



Providence Hall High School

Literary Journal

2019-2020

Short Stories

Choices

By Kyler Navarro

When I walked on the bus, I noticed my regular seat had been taken, so alternatively, I chose to stand. Soon after, I felt my legs trembling, but rather than move to a seat, I decided to ignore their cries. Returning from the office was always strenuous, but instead of feeling tired, I felt empty, and I was willing to do whatever to not draw any attention to myself. After a moment, I remembered that the driver would frequently take some sharp turns, so I started searching around for a place to sit.

At the end of the bus, I noticed an open row. But before I could make my move, the bus came to a screeching halt, so instead, I had to focus on keeping myself upright. I realised people were boarding, so I looked back at the seats to see if they were still available. Remarkably, they were still vacant and I quickly pushed past some people. Though when I made it, the two inner seats had been taken, but the end was still unoccupied, so I quickly claimed it.

Before I could get comfortable, I noticed a girl, who had just gotten on, was still searching for an open seat. Her clothes were soaked, her hair was out of place, and the look on her face implied an urge to cry. She continued to scan the rows and when she made it to mine, I quickly looked away. Then I remembered how I feel when I have a rough day; you feel alone, you're an insect, forced to accept whatever's thrown your way. Before making a move, I took a quick glance around for an empty seat...to no avail. So instead, I stood up. "Excuse me, miss, you can sit here," I offered nervously.

"Oh, no, you really shouldn't, thanks though," she thoughtfully replied.

I could feel people staring at me, so I tried again, this time with a bit more force, "Please, just, take it." I knew if she didn't, I'd feel guilty later. We passed each other as we traded places but kept our heads down avoiding eye contact. I remained standing for the rest of the ride.

I shoved my hands into my pockets to protect them from the frosty night. I generally kept my head down as I walked, but something deep within me urged me to look up. I noticed a homeless man at the far end of the street. I slowed my pace so I could think. But for what? I usually end up drowned in consequences rather than coming to a decision. I decided to give up and revert to my usual strategy. While keeping my head down, I successfully strolled past him. Though before I crossed the street, I stopped, raised my head, and turned to the man.

“Here.” I nagged out my wallet and pulled out a couple bills, “Hope this helps.”

He took it gently from my hand. “Thank you—god bless you,” he murmured.

I was a bit surprised by his response. I guess I...well, expected something else to happen.

I swung open the door exposing a bit of the warm interior. My apartment building was very shady, so I made my way through the main hallway as fast as I could. I lived on the top floor, so the stairs were always a harsh chore to surpass. But I had to live with it. The office didn't pay well, but it was the only work I could find. Well, technically, it was the only form I felt comfortable working in. Before I could make it up to my floor, a small voice called out from behind me.

“Um, excuse me, sir?” it said.

I turned to see that girl. The girl I'd given my seat to. My heart began to pound fiercely. Did she follow me home? How does my breath smell? I put down my things and waited for her to continue.

“Um, hi, I'm Tracy. I saw you walk in here and...I just thought I should thank you for what you did, back on the bus,” she reassured me.

“You're welcome.”

“I was having a pretty lousy day and...there's this cool quote...no, you wouldn't know.”

“Which quote?” I asked.

“Um...so, there's this one, I forgot who it's by”—she blushed—“but it says ‘We Rise, by Lifting Others’, and when you gave up your seat, that quote came back to me.”

“Hmm, that is a nice quote,” I agreed. “Well, it's been a long day...and I should probably get some sleep.”

“Okay, well...bye.” She hesitated, then left down the stairs.

I recovered my stuff and finished the hike to my apartment. My apartment was terribly small. It was like living in a hotel room, except it was square rather than a straight hallway. After entering, I took off my coat and hung it on a rack, then sat down at my desk. I opened my laptop

to continue a report I'd failed to finish during work. I put my hands on the keyboard, typed something, then deleted it, then typed another thing, and deleted it as well. I repeated this process a couple more times until I finally gave up and shut my laptop.

I felt guilty, Tracy went all the way up those stairs, for nothing. She'd gone that far out of her way, just to thank me, and in response, I shrugged her off. I was always doing things like this, avoiding, then regretting. Throughout high school, this haunted me.

I'd waste hours, doing nothing but watching videos on the internet, which I would later regret in bed. In fact, there are so many decisions I regret. Back in 9th grade, I wanted to learn how to play the guitar, and I did, well a little bit...before I quit. When I discovered it was required to play at concerts, I switched out of the class, leaving it all behind. I once excelled in math, and my teachers would recommend me for honors. But I was too scared to ever attempt it.

I remember when life was simple, no, easy. I didn't have to worry about taxes, bills, debt or any of that. Instead, I went to school, then went home. I do wish I spent my youth taking more risks, rather than playing it safe. Yet, the past is the past, and if I spend too much time dwelling on it, then what's the point of living in the present. The only choices that matter, are the ones I make now, when it actually matters, despite what has happened in the past.

I opened my laptop to order a guitar, and for the first time in weeks, I smiled. Not a forced smile, a smile of content. I then grabbed my coat, rushed out the apartment, down the stairs, and outside. I ran all the way back to the bus stop, hoping that I'd find her along the way.

"Lost?" a voice murmured.

