doesn't anyone want to join? Anyone? No? Wait! why are you calling 112!? I’m not crazy!

**MENTALLY ILL**

As I walk down the hall

Of this crazy, dark place

I notice a girl,

With the biggest smile on her face.

She's yanking her hair

Yelling crazy things

I run away scared

I don't know what to think.

I want to get out of this place

I did nothing wrong.

Just sliced a guys' face

And poked his eyes out with tongs.

*Ethan Moser*

## **An Encore of Shadows**

An encore of shadows:

The cursed spirits quench Hell,

But I tell you,

I am not an angel of death,

Not a goddess of love to wicked, mortal men

I am a maiden,

    a simple woman,

    a hero.

And I wonder:

How can the world be like drunkards and horny monsters;

Villains that haunt the perilous winters

Their cries sounding a crescendo ,

A harmony falling from a real pretty mouth.

Their lips drip red drool to the beat

Of violin songs tuned to a minor key.

And how can the world be like a destruction of wild cats,

Feral and feline like a troop of bearded ladies,

Caged up behind bars of iron and necessity.

Living a life full of gawking boys sucking salt off their peanuts

Because surviving this captivity is better than dying in the wild.

The wild where your mother can't protect you

From the vampires of business and parasites in suits

Chanting "freedom" as if you can't see

The lock on the door or the broken bulb

Of your night light in the corner.

And I don't mean, when I compare you to cats,

To call you a pussy, but if the shoe fits  
Then sprint through the forest in socks,  
Pierce your feet with pine needles and trace  
The maps of pin prick holes to the realization,  
That while the glass behind your eyes may be cracked,  
It hasn't shattered yet.  
And the floodgates have yet to erupt in waves of sordid blue honey,  
Have yet to coat the wings of angels in artificial sugar,

And promises.  
Promises that I could shine like a quiet truth,  
That I could escape lives full of discontent,  
But I tell you,  
I am not an angel of death,  
Not a goddess of love to wicked, mortal men.  
I am a delirious girl  
    a flurry of wisdom  
    a chance to inspire  
    a gorgeous dream of fiction  
    a hero.

And I'll spend my life watching  
The world be like other things, but struggle to commit to one.  
A simile praying to a god that he doesn't believe in,  
Chanting in accidental rhythm,  
"I wish to be a metaphor."

## Whitmanian Rants

"Avoid the clichés," my teacher tells me,  
"But clichés are clichés for a reason," I reply  
"And when I tell you that silence is deafening  
I don't say it to sound profound,  
I say it because it's true,

It's true that when the chirps and tweets of bird fly south,  
Along with their mouths and feathers,  
I am stunned and crippled by the absence of white noise,

And it's true that the sirens and whirs of the city,  
All hard, mechanical, metallic, loud,  
Fade as the sound of my tires on asphalt is shattered by gravel roads and dust,

And it's true, that I miss the music of voices  
The voices that surrounded me, inflated with laughter as helium balloons,  
High pitched and cycling,  
The voices that were cut off when that car door slammed home,

And it's true that the memory of her voice on my ear,  
Is eroding with passing days, torn,  
By wind or wave or flame, away from me,  
Her voice, full of inflection, passion, a broken beauty,  
Formed and culminated by years of her mother yelling,  
'I wish I'd never had you'  
And it's true that the way she said "beauty",  
was scarred and broken like her,  
And I wonder if we all sound scarred."

"They say that 30 minutes of dead silence will drive a man mad,  
So don't call it cliché, or a broken record, or a track stuck on repeat,  
Because it's true,  
Silence  
    Is  
        Deafening."

## **Apples**

And how lucky the apples must be,  
to be eaten full and ripe and whole  
save for seed and stems to breed new life  
while oranges are like bone,  
their marrow sucked out until nothing  
but an exoskeleton is left.  
Live and bright, but dead inside.  
And how lucky the apples must be.

*Isabel Villegas*

## **TIME IS MADNESS**

A single clock sits on a wall.

Dead silence surrounds all

But the clock ticks on

Tick-tock, tick-tock

Nonstop it goes

Tick-tock, tick-tock

We begin to center our lives around it

Tick-tock, tick-tock

Now time has become a perfect norm

Its taken place in our hearts, in various forms

Still the clock ticks on...

Tick-tock, tick-tock

Then the madness begins,

Slowly, but strong.

Tick-tock, tick-tock

We tremble we shake.

Tick-tock, tick-tock

We grow anxious in wait

Tick-tock, tick-tock

Is it noon yet?

When's tomorrow?

Tick-tock, tick-tock

We forget how to live, and it's such a sorrow!

Tick-tock, tick---

Let's stop all the clocks,

And go back to normal

Let's live in the present,

And not be so formal

Let's let go of our worries

And live free of time.

## **Silence**

Silence, utter silence, fills the earth, so nothing but silence can be found.

Silence overpowers, stifles, smothers anything trying to break through.

Silence, deadly silence, fills the void, and nothing exists except the silence, wearing its grey crown.

Silence deafens, controls, kills every half-formed thought and obscures it from view.

Silence stifles, muffles, overpowers, defines, shapes

Silence deadens, smothers, mutes, absorbs, takes

Silence is selfish, controlling other sounds, until it is the only one heard

Silence begs to be seen, to be heard, calls out for attention but uses no words.

Silence, quiet silence, stifles, slows

Silence, living silence, mutates, grows

Silence, throbbing silence, controls, fills

Silence, deafening silence, destroys, kills

Silence creeps throughout the room, silence grows, buds, blooms.

It grows a heart, takes a breath, then it rears its ugly head.

Throbbing, beating, pulsing, heating, now a breathing living being.

The silence thrills me, oh how it fills me, fills every empty and occupied space in the world

It continues to be silent, yet continues to be heard.

My blood rushes like water through my veins, yet it continues to be heard

My mind is as blank as an untouched sheet of paper, yet it continues to be heard

My very bones crumble and return to the dust from which they came, yet it still continues to be heard.

A silence so deep, so profound, that the waters of the ocean shake

And the stones that composed empires of old tremble

And still, it continues to be heard.

The silence rolls and crackles like thunder, the storm about to begin

I can hear the distant raindrops, see the clouds closing in

As lightning rips through the clouds above, as darkness fills the sky

The silence acts as a barrier, the sound of nothingness fills my mind,

The pressure increasing, the temperature heating, the storm living and beating,

The silence is pressing heavily upon me, the air is hard to breathe, I am about to give in

When everything stands still.

Time is frozen, the spell is broken, and I hear a sound, a precious sound, break the barrier

I can hear the raindrops, I can hear the boom of the clouds, I can hear what's outside of my head

I take a deep breath to clear my mind, thankful that I can breathe again

Silence, peaceful silence, fills the earth, calming, comforting, bringing a sense of tranquility

Silence, humble silence, quietly listening, seeking attention with humility

Silence calms, frees, envelops, tranquilizes, stills

Silence comforts, caresses, warms, lovingly fills

Silence eases, relieves, safeguards, cradles, loves.

*Rachel Millary*

## **A Blowing Leaf**

As the wind whips the leaf round it's sure to fall

Falling away from its staple simple leaving all

Turning, churning, and changing, being ever influenced by the whispers of the wind.

Detached, yearning for a place to stop decaying

Someplace worth staying.

You O mind, as you listen

The hoarse croaks of voices penetrate your walls

Your resolve weakens to the brittle bark from which you came.

The noise from outside grows louder and then changes

Until the deafening roars become utter silence.

You O mind, as you speak

You try but all you feel is a gaping hole where your mouth should be

Perhaps you're doomed to listening

And always considering others as they continue to croak like frogs in a bog.

