

Bobcat Writers
Literary Journal
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Advisors

Mrs. Carrillo
Mrs. Peterson

Editor

Adina Alam

Familial Problems

by Skylar Applequist

Never will I allow
the temptation of alcohol
to ruin my life.

Allow me to rephrase,
I will *never*,
become my mother.

Never will I let
the seduction of nicotine
get to my lungs.

Allow me to rephrase,
I will *never*,
be like my father.

Allowing these
poisons into my body
breaks me down,

one,
by,
one.

Just like it did
for my mother
when I was a child.

Just like it did

for my father
since he was a teen.

The temptation
passed on to
my sister.

I didn't know
if I should feel
ashamed

or if I should
have suspected it
all along.

For these reasons
I will never even
think to touch

such poisons in
fear of becoming
the people who

hurt,
me,
most.

Never will I
become the people
who made me think

I was worthless,
nothing,

meaningless.

Never will I curse
out at the people
just trying to help.

Never will I leave
in fits of rage
over small things.

When I'm older, I
won't ever harm my kids
mentally or physically

just because I
decided to ruin my
life through toxins.

I will treat them
different than I
was treated before.

All I can hope
is that I won't go
against my words,

making me a
hypocrite like my
mother,

or a narcissist
like my father
always was,

Caring only for
themselves and
not others.

Caring only for
their own pleasure
and not our safety.

Years of seeing
unaccounted DUI's
and ran red lights,

years of going through
unnoticed mental
and verbal abuse.

But now I may
roam free hoping
-praying-

that I won't be
anything like the
people who raised

A,
girl,
like

me.

Fire Boy

by Lezah Inreah

I dumped my books on my desk. Any more of these and I would need a brace for my back. I heaved a heavy sigh and opened my science book. I wrote a few sentences and then closed my book. I typed on my chromebook until the end of class. I knew my teacher wouldn't care because none of the teachers gave a crap about what happened to the kids. The bell rang for home time and I ran out of the class room only to bad for me because I ran into Jack and his goons."Hey pea brain. What are you doing?" Jack said and shoved me into the wall."Oh, probably just being dumb like he always is." said one of his goons. The whole gang laughed. I held my breath pleading not to let the flames come out. "What's he doing now?" Asked one of the goons. No, no, please no. My cheeks flushed red as they all backed away. I fell to my knees and shook all over. I could feel my hands heating up. I took a deep breath in and tried to calm the heat bubbling inside of me, even though I knew once I went under I couldn't come back up. My fist lit on fire, my teeth became knives and I looked up at the boys. After this it was not pretty. I lunged at Jack and burnt his arm. I jumped from Jack to one of his goons leaving him howling in pain. I pretty much burnt the next boy to a crisp. The anger that led me during this was uncontrollable. Right as I was about to pounce on Jack two of the boys caught my arms. I flamed up and burned them. Then, I regained consciousness and ran. This would be a lot to explain to mom.

The Scalpel and the Stethoscope

by Adina Alam

The first time I held a scalpel, my hands trembled. Not from fear exactly, but from the weight of it- how something so small could open or heal. The operating room was colder than I expected, white lights reflecting off silver instruments. I was only a high school intern, standing at the edge of the room, watching Dr. Smith repair a heart.

Everyone else seemed sure of themselves. I wasn't. Earlier that morning, one of the residents laughed when I said I wanted to be a surgeon. "That's cute," he'd said, "but it's a tough field for girls." I smiled politely, feeling numb and pretending it didn't pierce my heart and sting.

When the monitor beeped faster, Dr. Smith didn't even flinch. "Scalpel," she said, her voice steady and calm. Her hands moved like choreography- every cut, every sitch, precise. I watched in silence, memorizing the rhythm. At one point she looked up and caught my eyes. "You have to be calm enough to cut," she told me later, "but kind enough to care."

When the surgery ended, she let me hold the stethoscope, still warm from her neck. "Here," she said, "you'll need one of these someday." For the first time, I believed her.

That night, I wrote in my journal: *The scalpel heals the body, the stethoscope listens to the heart. I want to learn both.*

Code Blue on Mars

by Adina Alam

The red dust clung to everything- the walls, my boots, even the inside of my gloves. On Earth, surgery meant steady hands and gravity on your side. On Mars, it meant improvisation.

I was the only medic in Colony Ares. We trained for oxygen leaks, power failures, even solar flares. But not for what happened when Commander Johnson collapsed, his oxygen suit punctured by shrapnel from a drilling malfunction. The code flashed: **CODE BLUE.**

I floated toward him, weightless, heart pounding louder than the alarms. Blood didn't fall here- it drifted, tiny ruby spheres spinning in the air. My instruments floated too, so I strapped everything down with magnetic clips, whispering myself to stay calm. "You trained for this," I said, even though I hadn't, not really.

The others hovered by the door, waiting. I sealed the wound, each movement slow and careful, like stitching through water. Johnson's vitals stabilized, the monitor beeping its slow, perfect rhythm again.

When it was over, I drifted to the observation window. Outside, Mars glowed copper against the black sky. For the first time, I realized medicine wasn't bound to one planet- it was a promise we carried wherever we went.

The Lab Notebook

by Adina Alam

The lab was quiet except for the scratch of my pen against paper. I'd been running the same experiment for six months- trying to get immune cells to recognize cancer cells more efficiently. Six months of failure, smudged notes, and empty coffee cups.

Tonight, I almost gave up. My advisor almost warned me: "Maybe it's time to pivot your research." But I couldn't. My mother's chemo pills still sat on my dresser at home, untouched since the day she said, "One day, someone will find a better way." I wanted that someone to be me.

When the timer beeped, I walked to the microscope without much hope. But the slide looked... different. The immune cells were glowing, clustering around the cancer cells like a constellation forming in the dark. My hands shook as I repeated the test, again and again. Same result. It was really working.

I opened my lab notebook and wrote the words I'd been waiting for. *Trial 118-Success*. Then I just sat there, staring at the page. The lab lights flickered, and I could almost hear her voice again- soft, proud, certain.

Maybe this was only a small step in a long fight. But for the first time, it felt like the beginning of a new cure.

The Morning Shift

by Adina Alam

By the time the sun rose over the hospital, my scrubs were already wrinkled and my coffee cold. It was my third week of clinical rotations- twelve hour days that blurred together in a rhythm of pagers, patient charts, and exhaustion. Still, every time I pushed open a new door, I felt that same spark; I was finally here.

We were supposed to observe, not intervene. But when a patient's oxygen levels dropped, I instinctively reached to help adjust the tubing. The resident noticed. "Good instincts," she said. "Don't lose that. Medicine needs people who care before they respond."

Later, during lunch, I caught my reflection in the vending machine glass- dark circles, messy hair, tired eyes. I laughed quietly. This wasn't the version of myself I used to picture when I dreamed of med school. But maybe it was better. It was real.

That evening, I walked past the pediatric swing. A little boy waved from his bed, IV lines tangled like spaghetti. "Are you a doctor?" he asked. "Almost," I said. His grin was answer enough.

I kept walking, my stethoscope swinging against my neck. For the first time all day, I didn't feel tired. I felt certain.

Untitled

By Aazeen Atif

It was a dark and gloomy night. The wind was howling like a wolf as the trees shook violently. The moon's light was barely visible as the clouds quickly covered any trace of light. The air was damp and cold. The fog rose quickly, covering each and every one of the houses. All, except one.

Emma Hill was thirteen years old when her parents decided to move. She, however, wasn't very happy about the decision. Why? Because the street they were moving to was called "Murder Lane". And the house they were moving to, that was called "The House of the Undead". Did her parents know? Of course they do! But do they believe it? NO. She didn't even get a say in the move. Emma would have to try to not die...

From the moment she saw the ghastly house, her stomach was twisting itself into knots. Her hands started to sweat as she tightened her grip around her seatbelt. She couldn't believe that her parents actually agreed to live in this grotesque house. The moment she stepped foot in it, a shiver went down her spine, causing her to slightly trip on a loose floorboard. The floor creaked and mice screeched. Mice!

"Mother! I want to go back home. Back to England. There are mice in here!" she exclaimed.

"Now, now Emma. We can easily get rid of mice. Now go and choose your room," her mother instructed, not even bothering to go inside the house herself. Emma knew better than to fight with her mother, so she decided to go upstairs and look at all the rooms. To her surprise, the rooms weren't as bad as she thought they would be. Well, except for the dead mouse in the corner of course. The room she chose was at the very end of the hall. Inside, the walls were painted an alluring shade of purple, and it had maple wood planks that were as warm as the summer's sun. On the wall, there was a window with a white frame. When she looked out of the window, she saw her parents unpacking the moving truck.

"Emma.... I know you're in here," whispered a voice in the corner.

"Who's there?" she asked as she quickly spun around in the direction of the voice. No one. Now she really didn't like the house.

The next morning, Emma woke up to the sound of knocking on her bedroom window. It was four in the morning and the sun was barely beginning to rise. She sat up on the edge of her bed. Her room was still pretty empty, given that most of their stuff is still in the moving truck parked outside. She looked out the window to see a dark figure walking down the street. No! A dark figure floating down the street! The figure looked at her and vanished into thin air. Leaving a thin trail of black smoke. *This must be a dream*, she thought. She pinched herself once, then twice, then three times but still no luck. This wasn't a dream. This was the reality of Murder Lane.

At around six or seven a.m, her parents also started waking up. Her father and mother started work today, leaving Emma alone at home. She decided to do the list of chores her parents left her on the fridge, starting with vacuuming the house. Not just one room, but the entire house. Emma found the vacuum laying on the floor by the living room when all of a sudden she heard something fall. The sound was like a thousand nails falling onto a large metal tray. She sprinted upstairs to see that the door of her room was closed.

"I don't remember closing the door," she thought to herself. She walked towards the door so quietly, you could drop a pin and be able to hear it. On the count of three, she opened the door. One, two, three! There it was. A hideous, frightful being in front of her. It almost looked like the ghost she saw outside. In fact, it might be that ghost she saw outside! The thing looked at her, and then a frightful smile appeared on its face. Emma ran out of her room as fast as she could and ran into the library.

"That's odd," she said out loud. "I don't remember ever seeing a library in the house." As Emma's heart rate slowed, she walked in the library. It smelled of apples and cinnamon rolls. The floors were a soft carpet the color of charcoal gray. The couches were soft and velvety, and as she sat on one, it appeared to almost swallow her whole! Bookshelves lined the exterior of the room and in the center was a tall, maple-colored podium. It reminded her of a podium that professors used to give lectures at her old school in London. On the podium,

there was a large book. It was already open to the first page. In it, there were pictures of an old man and what looked to be like his wife.

"This must be the owner of the house," she thought out loud. She sat on another sofa and held the book in her hand. The carpet floor felt warm and tingly on her bare feet. Emma looked at the rest of the pictures in the photo album. All the pictures were happy memories until she came to the second-to-last page. It was of the old man frowning as the rain poured down on him. The house is in the background, and inside of one of the windows, she saw a face looking down at the man. It looked just like the creature in her room. In fact, the face was inside of what is now Emma's room!

She didn't know how to feel about this. Should she be shocked or should she be worried? Her heart beat started to quicken again as she tried to figure out what this meant. She flipped to the last page and saw that some of it was missing. The part that was still intact read, "My dearest Edwin, I have important news to tell you. If you are reading this message, that means you have found out my secret. The secret of..." She couldn't make out what the rest of the message said, for it was either ripped or stained, probably by tears.

Ding, Dong, Ding, Dong. The bell rang. Emma hoped that her parents had come home early, but unfortunately it was just a delivery. She dragged the bulky box inside and ripped it open. To her surprise, it was empty. Well, except for a small note at the bottom. It read, "Well done. You found out what is hiding in the house. Now all you have to do is TRY to escape..." She felt dizzy after reading this note. So dizzy, she fell to the ground and fainted.

By the time she woke up, her parents were home. She was on the couch in the Library.

"EMMA!" her father yelled at the top of his lungs. "Where are you?" She realized that her parents hadn't put her on the couch. Something else did. She got up and sat on the couch. The soft velvet felt so good on the rough palms of her hand. As she stood up, she noticed that the photo album was gone. It disappeared into thin air. Emma walked out of the room, still feeling very groggy, and noticed that the library was tucked into the far corner of the house, so of course her parents couldn't find her. As soon as she stepped into the

hallway, the temperature dropped drastically. Her parents must have forgotten to turn the temperature up again.

“Mother! Father! I’m here,” she yelled. Emma ran down the hallway and up the stairs to see that her room’s door was closed again. She opened the door to see all her belongings were gone. The only thing left in the room was the photo album and a small white table. She walked in the room and saw something written on the wall. It read, “GET OUT OF MY HOUSE!” She ran into her parents room, just to see the same thing written on the wall of their room too!