I quickly stopped and traced it behind me. I saw that homeless man, the one I'd given money to, approaching me. "Well...yes, after I left, did you see a girl, by any chance, pass by here?"

"Yes..."

"Okay, and did that same girl pass by here again?"

"Yes, if you're wondering where she went, I saw her walk into there." He pointed to an apartment building across the street.

"Thank you." I rushed over and entered the building. Each apartment was labeled and I eventually found one that had Tracy's name next to it. As soon as I made it to the door, I stopped. I had two choices...to knock on the door, or to ring it.

The Colors of the Storm

By Emily Crabb

Jenna opened her eyes to the sound of birds twittering in the trees. She sat up in her sleeping bag and stretched.

Jenna looked over at the sleeping bag next to her and shook her friend awake.

“Alisha, wake up.”

Alisha groaned and buried herself deeper into her sleeping bag, “But it’s cold.”

Jenna grabbed her pillow and smacked Alisha with it, “We’ve got to pack up, you’re the one who wants to leave, anyway.”

Alisha peeked out of the sleeping bag before ducking back inside. “Not this early though, I need my sleep.”

The tent unzipped and Lucas poked his head in. “You guys really need to get up sooner, we’ve got to leave.”

“Ugh...” Alisha sat up and rubbed her eyes, “what time is it anyway?”

“It’s eight-thirty,” Lucas stated, checking his watch, “We need to leave before nine if we’re going to get home before the storm hits.”

Alisha flopped back down with a sigh, “Curse the day I let you two talk me into this.”

It took forever for them to get Alisha up and out of bed. But they still had plenty of time to take the tent down and get it packed into the car. Once they had everything, they got on their way.

Jenna leaned her head against the passenger seat window as Lucas changed the radio station while he drove.

He finally found a song he was satisfied with and started whistling along. Then the song cut out, turning to static.

Then through the static, words started to become clear.

“stay indoors... there’s a... dangerous... I repeat, stay indoors. There’s a weather phenomenon occurring... very dangerous.”

Lucas turned the radio off. “Some big news. We already know there’s a storm coming.”

“Uh... shouldn’t we find shelter anyway? You know, just in case?” Alisha asked.

“Nah, you should never try to find shelter in trees during a storm.” Jenna dismissed, “And even if it you could, isn’t it safer in the car anyway?”

Alisha nodded, but she didn’t look like she agreed.

They rode in silence for a while, occasionally turning the radio back on to see if the message was still playing. It always was.

Eventually, with Lucas focusing on the GPS and driving, and Alisha reading in the back seat, only Jenna noticed the storm clouds forming in front of them. “Uh, guys?”

“What?” Lucas seemed a little annoyed by the interruption to the silence.

“What’s that?” Jenna pointed.

He glanced at the sky, “The storm we’ve been trying to avoid.”

Lightning flashed in the clouds. “It looks a little close.”

“Maybe the weather people just miscalculated, it’s not supposed to be a very bad storm.”

Jenna saw lightning flash again. She blinked. Had it been her imagination, or had the lightning been the wrong color?

“Did you see that?”

“See what?”

“The lightning, it was green.”

Lucas laughed, "Really? That's cool. Maybe that's the 'dangerous' weather phenomenon the radio was talking about."

Jenna laughed, it didn't seem like a big deal now that Lucas was saying it like that.

Lightning streaked across the sky again. Purple this time.

Lucas gasped, "Wait, was that purple? I thought you were kidding!"

Lightning flashed over and over, all the colors of the rainbow.

Alisha leaned forward from the backseat. "It's kind of pretty."

Then an orange lightning bolt shot from the sky and hit a tree off of the side of the road.

Lucas slowed the car to a stop as they saw the tree turn slowly to that same bright orange color.

Lucas laughed, "It changes their color, that doesn't seem that dangerous."

"Don't say that!" Alisha yelled. "You could jinx us!"

"Jinx us? Alisha, do you seriously believe the words coming out of your mouth?"

While they were busy arguing, Jenna looked at the orange tree. It looked like someone had dumped paint on it.

Before she even had time to blink, the tree started to dissolve.

"Uh.. guys?"

Alisha and Lucas were still arguing.

"I don't believe in bad luck, okay? I don't believe in jinxes or curses or anything like that!"

"Guys?" Jenna tried again, a little louder this time.

"Well, can you just respect the fact that I do? I just don't want anything to happen!"

"Well, excuse me! I was just making a joke! You don't have to get all-"

"Guys!" Jenna shouted, finally getting their attention. "Look!"

She pointed at where the tree was dissolving into its last few particles.

"Holy smokes," Alisha whispered.

"You know what?" Lucas shifted the car out of park and started down the road again. "I can see why this could be dangerous."

Lucas sped the car down the road. The rate of the lightning was increasing, a bolt striking every few seconds.

Multicolored bolts rained down from the sky, getting closer and closer as if the storm were intentionally targeting them.

Alisha was crying now.

Lucas had his foot pressed hard on the gas, "Come on, come on!"

Time seemed to flow in slow motion for Jenna, she just had the horrifying feeling that they weren't going to make it out of this.

Then there was an earth-shattering boom, and the world flashed pink.

Lucas panicked and yanked hard on the wheel.

Jenna felt weightless as the car tumbled down the road, finally coming to rest back on the wheels.