You O mind, as you fly

Weights lifted, voices from tongues gifted

And again you think of a leaf

Changing, blowing, perhaps even soaring

Yearning even as the paths twist and crumble

Learning to allow ourselves to influence as well as be influenced.

You O mind, can't you see

The difference between us and a leaf is that when we fall

We can get back up and move forward.

*Sarah Trindell*

## **Aerossault**

Boys who wear too much body spray,

Really, I think, need to go away.

It sticks to your clothes

And clogs up your nose

And really ruins my day.

Boys who wear too much body spray

Never stop applying halfway

It's really unbearable -

That crap is unwearable!

The scent of these boys cannot stay.

The boys who wear too much body spray

Have just gone out to play

They've gone out to play soccer

And ooh - what a shocker!

They brought their Axe with them today.

# Student Creative Writing Pieces



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# Courtney Liebler

## Melissophobia

Buzz.

The man examines his outfit.

White shirt. White pants. White shoes.

“The color white will make you all but invisible to bees,” the internet had said.

Buzz.

The man approaches his completely white and barren house. His house used to be red but of course, he could not have that.

“Red attracts bees!” he had said to his nosy neighbors.

The whole neighborhood questioned his sanity the day that he removed all plants from his yard.

“Where there are plants, there are bees!” he had declared with conviction.

Strolling up his walkway now, he shakes his head at his neighbors’ colorful homes and bustling gardens.

It’s like they want the bees to attack them, he thinks.

Buzz.

The faint buzzing sound grows louder.

Buzz.

The man sprints to his door.

BUZZ.

He fumbles for his keys.

It is too late.

“OUCH!” shrieks the man.

He has been hit. A bee stinger is lodged in his finger.

The man has lost the battle, but not the war.

He enters his home, an attack plan for tomorrow already spinning in his head.

The war will rage on.

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**Courtney  
Liebler**

## Struck

I sit, stationary at the back of Stella's, a small bakery in my hometown. I stare blankly out the long clear windows at the front of the store. Tracy, Stella's daughter is working in the shop this morning. It is early and she yawns as she asks me what I want. I ask for a small cup of chamomile tea and a biscuit with some raspberry jam and butter. I can hear Tracy working in the kitchen, opening and closing the oven and turning on the mixer. The smell of warm cinnamon buns wafts around the room as Tracy carries out the tray of large sticky rolls, white icing oozing down the sides onto the tray. She brushes her caramel-colored hair out of her face and wipes the flour on her apron. The morning sun shines through the windows, causing me to squint. It's hot in the bakery and Tracy flips the switch that turns on the fan as she sets down the cinnamon rolls. I can see the morning traffic starting outside- everyone rushing to their jobs. I look at my watch; it's 8:05. He should be here by now. I think of him, his dark brown hair and bright green eyes- the color of the sea. His laugh is a deep warm sound, and when he smiles, deep dimples appear just above his strong chiseled jaw line. I look at my watch again, 8:11. Where is he? I pick up the spoon Tracy gave me and stare down into my tea, stirring it in \_\_\_\_\_ circles- causing a whirlpool. The phone rings in the other room and Tracy rushes off to get it. The bell rings as someone opens the door. I glance up and then do a double take. There he is, his smile spreading and his piercing green eyes staring, not at me but at Tracy who had just entered the room. He didn't seem to notice me, but instead stood transfixed as Stacy walked up to him and asked, "Can I help you?" He opened his mouth but not a sound came out. He tried again, "Uh...yes, um...I guess I'll have a um...medium coffee." He stood, as if in a daze, watching as Tracy prepares his coffee. I got up and moved quietly but quickly towards the narrow hallway. I didn't stop until I had shut the bathroom door behind me with a snap. For a minute I just leaned my head against the door, breathing heavily, my stomach rising and falling simultaneously.

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# Ellie Kastelein

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## Emily Hart

### The Puppet (Prologue)

“Lovey,” shouted the toymaker with glee “I’ve finished him, would you like to see him?”

A curvy middle-aged lady with big curly white hair rushed down the stairs of their apartment into her husband’s musty-smelled, dirty, and semi-cluttered workshop, where he held his latest creation: a china doll no larger than an unsharped pencil with blue glassy eyes and a small nose above his pursed red lips. He wore a navy blue cap covering his short red-blondish hair, and he wears a blue overalls on top of his white buttoned down shirt. The toymaker’s wife gasped and smiled in awe of this creation. She instantly fell in love with it: a love as powerful as what she felt for her husband.

“Honey, he’s beautiful...he’s beautiful! What a delightful boy! What a beautiful delightful boy!” she kissed her husband on the cheek warmly, congratulating him on his work.

“Thank you, Lovey! But do you think Willa will love this gift?” questioned the toymaker with concern as the smile faded from his face.

“Rueben, darling, don’t you ever think that! Your granddaughter always enjoys your creations! She will more appreciate-”

“You listen to your wife, Rueben. She has a point you know.” Said the china doll in a squeaky voice.

Lovey caught her breath when she heard the doll talk. She was surprised to see that the doll could actually talk like a real human. But then she was wondering if the doll could really talk or if Rueben was just throwing like a ventriloquist. She couldn’t imagine Rueben using his ventriloquism to make him talk because he always threw his voice by stretching one side of his lip towards the puppet. “Is this real or is this my imagination?” thought Lovey.

“Rueben are you making him talk?” she asked while staring at the doll.

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## Emily Hart

Rueben gave his wife a quizzical look as if she spoke Japanese. “No and I’m sure you’ve seen me use ventriloquism before, right?”

“Yes, and it’s awful, no offense darling. Did you practice?”

“No, I didn’t practice. Why are you still giving me that smile? You don’t believe me here,” he laid the doll on a cleared space on his worktop and the doll immediately stood up and started to sing and dance even though there was no music,

*I’m not a china doll I’m a puppet, boy,*

*I’m the children’s chatty little talking toy.*

*Don’t need a hand or voice to just laugh and rejoice,*

*I’m controlled by a cloy spirit.*

*Every time I see or hear a weeping child,*

*I would quickly stop it before it drives me wild.*

*So I would ask what’s wrong and he would tell me all,*

*And you’ll hear me sing this song:*

*The heels of my shoes go click-click-click,*

*The swinging of my arms goes whoosh, whoosh, whoosh.*

*My toes hit bang bang,*

*And I sing la, la.*

*A spoonful of sugar for your medicine,*

*And flutah of the fluter would go toot, toot,*

*And the trumpet’s blaring tra la la la la.*

*When the heels and the toes hit,  
And the flute toots her last pitch.  
When I'm done I ask you, child,  
Are you happy?*

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## Emily Hart

Lovey stared in complete shock and amazement after his performance: utterly speechless. Her husband was right, it wasn't ventriloquism. It was pure magic from the spirit that goes by the name of Happiness. Her thoughts were now filled of how Willa, the birthday girl, would not only appreciate him, but love him. She would be carrying him around from place to place claiming him as her little brother, playing games with him, singing, dancing, etc. Oh Lovey couldn't contain her excitement when thought of the look on her grand-daughter's face when she sees him.

Willa was all dressed up as a princess dancing with her imaginary prince charming in her messy "Ball" room. She wore a plastic crown on her blonde curly hair, a pink Sleeping Beauty dress, and plastic shoes on her feet. Ever since she was little and believed in princesses, she always wanted to have somebody outside of her family to love her, like a prince or just a special friend. She's lonely at home and at school and she's too shy to make friends or talk to anyone. Willa danced and danced until her Grandpa stopped her by saying,

"Hey, birthday girl! How about a new dancing partner," He pulled out the doll for her to see. Willa's eyes grew in interest and excitement. She was going to grab the doll but her grandpa held up his pointer finger and told her to wait. He placed the doll on her smooth perfumy carpeted floor and the doll got up on his feet and performed the same song that he sang to Lovey. When he was done, the granddaughter giggled and clapped for him. Because the doll could talk through the spirit of Happiness like a puppet, she decides to name her new friend Puppet.