“Mother!” she shrieked at the top of her lungs. “Where are you?” This time, someone replied, “I’m here Emma!” The sound was coming from the spare bedroom down the hall. Emma ran as fast as she could, her feet sliding across the cold tile floor. Her hair flying in her face. She got to the door and tried opening it, but unfortunately, it was jammed.

“Emma,” her father started. “We’re locked in here, and can’t get out. It’s up to you to save us.”

Emma sat down on the floor. The cold tiles sent a sharp shiver down her spine. She started crying, tears flooding into her eyeballs and pouring down her cheeks. Suddenly, she felt a bump on the floor. She poked it but nothing happened. Emma decided to get a popsicle stick and try to lift it up, but it wouldn’t budge. She tried again, and this time the tile shifted a little bit, letting out a burst of dusty air straight into her face. She pushed even harder, and this time the tile broke apart, shattering into pieces across the floor. Inside there was an old rustic key with a note attached to it.

As Emma picked up the key, she noticed the THING in the corner of her eye. It looked at her with fear and revenge in its eyes. The THING was sprinting towards her like a cheetah at full speed. She tried picking up the note, but her slippery, sweaty hands weren’t cooperating. She fumbled a few times until finally, she was able to pick it up.

Emma read the note out loud in a quavering voice that she tried to keep calm, “This is the key to get rid of...IT.” She didn’t hesitate after reading that message. Emma stood straight up and looked at the door. She put the key in the key hole. Her hands were drenched with sweat and her breathing was very shaky. Her legs wobbled, but she tried keeping them straight. Finally, after what

seemed like one hundred hours, the key slid into the hole and the door clicked open.

Dust emerged from the gap and filled her lungs with it. But she didn't care, her parents were finally free. They were so happy to see her, they fell into an immediate family hug. For once in her life, everything was quiet. Well, everything except for the sound of a fading scream in the background. She kept her embrace tight as she realized something. The house was never haunted. It was guarded. It was guarded by the spirit of someone who loved it. From now on, it will still be guarded by someone who loves it... me.

Untitled

by Gianna Dizdul

The room is stuffed with the darkness of things that are invisible. The ideas I can't prove, can't see, can't hear, can't smell but I'm still told they're real. So many things I sit and ponder why society believes in them and why we are exiled for not. We can't see them but we still believe in them. Why? Because we actually think they're true? Or because we were expected to?

Someone to Love

By Gwendolyn Dugan

I sat in the dingy alley and cried. I just couldn't hold it in anymore. Ever since my parents died, I have been alone. Not homeless but, I didn't have any friends, no one to talk to, no one to play with, I was empty inside. My aunt was nice yes, but, she wasn't my parents. My aunt had gotten me new clothes, a phone and all of the things parents would get you but, still I wasn't happy. My aunt and I have had fun, yes and, we had fun almost every day. She is so nice and she is always looking out for me. She knows what I like, she knows when my birthday is. But, she isn't mom. She isn't dad.

I just wanted a friend to play with at recess, or, someone who listened without hesitating. The school counselor suggested a pet, but my aunt said that they were too expensive. I wanted someone to love. Someone to love with all of my heart.

Clang! Bash! I whirled around to find, the trash can had been knocked over. I was about to turn back around when something caught my eye. There was a small shape. It was shaking and skinny. It was scared. I crept slowly forward. The shape came into the light. It was a dog! It was white with brown spots and big brown eyes. I slowly stretched my hand forward and patted the dog on the head. The dog looked up at me with its big eyes and slowly crept forward. I sat criss-cross on the ground and patted my leg. The dog took a step forward, then another, then another until he was sitting on my lap. I stroked him across the back, he needed a bath very badly but I didn't care.

"Scarlet?" my aunt called down the alley. "I know things have been hard but, we have to push through it, together." She sat down next to me and her eyes landed on the dog. "Where did you get him!? Is he a stray? Explain please!" I told her how I had sat down and he crept out of the darkness. And how he had sat in my lap willingly. I also told her, I wanted to keep him. She was shocked but, miraculously, she agreed. "Under one condition though." I paused, what would the condition be? Would it be that we had to keep him outside? Would I have to pay for everything? Like, what in the world would that be?

Where the sigma would I get money from? How in the 6,7 world would I get enough money and time for him? Huh? But right before I was about to explode with 41 million more brainrot filled questions, she finished," We have to take him to the vet and make sure he is healthy. We also have to go to the dog store, buy him a bed, and some food. I will go to the store tomorrow when you are at school to buy the rest of the things he needs." I was overjoyed! I shot up and ran over to hug her. We climbed into the car and the dog sat in my lap. At the vet's office, the dog seemed scared. But, I still held him in my arms, refusing to let him go. I was afraid that, If I let go, Or even looked away, he would vanish, and I would be back in that alley. When he got his shots and tag, I was afraid he would run away. But, he stayed in place, he looked up at me with wild eyes, full of shock, but relief, somehow.

After the vet, we took him to the dog store. We bought a bed, water bowls, and some food. We even picked out a blanket for him.

At home, we went to bed. I got up twice in the night to make sure all of the doors were locked and he was still there. At school, all I could think of was the dog. I thought of names almost the entire day, and daydreamed about playing with him during math. At home, I dashed around the house to find him. I wanted to show him and my aunt the list of names I had created. It read,

- 1# Ash
- 2# Blaze
- 3# Cedar
- 4# Hawk
- 5# Rocky
- 6# Hunter
- 7# Thunder
- 8# Charlie
- 9# Jack
- 10# Max
- 11# Oliver
- 12# Lucky
- 13# Ace

I showed the list of names to my aunt. We went over each name, weighing the pros and cons. Until finally, we were down to the last two, Oliver and Rocky. I called, "Rocky!" the dog's ears perked up, but, nothing else. "Oliver!" This time, he looked up at me, as if saying, "why did you say my name?" "I think we found our name." My aunt said.

We headed to the dog store to get more things like toys, puppy gates, and fur-remover sticks. And, most importantly, a collar and tag.

That night, Oliver slept on my bed. He climbed into bed with me and I gently placed a blanket over him.

At school, all I could think about was Oliver! I was worried he would run away, or get hurt. What if he hid and I couldn't find him? What if he got stolen? Or broke something? I was just about to panic when I snapped out of my imagination. "Scarlet? Could you please pay attention? This will be on your exam!" Mrs. Overham shouted. I shot up and glanced around the room, Everyone was staring at me! Sally Parkston snickered and whispered with Violet Langury, Sally pointed at me and laughed. Sally had always been mean to me. My aunt had said that it just meant that she was insecure about herself, but I didn't believe her. Sally was so popular, she was always whispering with a friend, or passing notes to someone. She even had 3 secret admirers! 3! And Violet Langury, let's just say that she is Sally's bestie. She is like the beauty queen of the school, even though I know it is just makeup. She and Sally have super cool clothes too. Unfortunately for me, she has decided to ruin my social life. And my ego.

My aunt had left to go to the store, so I did my homework at the kitchen table. I thought Oliver was under the table, but, when I checked, he was gone! I ran frantically around the house, desperately searching for a sign he was here. But, when I reached the backyard, the door was open! I ran outside and around the back of the house, The back gate was open! I started to cry. How would I find him? Was he ok? I was so scared and sad, I charged forward and ran out onto the sidewalk, "Oliver! Oliver, where are you?!" I shouted over and over again until my throat was sore. I cried right there in the driveway, too sad and scared to move. I waited there until my aunt came back. She ran to me and hugged me. "What is wrong?" She asked. "He ran away, The gate was open

andAnd...." I was too ashamed and sore-throated to finish. She hugged me tighter. "We will find him together. I promise, he will find his way back." We went back inside. My chest felt tight as I lay in bed that night. I cried myself to sleep.

The next day, I felt short tempered, and sad at the same time. But, it was the weekend. So, I spent all day designing lost papers and calling his name out on the street.

After many days, my aunt told me that she found another way to find him! She told me how the vet had put a tiny little piece of electronics that would be able to track him! We rushed to the computer and opened the My Pet app. We scrolled and scrolled. It felt like the 67th section when we finally found it! We clicked the link. We had to fill out a form and add in some numbers but we made it! Finally, we found his location! I ran as fast as I could down the street. I turned the corner and..... He was there! Oliver ran toward me and I sat down to hug him. I took him home, still holding him in my arms. That night, I slept with Oliver curled on my pillow. From then on, I knew that nothing could ever keep me from him. I loved him, and he loved me. I could love him with all of my heart and more!

Untitled

by Malia Elliott

The early spring morning was moist. Last night, the village of Taino experienced a generous amount of rain. It would be enough to keep the crops and the people surviving. Kyato felt the cold mud beneath his bare feet. His scarlet kimono, flattered with designs of a great ryu, a dragon breathing its great fire. Flames symbolized life, like the grass did so to the earth. And life is beautiful.

Kyato took a deep breath of fresh air. When he exhaled, he could see a small cloud admitted from his mouth, hitting right back on his face. The warm bright ball of blaze above him shimmered down, getting blocked somewhat by the trees. It flashed across the broad features of the young man, blending a sultry golden across the tanned tone of his skin. It illuminated his eyes that resembled the color of whisked matcha, a blend in a soft sort of way. The day was at its genesis, and Kyato had things to accomplish.

The contrast from the cool, wet dirt to the toasty sand was quite the transition. But, since this was a pretty daily occurrence for Kyato, he was unscathed. He had developed a hardened padding on the bottom of his feet that prevented the vast change from affecting him. The stick connected to Kyato's ruby and amber lantern, fabricated in kanjis of praise and worship, adorned with cherry blossoms, orbs of light, and most noticeable of all, a dragon, just like the one on Kyato's kimono, dragged closely behind his in his hand's grasp. It had a certain manmade beauty like no other, completely unique to its own.

He started to push his boat across the sand, making it head towards the shallow water. Once it was reached, he took careful steps into it, removing his ankles and below from the freezing light blue liquid, and into his raft. Using the lantern stick and his upper body strength, he steadily began to leave the shore, pulling up to get the stick from sinking in the water's sand.

It wasn't necessary for Kyato to pursue rowing, the water seemed to haul the boat the pathway it desired. He propped a shamisen into his lap, playing an elegant ancient Gagaku song he must have heard about a thousand times

prior to. The bachi he used to pluck the instrument glided along to each string corresponding to the way the water was moving him along. Kyato sang for no one in particular, but if anyone were to hear, his melody flowing through his native tongue as prepossessing as an Akoya pearl found in the pit of an oyster's rigid outer shell. A song was an easy way for the long wait to pass.

And the long wait did pass. Soon, Kyato opened his eyes to find his boat bobbing atop the water, and then stopping once it hit the rough rocks and sand of a far off island from the one his village was on. Kyato hopped off, dragging his boat across to under the shade of a nearby tree. He wrapped a strap around his waist, tying the shamisen to his back, heading off on his walking journey once more. When he started up the path of the mighty mountain, his ink colored hair brushed gently across the back of his neck, flowing like youthful leaves would in the breeze.

Eventually, his expedition came to a halt as he stopped in his tracks. In front of him was a tone wall, old, crusty moss infected all over it. Kyato used the stick to move some vines that were draped over a crack, which turned out to be an opening to the side of the mountain. He propped the stick off against the side, using his hands to move the loose rock that blocked an entrance into pitch darkness. He grasped the stick once more, thrusting the lit lantern into the dark, shining a rouge light. It revealed a hole very close to the bottom of his feet. Going down, and down, and down, similar to the body of a python, slithering in a coil. Kyato forced his eyes into closing, and gritted down on his teeth sealed behind his lips. He turned around. And then- WOOSH! The breeze caught around him. He spread out his arms, feeling it swoop around him, as if he were a red-crowned crane taking flight into the cloud filled light cerulean sky.

It eventually stopped. Kyato opened his eyes as he felt his bottom hit him on a soft bed of sage moss. A sparkly, glowing substance almost like dust flew up into the atmosphere around him. Kyato stood back up to his feet. The world was suddenly light again. A fresh, humid scent flooded into his nose. He wandered forward to the waterfall rushing down before him. Just on the other side lies a statue, covered with green and oldness over every corner. The walls of natural stone formed a hole around a small body of water, a pathway leading down from the top where he stood. Kyato carefully navigated all the

way down to the water, jumping and sliding from stone to stone. The water created a cool gust against his chest, hitting him gently.

Kyato took the lantern off the hook that connected it to the stick, letting the stick fall without a care. Taking a tinder stick from the left pocket of his kimono, and a quartz piece and steel piece from the right pocket. He squatted, clanking the piece of steel against the quartz, creating a spark that lit the tinder a blaze. Using the fiery end of the tinder, he ignited the candle in the center of the lantern. Throwing the tinder out into the water to make the flame, he took the lantern in his grasp once more. Considerately, setting his palms in the water, the lantern floated in place. He scooped the water and pushed it, guiding the lantern slowly across over to the dragon statue. Kyato sat down tailor-style, putting his hands into a praise gesture, closing his eyes, and muttering. A prayer, even a wish perhaps. The same words said were some that had repeatedly come out of Kyato's mouth. Normally, the words would've done nothing. When he would open his eyes, the lantern would just be floating on the water like usual, and he would have to go and retrieve it to do the same thing again the next day. He would be met with nothing but empty hands and silence. But, this time was different, it was special. He wasn't met with silence.