"Is everyone okay?" Jenna wasn't even sure who said that.

The car was bright pink. It started to dissolve, and soon the three teenagers were sitting on the open road.

"Did that-" Lucas seemed flabbergasted, "Did that thing just turn my car into pink dust?"

Nobody responded. Alisha seemed to be going into shock.

After sitting there for a few seconds, the teens realized that they needed to get back into the forest, or they might be the ones to turn to dust next.

They helped each other off the floor and were about to start running towards the edge of the road when their hair started to float above their heads.

Jenna vaguely remembered reading something about how if your hair stood up in a thunderstorm, you were about to be struck by lightning.

The bolt struck before any of them could move a single step from their positions.

The thunder came right on top of the flash, and Jenna barely had time to register the brilliant white light the flash had made before the burning sensation started, it was unlike anything she had ever felt before.

Jenna could feel the electricity flowing through her veins, and judging by their screams, Lucas and Alisha could feel it too.

Then it stopped. The pain was gone and when Jenna looked down at herself, she wasn't the blinding white color. And when she checked, neither were Lucas and Alisha.

Then she noticed the scarring. Lichtenberg figures if she wasn't mistaken. Fernleaf shaped scars snaked their way up her arms. She had done a report on them for science class, but these looked days old.

"What-" Alisha sniffed, her voice hoarse from screaming, "What just happened?"

Jenna responded, "I... I think we just... just got hit..."

Lucas didn't seem to be listening to either of them, instead he was looking up at the sky.

"Lucas?" Alisha eventually asked, "is something wrong?"

"The- the storm," he stammered, "it's gone."

Jenna looked towards the sky, where minutes before there had been a massive storm. And instead saw an empty sky.

Alisha looked ready to throw up. She walked the few paces and leaned with a hand against a nearby tree.

"How can a storm appear and disappear like that out of the blue?" She asked, looking like the world had ended.

As she said the name of the color, the tree she was leaning against turned to a midnight blue color.

Jenna and Lucas scrambled backwards. "Alisha!" They shouted in unison.

Alisha leapt away from the tree as if it was on fire. "What happened?"

The tree crumbled into dust.

"You- you touched it and said a color and-" Lucas gestured to the tree again.

Jenna got a thought. She walked towards a different tree. She brushed the bark with her fingertips and whispered a single word. "Red."

Immediately, the tree changed into a cherry red color.

"I can do it too." Jenna stepped back from the tree as it turned to powder.

Lucas ran towards the next tree. "Gamboge!"

It turned to a mustard yellow pigment. Jenna and Alisha just stared at Lucas as the tree dissipated.

Lucas blushed, "What? It's my favorite word, and a color. Figured it worked."

"Why did this happen?" Alisha seemed on the verge of panicking. "Am I hallucinating?"

Jenna pondered this, "If you are, then we all are."

"Fair point."

Lucas looked like he was going to pass out. "Wait, do we have superpowers now? Like in the movies?"

"I-" Jenna was a bit concerned by the way he was taking this, "I guess so."

“Awesome!”

“How are we going to get home?” Alisha asked, looking around.

Alisha was right, the car was gone.

Jenna looked at Lucas, “Do you know where the nearest town is?”

He nodded. “Right before this started, I noticed on the GPS that there was a town around a mile away in that direction.” He pointed down the road in the direction we had been going.

“You guys ready to walk?” Jenna asked them.

Lucas and Alisha both nodded, and they started on their way.

“This whole thing is insane.” Lucas said once the dirt road turned onto a paved one, “I mean, are we hallucinating?” He walked over to another tree. “Purple!”

The tree turned purple and disappeared.

“Let’s not focus on that right now,” Alisha said, “I’m not sure if I can handle much more than this.”

“Come on, Alisha! If I don’t talk about this, I’m going to explode! Tell her Jenna!”

But Jenna wasn’t paying attention. She was looking up at the sky. The storm was back. But this time, if it was even possible, it looked darker, more sinister.

“Uh... guys?”

Lucas looked up as well. “We just can’t catch a break can we?”

The three teens started running down the road, hoping to get to the town.

A black bolt of lightning struck the ground right in front of them.

But this time it didn’t disappear in a flash like lightning tends to. This time it stayed right there.

“What the crap?” Alisha shouted.

Another black strike hit the ground a few feet to their right, quickly followed by more and more going in a circle around them until they were trapped.

“What’s happening?” Jenna yelled.

“Am I supposed to know?” Lucas screamed.

“Maybe-“ Alisha trembled, “Maybe it’s safe to touch?”

She took a bracelet off and threw it into one of the beams of black light that had come down as lightning bolts.

The bracelet vaporized on contact.

“Okay, don’t freak, we can find a way out of this.” Lucas looked more like he was trying to reassure himself than anything.

Jenna looked down at the ground and smiled.

“What are we standing on?”

Alisha and Lucas looked down and saw the same thing she did.

“Is that... a sewer cover?” Alisha asked

“Looks like it!” Lucas grinned.

“Assuming these lights don’t go all the way through the ground, maybe we can use it!” Jenna exclaimed.

“How are we going to lift this thing up?” Alisha asked.

“Like this!” Jenna stuck her palm on the manhole cover, “Green!”