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## Emily Hart

For a month she and Puppet had been hanging out together everywhere they go. Willa couldn't be anymore happier when she's with Puppet. Any time she forget to bring him with her, she would fret and would sprint towards him when she got home.

"Puppet," Willa asked one evening while she climbed to bed.

"Yes, darling?" Puppet replied while gazing at the clear starry sky through the window.

"Did Grandpa made you or mend you? Because sometimes he would pick up broken toys and mend them and would give it to me or the original owner if he knew them,"

The happiness in Puppet's blue eyes vanished when a gloomy image of him with a missing an eye and he wore ripped and stained clothing. The top right corner of his head was shattered and he was missing some fingers on his left hand, he remembered the good and bad times of his past.

"Willa, my darling, may I tell you a story?" he asked in a small voice.

"Oh, please do. I love you're stories!"

Puppet hopped down from the window and landed on the bed and sat on Willa's lap, she giggled a little bit and gave her undivided attention towards the china doll.

"What I'm going to tell you is a story about my adventure around the world that started in a toy shop in London."

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# Everly Mancuso

## Not Just A Disability, It's A Lifestyle

Sean had been home for a week and he was handling it just well. None of my friends could understand why I didn't want to bring them home anymore. They thought that they did something wrong. I kind of pushed everyone away for that week. Only two of my friends stayed, Jasper and Ellie.

I've known these two for my whole life. They've just never met Sean before. I kept my home life a secret to everyone. All they knew about it was that I had both parents and a brother, which they knew very little about. I hadn't wanted anyone to change their opinion about me that much. They only know the facts that are important.

"Hey Ali! Can we come over and hang tonight?" Ellie asked me one day. I pretended to look through the calendar on my phone.

"Sorry. We're busy tonight," I shrugged, then thought of a compromise. "Why don't I come over to your place this weekend?" I suggested. She smiled and nodded.

"Cool. Let Jas know. Just warn him that if he gets on my nerves, he better run," she pointed at me. I laughed and we walked our separate ways. Ellie was sweet in all, but tell her a secret and the whole school finds out. I found that out the hard way when I accidentally told her who my crush was. She blabbed it to the entire school and he found out. I never trusted her after that. Jasper was walking over to me, with a big smile on his face.

"Hey!" he said as he rested his arm on my shoulders. I smiled up at him. He was about a head taller than me.

"We are meeting up at Ellie's house this weekend to hang," I told him and he nodded. I poked his chest. "But she told me to tell you that if you get on her nerves, you better run,"

"Oh come on!" he exclaimed and I rolled my dark brown eyes.

"Jas," I raised an eyebrow at him. He grumbled and agreed. "Good. So, what's up?"

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## Everly Mancuso

“I just wanted to check on you,”

“I’m good. Why do you ask?” I started to get nervous and when I get nervous, I twirl my long wavy hair around my finger. A bad habit that can turn my finger purple if I pull to tight.

“It’s just that, until a week ago, you were a social butterfly and now you’re not,” he stepped in front of me and shoved his hands in his pockets. “I just want to find out if you’re ok,”

“Yea. Everything is fine. Why wouldn’t it be?” I asked, knowing that my voice was shaking.

“Something IS up isn’t it?” he stepped closer to me.

“I would rather not talk about it,” I stepped back from him, putting my hands up. Then I turned away from him and walked to my class. There were running steps behind me.

“Ali!” he yelled behind me. I just kept walking. “What’s wrong?” he ran in front of me. I put my head down.

“I have to go to class Jas,” I turned the other way and ran to my class. Jas didn’t need to know about my brother as much as everyone else didn’t need to know. I just don’t want to open that can of worms yet.

I walked home from the bus stop. Jas would drive me home, but I told him that it wasn’t necessary today. Sean’s new TSS was coming over today, so I was going to meet them. My mom could be uberly overprotective about my brother. So far, I think we went through about 30 TSSs’.

“Ali!” she yelled when I walked in the door. I slowly walked over to where she was. She was sitting on the couch with, I assumed, was Sean’s new TSS. All of his other ones were ladies, but not that one. For the first time in forever, he had a male TSS. It had been a while since he had one of those.

“Ali, this is Chad, Sean’s new TSS,” my mom introduced me. I smiled at him. He did the same.

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# Everly Mancuso

“Nice meeting you Chad. Well, I have a lot of homework to do. I’ll be in my room if you need me,” I stated and went into my personal cube. Getting settled at my desk, I grabbed out my laptop and started typing one of my stories. There was a light knock on the door. “Yea,” I said, on a role with writing that I didn’t pay attention to who was coming in.

“Ali,” a voice said behind me. My mom. “What’s wrong?”

“It’s just that... I... It’s hard to put into words,” I struggled with the words.

“I know that ever since your brother came back, it’s been hard on you. You’re a trooper for accepting everything that has happened,” she patted me on the shoulder and walked back out there. I let out a long sigh and went back to working on my story.

I had worked on my writing for about an hour before there was a knock on the front door. Thinking nothing of it, I kept working. When someone opened my bedroom door, I turned to find Jasper. My eyes grew large. Chad was still here, so he most likely saw his car. Immediately, I thought of an excuse.

“So, I see that you’re busy,” he crossed his arms over his chest.

“Jasper, let me explain!” I jumped up.

“Why would you lie to me?” his eyes showed that he was really hurt.

“Please understand that...I...It’s hard to explain right now,” I stuttered, struggling to find the right words.

“Yea. That’s because you haven’t come up with an excuse yet,” he stormed out of my room.

“Jasper!” I screamed running after him. My mom was sitting in the kitchen, watching Sean and Chad mess around in the

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# Everly Mancuso

pool. It was October and our pool was still opened if you were wondering. The doctor said that it was ok, so my mom went with it. She heard us coming and turned to us. Right away, she knew that she had to leave. I grabbed his arm to stop him.

“Ali, let go,” he growled.

“Please Jasper. I don’t want to lose you,” I choked out. There was a droplet of salt that trailed its way into my mouth.

“You should’ve thought of that before you tried to lie to me,” he jerked his arm out of my grasp and ran out of the house. He slammed the door shut behind him. I was full out crying now. I just lost my best friend.

“Honey,” my mom walked over to me. I shrugged away from her touch and ran into my room. Falling face down onto a pillow, I started crying.

Jasper hadn’t talked to me for a week. He didn’t even bother going to Ellie’s house. She thought that it was weird, but I just shrugged it off. The three of us had lunch together, so it was just Ellie and I for that period of time. Jasper was sitting with some of his other friends. I was watching him and he turned to me. He sent me a look and I turned away.

“Are you two ok?” she asked when she saw us staring at each other.

“Hm?” I turned my attention to her.

“You guys haven’t talked for a week. What’s going on between the two of you?” she asked. I sighed and shook my head. Looking down at my plate, I continued eating my pizza that I had bought for lunch. “I can’t take it!” Ellie grumbled after a few minutes and got up. She walked over to him. I gasped, getting up and running away. The only place that I thought of where I could go to be alone was the auditorium.

It was relatively close to the cafeteria. There were two levels to it. Not many people knew how to get up to the second

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# Everly Mancuso

level, but I had. It was a place for me to go to clear my head. Plus it was good for some peace and quiet. The auditorium was used for pep rallies, concerts, assemblies, and the musical. I sat in the front seat, close to the railing. Leaning forward, I rested my arms on the bar and my head on top of them.

“Ali,” someone spoke behind me. I turned my head to find Jasper. He looked hurt, but he came over to sit next to me. “You’re hiding something big. I can tell,” he spoke up after a few minutes. We looked out to the stage.