His eyes shot open when he heard a rumbling sound- it was the sound when a boulder was rolling down a large hill. The statue of the dragon suddenly exploded, pieces flying everywhere. Kyato shielded his face with his arm. When the pieces eventually stopped their airborne assault, Kyato removed his arms to see what the remains were.

The most beautiful creature he had ever laid his eyes upon. Skin like saccharine honey that is used to be mixed in kabusecha. Irises shining mauve, pupils shaped like cherry blossoms with soft outlines of rose, and when they locked with Kyato's, he was mesmerized to the core. Small horns like little bamboo sprouts. Hair, a blend of ruby and gold, identical colors to the lantern Kyato had, gently gushing down his shoulders. Kyato could feel the breath choke in and swallow in his throat. All he could do was stand there, wide eyed. The figure attempted to stand, however the ground below him was unstable. In turn, he tripped- SPLAT! Kyato quickly ran over to the water, taking instinct and jumping in after the man.

Kyato, after some swimming, crawled back out, dripping with glistening water. He flopped down, catching some air. His eyes were squinty as the beautiful man, who was sitting at his head, sat up, tilting his head like a curious animal while looking at Kyato. A few droplets fell back onto Kyato's face. At first, he blinked. Once, twice. Then he chuckled softly. He almost couldn't believe what had just happened himself, it seemed unreal. It was unreal. Yet not, since it was real. Wasn't it? Kyato reached up and touched this mysterious man's cheek. Yes, it was real. He was real. In those songs he sang- those prayers- those lanterns he's made for ages- his kimonos- a dragon. This dragon, a man. His faith brought him a gift no royal could buy with all the currency in the world.

"You're a dream...", Kyato whispers in a flabbergasted tone.

The man's lips form a warm curve up. "It's you. You're the one that's been leaving me the lanterns, hm? We've known each other as long as time could tell. You've come and brought me a present almost every passing day, and now, I've come to answer your prayers." Kyato was struck by all the memories. People forgetting tradition, giving up hope. Kyato remembers the feelings of being ashamed, embarrassed, humiliated of something others found as nothing but a mere fable. No dragon exists, they told him, no. But here one sat, right in front of him. Kyato wanted to show them, show them how wrong they all were, all this time. But a voice inside him protested, *don't be greedy, this isn't about you, for his safety.*

Before another thought could flow in Kyato's head, the young dragon man grabbed his hand in a soft grip. He suddenly found himself being pulled. To where? He wasn't sure. Yet...

The Sticky Note

by Kailah Gonzalez

Before I left my last period algebra, I saw a burned crumpled sticky note on Amber's desk and I felt scared to open it. I slowly, -so slowly opened it and it said, "Don't trust your math teacher." So, I went to try to find Amber in the hallway but she was in the courtyard.

"Amber, someone left you a note in your math class!" I shouted.

"Oh, I didn't get to read it. Maybe it was my crush because he has math fifth period," Amber whispered.

"Ugh, Noah!"

Amber read and repeated back the note, "Don't trust my math teacher! Why would Noah do that!"

"Amber, it's not Noah. Calm down and it is not even his fault," I confronted her.

"Yeah, my cutie would not do something like that," Amber giggled.

When I saw her crush coming out of the hallway, I said, "Your crush is right over there and I bet you don't want him to see you all giddy."

Amber didn't listen to me and went straight to him to have a small talk. I asked myself "Why would a girl talk to a boy first? That is so brave. I can't even do that, because I want my crush to talk to me first and it is less embarrassing. All I do is stare."

Her crush has dark blonde hair with blue eyes wearing a white hoodie with black shorts. He is even wearing matching shoes with her. Maybe he has a crush on her.

As Amber went up to me after a little talk with him, she said with excitement, "Oh my god! He even knows about the sticky note."

"Yo Amber! I'm coming!" Noah shouted.

"Uh, okay!" Amber shouted.

"Guys, I have to get my stuff from my locker." I said.

"Because of the sticky, okay," Noah replied.

When I was opening the hallway doors, it groaned to me within my feet and just suddenly moved in different directions. My locker is really close to my English class and when I opened it, it groaned because my school is old. When I look at myself in the locker mirror, I'm stressed because the note is important to them.

When I closed my locker, the sound that it spoke was so loud that the silence of the hallway was staring at me. Since there is nobody in the school, I texted my parents about hanging out with my friends until 4pm and I got the okay from it.

When I got out of the hallway and went to the courtyard, we were doing some investigation with the note if it was cursed or not. So, Amber pointed to my math teacher, Mr. Peterson and as we came up to him, he was really confused.

"Mr. Peterson, I saw a strange sticky note in your classroom and it is making me wonder," Amber said in a concerned tone.

He said, "Well, it may seem cursed on the outside, but there is no curse in it because there are no curses in this world."

I said, "Well, I will keep it just in case."

He said "Ok, I will see you tomorrow, guys!"

After having a small talk with Mr. Peterson, we all went out of the school to go to the oldest restaurant "Mirco Macs" that is very close to the school because they sometimes do mystery things and it is a five minute walk. So, we were having a conversation about our school day when we were walking to that place.

"How was your day in all of your classes?" I asked.

"There were some negative and positive things so 50/50," Amber responded.

"My day is really good! I can't hold them in any longer!" Noah exclaimed.

Amber said, "There is a girl that is bothering me and her name is Flora. She is in two of my classes. Yeah, really annoying, -so annoyed that I am about to crash out. In my first period science class, she was talking about me causing trouble to one of my friends and I didn't do anything to her; that's a lie. In my third period English class, she was staring at me, this is a mental breakdown. Let me repeat that again, a mental breakdown, -a breakdown."

"I'm so sorry for you. Well, tell me the positive things about your day and I don't want you to be worried during an after school hangout," Noah comforted.

When he said that to her, her cheeks became so pink like starfish and started laughing, "Good time at lunch and work in my classes."

"Hey look! We have arrived at the oldest restaurant in town!" I exclaimed.

I took a deep breath and opened the door to look at what was doing in there with a sticky note. We heard a lot of chatting going on, went straight to the worker, James, and he even knew about the sticky note.

James said, "Follow me to the back room and I can help you to figure out the sticky note."

As we are going in the back room, that room is so dark and it is making me wonder if something strange will happen in there. James turned on the lamp and he locked the door within a creepy smile.

In our minds, "What is going to happen to me? Seconds away from dying? This is so cruel, -really cruel!"

He said, "Good being in there and I will not let you come out. You will be in there for the rest of your little lives."

After he locked the door, I screamed, "Now what can we do!"

"Well, I know James and agreed to put that sticky note in your math class to make you guys feel clueless like always," Noah said with the same smile that James created.

"Why did you do that, Noah!" Amber shouted.

I said, "You know about that dumb sticky note and having to trust you along."

"Sorry not sorry. I have to trap you guys," he chuckled.

"No, you will not!" Amber yelled.

"Fight me! But I will win!" Noah said in arrogance.

So he had a roll of tape and a rope so we had to think for a second. We ran to a wall and the plan was to have together pick him up, but it didn't work; he has a spray hidden in his pants that makes people fall asleep. He sprayed that on us and had to cover our eyes.

"Covering your eyes won't work and it is a vinceable spray! Ha! Ha!" Noah said.

As we felt dizzy from the spray and my vision was so blurry that we couldn't see anything. I went down to the floor and slept.

"Hey, wake up! Lizzy!" Amber shouted.

I opened my eyes and I saw Amber looking all worried.

"Lizz, I am glad you are awake!" Amber screamed with excitement.

"I am okay! No blurriness!" I said it with excitement.

I was putting my hands in my pockets and thinking about a big rock that I forgot to return to Mrs. Fray, my science teacher; I can use that to break the window on the high ceiling.

But, I am asking myself, "How can we reach the ceiling?"

Amber questioned, "Did you tell me earlier in band class that you forgot to return the rock in science class?"

"Yes, I am thinking about using it to break the window, but the problem is how do I reach the ceiling?"

"I see a ladder, so let's grab it!" Amber exclaimed.

I said, "Okay, let's try it out."

The ladder collected a lot of dust, maybe this is because it is an abandoned room and the workers must have used it before the restaurant was still being built. We used it anyway to help us escape.

We used the ladder and it worked out perfectly because the ladder is as tall as the height of the room. As I threw the rock at the window ceiling, we climbed up on the window as fast as we could because in our minds, "what if Noah and his employee are by the room?"

"We did it, Lizz!" Amber said it in excitement.

I said, "Thanks for celebrating, but we have to talk to James."

We ran on top of the building of the restaurant and found a big mattress by the entrance, so we jumped. When we were falling, gravity was pushing on us hard. Are we going to get hurt? Well, this is how to risk lives.

When we landed on the mattress, my right leg was full of pain. Yeah, full of pain.

"Let's call the police first before we head in the door."

As we were done calling the police, we went into the restaurant and talked to the employee.

As the employee James saw us, he asked, "How did I escape my room?"

"Well, a combined big brain is our escape!" I shouted.

"This is impossible! Noah has the spray as a number one trap! Ugh!" James crashed out.

As I looked away from James, I saw the police cars parking in the parking lot and they ran like tiring dogs.

When the police officers opened the door so hard, one of the officers screamed, "James! You are underarrested!"

He shouted, "Ugh! Okay, fine!"

His face became really red like roses and his body was full of sweat because he was nervous about the serious consequences when he arrived at jail.

As the police officers left with James, I saw Noah sitting by the windows. When we came up to Noah, he looked mad at himself.

He said, "What!"

"Why did you help James, the untrusted employee?" Amber questioned.

He said, "He really dared me to set up the note in math class to set you guys to a trap. If I don't, he's going to beat me up on the roads."

I asked, "So you felt scared to ignore him, right?"

"Yes. The scariest part is there are cameras in that room so I have to act like I am the villain," he answered.

Amber told him, "Don't do that, it makes us scared."

"Yeah, I will try," he replied.

After having a talk with Noah, we all walked together home because it was sunset and we thought parents were worried about it. As we were walking, all of us felt calm like a day at the beach.

"Don't forget to tell your parents about the employee being arrested!" I shouted.

"Yeah, okay!" Amber shouted back.

Noah said, "Yep, bye see you tomorrow at school!"

"Bye!" I replied.

The Spirits of Meshomat

By Noel Grey

Prologue

As soon as she stepped into the abandoned house, she felt like she was being watched.

Despite this, Mia, being her brave self, continued to wander the possibly haunted house while repeatedly thinking:

'Is this house really haunted?'

As a ghost silently stalked her, Mia worried about the house and her cat Marshmallow, making it impossible for her to notice the otherworldly presence of the ghost.

But this ghost wasn't just a normal human ghost, it was the ghost of a bat.

Silently flapping its halfway transparent dark gray wings, and hovering over the cracked, unlogged floorboards, the spirit glared at Mia with beady glowing cyan eyes.

And this ghost just so happened to be the sixth spirit— Lamula, The Spirit of Darkness— and it was Mia's goal to, somehow, discover it.

Chapter 1

Mia quietly walked across the silent meadow on the planet Meshomat as the wind flowed over the quiet sky.

"Mia!" Her father called from her house on the other side of the meadow. "It's time to come back inside!"

"Okay!" She shouted back, even though she felt she was only outside for 5 minutes.

Mia was a short, brown-haired girl with two mis-matching boots and striped socks.

"Come here, Marshmallow!" Mia smiled at her blind white cat as she got closer to her small cottage near the forest.

"Mowwww." Marshmallow responded, trotting in a wobbly line into Mia's open arms with his brown-tipped ears turning in different directions to hear around him.

"Hey, Mia!" Her dad called from the doorway of the cottage. "It's time for dinner! It's chicken soup!"

'I thought that was something from 3060. . .' Mia thought. 'Well, maybe not that long ago. . .'

Rushing into her house with her cat Marshmallow in her arms, Marshmallow stretched his fluffy off- white paws as Mia set him into his favorite brown cat bed with his name sewn into the front in thin white silk. Mia rushed past the kitchen to sit down at the dining room table.

As Mia opened her mouth to begin talking to her dad, Marshmallow leaped up onto Mia's lap, up onto the table, and began to meow loudly.

"Marshmallow!" Mia's dad shouted over the loud cat. "Get down!"

"MOOOOOOOWWWWWWWWWWW" Marshmallow continued, despite the warning "MOOOOOOOOUUUUUUUWWWWWW"

Deep inside Marshmallow's shiny blind eyes, Mia could see something.