The manhole cover dissolved into dust.

The teens took turns jumping down into the sewers, where they discovered that the lights hadn’t come down through.

They ran through the sewers until they reached the town and eventually got up.

They decided to tell no one of their abilities.

A storm like that one never came back.

They never knew why the black lightning trapped them like that, but as they drove back home in their rental car, they were glad they would never have to find out

But He Didn't Cry

By Vivian Martin

It was late October when my mom took her medication and didn't wake up. I had never cried because my father always told me, "It makes you look weak," I was 22 years old, but still looked like the little boy my mama had been so quick to comb my hair or tie my shoes. My brown shaggy hair ran into my eyes and kept me squinting too often, my mama never liked this.

"Timothy, you must groom yourself."

"I do mom, I wash and brush my hair. I don't want to cut it." She gave me a kiss, and pushed my hair to the side anyway.

Why was it my mom? Why did the cancer get her? Why couldn't it have been dad, wherever he was anyway. The casket was walked by me through the old catholic isles, it had been our church on Oleander Boulevard since my childhood. Flashes of the night my dad left came back to me. But I didn't cry.

"Timothy, go away." He was going to hit mom, I knew it. I hid behind the doors and waited for sound, anything to pounce. Then it happened.

"Don't you touch me, stop, stop, stop." My mom was crying.

I ran through the doors and stopped, my dad had his hands around my mother's neck. "Get off of her!" My dad leaped back in surprise, "Go away Timothy," and the doors slammed in my face. I continued to pound on them.

"All you ever taught me was to protect women and that I should never hit them, ever. I hate you." I screamed through the walls of the apartment. My dad left and never came back, but it was okay. We didn't want him to. But I wouldn't cry.

Poor Timothy is what everyone thought at the funeral. *The boy can't even carry his mother's casket. Instead he was slumped forward in the front row. His eyes were red and he looked tired. But he wouldn't cry.* My mind drifted to the day my mom got sick. It had been any other usual morning for us, hiking around New Jersey when my mama collapsed in my arms. "Breast Cancer stage 3, I'm sorry kiddo." The doctor announced to me in the waiting room. But I wouldn't cry.

The funeral came to a close and so did my last thought of my mother. I went home to the empty apartment. I expected the smell of my moms tea, it wasn't there. I expected the smell of my mom's perfume, it was gone. Instead I found a note on the kitchen counter;

My Shaggy Haired Boy,

Although I can't be there with you, And for now I have to say goodbye.

I hope you still see the flowers in the garden, And think about me.

I hope that with each passing day, Your pain hurts less.

I hope that you know it's okay to cry, Even though I can't be there to hold you.

I'll always be your imaginary friend, and your mama.

I set the note down, and fell against the wall to the ground. A single tear fell down my cheek.

Shards of Light

By McKenzie Capito

Her shield of confidence and calm, with accents of fury, could not protect her from her childhood, the shattered glass, and loss of the black and white world she once knew.

The beeping and the black. That's all she could sense. The beeping and the black.

"Miss Zeus, can you hear me?" A man's voice said from nearby, as a hand grabbed hers. She nodded her head, and squinted her eyes, hoping for some kind of light to flow through. "Miss Zeus, can you see me?" She blinked her eyes repeatedly, wishing the answer was yes, but had to shake her head no. She heard the scribbling of a pen on paper beside her.

"What happened?" She whispered.

"You were in a domestic incident. Do you remember anything that happened?" She closed her eyes, trying to think through the migraine permeating her skull in order to remember. She grabbed her head, trying to force the pain away.

"Miss Zeus, you don't need to remember right now, go ahead and rest." She heard footsteps leave the room, and the tears started to flow with confusion and frustration over what she could not remember, and the things she could not see. Emotions that followed her into a painful and restless sleep.

"Charlotte..." Her mother. "Please forgive me."

She startled awake in a cold sweat, searching with her hand for the call button, as memories crashed into her. She gave up on the button for help, and instead curled up, hugging her knees close to her chest, and waited for someone to come.

Footsteps entered the room the following morning, and they rushed to her side to check her pulse.

"I... I remember." She whispered, the tears falling out of her unseeing eyes, as the remembrance shook her body.

"You remember what happened?" The doctor asked, laying a large, warm hand on her arm.

She nodded her head, and relaxed into the touch, brought back to the pitch black of the present.

"Would you be willing to talk with a police officer?"

She nodded again, and stopped resisting the tears as the doctor's footsteps left the room, and returned moments later with another person; the two of them chatting in hushed voices.

A deep voice permeated the quiet over the rustling of papers and click of a pen. "Miss Zeus, I'm here to help. Can you please describe what happened?"

Charlotte nodded her head, and the memories were slowly pulled from her mind into reality. It seemed like forever, and yet in a blink she was done.

"Thank you, Miss Zeus. That's all we needed to hear."

"Now, go ahead and get some rest." The doctor's voice said, and both men left the room, abandoning Charlotte to darkness and sleep.

The days blurred together within the hospital that she couldn't see, between sleep filled with shards of glass, visits from her doctor, exercises, and waiting in constant darkness.

Then one day, light shone through, piercing the black that she'd lived through since the accident.