“Ali, tell me the truth, are you hiding something?” he asked.

“Leave it alone Jasper,” I grumbled.

“You are! Tell me,”

“No,”

“I can tell that you are hiding something from me!” Jasper yelled in my face.

“Leave it be!” I responded just as loudly.

“What are you hiding?!” he tried again, except softer.

“Nothing,” I told him, barely audible.

“Is there another person involved?” he asked.

“Yes,” I mumbled.

“Are they more important than our friendship?”

“Well...”

“Who is it?!”

“It’s my brother!” I screamed, my voice echoing in the auditorium.

“Since when do you have a brother?” his voice lowered.

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# Everly Mancuso

“Since he was born. He just was sent away to another place,”

“Why?”

“He...um...” I paused.

“He what?”

“He has autism!” I stood up and turned away from him. “My parents couldn’t handle it because he was getting rougher so they sent him away,”

“What’s autism?” he asked, coming around to face me. I sighed.

“Someone who experiences the senses a lot differently. Someone who is developing at a slower pace than everyone else,”

“Why haven’t you told me about this before now?”

“I was scared of what you were going to say. I was scared that you were going to look at me differently. I thought that you would leave,” I looked down at the carpeted floor.

“I would never leave you,” he wrapped me in a hug. We stood like that for a while, then he put me out at arms length. “Are you going to tell anyone else?”

“There’s the same reasoning behind it. I don’t want to be the center of some rumor,”

*Author Note: People never understand what families of a child with special needs goes through on a daily basis. Usually I tell this to people that I know, but this story is loosely related to my life. Now that you know this information, treat people who are balking in the halls with understanding, not judgment. Don’t just think that someone having a tough go is a brat, they might have a serious problem.*

“Him”

He appeared to be genteel. His hands were large, but showed no form of abuse. His torso was clothed; there were no bulges or tightness that showed through his shirt.

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## Kiri Spayd

The stature of the boy was tall and when he resumed the correct, upright posture, he was taller. He wasn't towering, but just the perfect height.

Leisurely, he ambled along. He never rushed anywhere. His long strides were graceful and elegant.

A blue backpack was slung around one of his shoulders. It weighed heavily but he didn't let it show.

When he sat, he postured upward with patience. He folded his hands on his lap. His right foot tapped an inaudible beat. His chest rose and fell at a steady pace. Other than those, there were no signs of movement.

When he laid down to rest, he lay flat on his back. His strong arms settled at his sides. His body was peaceful.

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# Kynah Walston

## Grave Dancing

I once had a friend who always suggested that we go graveyard dancing. of course, he was kidding and we never did, but that is what it reminded me of. standing on the tree stump I immediately felt like I could not be disrespecting it more. Here I am, standing on the mangled carcass of something that was once so alive. The rings spiraling out of the center of the stump, looked like falling down a rabbit hole. I saw ants crawling across the no-longer living tree and thought that they too, were dancing on graves. But I know trees and ants don't have emotions, and by standing on a tree stump I am not disrespecting the tree, and that I am not dancing on graves, and that I'm just insane. "But a sane person in an insane society must appear insane." - Kurt Vonnegut

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# Mackenzie Lukacs

## She's a Sadist

She was an ember emerging from the shadows of night. In the darkness surrounding the artificial glow of the street lamp, she was an apparition of color. As she stalked farther into view, her victim grew agitated. He had caught the first glimpse of her hair and immediately averted his gaze, feigning interest in the cracks of the sidewalk. He fidgeted in await of her arrival; his hands alternated between playing with the worn hem of his jacket and clenching nervous fingers into shaking fists. He knew she enjoyed this; her steps were slowing, her eyes roaming about his form, sizing him up. Already the game had begun.

He felt her heated stare, but kept his shoulders hunched and head bowed. He inspected a mound of loose gravel, thinking of all they had told him. He had sought them out as soon as he knew she was looking for him; he had been drilling for months to remember their tactics. He was not to speak to her, only absorb what she had to say. To bow his head was a willing sign of weakness, a strategy that was easier to follow in practice than he had once assumed. They had told him that she would be frightening, yet he could not have imagined this. He was quaking beneath her gaze before she was even ten feet in front of him.

She was noiseless in approach; he did not think to look up until suddenly her feet came into view. She wore no shoes, stepping bare onto the flecks of gravel without flinching; her form was made to bear more than any soft worldly human could.

He had been told that she would be beautiful, yet his world's concept of beauty had not prepared him. He knew he shouldn't, but his eyes began to wander. Up porcelain legs and curving hips, slender torso and toned muscles. He trailed an invisible path with his eyes, taking her in. Her body was symmetrical, every inch of her impeccable; she was perfect, with no possible flaws. She seemed so luminescent, her skin aglow in pale light that could put the moon to shame. He felt as though she resembled all that was pure and perfect, all that humans could not be.

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# Mackenzie Lukacs

He had saved the space above her shoulders for last. His twitching fingers ached to roam the crevice of her collarbone, the sloping curve of her neck. He was inclined to beg her, plead to cradle her chin in his hand, run his thumb across her snowy lips - perhaps even dare to ask her for a kiss. He lusted after her glow, the aura of power she carried about her. He longed to tangle his fingers in the flames of her hair, whisper questions of intrigue. He wanted to know her, the way she worked and who - or what - she really was.

All the same, he kept his mouth firmly closed, lips pursed securely. His fists were jammed into his pockets, legs firmly planted. He had been warned before that this was her game. She would attempt to destroy him in as many ways as possible. How difficult a task it was to resist - but he met his eyes to hers and held his ground.

She watched him with a smirk lifting the edges of her pale lips. Her eyes met his, two windows to a soul colored like the sky before a storm. Grey, flickering with jolts of blue lightening and flecks of rain - she had eyes that were impossible, imposing on their own. She knew he was entranced by her appearance. He did not seem to physically interest her at all; instead, she patiently awaited his own observation to cease. When his gaze met hers once more, she smiled at him invitingly. She was ready to begin.

"I'm going to kill you," she chirped, the harsh words spilling cheerfully from her grinning lips. Shocked by her sudden declaration, his eyebrows arched high; on cue, his heart began to beat, a pleasant sound that fell upon her ears. When they had told him to prepare for her arrival, he had assumed that there would be trouble; yet the gleeful way in which she spoke of killing him caught him off guard. He felt his body prepare its fight or flight instinct, muscles coiling and adrenaline rushing through his veins. Her simple words had placed a newfound fear of God into his heart. Round two of her game had begun.

His mouth formed one word, a question unheard. He could not force the sound out, but she knew. Of course she knew.

She leaned in, wisps of coppery hair falling before her eyes. "Of course I'm not going to tell you when!" she cackled, laugh-

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# Mackenzie Lukacs

ter lines creasing her delicate countenance. Yes, they had told him how often she would do this.

"Well, I might be persuaded to tell you..." she paused, drawing out her words for effect. "How!" she decided, grinning wider than a Cheshire cat. "Do you want to know?" she nodded along with her words, as though he would mimic the action like she wanted him to. He would play the game by her rules, no negotiations.. She would cradle his fate in her palm, taunt him with what she knew, enjoying herself.

He nodded slowly, knowing he must. "Do you really?" she goaded, eyes wide in excitement. He forced his neck to bend once more, bobbing out another nod. She knew she had him. He might have been prepared to meet her, but no one could have readied him for this game she played. He was caught between subconscious awareness of her tactics and a slow falling for her words.

"I don't know, this goes against everything in my job description..." she feigned pulling back, a mischievous gleam in her eye. She looked at him sternly, as though he were at fault. "I'm not even supposed to be talking to you." She admitted. How many times had she said that before? He knew she was breaking the rules - this was a part of her lifestyle.