'*What IS that thing..?*' she thought to herself, curiously staring at the small white glow that had appeared in her cat's eyes.

As the racket of Marshmallow and her dad faded into the background, Mia looked out the window, and a hazy silhouette was standing outside, near the forest. The silhouette looked over its shoulder and stared at Mia with piercing glowing white eyes for a heartbeat, then quickly disappeared into the forest behind it.

"Who was that?" She muttered to herself.

Almost tripping over a rock, Mia ran deeper into the forest, chasing the mysterious figure. The silhouette had run out of sight, and into the deep foliage of the forest near her house.

"Wait! Come back!" Mia shouted at the mysterious person. All they did was glance back at Mia, with their piercing white eyes.

But Mia saw something strange about them...

'Those teeth...' she wondered. But while she wasn't paying attention, she tumbled over a root, and fell face first into the Earth.

'Owwwwwww. . .' She thought, clutching her head in pain. 'Wait— *all these trees look the same. . . where am I?*' She realized. Then, the sun went down.

All the way down.

As the first stars began to emerge, Mia began to hear a faint noise

"Mowwwwwwww! Moooooow! Moooowwww!!"

"Marshmallow?!" Mia said as a white cat with brown-tipped ears wobbled up the hill towards her. "How did you find me?"

"Mrrrow" Marshmallow answered, rubbing against Mia's legs in a ball of fluff.

"Hahah! OK!" Mia laughed. "But— do you know the way home? Oh . . . well your blind aren't you. Sorry."

Marshmallow stared up at her silently saying: *seriously?* But Mia noticed that the small white dot in his eye was gone— but Mia began to wonder '*Was it even real?*'

Quietly humming a tune, Mia set up a small camp for her and Marshmallow between two short trees.

"Mrooowwwww!!!!" Marshmallow proclaimed as he arrived with some sticks for the fire.

"Hmmm. . . A cat named Marshmallow setting up a fire— that's ironic." Mia muttered as Marshmallow added to the pile of sticks he found.

"KRAK!" A twig snapped behind Mia, and she quickly whipped around.

"Who's there?" Her voice wavered as she held a handmade stake out cautiously out in front of her.

To be Continued. . .

Untitled

by Hayden Jordan

After winning a bet a single mother of three goes on a blind date.

The second I get to the restaurant, I am smelling pasta and tomato sauce. I walk up to the host and smile.

"Uh, I'm here for dinner. I'm in a party of two" I say.

"Mr. Carmichael is already here" he says confidently. I walk past the little desk and to the dining room going towards what I think is Mr. Carmichael. He is tall even while sitting in his seat, his hair is the color of the night sky. His cheekbones looked as if they could cut diamonds. This is not even close to what I thought he would look like. I was thinking of someone less attractive, less.....everything. I walk to the glossy marble table and sit down.

"Hello," I whisper, he looks at me for a moment with surprise. Maybe I wasn't the only one who didn't get who they were thinking. He pauses his investigation to look me dead in the eyes. My mind, diving into the caramel pools.

"Hello," he says "how are you?" I wasn't exactly expecting for him to sound so... deep? I look at him for a moment, wondering how I thought he would sound.

"I'm fantastic" I say not that, that wasn't true, but it also wasn't a lie. I am doing fantastic on the date so far but apart from the date, my life was a wreck. My son is having trouble in math, my daughter is about to go into third grade, and my youngest is about to start preschool. Everything was happening too fast. I thought this date would slow things down a little.

"How was your day?" I ask.

"Today, I worked like always," he mutters, "today someone did try to break into the firm but the guards stopped them," I smile.

"Well that's good, at least they didn't get out with anything." I say, he laughs for a moment.

"Yeah, it's probably good they didn't get away with any art" he says.

"How much art is in there?" I ask laughing.

"A lot," he says, chuckling. Lawyer huh?

"What kind of lawyer are you?" I ask, smiling.

"Attorney," he mutters through a mouthful of pasta. I laugh as some drips out of his mouth, he chuckles and wipes it off. Red smudges all over his mouth.

"Dip the napkin in water and it will get the pasta sauce off," I say, laughing for a moment.

"Do you know that from having children?" He asks, I nod slowly, chuckling.

"How many do you have anyway?" He ponders.

"Three, May, Miles, and Millie," I reply, taking a bite of pasta. "Do you have any kids?" I ask.

"Two, Charlie and Kendall." He pauses for a moment "You really like M's huh?"

"Yeah and then it goes May Jane, Miles James, and Millie Jone."

He laughs for a moment and then takes another bite of pasta.

We continue eating for a while until an alarm starts going off and the sprinklers rain down pounding on our heads. He takes his work jacket off and throws it over my head, grabs my arm and starts pulling me out of the building.

"What is this?" I yell.

"Normally for a fire but in this kind of establishment it's more for stealing"

He says his eyebrows knitting together.

We ran out of the restaurant trying to get as least wet as possible. We get outside the restaurant and he smiles at me. Takes his jacket back from my shoulders. Kisses my cheek, shakes my hand and then runs to what I assume is his car. He drives off and I watch as he leaves. I look down and see what I thought was a bracelet that was hanging on the wall of the restaurant when I came in. I had to be wrong...right? An employee comes over and snatches the bracelet off my wrist.

"Where did you get this?" They growl,

"Uh, my date put it on my wrist" I say confused. Why was this a problem? Some dingy bracelet on my wrist that was my last reminder of the man I met.

"This is a bracelet that is always on the wall in our restaurant. It's worth millions." They say looking at me. It was him.

The Fascinating World of Birds

by Sebastian Motta

While some birds may widely be considered, pests they are actually quite fascinating and my goal today here is to convince you this is amazing world of the avians as a personal dream of mine is to be ornithologist and my goal isn't to make you one, but rather hopefully plant a seed for an interest in birds.

Unique Birds

Unique birds, in this next paragraph or 2 will be talking about some birds with unique behaviors or features. One such example is the frigate bird. While on the surface, it may look like a normal bird with a weird neck but that weird neck is actually a pouch that it can inflate, its main purpose is to help attract mates not only this. But the bird has the odd behavior of making other birds throw up by shaking their tails and then digesting that throwup, this is because they are water hunters. However, they don't have enough oil to make their feathers waterproof so they have to scavenge from other birds at times. If you thought the frigate was weird, wait till you see the BUTCHER BIRD with a name like that you'd expect a big falcon or eagle. But in reality it's much worse. They are 7-8 inch long song birds but how do they deserve a name like that ? Unlike other song birds that eat fruits and nuts, these small birds are vicious predators. For example, a butcher bird catches a shrew keeping it tight in its claws, it flies to its nest all cute like and then takes its prey and impales it on the thorns of its home it may be cute but it catches anything it can.

Those 2 birds were pretty sick huh? Well if you liked those, I have 3 more birds as wild as those. Starting out is the bird of paradise, now what makes these birds unique is their feather, the unique shapes, colors of their plumage to help attract mates and scare off competitors, the females don't have as colorful or unique plumages due to not having to attract mates themselves, these birds live in the thick dense forests of the Amazon and New Guinea. They have very elaborate dances as well. I hope these birds continue to thrive.

Birds of paradise are very pretty. That's how unique this next one is in another way. Its speed, the Peregrine Falcon the fastest animal alive, all your life you may have thought it's the cheetah but however, the Peregrine Falcon when diving can achieve a speed of 240 MPH. That's even faster than some or most cars, while it's not the biggest bird, it somehow is able to control its insanely fast descent now in complete contradiction. The Wandering Albatross, the biggest bird in the world that is currently alive with the massive wingspan of 12 feet and with how big they are, it's no surprise that within the span of a day they usually fly about 530 miles which is actually surprisingly similar to its cousins flight distance. Due to the fact albatross are distance flyers, most birds aren't known for their ability to smell, but these albatross have fantastic smell which also is what makes them unique but this was a huge bird on the contrary here's the. Bee Hummingbird the smallest bird in the world currently alive at a tiny 2 inches and a quarter however when flying because of courtship these tiny birds flap their wings 200 times in a second , its also half the weight of a backyard humming bird they are beautiful birds with the males red spiky looking feathers.

Intelligent birds

I will be discussing in this chapter the intelligent sides of birds and why bird brains aren't actually much of an insult. People know crows are the iconic smart birds. We are gonna discuss them later. Let's talk about their under-mentioned cousin the humble raven, humble isn't a good word as ravens are even smart enough to be cocky. Its said that ravens have possibly the intelligence of a 7 year old child , which may not seem like a lot but if you compare it to other animals its actually very intelligent they even form symbiotic relationships with wolves they become scouts for the wolves while the wolves allow the raven to feast on their prey , but this goes farther than you think as ravens are able to play games with the pups of wolves this is a show that ravens are very social creatures . But another person also discovered that they can actually hold grudges and tell other ravens about a person who mistreated them (goes to show whoever did that didn't do their research) but they also remember people who were kind to them and sometimes form bonds with them (note; Keeping

them as pets is not recommended, Next we move on to the classic smart bird the one that everyone knows as the epitome, Owls they are always depicted as smart and wise but how smart are they really the real answer is the fact that they aren't actually that smart , their brains instead specialize on hunting and their senses and less on problem solving and advanced tools so owls are smart but not in the conventional form of smart.

So in conclusion to everything I've said thus far , this truly was the fascinating world of birds and so I hope you all learned something from this essay because I poured myself into it. Good bye i hope you too may develop a passion for birds this truly was a fascinating world of birds

KISS IT GOODBYE, JULY

by Catherine Oh

The crickets chirped in the early-July sky. Smoke curled upwards over the Smoky Mountains, their rings of blue surrounding the range like Saturn and its rings. I sat on the grass, staring up at the stars and watched constellations dance and jump across the sky. 4th of July fireworks fizzed like the soda on the picnic table 5 feet away from me. My relatives and much older -but not wiser cousins chatted amongst each other about things like the news, betting on Formula 1 racing, and for my cousins- crushes and high school flag football games at their school somewhere in Timbuktu, not that I'm saying that they're from the middle of nowhere. I am too. Welcome to Fort Mill, gem of South Carolina.

I sat far away from them, listening to the screeching of tires as Uncle Jackie tried to teach the older cousins driving on the red-dirt road. I could hear the old dinosaur backfiring as one of my cousins, probably Angel, drove into the big old oak over by Rockwood Street, followed by cursing Uncle Jackie as the car broke or was scratched somewhere for the millionth time. Full and sleepy, I was dozing off when somebody screamed, followed by others.

I sat up on the grass, startling some fireflies out. I smelled smoke.

What the 67? The barbecue was extinguished an hour ago. I turned around and saw my house burning.

"AHHHHH!!!!" I screamed. What the 6767!?!? Everybody was screaming now, and neighbors stumbled out onto the street, their hair in curls or in bathrobes. Some tried to call the fire department, while others turned on their hoses and sprayed the fire. The house still burned. Everything seemed to be a blur, the red-hot fire, the calm cyan of the sky, and the pink smudge of Ms. Madge's bathrobe as she hobbled across the street frantically with her cane.

10 minutes later, or an hour, with panic, the fire still scorched and the fire department pulled up and used a gargantuan hose to extinguish the fire. It was too late. My house, #41, Boathull Avenue, was gone forever.

I could hear the apologetic tone of my cousin Holly, an hour later after my house was ruined. She cried sorry over and over again. Tears brimmed in her eyes. I wanted to tell her it was just a firework gone out of hand, but I couldn't bring myself to say that. I felt horrible. Just an hour ago, I was dozing and stargazing, but now I was staring at the smoldering remnants of my home.

Uncle Jordan, father of Holly, and guilty, offered us a room in his big pristine house. Grateful and unable to say more, my parents and I staggered into his green Jeep and he drove to his house. I must have fallen asleep at some point, because when I woke up, I was in a pink girly room with rose-scented room spray and there were posters of Taylor Swift and Sabrina Carpenter plastered all over the walls. Still in my grass stained clothes, and mud-caked shoes, I was engulfed in plush lavender bedsheets and red heart velvet throw pillows. Holly's room.

Uncle Jordan was in a neat plaid shirt and khakis and sipping a cup full to the brim with cappuccino when I came downstairs to the kitchen. "Hey there buddy, Cassian. Sorry about yesterday. I know it's hard, but everything is going to be okay. By the way, I'm going to work in 5. Holly will still be here to watch you." Why did grown-ups have to sugar-coat everything? "It's going to be okay." Seriously? What can be worse than having your house burned down to the ground, with all your stuff in it too? I sighed. No use being Oscar the Grouch now. Hopefully, when mom and dad got back from work, they would have a plan figured out. I probably couldn't stand Taylor Swift staring at me in bed for the remaining summer break, or the dizzying rose crush spray. I'd probably crash out after a week. I grabbed a water bottle from the pantry and set out to the backyard.