She could register the intense light of the bulb that the doctor shone into her eyes for the first time. Bit by bit, over the following weeks, her energy began to return; her smile, and her voice, as more light began to filter in, until she was finally able to see the world.

She may not have been able to actually make out any details, but there were blurry shapes that the doctors assured her would get clearer. Finally, she was allowed out of bed, and started walking once again, exploring the hospital and, ultimately, walking back toward her life.

Her first visitor, giddy with excitement, awaited her one day as she returned to her room. "Charlotte!" A blur jumped up and embraced Charlotte before she could even comprehend who it was.

"Oh my god! Sherri!" She collapsed into the warm body against her, and soon the two girls were giggling and smiling as only lifelong friends do.

Sherri helped Charlotte to sit down on the edge of the hospital bed, neither of them quite letting go of the other. "How are you feeling, Charlotte?"

"Better." Charlotte smiled up at where she sensed her best friend's face was.

"That's good. The doctors said that your vision has been improving," Sherri noted.

"It is. I can only see shapes right now, based off of shadows and light, but it's getting clearer and clearer with each day."

"Yay! I can't wait for you to come home Char; work is no fun without you. I guess you can't see that I'm frowning, but I am."

Charlotte laughed in response. "I can't wait to come home too Sherr, and for my vision to be back to normal. There's no one to get all of the gossip from here." The two almost-sisters laughed and curled up against one another on the bed. Sherri spilled all of the gossip that she knew, taking it on as her responsibility to bring Charlotte up to date on the current world.

Sherri's visits to the hospital became more common as the two waited for Charlotte to be cleared to discharge, as her sight returned to normal. They

perched eagerly together on the edge of the bed, while the doctor filed Charlotte's papers.

The two of them laughed all the way out of the hospital, as if involved in their own secret joke, and then back to their shared apartment. She was finally getting back to her life. No more hospitals, no more of her past, and no more altered vision. Just work, her best friend, and going out. She felt ready for the future; but she could never have imagined what was to come.

Charlotte didn't waste any time resuming her prior life, and was ready the following morning for her first day back to work. Although her return was met with just a mumbled, "Welcome back", from one of her coworkers, she couldn't have felt more ecstatic standing behind the front desk, fielding calls and checking in patients. The black and gray of the front lobby felt so normal, so natural, so perfectly regular.

But even better than work, was being back in the shabby black and gray apartment that she shared with Sherri. Although drab, they'd done their best to spice it up with weird geometric decorations throughout the rooms. It had become a wreck while Charlotte was recovering, but she was grateful to take up the growing list of chores as just another speck of normalcy in her life.

Everything was finally back in order, and Charlotte was grateful like never before for everything that she had. But the faint appearance of a bewildering and entirely unknown sensation was not a welcome sight. She couldn't even describe it to herself, much less anyone else. Everything was changing from the typical black, gray, and white, and changing quickly too. It was all different. But different in a way that nobody would ever understand.

For the first week, she just blocked it out and ignored it, continuing about her day. She hoped that it was a simple lapse in her vision, that it would correct itself as her blindness had. But what was once just a faint annoyance became vibrant, and shocked her wherever she went. The contrasting shades of gray that had fit together so perfectly before now clashed in ways she had never thought possible. But she could never get out of her head, that just a week ago, they were only black and white.

"Charlotte!" Sherri yelled over to her, "What are you staring at?"

Charlotte startled and looked over to Sherri watching her at their job. "O-oh. Nothing." She stumbled over her words as she glanced back out of the corner of her eye at the not gray plant in the corner.

"Is there something wrong with the plant?" Sherri asked, confusion smeared across her features.

"N-well, yes." Charlotte hung her head, as her pretense of regularity faded with each passing second. "It's not gray anymore."

"What do you mean it's not gray anymore?"

"You don't see it?"

"See what?"

"You don't see how nothing is black and gray and white anymore? How none of it's normal anymore?"

"Charlotte, I think you need to go back to the doctor." Sherri's worry was contagious.

"Yeah, maybe." Charlotte smiled over at Sherri, hoping to ease her anxiety, but couldn't help looking back to the plant in the corner as the next customer walked up.

The thought of her friend persisted, and soon Charlotte sat waiting in the doctor's office, her finger tapping anxiously on the arm of the chair as she waited for answers to the weird, mismatched sights around her.

She startled when he walked in, and sat up straighter as he smiled over at her across the desk. "What seems to be the problem, Miss Zeus? According to your record there were no issues when we excused you from the hospital." The doctor flipped through the papers in her file.

"No, there weren't, but now... I don't really know how to explain it, but everything around me has changed. The entire world is different." Charlotte responded.

"How so?"

"I don't know, but, just, nothing is black, gray and white anymore. Well some of it is, but not all of it. I don't know how to describe it, but everything's different. Like a plant at my work, it has always been the same shade of gray, but it's no longer that shade of gray anymore. It's... something else." She looked down as the flush flew across her cheeks and took her composure by storm.

The doctor sat in thought for a few moments. "Let me call in Doctor Pharamond, he's the expert in abnormal cases of optical trauma."

She smiled up at him as he left the room, and moments later another, older doctor entered, shook her hand, and sat on the edge of the desk next to her.