"But - oh, you!" the way she moaned the word made his pulse jump. A dreamy sigh escaped her lips, her expression lofty. "Your end is so deliciously... wicked." she explained, grinning at the thought alone.

"I'm surprised they're letting me do it - you know, the people upstairs," she gestured loosely towards the heavens to punctuate her words. "They have these rules about who to kill and how to do it and what's considered "torture." Can you believe it?" she scoffed in indignation. You'd think the angel of death would be in charge of her own methods." She sighed, mulling over it for a moment before stirring the air with her fingers, whisking the thought away.

"But I guess I can't complain - I've got you!" she leaned in and poked him on the nose. He recoiled from her touch, looking away with crimson cheeks. He was shaking, the nerves wrack-

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## Mackenzie Lukacs

ing his body too unbearable to sustain. He had thought he had a tight grip on the situation, but began to realize that such a thought was futile.

"And I can do whatever I want to with you." She reached forward, gripping his arm. Feeling his shiver under her fingers, she wrinkled her nose. "Oh, stop trembling," she commanded as she let go. White prints outlined by blushing skin left her mark around his biceps, and he rubbed at the tender skin.

He did not obey her, however. She noted this, and chose her next words carefully, stormy eyes appraising his reaction. "It's not going to be soon," she reassured him, her soprano voice mockingly comforting. "No, no, I'm dragging this out. I'm going to get so far into your head, you'll never purge the thought of me." She snickered, and he thought of the men who had warned him. Their advice hadn't helped; he should have known from the start. There was no escaping her sadism. To beg for mercy, as had been his plan, would result in unfathomable pain, worse than he knew was coming. She was starting round three, and the thrill of the game was much too strong to turn back now. He was her cat toy dangling above her, being batted about with unrelenting force. She was having too much fun to stop; had he the bravery to ask to end it now, he would throw her into full-force torment. He could not risk it.

"Look at your face!" She mocked, "I've already moved into your subconscious, haven't I? This is much too easy!" Her grey eyes twinkling under the yellow haze of the street lamp as her lips stretched into a gleeful grin. He stopped meeting her gaze as it began to settle in: from this day forth he would live in fear, forever wondering when his end would be.

She took in his expression and shrugged. "I've said too much, haven't I?" she asked with false concern. "You just stay here and think of me for a bit." She began backing away, sinking slowly into the shadows of night. "Don't worry - the second you start forgetting me, I'll be back." She snickered, her shining smile and flame colored hair the only visible sign of her left.

For a moment, she was silent, staring him down in the depths of the space between them. Then she stepped forward, her

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# Mackenzie Lukacs

smiling face leaning in, with a renewed excitement in her eyes. "Have you ever seen the wrath of an angel?" she asked, as though it were possible that he might have. He'd heard of what might happen, yes - but no one would dare describe it. Those who lived through such an experience would never manage to retell the tale. He shook his head left to right, wondering if perhaps she might demonstrate, if the end she had in mind would begin now.

"No?" she snickered. "Oh, then this will be fun!" She turned, leathery wings unfurling from veined shoulder blades. The words to depict her glory escaped him as he watched her ascend. Within seconds, she had made her noiseless departure, and he was alone once more. The streetlight cast its orange glow upon the man, who stood dazed, his shoulders hunched. There he stood feeling torn between wanting her to stay and wishing she had never found him.

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# Colleen Barno

## “Reaching Out for ‘Him’”

Sierra had lost herself in a daydream – thoughts of Michael, her dead boyfriend, who she missed dearly, mused within her and wrapped her in a binding thickness; her vision unclear, as if she was drowning in murky water.

She looked around. She was seated upon the dirt of the floor in the same damp darkness, and she faced it – the familiar, infuriating strip of light below the base of a door she herself could not open or pass through.

She reached her hand into the light and gazed down at her fingers, which were illuminated by the light from beyond. Sierra could see that the flakes of blood embedded into the swamps of her skin were lodged there – worse than ever, and the grime within the webs of her fingers had developed an oily crunch.

The young woman had thought her life would be better than the current nightmare she was living. Surely, Sierra was not unique in her discovery: the desire for what you never had... or barely had, and the despair for what you had lost... or for what is.

There she lay, a maggot in squalor – fallen too far to descend any farther. She was curled up into a tight ball near the door, looking like a young child playing “Hide ‘n’ Seek.” The debris of her despair piled up in invisible heaps around her, leaving no escape route, which she desperately needed. Her body ached simultaneously with fear and hope.

This door... she thought. Could it be a portal to Heaven itself? Will it lead me to where Michael went?

She thought of her last encounter with this “door to Paradise.” At that time, warmth radiated off of it as she remembered all the irreplaceable memories shared with her family.

Now, it was a door of darkness, of death. It was the thing that separated her from her one true love. Did she have faith that the door could go back toward the light, instead of drift-

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# Colleen Barno

ing away from it like a ghost leaving the earth? In relation, did she still have faith in Him?

Sierra pondered. Questions swirled around in her brain, mixing inside of her like the colored circular lines in an old-fashioned lollipop: Have I not sacrificed enough? Didn't I leave all I ever knew to travel to so foreign a place... on faith alone?

She had trusted that God would care for her and guide her; trusted – in Him, and in the “him” she had come to love. Was that not faith? She yearned to know, but she felt quite incapable of serious thought.

Outwardly, Sierra sat stewing in her wretchedness, but somewhere deep down in the fathoms of her body, some kind of spiritual squabble was taking place.

Her head, covered with dark fiery-red hair, fell miserably as she squeezed her eyes shut, mountains forming between her eyebrows. Her body shuddered as she exhaled a breath so miserable it nearly woke her from this stupor. As she did, she felt the familiar warmth of another hand upon her own beneath the door.

Her green eyes snapped open, making her look like a deer in the headlights. Unlike said deer, Sierra was quite alert.

Gazing down, she noted that the hand was most assuredly male – large and strong, but also worn. The hand looked as though it was divorced from the functioning body of a human. Still, the expression in the fingers was kind, and the warmth of both feeling and heat thoroughly apparent.

For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand. It is I who say to you, “Fear not, I will help you.”

–Isaiah 41:13

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# Colleen Barno

Was this the hand of God? Had her moment finally arrived?

“Sierra,” a familiar voice breathed softly from the room beyond.

Could it be? It could not... but it was.

“Michael?” Sierra called out tentatively, still not believing what might be happening.

“Sierra...” Michael’s voice was no more than a whisper. “My love, it is me.”

Sierra turned her hand upward so that the hands of the lovers’ lay palm-to-palm, similar to Jane and Tarzan’s way of saying “good-bye” to each other.

Michael responded with a simple squeeze of his loved one’s hand.

Sierra was not alone. She had never been alone.

Despite it all, she still had faith.

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# Mary Whelan

## Anger and Fear

“I thought you said this was the way we were supposed to go!” Ana shouted.

“No, I said that I thought this might be the way we should go!”

“So?”

“I never said I knew definitely!”

Jane kicked the rock wall in front of them.

“So, there’s no way out?” Ana slowly sat down.

“No. There’s no way out.” Jane whispered.

“Great. I didn’t even want to take that tour.”

“I doubt that anyone did.”

“Then why did we go!?”

“Pride! No one wanted to admit they were scared!”

“Well, guess what! I’m scared now!”

“I’m not...” Jane muttered.

“WHAT?!?” Ana asked more in anger than disbelief.

“I’m not scared! We are going to find a way out of here or die trying because I’m not SCARED!” Jane yelled at the solid wall before her, and with that she walked straight through it and disappeared.

## Eyes

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# Matthew Jenkins

Eyes. That's all they were. Just eyes and nothing else. I know they were supposed to be beautiful. I know that I am meant to think women are stunning creatures. My god expects it. But the feelings inside of me said otherwise.