Acacia trees surrounded a pool, so I set my feet down near the shady water. Although it was only 7 a.m., the weather was already sweltering. I drank some water and stared at the Smoky Mountains. It must have been 30 minutes when something rustled in the spiky bush in the corner. Must be some pigeon. After staring at the bush for 6 or 7 minutes, the rustling continued. I stepped carefully toward it, hoping it wasn't a pigeon that would jump-scare me. Wincing and pulling the prickly bush gently apart, I saw a kitten.

It was like a white sock that had gone linty, if the lint was stretched like lamb's wool. The mismatched eyes and wonky nose of the creature were practically squished into all that mess of fur. I didn't know it was a kitten at first, but when it started mewling, I knew it was one. A stray, obviously. Mom, being a vet, was at work, but when she got home, she should be able to help the cat. In the meantime though, what should I do?

I took the phone out of my pocket. The phone case was slightly melted from the fire, but it would be fine. Googling up: how to take care of cats, a million results popped up. They mostly said try and make it comfortable around you or the typical do's and don'ts to owning a cat. Pouring some of my water on a

paper plate I put it on the brick porch, and I offered it some water. Very slowly, almost in slow motion, a tiny pink tongue peeked out of the tangle of fur and lapped up the water. I stayed with him until I heard the garage door open, and Mom came in in ripped SKINNY JEANS and a pink Taylor hoodie. WHAT THE 41???

Then, I realized she was wearing Holly's clothes because all of her stuff had burned down. You probably couldn't go to work wearing smoldering khakis and a charred polo shirt.... I opened the backyard door and yelled at mom, "HELPP!!!!!!" Ok, so I'm being a drama dude, so what? She came dashing and exclaimed, "What Cass?"

I showed her the raggedy kitten, and she exclaimed, "Jiminy crickets!" and a couple other words I would get a bar of soap shoved into my mouth for if I ever said them. She picked up the poor kitten with a kitchen towel, muttering that Uncle Jordan wouldn't mind about the dirty towel.

She practically hulked off the door of the car as she beckoned me to follow her. What is happening? What's wrong with the cat? A million thoughts sped through my head faster than the Formula 1 racecars as she pushed her foot on the accelerator. The speedometer crept up to 67 mph, abruptly jerking back to 41, then back to 100... and over. Woah. We could've beat them racecars.... but lose my stomach somewhere in Uncle Jordan's yard. As we turned Midlight Avenue, I knew we were headed to Mom's workplace. But why? I asked her these questions but she wouldn't reply. The car screeched and squealed as she pulled into the parking lot. She dashed out, faster than my cousin Brandon, when he ran track and opened the doors to the vet office. Sprinting faster than ever, she ran into her office. Desperately pulling out brightly colored bottles out of her vet's cabinet and still cradling Ziggy (as I've already named him) she got the faucet in a corner of her office running and dumped in a pinch of that and a whole bottle of this. Then, ever so slowly she dunked Ziggy into the Harry Potter-like cauldron of medicines.

He was absolutely VICIOUS as soon as his paws touched the water. He hissed, flailed, and even bit Mom as she tried to set him down. If he was a housecat a moment ago, he was now the equivalent of the Nemean Lion. As he was dunked fully in the sink, Mom wiped her scratched and bitten hands on a towel and turned to face me.

"He has a ringworm infection. I could tell because he yowled when I accidentally put my fingertips on exposed skin," she said.

"In English?" I asked. "It's a fungal infection that makes your cat's skin sore, and the bath will make it better." she replied matter of factly. "It's Ziggy, by the way." I added.

She sat down on her computer while Ziggy yowled and hissed, followed by a chalkboard-like squealing of his nails raking the metal kitchen sink. I sat on the couch in the corner of the room and picked at my already too-short nails. I could practically hear my nails begging for me to stop. Time seemed slower than a turtle in slo-mo. Finally, Mom got up and pulled the plug for the sink to drain. Ziggy had kept up a racket all this time, and it got only louder as she rubbed an ointment smelling of peppermint onto bald patches I hadn't noticed. She said, "Now, where to keep this cat?" she muttered to herself as she gently toweled his messy fur. "In Holly's room?" I questioned back. "If she agrees," We drove back home, slowly this time. Ziggy rested in my lap, and I realized Mom was letting me keep him, just like that. Probably because she knew I was going through a lot. I was grateful for that and couldn't wait to see him healthy when he got better. The car pulled up into the driveway, and Holly was outside with her current boyfriend (this was her 15th boyfriend) holding hands and gazing at each other in a way that made me shiver. Eww... I got the door open and slammed it closed. The 'lovesick' couple had the Cupid scared out of them when I did that. "HOLLYYYYY!!!!" I yelled, "CAN ZIGGY STAY IN YOUR ROOM TOO?!?!?". "Wha-who-when is a ziggy?" she yelled back, sounding like a mountain yodeler out of her surprise. After arguing and even a kick delivered up the knee-between, up high, and where it hurts- to Holly's boyfriend, it was settled. Ziggy could stay in Holly's room. With a bed from Home Pets, and the water and food bowl being from the same store, Ziggy found a home.

Over the course of 3 weeks, Ziggy's bald patches began growing in, just like how the foundation of our burnt house was being rebuilt like a phoenix rising from its ashes. If I didn't know better, he even smiled in a cat-like way from time to time. Even Holly cooperated. She bathed him in the special potion that made his fur sleek and shiny and sometimes, refilled his water bowl when he needed it. I could just once catch her cooing softly to Ziggy.

One day, after walking to the local grocery store, we hit a stop for Ziggy's cat toy that he shredded. We swung by and grabbed the toy that (thankfully) was still there. While Mom checked out, I waited behind on a bench. Behind me was a bulletin tacked on with either yellowing or new papers of missing pets. I scanned my eyes over them, not really paying attention when one poster in particular did.

A cat with fur exactly like Ziggy's and the sky-blue eye on the right and amber on the other resembled Ziggy closely. Too closely. This cat had gone missing a week before the fire, and his owner had the number 803-674-169. The cat had his paw raised, and it had the same reddish stain Ziggy did. Then it dawned on me... **Ziggy wasn't a stray**. As I lay in bed, that night, the sickly sweet rose room spray tickling my nose, I knew I had to give up Ziggy to his owner. Dad had gotten home late, looking very much like Mr. Wormwood from Matilda with Uncle Jordan's tweed suit and borrowed hat as he shuffled down to the showers.

The next day, I told Mom about letting go of Ziggy. She didn't comment. But, she too, had gotten very fond of him. As she went to work, I sat near the pool like the day I first saw Ziggy, with a now healthier version of him playing with the new toy. Midday, I walked to Home Pets and ripped off a copy of the owner's number from the bulletin. I trudged back home, the light feathery paper slip weighing a billion pounds on my mind.

Late, at 7 p.m, Mom and Dad walked through the door. I sat at the kitchen table, while Ziggy played, oblivious to the fact that he would be returning to his real owner.

I felt torn in two. I felt happy that Ziggy (if he was even named Ziggy) was going back home. At the same time, I wished I could keep him with me. I bet that made me a horrible person. We called the owner the next day, and she told me she would be there at 2 p.m. Her name was Cornelia. The next hour whipped by in a blur, and soon I could hear the sound of a foreign car parking in the driveway. I waited on the porch, with Ziggy looking groomed and well-fed as he rested in my arms. "CORNELIUS!" Cornelia called as she dashed toward Ziggy. She engulfed him in her arms and there was an aura of sweet reunion, but also the sadness of parting. I guess that's where Shakespeare got the saying "parting is such sweet sorrow".

"Thank you, thank you," she murmured as she took Ziggy, now named Cornelius, away to her mint-green pickup. "You're welcome," I managed to choke out before tears flooded my eyes. I waved goodbye and there was silence as I went back into the house. Mom and Dad at work, Holly on a date...and no Ziggy made things empty.

2 days later, it was August, or my birthday. That didn't cheer me up. What did was knowing that Ziggy was happy. On Cornelia's Instagram account she shared I saw Ziggy in a lopsided party hat and smiling a cat-smile celebrating his return. I smiled back, and thought:

*Goodbye July, welcome August: a new month full of new paths to take, a
new home, and.....
A furry someone of my own.*

Untitled

by Sofia Ramirez

Hello. My name is Katie. I moved to a random city in California a few weeks ago, I think it's Manhattan Beach, though I don't care too much about it. I just want to go back to where I used to live.

Anyways, this one girl in my school, Mindy, keeps being annoying. She keeps insisting that we'll be the bestest of best friends. She's been doing that since I first arrived at my current school. It's annoying, but she's the only person that talks to me, and I recently decided to tell her something. What is this thing that I decided to tell her?

In my apartment that I live in with my mom, I keep seeing these weird creatures at night as I'm trying to go to sleep. I'm not completely sure how to describe them... But they're blob like, with antennas, but they're also goopy. I don't know what they'd feel like, but maybe slime-like. They have wide gaping mouths, too. I guess I'd call them a type of alien. Yes, this is what I told Mindy, and you want to know what happened? Well...

"What? Weird creatures that you call a kind of alien? Oh, you're so silly, Katie! You know, we're the bestest of best friends in this entire school, maybe in the entire state, but there's no way you're *actually* seeing whatever you're seeing. You and your silly little imagination, Katie. I love aliens, but I don't think you're actually-"

"OKAY, I GET IT!" I yelled at Mindy. Everyday, the more I realize we're polar opposites. She *loves* to socialize, can't stop talking, and insists she's friends with everyone even though everyone is annoyed by her! Meanwhile, I don't want to socialize, I barely say anything most of the time, and I don't even want to be friends with any of the people here. I want to be with my old friends, Lily and John, the only people that I actually enjoyed talking to all the time.

"...Oh, wow, I did not expect that from you Katie!" Mindy started. I know she started saying something else, but I tuned her out.

She starts running her mouth over, and over... *I swear, I'm about to... You know what?*

I grab her wrist and start dragging her with me. She started to talk again.

“What!?! What are you doing? I know it's the end of the school day, but I have to meet my older sister, Clara, and you know that! She'll worry, probably and-” Mindy starts before I cut her off again and tell her, “Just text her. It's not that hard.”

“Oh, yeah, I can text her! But where are you taking me anyway? I hope it's exciting!”

“My apartment,”

“Your apartment!?! Woah, I never thought I would actually get to see your apartment, this is so exciting! Oh, yeah, I still need to text Clara otherwise she'll worry and then she can't go home yet until I meet her which will make our parents worry! Wait, Katie, what if I sleepover at your place tonight? That will be-” she keeps doing her thing... I groan before I tell her, “Fine. Go meet up with your sister and tell her that you're having a sleepover,”

She keeps saying things like “Yay, that's cool!” before she asks me for my apartment. Oh. I forgot that I haven't actually told her where it is. I rip a small piece of paper, write what apartment I live in, what time to come, and give it to Mindy. She starts jumping up and down and... You guessed it, she starts yapping again. I groan and start walking to the apartment.

About twenty minutes later, I get to the apartment, and it's the same as it is everyday. Mom is at work, I go to the kitchen, grab a snack, and I go to my room to do my homework. However, this isn't like most days, because I'm going to show Mindy what I've been seeing. I'm not crazy, these blob-like-alien things are real. I finished homework, and now I wait.

I check the time and... Oh. Mindy should've been here already. You know what? I open the door of my apartment, and I see a clueless Mindy wandering around outside in the parking lot. *Are you kidding me?*

I put my shoes back on, go outside, and go down the stairs. Mindy sees me before I finish coming down the stairs of the apartment, and she skips over to the bottom of the stairs. And you can guess what she does (yep, she starts yapping).

Camp Bluebumby

by Emma Siegel

Chapter 1-Getting ready

At Katie's and her mum Malvel's house (8:00am)

It was a sunny morning at 8:00 am when Katie's mum Malvel went to wake Katie up.

Mal: Honey wake up do you have everything packed? *She said softly at the end of Katie's bed*

Katie: Huh... *she mumbles half asleep, not wanting to wake up yet even though she knows she has to*

Mal: Wake up sweetheart. *Her mum says a little louder, shaking her lightly*

Katie: Whatttt.... *she says still half asleep*

Mal:... Wake up or you'll be late! *she says sternly shaking her more*

Katie: Mmm.. I will.... *she says still half asleep, planning to go back to sleep once her mum leaves her alone*

Mal: NOW! *she says sternly*

Katie: Ok ok im up! *she sits up realizing she now has to get up*

Mal: Do you have everything packed!? *she asks hoping she'll say yes*

Katie: ... Yess.... *Malvel knows she's lying and gets frustrated*

Mal: ... GET PACKED! *Katie now realizes her mum is serious*

Katie: Yes m'am *she goes to get packed*

Mal: Tisk! Children.

Katie: Ok I have all my outfits, all my chargers and electronics and all my pjs, oh and my snacks, also bathroom stuff like toothbrush and extras! Ok, I'm all packed!