"Miss Zeus, is it okay if I ask you a few questions?" She nodded her head. The doctor smiled at her, and held up a card that wasn't gray. "Does this card look gray to you?" She shook her head. He pulled up another card. "What about this one?" She shook her head again. He smiled and then walked over to a small plant in the corner and held up a card next to the plant. "Do these look the same?" She nodded her head, neither of them were gray, and neither of them made any sense.

Doctor Pharamond nodded his head and smiled at her as he laid the cards down on top of the desk. Before she had a chance to respond, he had quickly and quietly locked the door to the office. Adrenaline rushed her system.

"They're called colors." The doctor said, turning back to her, as she gaped at him in shocked silence. "The differences in the world around you, they're called colors."

Red on My Black Heart

By Maya Heesch

My alarm clock rang out suddenly. "Gak!" I tumbled out of bed, ugh I hate alarms. But that's what I get for choosing a job with early hours. 4:00 every morning I woke up, showered and put on my suit. I ate some fruit and drove to work. Since today was exceptionally mundane I picked my drabest grey suit. When I got to the office, the desk man didn't look up, "It's a morning River." I nodded, "You got that right Joey." I rode the elevators to the sixth floor, my supervisor, Theodore was waiting once the doors opened. "Mr. Jameson, it's good I caught you before you reached your cubicle. You need to go into the field immediately. There is a politician that needs escorting downtown in 10 minutes." I sighed, "Why can't politicians travel in the afternoon? It's barely 8." "I dunno Jameson, we're all just miserable people in this miserable world." Theodore was right, every day was bland and boring. Even today with the sun shining, everything was a shade of grey, black. I had thought that taking a job as a security guard would spice up life, but it just added busy work to my day. No one needed protection anyways, because even committing crimes was boring. My mind wandered as I walked behind the politician, a senator I think. Despite being a particularly drab day, there was quite a crowd. My earpiece buzzed, "Heads up River, the crowd is looking very lively up ahead." "Really? Well, that's a first." I scanned the sea of people, they were starting to push against the police barriers. "Stay back Mr. Senator, I've got it under control." He actually looked nervous. This might be an exciting day after all. Something flashed in the corner of my eye, a girl darted through the barriers, but she wasn't wearing grey, nor black. She was wearing something... exciting. I must be hallucinating because that wasn't a color on the Grey Scale. It didn't exist but she was standing right in front of me. "Uh, I... uh. Ahem, ma'am, I'm going to have to ask you to go back behind the barrier." She tossed her hair, which I guess if power had a color that would be it. "And who's going to make me, muscle boy." I stopped, no one had ever talked back, or refused. "I... I, um." She walked closer almost like a predator like. Her fingers danced around my lapels. "For such an imposing figure, you sure don't talk a lot. Don't need brains for this job, do ya big boy." My heart rate was increasing rapidly. This has never happened to me before. My earpiece crackled, "River, I don't know what's going on up there but you need to get the line moving. The city wants this thing wrapped up soon." I shook my head, whatever had been going on with my head was fine now, she was back in her proper grey colors. I pulled my suit jacket out of her hands and pushed her back behind the barriers. "If you do that again ma'am I will be forced to detain you." She just licked her lips and grinned. "Anytime you want muscle man." I returned to my position and escorted the senator to the town hall, with no more... encounters. But the girl didn't leave my mind for the rest of the day. I laid in my bed, thinking of how her hair glowed with a new color, I had decided to call gold. And her eyes were, they were like the feeling of jealousy and envy. I've called it green. Her skin was a warm comforting color, I called it tan. She occupied my every thought as I drifted to sleep. The next day was mundane, at least until lunch. Then I saw her again, in the cafe across the street. Amid all the greys and blacks was a flash of color. Her golden hair, and her warm skin. I could almost feel her green eyes boring into my soul. And her shirt, it was the color of sadness and longing. I didn't know what to call it. But the combination made me want to drop everything and protect her at all costs. She met my eye and smiled wide. I watched in horror as she left the cafe, and crossed the middle of the street, far from the crosswalk. I groaned, she lived too dangerously for me. She slid into the table across from me. "Hey, there muscle boy, hows life?" I shrugged, "Oh c'mon big boy you gotta talk. At least tell me your name." "My names River, River Jameson, and yours would be?" She smiled, "My name is Tamalia, Tamalia Rhonston." Geez her name was just as exciting as her new colors. I pushed the rest of my muffin toward her, "Oh wow River! You really know the way to a girl's heart, a