The womanly form covered in rags that held no feeling, their voiceless gazes, their disposition to submit to men so willingly. All these qualities that I was supposed to find attractive.

But they were just eyes.

I remember stealing glances at the other boys in my Mosque, then spending hours begging god for forgiveness. I remember my neck warming up at the sight of the strong working men on the street. I remember the self-loathing I endured for years, and years.

It started with puberty, when my body first began to change. I used to think I was cursed. What is wrong with me? I would think. Why can't I just like girls? I was alone with no one to turn to. My mother and sisters were just like all the other eyes. Dutiful, submissive, silent. They could never understand. I didn't dare turn to my father, he would scold me, beat me, send me to my room until I promised to never speak such filth again.

For many years I was lost, not trusting my feelings and not wanting to. I became an expert in hiding and professional at keeping it down. Every prayer was a lie, and every blessing was a disgrace to the Holy city of Mecca.

With my adulthood came talks of marriage. My father wasn't a wealthy man, though he was far from poor. I would make a find match for any young woman with a respectable family. Luckily my father was a stubborn man. He would not settle for anything less than a beautiful, conservative, Sunni wife for his only son. I remained unmarried.

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# Matthew Jenkins

The cataclysmic event that would eventually lead to the end of my silent self-hate ironically began with a louder version of hate.

My father was shouting, holding a sign above his head. It read “death to the infidels” and this we yelled with a fevered passion. Dozens of fellow Sunni men surrounded us. I held my sign with embarrassment. I felt eyes on me. Even as part of a group, attention frightens me.

The Synagogue we were targeting today was smaller than most we protest. The building itself was measly when compared to the towering structures around it. Anything to stifle the Hebrew cause, I guess. The Jews outside were shouting back venomous slurs. Security officers created a barrier between the two parties. I would occasionally glance at my father and feel frightened by the look of pure hate in his eyes. These things always unsettled me.

They also almost always ended in violence. Once the first Sunni was past the officers, hell raised up to earth. A mosh of people filled the yard, teeth flying, blood spurting, screams filling the air.

This was the part where I always ran. Shame filled me as it always did. I should stay and fight the Jews. Fight for me people. Fight for me father. Yet my body forced me from danger.

I saw a narrow alley between two buildings. I threw myself in, praying no one saw me. I curled up, tucking my knees to my chest and putting my head between my legs. Good Muslim men never cry. They are strong and authoritarian. This I reminded myself as my chest heaved and rivers flowed from my cheeks.

I heard a sound to my right and found I was not alone. Crouched against a dumpster was a cowering Hebrew man. His dark curls bounced under his Yamaka with every snuffle, and his formal suit was ruffled. He looked scared and close to bolting. I am aware that I needed to hate him, but when I looked at him, all I saw was a frightened young man. I saw

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# Matthew Jenkins

myself. He was also quite attractive. The sight of him made me feel warm, but I was quick to shut it down.

The sound of violence raged on just around the corner, but here we were safe. I reached into my pocket, which made the Jew jump up and scurry away a few feet.

“No,” I said. I withdrew one of the many tissues I have stored. I held it out to him. Hesitantly he inched forward and sat next to me. He took it from my hand and dabbed his eyes. A silence passed between us, two sworn enemies sharing tissues. “My name is Abu,” I said.

He shifted uncomfortably, “I’m Eli, thanks...” he said, never making eye contact. A loud bang was heard and Eli cringed. Flash-bangs, that meant the riot was nearly over. Eli was obviously new to this.

Eli spoke in hushed tones, “Why does this happen? Why do you hate...” he caught himself, blushing. I gave him a sad smile and put my hand on his knee. He seemed comfortable with my touch. I don’t know why, or how, or what made me say it being the good Muslim I had to be, but the words came.

“We don’t all choose to hate. Some of us are just great liars,” I said. I gave Eli’s knee a gentle, reassuring squeeze. He looked into my eyes for the first time since I dove for cover. We seemed to share something in that moment, something immaterial. Something I didn’t understand. I could never begin to explain what it was. I felt the warmth return and hated myself for it. Just then I heard sirens and knew that the fighting was all but over. I rose and Eli rose with me.

“The riot is almost over. It’s best we rejoin now,” I said.

Eli was still gazing into my face. He looked as if he wanted to say something, opening his mouth and shutting it, eventually resolving to silence.

“I hope to see you again, in a situation better than this,” I said.

The faintest trace of a smile snuck onto Eli's pale face. He stammered, "Thanks for the tissue." He ran to join his people and I ran to join mine.

And that's how I first met him. How few words we shared. How little time we truly spent with each other. There was a connection though, there had to be. I refused to believe otherwise. That was real. The more I thought about him, the more repressed frustrations boiled to the surface. For once I didn't care. I let the warmth come. Despite how little I knew about him, I knew one thing for certain.

Eli was more than just eyes.

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# Matthew Jenkins

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# Sara Lewis

## Speechless

And so the concierge handed me the old copper key to my room and motioned to the bellhop to take me to there. With my stamped and tightly packed suitcases in hand, he lead me towards the elevator. As he walked, he made a slight limp; his back strained slightly and his neck stayed erect and stiff. Red hair, plastered against his neck from small strands of sweat that trailed down his skin and pooled at the small darker shade of red at the collar of his shirt. Watching him struggle made me want to offer to help him.

“I can carry my bags, it’s okay!”

Was something that I would’ve said, but talking to people isn’t exactly something I’m a pro at. In fact, if I had to pick between talking one on one with someone and eating a bowl of worms, I would definitely choose the worms, every time.

I stood in front of the rustic elevator as he fought, with my bags in hand the metal bars whose intricate flower design chipped of fake gold paint. It creaked and squeaked painfully loud as he finally pushed it into its holding place and leaned against it, hopelessly trying to catch his breath. He motioned to me with a bag to step inside while he kept the door open, and I complied with guilt silently growing in the pit of my stomach.

When I was past him, he quickly got in letting the bars slam shut loudly behind him. The harsh creaking and groaning of them filled the spacious hotel lobby and echoed into the hall always of the floors above.

I leaned my head against the wall that matched the door and gazed out into the lobby as we started to rise floors. I watched as we passed each hallway that were all deserted. The elevator slowly made its way to a stop, groaning and shuttering loudly as the bellhop made another attempt at opening the strong metal doors. He let me climb over him again and I cringed at our closeness. The scent of thick sweat hung around him and I tried not to wince.

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# Sara Lewis

The floor I stepped out onto was at the top, and if you leaned over the railing beside the elevator, you could see the lobby below and some of the carpet from the other floors. My gaze went from the railing to the rustic hallway that wrapped around in a circle. It had the same soft blue walls as the lobby, that reminded me of the flowers that my mother planted in the back garden or the bird that used to greet me every morning outside my window when I was small. The doors to each room were rounded at the top and were painted a lush green, the carpet was a royal purple and looked as though it had been worn down over the years from the many shoes that passed over it.

The sound of the elevator door slamming caused me to jolt, and I stood rigidly as the bellhop limped down the hall and slowly stopped at one of the doors. He glanced at me, his lake colored eyes, though dull and murky, seemed to see right through me. His mouth was in a straight line, and I thought that he was slightly annoyed. He motioned with a bag to follow him, and again I obeyed. He set down one of the bags and put his hand out towards me. I stared him confused and bit my lip unsure of what he wanted from me. He shook his hand slightly and kept the same annoyed look upon his face.

“The key.”

He said, and I made a small ‘oh’ sound and fished out the copper key that had nestled itself inside my pocket, handing it to him. He slid it into the lock and opened the door. He disappeared inside and I followed suit.