3 hours earlier (5:00am) At Jessy and her mum Verionica's house

Jessy: Omg, I need to check the list one more time! *she panics even though she checked 5 times and has everything*

Verionica: Honey it's 5:00 am... go back to bed *she says tiredly*

Jessy: NO I need to be perfectly ready! *she says stressed*

Verionica: UGHHHH *She covers her head with a pillow while frustrated*

1 hour later (2 hours earlier then at Katie's and 1 hour later then at Jessy's. (6:00 am), at Donna and her dad John's house

John: Ok honey you all ready? *he said while making breakfast*

Donna: Yup all ready! *she says calmly as her dad finishes and serves her breakfast* D: Thanks dad.

John: You're welcome. *She gives him a smile and starts eating* Joh: Ok honey I got to go to work but Lila and her parents will pick you up for camp in a bit. *he said while he tied his tie, put his shoes on and opened the door. Donna finished her food quickly because she was really hungry*

Donna: Ok bye dad have a good day. *she said calmly and her father left for work*

15 minutes later (6:15 am) at Lila and her mum and dad Jase and Molly's house

Lila: Ugh hurry up we have someone to pick up! *Jase sighs*

Jas: Yes honey I know, we're just waiting for your mother. *her mum calls out*

Molly: I'm almost ready, just one more thing! *she sprays some perfume and walks down the stairs*

Molly: Ok I'm ready. *Jase sighs*

Lila: Ugh finally can we go now!?! *Molly grabs her keys*

Molly: Yes but have some patience for once! *Lila rolls her eyes*

Lila: Whatever. *They all go to the garage and Molly starts the car. They all get in and Molly starts driving*

Back at Donna's 10 minutes later (6:25)

*The door bell rings and Lila yells from outside***Lila:** COME ON I DON'T HAVE ALL DAY!

Donna: Hm perfect timing... *She grabs her suitcase gets her shoes on and opens the door*

Lila: Ugh finally! Get in. *Lila opens the car door for her*

Donna: Thank you. *she gets in*

Lila: Yeah, whatever. *Lila closes the door behind her and gets in* **Lila:** Get driving we don't have all day to get there. *she says sassily*

Donna: Wow, your car is fancy... *Donna says softly*

Lila: What did you say? *Lila stares not hearing her*

Donna: Oh... nothing...

Lila: ... alright...

Donna: Thanks for driving me. *She smiles softly. Lila scoffs and nudges her* Sorry... *She whispers to Lila*

Molly: Your welcome sweetie.

Jase: Yeah it's no problem. *Donna smiles softly*

At Kat and her aunt Rebeca's house (8:25 am)

Rebeca: Honey camp is in 5 minutes *She says with her sassy russian accent* I just got a text from the group everyone else is already there.

Kat: I know I'm almost ready! *She yells down from upstairs*

Rebeca: Mhm hurry up you ain't packing the whole world are you. *Kat walks down the stairs with her whole suitcase packed* **Rebeca:** Alright then, let's go. *They both get in the car and start driving to camp*

Chapter 2-Welcome to Camp

Mr. Kaloskie: Welcome, welcome everyone! Take a seat on the logs! *The people who are there or had just arrived sat down* **Mr. Kaloskie:** Alright, that's everyone on my list! Let's start with going in a circle and saying our names! Starting with... you! *He points at Daniel*

Daniel: Me? *Mr. Kaloskie nods* Oh, I'm Daniel.

Mr. Kaloskie: See everyone just like that! We are going clockwise so you next! *He points at Jackson*

Jackson: Alright, uh, I'm Jackson.

Percy: I'm Percy.

Angie: I'm Angie!

Kat: I'm Kat!

Lila: Ugh I'm Lila.

Donna: I'm Donna.

Katie: Katie.

Jessy: I'm Jessy. *Everyone else introduces themselves*

Mr. Kaloskie: Alright, that's everyone! Hm... *He points at four people, Jessy, Joslin, Draco, and Fred* Mr. Kaloskie: You guys! Cabin one! *He points at cabin one and they all go there.* Mr. Kaloskie: Perfect, perfect. You guys! Cabin two! *He points at Moanica, Katie, Kat, and Jason, then at cabin two and they all go there* Mr. Kaloskie: Alright... You guys cabin three! *He points at Donna, Lila, Liam, and Percy, then at cabin three and they all go there* Mr. Kaloskie: Alright then the rest of you. *Jackson, Angie, Melia, Daniel* Mr. Kaloskie: Last cabin, cabin four! *He points at cabin four and they all go there* Mr. Kaloskie: Alright guys settle in your cabins, get to know each other and I'll just be setting up for activities! Have fun and I'll tell you when it's time to do an activity all together! *They all start getting settled*

At cabin one

Jessy: Ok... I call the first top bunk, on the left! *She climbs up and lays down. Draco rolls his eyes*

Joslin: I call the bottom bunk on the left! *They stare*

Jessy: That's not how it works... You call the top bunks because everyone hates bottom, so you're definitely getting bottom. *Joslin understands what she's saying*

Joslin: Ohhhh! Sorry..., but at least I got the bottom! *she plops down on the bottom bunk she called*

Draco: You guys are so immature, and that's basic knowledge you're clearly just dumb Joslin.

Fred: Draco can you not... we just got here and-

Draco: I did NOT ask for your opinion!

Fred: Oh... ok... sorry... well can i at least have the right top bun-

Draco: I call the right top bunk! *He smirks at Fred at goes to the top bunk he called* Dr: To slow.

Fred: Oh alright then...

Joslin: Yayyy you get to be down here with meeee! *She says excitedly then whispers to Fred* Joslin: Where the real cool kids sleep! *Draco rolls his eyes. Fred giggles*

Jessy: Yeah like you guys can add fairy lights and fake vines and make it into like a mini cave or something! *Jessy smiles*

Draco: Yeah and pretend to be rats, oh wait, you guys already are! *Jessy looks at him angrily*

At cabin two

Katie and Kat are singing espresso by sabrina carpenter very loudly

Moanica: Freaks... *She mumbles to herself*

Jason: YESSS GIRLSSS, OMG QUEENS! *Moanica stares*

Moanica: CAN YOU GUYS BE QUIET! *They stare*

Katie: Fine party pooper.

Moanica: Finally, ok so I get the top right bunk, Jason you can have bottom left, Kat you can have uh... bottom right, and UGHHH I guess you can have top left bunk Katie.

Kat: Um who are you to decide, like respectfully we can make our own choices. *Moanica steps closer to Kat and speaks menacingly*

Moanica: Do as I say if you don't want any problems.

Kat: Ugh fine. *They get settled in their bunks*

The other cabins get settled and it turns night

Mrs. Jalovie: Ok kids come outside if you want a late night campfire! *She says over a speaker and all the kids come outside. Mrs. Jalovie is waiting at the campfire* Mrs. Jalovie: Ok kids! Well, I'll leave you guys to it! Make friends and have fun! I'll be at the coaches cabin over there if you need me! *She points at the cabin and goes there*

Daniel: Well um we're all here so should we um...

Katie: Talk?

Draco: Boring!

Percy: Too bad that's the safest thing we can do so we're doing it.

Liam: Ugh fineeee.

Daniel: So um... how have you guys been? *There's just silence*

Lila: We're good. How about we play truth or dare instead!

Jack: Yessss-

Daniel: I don't know...

Lila: Come on, you're so boring!

Liam: Whatever, let's just think of something different.

Moanica: It's just one person's opinion and she doesn't have to play, let's just do it!

Lila: Yeah but that would be rude, so.

Draco: Yeah but why does it matter?

Lila: Well because- *Lila gets interrupted*

Liam: Do you have a crush on Donna or something!?

Lila: WHAT NO! I could NEVER! *She blushes then mumbles to herself* I'm also not even allowed to like girls anyway... *Some stare at what's going down*

Liam: Sureeee, but fine whatever! *Donna is blushing*

Lila: I'm telling the truth!

Liam: Ok geez! *Mrs. Jalovie comes back*

Mrs. Jalovie: Ok kids! I would say it's time to get back to your cabins and get ready to go to sleep! *They all go to their cabins and get ready to sleep and most go to sleep*

Daniel: Good night guys.

Lila: Good night...

Liam: Good night! *Liam says still slightly giggling and Percy is already asleep*

TO BE CONTINUED...

Untitled

By Hannah Smith

1

I wake up to my mother as she speaks to me. "Violet, darling, it's time to wake up!" My mom shakes me. I feel her warm, soft hands against my cold arm. "Fine," I mumble. My mother gives me a kiss on the cheek and leaves the room. I slowly step on my cold, wood floors and look around the empty room. My new school has dorms, and I had to pack up all of my belongings and bring them to the school. Well, my mom did. I refused to go see it beforehand because I was so mad at my parents for sending me there. Now I think I'll regret that.

I've seen pictures of it online. It's massive. It's very old and looks like a castle, like the ones you see in movies. "Thornhill Academy... sounds sketchy." That's what I said when my parents first showed me. They just laughed. Of course, that just made me angrier. I'm that type of person who can't take a joke, and I hate that quality. I don't have a sense of humor and am always serious. No wonder it's so hard to make friends.

"VIOLET! BATHROOM!" My mother shouts from the kitchen. "Okay, I'm headed that way!" I shout back. I trudge to the bathroom and stare at myself in the mirror. *It's about that time, Violet. Get yourself together. There's no backing out now.* I shake my head to lose the thoughts. I want to back out and go to my old school so badly. But I can't. I must go to Thornhill Academy. It's where I am forced to go. I get ready and head to the car.

2

My mother and I sit in silence throughout the entire car ride. My mother tries to make conversation, but I won't respond, no matter how eager I am. I must resist. "Well, it's a bit of a drive!" She says, chuckling awkwardly. I say nothing. Silence. My mother attempts again, but it doesn't work. I cannot talk to her or I'll get angry and yell at her. I don't want to yell at her, so it's best to keep quiet.

We finally pulled up to the school. It's much bigger than I ever thought. "Have a great day, darling. Call me!" My mother kisses me on the forehead and

I leave the car. I don't dare look back. My mother is forcing me into doing something I hate. I hope I never forgive her.

As I open the heavy doors, I am greeted by a beautiful interior. Polished wooden walls, polished tile flooring, big chandeliers... It's so amazing. *Violet... you're supposed to hate it.* I shake my head. My thoughts are right, I can't appreciate anything here. If I say anything positive to my mom, she'll keep me here for good. And I don't want that.

I look at my schedule and head down the West Hall. What a fancy name for a hallway! I'm not surprised, though, since this school is basically a castle in disguise. I walk down and find my classroom. First period, History. I sit down at one of the desks and a tall blonde girl immediately approaches me. "Hey! I'm Sunny, what's your name?" She beams a smile at me. I cannot handle her energy already. "Violet," I say in a hushed voice, ignoring her face. "Violet! Oh, I just LOVE that name! So, why'd you come here?" She stares at me with her big green eyes. "My mom and dad sent me here." I reply, still avoiding her face. "Well! Isn't that such a coincidence! Mine did too!" She's glowing with happiness now. "Um, yeah..." I slowly open my textbook. *I bet her parents couldn't take her energy. Yeah, that's why they sent her here.* I grin to myself. The bell finally rings, and I'm grateful it sent Sunny back to her seat. She is too much.

Mr. Johnson walks in, looking paranoid. "Hey class, it's uh- free time since it's the first day of school!" He puts on a fake smile. The class is booming with joy. Everyone immediately opens their laptops and plays games. I read.

Mr. Johnson approaches me and sits beside me. "You're the new kid, aren't you?" He looks at me with a grim expression. "Yes, I am." This time I make an effort to look him in the eyes. "Well, welcome to Thornhill. I don't have much to say to you, but I do have one piece of advice." I nod. When he whispers it in my ear, I am so confused. "Don't trust the math teacher."

3

Next period: Math. I take a deep breath and remember what Mr. Johnson said. What is that supposed to mean? As I enter math class, a tall, slender woman with white skin and red fingernails comes in. "Hello, class. I'm Mrs. Withers... your math teacher." I take a moment to look at her and I notice she is

staring straight at me. I look around at the class and notice everyone looks at her in the same way with lifeless still eyes. They all say, "Good morning Mrs. Withers," in a robotic voice. No way this is natural. Either it's not, or the kids here are just plain weird.

Class goes by and I pay attention to each of the kids. Sometimes they act like normal kids and other times they act like robots, especially when Mrs. Withers talks. Once I looked at this dull girl and she stared at me with pleading eyes. I looked at her while she whispered the words "Help me," to my face. I immediately turned away and felt unsafe the rest of the day.

Today I woke up feeling...worried. I don't know why. Maybe something is going to happen. No, nothing is going to happen. This is a safe school. It's not like somebody is going to break in...right? I get up and get ready for first period. Oh, yeah, I forgot to mention that Sunny is my roommate. Ugh! I don't speak, although she gives me information about Mrs. Withers and how she's (apparently) been teaching here for over 100 years. She might be some sort of supernatural creature. Who knows.