half-eaten muffin is super romantic.” My cheeks got hot, “Its ok pretty boy, this girl just happens to love muffins” She leaned over the table and kissed me gently. I laughed, for the first time in 25 years I laughed. And suddenly the cafe exploded with new colors, I was speechless. Tamalia gave me a weird look, “What’s wrong River?” I was blinded by everything, so many different colors. “Do you see that Tamalia?” She flicked me between the eyes, “Hey you’re starting to freak me out.” I looked at her, “What color is my shirt?” She wrinkled her nose, “Um it’s yellow, I guess.” My hands started shaking, “That can’t be right because this is shade 82 of grey, the same shade I wear every other day.” She frowned, “ Wait, what color do you think my shirt is?” “Um, I haven’t thought of a name yet... “ She stood up, “What are you telling me River.” “Up until i saw you yesterday, everything I saw was a shade of grey or black. But you were a different color, literally. I’ve never seen those colors before. It all changed when I saw you.” She ran a hand through her hair. “Is that why everyone here is so boring. Do you all see monochromatically?” I tentatively reached for her hand, “Every day of my life. But why do you see more colors?” “Well, I like to live dangerously, which I’ve noticed not a lot of people do around here. But that would be a stupid reason, its probably because I was born blind. I had to have a lot of surgeries when I was young.” She was looking around, “Tamalia are you okay?.” She walked out the door, I paid for the tab and followed behind. The world looked so different with more colors, it was exciting. I looked at my hands, they were brown, a dark brown. My shirt was jellow, or yellow, or whatever she called it. My pants were still grey though, that was kind of a letdown. “Hey girl, watch out! My brakes aren’t working” I looked up suddenly, Tamalia was sitting on the curb, there was a truck barreling toward her. “Tamalia get out of the way!” She looked at me, “What did you say?” There was no time, I dove toward her, throwing her out of the way. I was trained, for one thing, protecting people and I would do my job even if it killed me. “Tamalia Rhonston, I hope your future will be colorful without me. Just know I love you.”

2056

By Miles Ruff and Krishna Golakoti

Before you read:

To be honest, we didn’t know that the theme of this contest was “A colorful future.”

It just kinda turned out that way.

The purpose of this story is to make people think about the freedoms they have now, and enjoy them.

Seemingly, we only love the things we have when we lose them.

The story is written in a very jarring and confusing way, and this was on purpose. We knew what we were doing, and as my father said it - “[We’re] taking a literary risk.” We wanted our readers to make their own connections, especially between the many symbolic gestures throughout the story. Despite that, we hope you enjoy it anyway.

This story - “2056” - takes place 36 years in the future.

It is heavily inspired by the classic novel “1984”, which was written in 1949 - 35 years into the future.

The story takes place in New York City.

One man and a secretive underground society conspire to bring an end to the superpower that is the ALL.

The people know nothing. The people feel nothing. The people are nothing.

There is only the ALL.

A - ALLEGIANCE - ALL MUST OBEY THE ALL

L - LOVE - ALL MUST RESPECT THE ALL

L - LOYALTY - ALL MUST SERVE THE ALL

Ticking.

Constant, omnipresent ticking.

Is there an end to it?

No.

There is not.

The man stares at his watch as the hands jerk their way about the face. It is almost time. Before long, the lights begin to flicker and his heart flutters. Unreal. What he is about to do is highly dangerous - not to mention pure insanity - and *illegal*, even.

A natural would gasp at the thought, as it was a condemning one.

Death. An easy, but unimaginative escape.

One by one, the street lights begin to dim, the ever-watching screens burn black, and the swarm of cameras slow to a crawl. He tightens the straps of his backpack, grabs two of the many smoke bombs under his jacket before clicking the indicator.

It is time.

With one, giant, heroic leap, he lands in the street below. The startled citizens backed away from him, swabbed in his *illegal* clothes. He snaps his fingers, activating the lights that lined the seams.

Now the real fun begins.

He sprints down the street, lobbing both bombs at the few ALLEGIANCE members that roam at night, usually to prevent a straggler from scheming.

The prevention part was never pleasant - at least on the part of the one being prevented.

The man, reaching over his shoulder, grabs his battering axe - a long, thick metal rod that, near the top, separates into several even shards that hover near the main body, with a sharp edge and a mean blue glow - and swings it with one hand before sprinting toward the nearest target: a large, blaring screen stuck in the dangerous space of a power outage. With a mighty lunge, he slams the metal rod into the screen which shatters into oblivion. The pieces of the metal rod follow behind, striking the screen with similar velocity, further obliterating the permaglass with a fervent tremor.

One down, 119,999 to go. However, he would not be the one to destroy them all - others would destroy them.

Power.

True, undeniable power. It was his, now. He was free; that was all the power he needed.

He heard the faint buzzing of failing circuits. He thought of how funny it was that one tiny EMP blast could shut off the most complicated technology. Four ALLEGIANCE members stood still in the street, stone faced and dead. The bare wires of their left hemisphere sparked and sizzled, and the lights in their eyes flickering as droplets of rain ran down their fake ceramic faces.

Trash. He pushed one down, where it slammed the street and the face shattered.

The people in the street began to gather around the scattered remnants of the ALLEGIANCE member. They murmur; it was no longer a tone of longing or remorse, but excited confusion. Several other ALLEGIANCE members, all in different stages of transformation, begin

to shake themselves out of their stupor. The ones who were no longer human - as most of them now weren't - remain emotionless and blank.

He could do that too.

His mask lights up in an unruly and fiersome grin. The light bounces off of the rain soaked street into the eyes of the beholders, their very own ALLEGIANCES wavering. Could they trust him? No, they could LOVE him.

Fear. Such a powerful weapon.

The ALL's primary - and consequently, favorite - tool of citizen control. Scores of innocent people, lost. Slaughtered. All because one man, the HEAD, couldn't get enough of it.

With one gloved hand, he pushes down the last remaining ALLEGIANCE member from this unit.

Another crash.

He leans down to rip the tool from its hands - a brutalizer. Made from the same material, the battering axe was made to the likeness of such a weapon, but much, much more dangerous.