The room was one that one would think to only find in stories or movies. The bed was large and had silky pink blankets that were worn at the edges; two large pillows sat on top adorned with chocolates. The carpet was the same outside, and the walls were still the soft blue color. The bellhop set my bags on the bed and then turned to me expectingly.

Of course I wanted to say: “What? What do you want?”

But again...I couldn’t so I just stood there, and had a very...awkward stare down with him. He groaned and rubbed his eyes.

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## Sara Lewis

“A tip, ma’am. It’s polite to tip.”

I flushed in embarrassment and pulled out my wallet handing him a few pounds. He said a quiet thank you, and then left.

I eased myself onto the bed and ran my palms over the silky fabric, enjoying the smoothness of the worn out material against my rough skin. I kicked off my shoes and laid down onto the bed, my legs dangling slightly over it. The lights were dim in the room, and I cast long shadows along the ceiling, I traced out different shapes in order to entertain myself.

The air felt stifling all at once, and started to get the feeling a severe wave of homesickness. Being away from home was something I had never done before, and to do it for the first time in a foreign country? It was probably a really idiotic decision. I brought my legs up onto the bed and against my chest burying my face into my knees. My knuckles pressed tightly against my skin as I clung to my legs, causing my hands to ache. I needed a way to calm myself, I had seen a bar down in the lobby so I decided to go down there and try to get a drink.

I sat down in a plush green chair, my elbows resting against my knees as I pushed my palms against my eyes willing the panic, and nauseating feeling to go away. Repeating, ‘stupid, stupid, stupid’ due to my incompatibility to speak to the bartender when he had asked me what I’d have to drink. I felt like a ten year old child again in a restaurant, tongue tied as the waiter and her parents stared at her waiting for her to order.

A glass clinked onto the wooden table.

I looked up, to see a small glass with caramel colored liquid swishing around inside.       Scotch.

My eyes traveled further to see a woman sitting in a chair identical to mine. She had one leg crossed over the other, her arm was propped on the armrest and her head rested on her fist. Her face was relaxed but even so her lips in the center were parted, and they curved up naturally at the end, as if she

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# Sara Lewis

was meant to always smile. The color of her lips was almost like a strawberry covered in a thin coat of chocolate. Her eyes were so dark that they almost looked black, and I could see my pale distraught face in them, they were so alert, so clear. Light brown skin covered her cheeks and they made her cheeks look fuller. The light brown went down into a darker shade. Her black hair naturally fell around her face and onto her neck in soft waves and I almost felt...calm.

“Drink it,” she said, as she switched positions of her legs. My hand folded over the cold glass and I took a sip. Her lips pulled up in a smile, as I set the drink down feeling a wave of calm pass over my body.

I leaned my head back against the chair and stared at her through half closed eyes. The woman studied my face, her other hand rested on the other armrest and thrummed in simple rhythm of fives.

One: Down went the thumb.

Two: Down the index finger.

Three: Goes the middle.

Four: And the ring finger.

Five: Pinky.

“What’s your name?”

Her voice penetrated through the silence, and jolted me a little bit out of my hazy state. I decide to look directly behind her at the fire place, instead of meeting her dark eyes. I swallowed and twiddled my thumbs.

“Does it really matter?”

My voice cracked a bit, and I still kept my eyes away from hers.

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## Sara Lewis

“I suppose you’re right, what indeed is the point of names to a stranger when more than likely we will never meet again?”

I nodded in response, my mouth suddenly becoming very dry. She was odd, and I wasn’t entirely sure what to think of her. Her face said read, motherly but her eyes showed something more. What that was I still do not know.

She leaned forward, her sharply plucked eyebrows furrowed downwards. She studied my face, as if she was looking for something. If it was possible my mouth became even dryer and I started to feel nervous and anxious again.

“Have you always been this way?”

My eyes widened at her question, “How do you know?” seemed to be stuck on my tongue, I opened my mouth as if to say it in real life but I shut it again. She couldn’t possibly know, no, no, she couldn’t.

“No, not always, you weren’t like this when you were younger.”

I just stared at her in complete shock, how unbelievably rude of her to say such a thing, and yet...I didn’t feel as offended as probably a normal person would. If I was normal, I probably would’ve muttered an excuse and been on my way, but no here I was in a bar with a stranger whose name I did not know discussing my problem. Or at least, I believed we were.

After a long while she replied; “I’ll take that as a yes.”

She leaned back against the seat and resumed her previous position, head on hand, one leg draped gracefully over the other. Her lips curved up again, as if she was having a difficulty not laughing at me. Or more at the awkward situation she put me in.

“Is this what you do?” I finally asked, my voice sounding a bit stronger, which comes to me as quite a shock, I was never like this.

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## Sara Lewis

“Ah, so you do speak,” she laughed more to herself, and her smile grew. I frowned and felt a slight headache coming on. Why didn’t she just leave?

“I spoke before, did you forget?”

She laughed louder, grinning as if she had just won the lottery and her eyes seemed to flash.

“Ah, but did you really speak before?”

I hadn’t noticed, but she had stood up she smiled down at me and I continued to glare. She was tall now that she was standing, and I suddenly felt intimidated by her. But more than that I felt angry, and annoyed and it didn’t matter that I had a hard time talk to people. I really, really wanted to yell at her, throw a chair, I don’t know really, I just wanted to do something.

But before I even could, she was gone, the chair empty as if the odd woman had never been there at all. Not even a small impression in the seat left behind by her. And it was odd, but I wanted to see her again, just to make sure she had actually existed and wasn’t just a figment of my imagination as I hyper ventilated in the bar. But I never saw her again.

## Angels Unaware

When Samuel sits down not quite next to the girl but not quite apart from her, either, the metal bench creaks beneath his heft. Back in his college days, the extra weight had been more tool than weakness, reinforced with solid muscle and bones that resembled those of a small ox. Now, though, the man's girth strains against his ink-and-crimson business suit, a constant source of annoyance and insecurity. He is merely the shadow of a once-formidable warrior.

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# Dana Taylor

The girl is small, with pale, rounded shoulders and big blue eyes that gleam violet in the late afternoon sunlight. She holds a book in her spidery fingers, a small, patchwork volume embellished with pictures of wide-winged doves and twirling mint leaves. A small, pale purple sundress comes to rest around her ankles in gentle swirls, kissed by the blissfully cool summertime breeze that wafts in through the open door.

Every shift of the fabric, so slow and so beautiful, makes Samuel's gut lurch.

Her pale rosebud lips turn up to form the gentlest of smiles. "My name is Elizabeth."

The man raises a single caterpillar-like eyebrow. Oh, how his brothers had laughed on the day of his birth, how they had chortled at the sight of the babe's smooth chocolate face, its gentle beauty marred only by those thick and bushy brows. "Hello, Elizabeth."

"Are you going to tell me your name?" The girl inquires, letting the strange little journal flop against her barely-bent knees. She blinks up at Samuel through those strange eyes, round as an owl's and neither blue nor purple, but a strange, unearthly blend of the two, accented by a burst of gold around the pupils.

"No." The man responds without deliberation, nostrils flaring in his thick, flat nose. His rebuff seems to frighten the girl into silence, for she spends the next few minutes with her lips tightly pursed and her gaze fixed firmly on an empty point on

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# Dana Taylor

the wall, as though enraptured by an image that is visible to her and to her alone.

Samuel watches as a pair of nurses dash about in their smiley-faced scrubs, speaking to one another in hushed, anxious voices. The shorter and slighter of the duo, a birdlike woman with pale, tightly bound hair, bends to murmur to a hunch-backed man who shrinks away from her as though every gentle word is a flesh-piercing dagger.

Samuel bites his lip: that could be him, left reeling in the wake of words he cannot bring himself to believe.