I leave the room without waiting for Sunny and I head to Mr. Johnson's class. Mr. Johnson looks particularly paranoid today, and he bends down to whisper something in my ear. "She's going to blow," he says. Who is going to blow? I want to ask but something tells me I'll figure it out soon enough. But then I do. It's Mrs. Withers.

4

I nod and go to class. It goes by very quickly, and I find myself not paying attention to anything Mr. Johnson says but instead trying to answer all of the questions in my head. Soon enough, the bell rings and I run to math class only to find an empty classroom with only Mrs. Withers sitting at her desk.

"Dearie, something has had to happen to the rest of the class.." She motions for me to sit down. I don't. "I know you've been lucky in the past," she says. It's true. I have been. But I don't nod or anything. I just stand there. "But, I'm afraid you won't be so lucky this time." She grins an evil grin. I swallow hard. "What do you mean?" I say, uneasily. Something isn't right. Mrs. Withers then stands up and transforms into a supernatural creature! I gasp and try to run, but she grabs me by the waist. Lucky for me, though, I see a chair right in my arm's

length and throw it at her. She then disappears into thin air. I stand there, mystified. What was that? What just happened? What did I just witness? I look around and Mrs. Withers is nowhere to be seen. Then, I realize the real problem. What happened to the rest of the class? Should I try and find them now? Or is it too late?

The Doll

by Isis Smith

As soon as she stepped into the old abandoned house, for some reason she felt like she was being watched. She looked over her shoulder, nothing was there. She convinced herself she was simply just imagining it. After all, the house was abandoned, no one was in there but her. The girl planned on leaving just as quickly as she arrived after retrieving what she was looking for. She walked over the dollhouse against the wall, full of beautiful porcelain dolls. One doll stuck out in particular. The doll had a short blonde bob cut, her ends were curled, her eyes like black holes, her dress was shredded up and dirty. All of the other dolls had long black hair, brown eyes, a red hair bow and were wearing a long pretty dress. They looked perfect, without any cuts. The girl felt she could relate to the blonde doll. She felt abnormal in a world where everyone is identical. She had always felt alone, like a puzzle with half of the wrong pieces. But seeing this doll... seeing this doll made her feel like she was recognized. It made her feel appreciated. As if this doll was just like her, just in a different body. She wanted to inspect the unusual doll. She grabbed the blonde doll, and stared into her soulless eyes. As she leaned in closer to get a better look, the doll suddenly blinked back at her. "Ah!" The girl screamed, dropping the doll and breaking her head open. Inside was a key. The same key she was looking for.

The Tail of Two Kitties, a True Story

by Kaitlyn Tu

Joey

"Bye Joey, when we come back, you're gonna be a big brother," my owner said, acting all excited. I didn't understand what she was saying, but I could tell she was so energetic. She left the room waving at me. What was that about? I was on a comfy, high bed that my owner sleeps in. I closed my eyes, hoping my owner will come back soon. I am Joey, and I am a cat.

First thing I know, my dad-owner is waking me up, hands on me picking me up. "Who are you, human to wake me up from my nice, comfortable spot?" I said meowing, because I wasn't happy about this. Next thing I know I'm locked up in my mom-owner's room with a bowl of water next to me. "WHY!" I said meowing as loud as I could. How could they do this to me? I am their companion! "I promise I'll be nicer, I'll eat my food, and I'll even play fetch with you if you let me out!" I said, meowing even more. Minutes later, the door knob moved. Yes! My owner came in, even more excited than before. What is up with her? Behind her was her brother and dad, all coming at me. Wait- something isn't right, because I smell CAT. Not just any cat, a different cat. Sniffing them aggressively, I looked up at them with the "please, let me out" eyes. "Everything is gonna be okay Joey," my dad-owner said.

They left me, AGAIN. I looked down at my paws and just remembered about the water bowl next to me. I put my head down and drank. I was so thirsty, doing all that meowing. I still can't believe they locked me in here! Ah! I thought. It was so nice to have the cold water go down my throat, cleaning it fresh. After, I realized it was no use trying to meow, because I was stuck in here. I sat down in "loaf mode" as someone was opening the doorknob. Yes! Finally! I thought, running out the room. Thank you!

Kiwi

The loud engine turned off as I kept meowing. They carried me and we got out of the car. I was meowing to the people who brought me here, taking me away from my brothers! One second I was playing with these people in the

play area, and then the next they took me away from my brothers! I was in a pink cat carrier, and as soon as they brought me into the house, I smelled food! There was something else too; another cat! Yay! I thought. I could have that cat as a sibling!

They took me up the stairs as my heart was pounding. What was this new place? Will this be permanent or temporarily? I examined and studied the view I could see: toys around the room, soft ground, high ceilings, and cat toys! I smelled a LOT of cat hair. By the smell of it, it was a boy. They also took me to a small room in a girly, pink room with a lot of things. I could tell that the other cat slept on the high looking comfortable thing because it smelled a lot of him. They took me to an even smaller room with lots of clothes! They opened my carrier, and although I wanted to get out of this, I was scared of this new place. "We are gonna name you Kiwi!" the family said, looking at me happily. Kiwi? I thought. Is this my forever home?

Joey

As soon as they open the door, I run out, free! I started to purr, until I stopped because of something. That cat, I thought. It wasn't like I have never smelled other cats from my humans, but I smelt it more than them. It was coming from under my girl-owner's room. I slowly came closer, as the smell got even stronger. I take a step back. This is too much, I thought. They-they abandoned me. Replaced me! I ran away from the door and ran downstairs. How could they do this to me? I'm their companion, right from the start. I chose them and they chose me! It's okay, I thought as I slowed down, walking. "Joey? Where are you?" I heard upstairs. Then I realized that I can't abandon them. I'll show them that I'm unhappy about it, but I'll also have to be better than this new cat.

Purrrrrrrrrrr. Purrrrrrrrrrr. Purrr-purr? I'm awakened by loud footsteps on the stairs. THUMP. THUMP. I jump out of my cat tree and go under the dining table. *Aw man*, I thought as I looked around. *I need to go. BAD!* I ran to my litterbox as the footsteps got louder. I didn't like loud noises, no cat does. When I was done with my business, I ran back to my tree, because it was just Kaitlyn, my girl-owner. The same one who has that cat in her room. Ugh! Unfortunately, she found me and started to hug me. It was too tight! I bit her and she let go of me. "Bad Joey!" she said. I didn't understand, how could I? They speak Italian Alien

French, while our language is so easy. How can I trust her if she brought another cat into my home and my territory?

Kiwi

Lights that were lit soon turned dark. My room was really dark, and I barely could see anything. "Let me out!" I said, meowing. I don't really like to meow, but I will if I need to. She left me boxes, food, and a big dollhouse that I began to walk to. I went behind it and closed my eyes gently. I was peaceful, and then went to sleep.

It was morning, and I'm awakened by a twist of a knob. *Who could it be?* I thought, as I ran even more behind the dollhouse. The girl came in, being all gentle as she sat down in front of the dollhouse. "Hi Kiwi! I have your food! Why don't you come on out?" I realized that it was my new girl! I stepped carefully, looking up as the light started to shine on me when I walked out the dollhouse. I approached her and sniffed her gentle hand. It smelled like that cat I saw the other day because I knew that before she saw me, she saw that cat. "Are you my new owner?" I meowed softly, tilting my head and staring at her. She smiled and answered, "Awww! You are so cute with your adorable meow, Kiwi! Goodbye now!" She put down some wet food and dry food, standing up and starting to touch the knob. I walked to the bowl of food, sniffing it. Oh well! I thought as I licked it. This is my new life!

I didn't see them until a few hours later, when I heard footsteps coming my way. I ran behind the dollhouse again, uncertain. Why did they leave me for so long? I thought to myself. The doorknob moved and two of my new humans came in; my girl owner and my mom owner! They came in with a pink and gold strap that started to come near me. I took a few steps back. What is that? The girl held me as the mom put it around my neck. As soon as they put me down, I shook myself, but it was no use! Ugh! What is this! I heard them laughing as I tried to get it off. I was bouncing, jumping, shaking, and rolling! The mom's owner opened a bag and gave me a treat. Yum! I thought as I devoured the treat. Now I can get used to this!

Kaitlyn (Me)

Now you know about my two cats, Kiwi and Joey and how they started off. Both cats haven't seen each other, and they are both so curious. They weren't supposed to meet, until a week later.

My family and I were playing with Kiwi as we heard Joey meowing at the door. I opened the door and closed it behind me, not letting Joey's paws get through. He ran away as I tried to pick him up and when I did, he did something that hurt. Yes, I was used to the biting and scratching, but not this thing. This hurt so much it made my eyes tear up. Joey hissed, hissed for the very first time.

Joey

I know that I've hurt my owner, Kaitlyn. I've never made that noise before. I knew how to do it, it's just that I did it because I was upset, upset about how they have been paying attention to her instead of me. It took some courage to get that out, but I know that noise now.

It was after lunch time when I walked up the stairs and checked on that CAT. *Ugh, why am I even doing this?* I asked myself. It's not like I'm going to be friends with her, because I won't!

Kiwi

Kaitlyn, my new owner, came in, crying. *What was wrong with her?* I walked up to her and sniffed her. Uh-oh. Mean cat alert! This other cat was very upset right now by the smell of the odors on his hair. Every time I smelled him, he seemed angry. *Jeez, I thought to myself. Chill out dude. Why you gotta be so rude?* I rolled over, letting hands rub my belly. It felt nice and relaxing. But seriously, that cat has to CHILL OUT.

Kaitlyn (Me)

It's 6:00 and I'm awakened by meows. Kiwi meows a million times more as I get up out of bed. "KIWI!" I say, opening the door. She runs out, rubbing me with her soft, grey fur. Okay, I'm relaxed now and I forgive you Kiwi. I felt like today was the day to introduce them to each other, but I knew it would turn out.... not so good. Later that day, we planned to have them meet but we didn't know if it would go very well. We had Joey in the living room as we tried

to move Kiwi. She was a mischievous monster, biting my hands, trying to get free. "MOM!!!" I screamed.

She runs in, grabbing Kiwi and tries to bring her outside. For the first time ever, Joey saw Kiwi– and Kiwi saw Joey. At first, Kiwi tried to go to Joey when Joey hissed and growled at her. Were they even ready to meet? Was this a mistake?

She gave him space as Joey felt better. Then, time after time, Joey got more comfortable and interested in her. Everywhere Kiwi went, Joey went. Everywhere Joey went, Kiwi went. It was a cute pattern, and I enjoyed every bit watching them connect together– being more comfortable with each other.

This is my story about when a kitten named Kiwi, a ball of energy entered our lives, and how Joey reacted. Love your pets, because they aren't just companions, they are your best friends, furever. Yay!

–Kaitlyn Tu

Epilogue:

Tic-Tock. Time passed by as Joey and Kiwi got used to each other. Yes, there are still days when Kiwi sniffs Joey's part where he doesn't like to be sniffed. Yes, Joey still hisses at Kiwi when all she is doing is following him. What mostly matters are the days where there is love- when they cuddle with each other on the bed and close their eyes. When Joey licks Kiwi's fur all of the sudden.

The Reasons Why

By Clarity Wimmer

The dinner table was as quiet as the whisper of a breeze. Only the humming of the refrigerator broke it. Trying to start a confrontation I sputtered, but cut my own self off with a dry cough. In the meantime, I ate the peas one by one by plopping them in my mouth tasting bland, then my dad stood up. The chair screeches beneath him. His plate is empty. He slowly walks up the stairs. My mom is done too, but she stays and waits until I finished.

"Charlie," she says, "your friends have been going down to Willow Creek haven't they?"

"Yes m'am." I replied softly, my voice trailing off. We better not be talking about him.

"And you haven't been going with them?" She persisted.

"No." I mumbled in agreement.

"Well, I saw on the news one of them well...went too far down the creek last week."

I froze, my breath getting heavy. I don't want to talk about... about him.

"Do you know anything about him?" My mom says, "his name is like Cauly Marger or something." I look up to face her shaking now and she looks so calm. "Yes" I whisper the words shaky. My mom sits there wondering why I am crying. "Why are..." my mom says. I kick the chair back and run up the stairs. The carpet fraying under me.

I run up to my room, throwing myself on my bed. It creaks as I move, pulling my phone out, opening it to look at what I could do.

It's 10:38 pm now after my bed time. I'm 14 I can stay up on that little screen 'ding', a notification popped up from Deacon saying, "Dude, actually come this time we're doing something cool!" Normally I don't come, but something in me just had to go. To see well if he is alive. So I texted back, "I might come," then I shut off my phone and placed it on my nightstand.

Sitting there waiting until it was 12:00 pm then my door surged open there standing my dad.

“Why aren't you sleeping!” his voice boomed in my small room.

“I-I was just umm sleeping with my eyes open?” I stammered.

“Sure you were.” he harshly said back, then he did a final glare and closed the door lightly, so he wouldn't wake up my mom.

After two hours, midnight was here. I got up from my bed trying not to wake my dad or mom. I opened the door softly, looking out making sure that no one was outside in the hall. Sneaking passed my mom's and dad's room to the stairs. I scampered down to where my shoes were. It was probably cold outside so I got a coat, gloves, and boots.

To give you background, we were on the “poor” side of the creek, but the other side is supposed to have a beautiful abandoned musical house far downstream. Walking would take fifty minutes, but it is so hard to find. For the “best” hangout spot you need to sacrifice your time.

The night was cold and dark, not one person was out. Only small street lights lit a narrow path on the road. Thankfully I brought a flashlight! I quickly turned it on and I started on my way.

I froze, only to hear laughing in the distance. It was them. I ran towards the sound and there they all were standing and laughing because Deacon pushed Jack in the creek. I didn't yell at Deacon not to do that again, because Jack was laughing too. I wished I had scolded him.

“Hey Charlie,” Deacon said, still giggling.

“Hi” I sputtered.

“I can't believe you came!” Deacon said between laughing.

“Yeah” I said weakly, walking up next to him. The stench from the swampy creek surrounding us. I turned to face the creek, not aware that Deacon moved behind me. Then I felt my body fall forward. The world seemed to spin as I tripped. I was meant to fall in the creek but instead I fumbled down. My head hit a jagged rock along the creek so hard that it knocked me out.

I woke up not in a hospital, but half on the ground. My lower half was still in the cold greenish creek, making me too numb to move. I yell, hoping someone would hear me, but there is no reply. I should be focused on getting out of the cold creek so I don't freeze to death. I take a deep breath and gather all my strength. The pain hits me like a semi truck . My arms felt like they

were on fire, but I dragged myself onto land. I lay there for a moment, trying to think why didn't they come after me. D-did they not care? I wanted to know so desperately.

I stopped and looked out in the distance seeing a small light. Lifting myself up I stumble though the light that is only getting bigger, than I see it. It's true I thought, it's really true there sitting on a flat clearing was a mostly intact abandoned musical house. An old harp was in the middle of the dust covered stage then a string rang and I froze. W-was this harp playing itself. Then I had a memory of playing that harp. A nice up beat happy song that I felt like I knew. I never played before. How am I somehow remembering this? Then the world became unsettling. The trees turned into dark weeping willows. Singing blue birds into cawing crows.

My body walked to the harp without my control. I try walking back but whatever is happening can not be changed. I'm standing in front of the harp. I gravitate towards it with my hands holding it now. The strings have a rough bumped texture. Then I play, the song is beautiful. A slow gentle sound, the noise flowing with the wind. Then my vision goes black. I can only hear what happens and not see it anymore.

Untitled

By Angela Xu

The village was bustling with travelers and markets full of people. The bright sun shone through the trees and reached my eyes. It was almost November, my favorite time of the year. I could almost taste the pumpkin pie and the hot cocoa being served around the dinner table while laughing with my family about stupid jokes.

I walked past the farmers market and felt a small drop on my arm. It was pouring, and I tried looking up to see the sky but it started to rain heavier, drenching my face and wetting my hair. I picked up my pace, moving and darting under trees while people ran to close their food stalls before the rain reached the foods and snacks they were selling.

The door creaked open with a groan and I looked at the long hallway that stretched throughout my house. Slowly, I took off my shoes and set them aside from the door. I creep towards my room and shut the door behind me.

But, something strange happened. I always make sure to light a candle before I leave the house so my room smells like fresh lavender but it had gone out.

Brushing it off, I look, moving back my silk curtains and tucking them to the side.

It was beautiful, the rain went away, leaving small puddles of water all along our stone walkway in the garden. My herbs, flowers, and fruit were growing pretty big, which meant that I would have to harvest. Running outside and grabbing the basket I made out of straw and putting on my beautiful slippers I got as a gift from my great grandmother.

My shoes clicked against the hard stone steps going down into my little part of the garden I'd spent months growing and watering and taking care of. There were small strawberries, herbs that would be great in tea, and some flowers that would be beautiful in vases.

It could have been an hour based on how long I spent collecting everything, but the basket was full to the brim, small fruits spilling out the edges,

and my entire garden empty. Inside the kitchen, I boiled some water and dropped some herbs and flowers into my large tea cup and stirred around until I smelled a delicious aroma filling the entire room. I flicked my long brown hair behind my ear and poured the tea into a small cup. I stared out the window, into the vast meadows on the outskirts of my village.

The sun was setting fast and I hurried to my room, hoping to read a bit before I dozed off. Climbing into my bed, I wrapped myself in a fur blanket bought at the market last year.

I was halfway to grabbing my book when I heard this eerie scream that echoed off the walls and made my ears ring. I shot up and looked into the yard.

A woman was standing there, white gown glowing and flowing in the wind, making it look like an angel had flown down from the sky. Staring in shock, I didn't notice she was staring directly at me. She let out another shriek and disappeared into the dark night.

I let those eyes look into me, glowing in my mind, like an imprint. Maybe it was special, like it was supposed to be remembered. I still see it to this day, but completely different. She looked familiar, like I had seen them somewhere, but it was lost in the clutter of today's mess.

The book sat untouched on my nightstand, forgotten like a dirty dish in the sink. I could almost feel bad for not reading it today, but I couldn't care less if I read a book tonight or any night. My eyelids felt like heavy weights and I let them fall. I usually never have dreams, but tonight was different. I dreamt about that woman, who looked like a bird in the sky, moving with every blow of the wind. She was standing outside a white mansion, dressed in that same white gown, and the same piercing eyes that had stared at me like I was an enemy. She was singing something, a beautiful song that resonated across the dark forest and over a pond that rippled with the sound.

Light flooded my bedroom and birds were singing a melody. The maple tree branches were littered with different colors and were flowing along with a small breeze in the air. The air filled my lungs as soon as I opened my window, it smelled crisp and had a slight pumpkin scent.

A small bird flew over onto my windowsill and chirped happily before abruptly flying away.

I walked briskly across the field and to the pumpkins and locked eyes with the smallest and most beautiful pumpkin I had ever seen, it was red and orange, sprinkled with dots of yellow. Picking it up, I saw a small mouse under it, chewing on a small piece of another pumpkin. I picked it up and dropped it into my little bag.

"Thank you for buying from us, and we hope you can come again!" The lady at the front of the pumpkin patch says while handing me the pumpkin. "Thanks!" I mutter under my breath and walk away. The little mouse dances in my palm as we walk home, and I stare into the golden sunset and think about my day. I went out to the market and bought some fruits and vegetables, and then walked to the pumpkin patch to pick out something to carve and possibly eat.

I can never decide on a dish to make. But today, I knew what I was going to eat. Pumpkin rice was always my favorite and definitely delicious. Using a small knife I cut a hole into the pumpkin, and scooped out all the pulp, and rinsed them and let them dry.

Wait...why is the bowl levitating?!

I shot back away from the counter but the bowl seemed to follow me. I tried grabbing it but it seemed like it was avoiding me. Finally, I looked away after what felt like a million years. The bowl dropped and shattered on the floor. Shards flew everywhere and when I bent down to grab the glass pieces, one cut my palm. Blood pooled out of my hand and I grabbed a tissue to stop the bleeding.

The blood started to glow, like it was enchanted and my eyelids felt like weights falling to the ground.

I passed out on the spot, and to my shock, the wound was gone when I finally woke up. It was like a dream, there's no way it could have healed overnight. The glass shards were still scattered all over the floor and my hair was a mess.

Sure, maybe I was tired and couldn't remember what had happened, but I could swear there was a shadow that slid across my hallway right before I hit the floor.

There's something happening and it's not normal. There was something far worse than just a bowl floating and a shadow in my house.

The pond was the only thing that could calm me more than the evening walks, it was surrounded by a forest, and had this strange energy. The pond was a light blue, not like the green murky waters you see in regular ponds.

I dipped my feet into the water and stared into the forest. Deer and foxes all gathered around, staring at me. The water rippled and I saw her, my little sister. She had drowned in this very pond, and before I lost her, I cut some of her hair and put it in a necklace.

Her voice was soft and quiet, but it echoed off the water's surface. "Why?" I grasped at the necklace and stared at it for a long time. Her golden locs reflected off the bright sunlight and blinded me.

The water reached my shins and my legs locked in place. A strange glowing figure suddenly appeared in the distance, the woman from last night, she was again looking at me. She hid behind a tree trunk and was watching me with those same glowing eyes.

Water rippled with the wind and blew against my face.

The forest was thick with leaves and little weeds on the forest floor. I stepped through the trees and climbed onto a birch tree. I used to always be told I was like a squirrel, climbing swiftly onto trees. My feet wrapped around the thick branches and my hands grasped onto the small ridges of the bark. The view was beautiful and the land below was tiny compared to the pink and orange sky. Clouds floated in bunches and the setting sun was almost invisible behind the vast mountain ranges. I could almost stay here forever, watching the sun set over and over again.

A little rabbit flashed around the trees and I looked down.

Bad decision.

I was on the very top of a tall tree and as soon as I glanced down, my foot lost its grip on the branch I was standing on.

My shoe squeaked against the bare wood and slid off the side of it. My stomach felt like it was flipping upside down and I reached out my hand instinctively. My fingers traced down the tree as I plummeted to the ground. Luckily, I grabbed the side of a branch.

My heart was like a hammer in my chest and I was breathing out of control, taking big gulps of air.

And just as I thought I was out of danger, the branch snapped under my weight and I continued falling.

I hit the ground with a loud thud and my head was spinning.

I opened my eyes and a bright light hit me. Am I in heaven?

The sound of machines beeping woke me up and I looked around me. This was not the forest I remembered. The room had white walls and fluids were being pumped into my arms.

Where am I?

But before I could stand up, a nurse rushed in and her face was a mix of shocked and relieved. On my bedside, she hit a button and a doctor walked in, holding a clipboard and a stern look plastered on her face.

“Catherine Monterose?”

“Yes. What's happening? Where am I?” I sat up straight and stared into the doctor's eyes.

“I'm Doctor Jackie, you got into a serious car crash on highway 91 and got put into a coma. It's a miracle you woke up, you've been here for 3 years. She walked up to me and adjusted the IV in my arm before excusing herself to process discharge papers for me.

The nurse is still standing in the corner, looking at me like she had never seen another human before. And as I start asking questions, she just shakes her head and walks out.

How have I been in a coma for 3 years? I was just climbing a tree moments ago. My mind is fuzzy and it feels like my memories are from a completely different dimension.

The cool air blew against my face as I stood in the cold November afternoon. The hospital grew smaller with each step I took.

My phone chimed with a notification and looking down, it was my mom. The doctor told me I had lost most of my memories, as a part of the accident.

The message read:

“You know what to do now...use your memories wisely before they escape from you again...”

“What?” I muttered to myself as I stared at the message.

My door let out a loud creak as I crept into this house that claimed to be mine.

A living room lay before me, a couch, tv and a coffee table that held memories I could no longer recall. I walked slowly into the dust covered house, every inch felt distant and not mine. Those words rang in my ear, “*Use your memories wisely—*”. *What was that supposed to mean?*

A few months into this new life I had grown used to walking to work everyday, staring at the beautiful golden shoreline where little kids played in the water. The old workplace was packed with people running around printing papers and writing documents. And I had settled into a small routine of finishing work, getting a meal, and going home to enjoy a tv show.

Walking back home was surreal, the wind blew softly on my face and maybe it was a bit too good, because my papers flew with the wind, dancing softly to the breeze, and eventually getting stuck in a tree branch.
Great.

Climbing a tree was my thing, staring into the orange and pink sky and letting the wind take me where it wants to go. I could almost stay here forever, watching the sun set over and over again.

A little rabbit flashed around the trees and I looked down.

Bad decision.

I was on the very top of a tall tree and as soon as I glanced down, my foot lost its grip on the branch I was standing on.

My shoes squeaked against the bare wood and slid off the side of it. My stomach felt like it was flipping upside down and I reached out my hand instinctively. My fingers traced down the tree as I plummeted to the ground. Luckily, I grabbed the side of a branch.

My heart was like a hammer in my chest and I was breathing out of control, taking big gulps of air.

And just as I thought I was out of danger, the branch snapped under my weight and I continued falling.

The ground felt cold, and colored lights illuminated the blackness of my vision.

I scraped my arms against the ground but I guess my legs gave out because I got another text, which lit up the dark sky around me.

"I told you to listen to your memories, didn't I?"

My heart started beating slower and my consciousness slowly faded away as I felt a hand on my throat.