“But it won’t be.” Elizabeth murmurs in her startlingly thick voice. She reaches out and touches her pale, stubby-nailed fingers to the wrinkled brown trunk of his arm. Samuel cannot bring himself to flinch away from the contact, however unwelcome it may be.

“Won’t it?” Samuel tries to twine his fingers together, but they are too thick. If he is disarmed by the child’s words, he does not show it. “She’s got cancer, my wife does. Found out almost a year ago, just after my kid’s birthday.” He slurs the words ‘my’ and ‘wife’ together, transforming them into a single gruff-voiced syllable, laced with love and flecked with anxiety. “The doctors- they say they can remove the tumor. They say it’ll be alright, that the surgery has a high success rate.” The man’s big back slumps over, and he lets his chin rest between those sausage fingers. “If it don’t I’ll snap the bastards’ necks, an’ I told ‘em so.”

“You love her.” Elizabeth observed in a tone just as rough as his own, just as wounded. It made Samuel feel sick- no child should be forced to bear that world-weary rasp. “You love her so much, and you’re so afraid.”

“Yeah.” The former linebacker snarled, sitting up straight and running his hands, smeared with tears and the greasy remains of hospital fries, through his graying hair. The girl did the same, a small smile flickering on her thin, almost colorless lips. Her tangled flame-colored locks slip out of their messy bun, curling and twirling around the teenager’s freckled cheeks. Samuel frowns. “The hell do you want anyway, girl?”

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# Dana Taylor

“To listen.” Elizabeth replies, quirking an eyebrow. “I thought that was obvious.”

“Looks more like a brat sticking her nose in a grown man’s business.”

“If you don’t want to talk to me, you don’t have to.”

Quiet fills the waiting room once again. An ant picks its scuttling way across the cracked linoleum floor. An old but muscle-bound woman sits in the corner, thumbing through a health magazine and spooning yogurt into her garishly pink lips.

“The operation should’ve been finished by now.” Samuel grunts.

“There’s been a complication.” His pale-faced companion replies. “Not a large one, though. They’ll be done soon.”

“How would you know?”

The girl simply shrugs, her preternatural eyes downcast. She opens the journal, turning quickly to a page that has been filled with a thin, sprawling script. “She died when you were very young, didn’t she?”

The man’s eyes, half-closed with fear and exhaustion- he’s been up for more than twenty hours by now- shoot open. “I was twelve.”

“Cancer?”

“In the skin, just like my wife. Except- oh, my old Gran... she was too proud to see a doctor, too stubborn to admit that she wasn’t so young anymore. And she hated medicine, and hospitals, and surgeries.” A smile dances on Samuel’s lips, disproportionately full, and when he raises his gaze, it is not Elizabeth he is seeing, but a woman with chestnut skin and eyes like liquid toffee. “Such a stubborn old woman, bless her soul.”

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## Dana Taylor

“She died happy.” The girl shattered the illusion with her harsh voice, so unlike Mama Christine’s lilting giggle. “You were all there with her, her babies and her babies’ babies, and that was all she ever wanted. You didn’t let her go alone.”

“In the end, we all go alone.”

Elizabeth snorts, and when her nostrils flare, Samuel can see a small ring glinting against dimpled skin. “Do you really believe that?”

“Unless the Old Man himself came down to guide her home, how else could it be?”

The child wrinkles her nose, and Samuel cannot help but picture a bright orange bunny with floppy ears and twitching whiskers. “‘The Old Man’, eh? People always do that. They assume that god is just this big, wrathful man with a bushy beard and alabaster skin and a lightning bolt in each beefy hand. I don’t know why. God could be anything- he could be a businessman with a flat nose and fluffy eyebrows and skin like hot coffee.” She grins, and those ethereal eyes shine with mischief. “God could be a little girl with rag doll hair and a pale purple dress.”

Samuel, despite his fear, despite the anxiety that has plagued his sleep for weeks on end, laughs. “God is taller than you.”

Elizabeth bows her head with a giggle. “Yes, I suppose he is.”

Another nurse comes bustling into the waiting room, his narrow face flushed with victory. His scrubs are garish and tacky, deep purple in color, patterned with polkadots and bright pink elephants. His hair is close-cropped and blonde.

The little redhead stands up, brushes off her dress despite the fact that it is flawlessly clean. “He’s here for you.” She breathes.

“Mr. Page?” The young man asks, turning towards Samuel, who had leaped to his feet long before the words were spo-

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## Dana Taylor

ken. “Ah, Mr. Page, good news. Your wife has just emerged from the operating room. The doctors are still running tests while she’s under anesthesia, but the surgery appears to have gone splendidly! It’ll be a good couple minutes before she wakes, but as soon as she does, I’ll come and get you.” Even as he bustles off, the boy continues to smile, as though nothing pleases him as much as bearing this most splendid of news.

Elizabeth moves so that her slender hand grazes across Samuel’s broad shoulders. The man reaches up, his thick fingers enveloping his companion’s- his savior’s- skinny ones. “Told you so.”

The man’s face, so large and heavy and fearful mere moments ago, is now shining with sweet joy and salty tears. “I don’t know how you know what you know, girl, but thank you. Oh god, thank you.” She is okay. He thinks, and the words are almost too beautiful to be real. My wife is going to be okay.

Elizabeth stoops to retrieve her little blue-and-purple writing book. She turns to move towards the door, but stops short, frowning, and asks, as if on a whim: “Do you believe in angels, Samuel?”

“Right now, girl, I believe in everything, every god and every angel. And I love them all.”

Samuel turns to watch Elizabeth as she departs without another word, her slender arms bouncing against an equally slender waist. Her hair has all but escaped from its once-tight bun. His eyes are drawn to her back, which seems strangely broad, contrasting awkwardly with the girl’s slight build.

He swears that he can see the silhouette of two wings, broad and red like the dying sun, emerging from both sharp shoulder blades.

## Often Upon the Little Star

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**Noel  
Mhelaney**

The Jewelry Box was a quaint little star in the clouds. Or, at least that's what the townspeople called it because it was a point of interest amid a sober, tale-less town. The jewelry box was an alternative-you might say- thrifty jewelry store where the used and abused broaches, rings, necklaces, and bells eventually ended up. The one room store area itself was plain, like an empty warehouse, but every inch-every corner was covered with sparkling gems and shining rivets. The jewelry there was arranged on any and every object. The chairs that smelled of wood (for they were wood) had small holes drilled in them to hold pairs mod dangly earrings that had been forgotten by many in the 60s. There were modern earrings too. They sat in a sheet of barbed wire that hung from the wall, the black and blue gauges in harmony with the sharp wire. The Jewelry box was small yet large-which only the towns people knew.

In another corner there was a row of ladders with the rungs ending too short or sometimes too long. On the rungs hung armbands of silver, gold and copper, and some of all three. They felt cool and tasted bitter-for those who liked to play with them. The ladders sat docile and quiet, but sometimes they spoke. They only spoke in squeaks and occasional whines if knocked off balance. The armbands among the ladders let off an inescapable metallic sent which was, sadly, I think, masked with an artificial sent of ocean breeze. That corner was complex and simple all at the same time.

The most unusual corner of the shop was the home of the checkout desk. The desk was a mass of wood with small cavernous holes on the front, top and right side. The holes held rings, but not just any rings, claw rings, two finger rings and rings creating optical allusions. In one of the crevices was a ring resembling a butcher's knife that looked as if it were slicing your fingers if you put it on. The claw rings were meant to curve you're your fingers at a grotesque angle; they sat in their caves cackling with the allusive jewelry. The two finger rings were the friendliest of the bunch, for they brought two very

separate fingers together, nothing harmful or misleading. It was with those gems that the star amidst a sad, pure cloud could shine so brightly, so gingerly and warmly, drawing in even the shiest of simple townspeople.

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**Noel  
Mhelaney**