He tosses it to the crowd, where one hand shoots out and catches it.

"You're turn," he says.

He faces the colossal glass building in the center of the city.

"And now," he whispers, "it's our turn,"

The blissful sound of the shouting people and the shattering of ceramic faces follows him into the dark building, along with the light coming from the illuminated smoke-color bombs that he left. It all seemed easy; too easy.

He descends further into the building, nothing but the glow of his riot clothing to mark his path. Feeling the constant, heavy thrum of the grav-gen, he picks up his pace. He hears

worried scientists and ALL officials whisper as he passes, but none move to stop him. They are too scared.

There's a light protest from one of the officials as he pushes through a set of thick lead doors that open to a massive chamber, where a gyrating machine gathers energy from a contained neutron star. Incredibly dangerous, but incredibly powerful.

Ignoring them, he lets the doors shut behind him as his backpack beeps at him angrily. At this, he leaps down off of the raised platform onto the cement bunker floor. There, he places the back pack face up. Metallic legs extricate themselves from the bag and hook themselves into the ground. A gentle whirring rises as the pack opens, revealing a miniature version of the grav-gen - a gravity bomb.

He flips a couple switches and tosses a small pebble from the cracked floor into the center of the bomb, where the purple-black energy around the black hole crackles and fizzes.

Satisfied, he climbs up the ladder to the raised platform.

“Friga, you're going to disappear the next time I see you, understand? I told you not to call me anymore, or else I'd make your entire family line never exist!”

The receiver crackles. “I know, sir, but look outside! It's madness!”

This prompts a hearty laugh from the portly man sitting in his high backed chair. “It can't be, the ALLEGIANCE are -”

The receiver hits the floor.

It is madness.

There are huge plumes of colored smoke in the air, and people shouting. *Shouting!*

Flustered, he picks up the receiver - attempting to bend over forces him to grunt from effort as he reaches over his gut. “Friga! Activate the backup generators! Refresh the power mains! Anything!” Sweat beads on his forehead.

A pause. "I ... I won't do that sir."

Huh?

"I'll see you in hell."

The call ended with a click.

The fat man, the HEAD, sits back in his chair. *This can't be real*, he thinks. *It's just a nightmare.*

The door to his spacious office bursts open. Startled, he grasps the repeater underneath his desk and points it at the intruder, but it's too late.

A demon.

His face is covered, and no skin can be seen. Neon lights glow all over his outfit, and he has several smoke bombs still attached to the inside of his jacket. The watch on his left wrist glistens as a few more bombs go off outside.

He's on the table, holding the HEAD's stained shirt. "You're dead, old man," the riotor says.

"Not yet, I'm not."

A flash of light fills the room and the riotor is thrown backward, bouncing off of the steel coffee table and rolling to the floor. The HEAD stands with his repeater, barrel smoking, looking for him.

"You can't stop me. You can't stop the ALL! I AM THE ALL!" He bellows.

A quiet hiss sounds by his feet. He glances down and sees a smoking bomb.

BOOM

Coughing and disoriented, the HEAD waves his way out of the purple smoke and puts his hand on the glass window. Seeing that he has failed, he raises the repeater to his head.

“HEAD!”

He pauses and turns.

“This is your ALL,” the riotor says standing on the coffee table, waving his hands. “And this,” he says, taking off his goggles to reveal two eyes - one gray, one milky white -

A mellow humming grows loud as the riotor holds his hands out wide, the violent blue glow behind him getting brighter.

“This is *my* ALL.”

The building explodes.

Friga had never felt so *alive*.

She ripped the tag from her neck as she ran into the fray, grabbing the mutilators off of the wrist of one of the downed ALLEGIANCE members. She tied them to her own wrists and scanned for the nearest patrol, zeroing in on one near the entrance of the building. Interesting how she had been trained all her life to ignore them - to tune them out.

Now, she was about to do everything in her power to destroy them.

With a battle cry, she charges at them. She cuts up their servos, their mother boards, their fake hearts, and their precious, terrible faces.

26 years of hatred funneled all into this moment.

All at once, the scraps fall to the ground and Friga is left by herself in a circle of technological carnage.

She falls to her knees, looking at her hands. They are cut up by the metal she slashed through, and they are shaking. Tears fall from her smiling face.

She can bleed! She is alive! She is human!

She raises one fist to the air, and screams with all her might. Others in the mob see this and slash their palms, raising their hands in accord.

At that moment, the building above them implodes. They all duck to avoid debris, but none comes. Friga looks upwards and sees that the entire top half of the building has been decimated, presumably the HEAD has perished as well.

They won.

Something falls from the building and lands in front of her - a silver watch. The glass has been destroyed and the hands aren't moving. She picks it up and examines it before she realizes that this was the watch the rioter was wearing. She takes off the mutilators and puts it on her left wrist, then adjusts the hands to the current time.

Her face paints a massive grin, and she undoes her hair from the pony tail to free it. No music is playing, but she begins to dance in the rain - her blood soaked skirt flowing about her.

Every drop on her lips tasted sweeter, and every drop on her skin felt cleaner. Clearer.

She laughs. Is this what life was meant to be?

She looks around and finds her love, Clem. He catches eyes with her and laughs as well. They embrace, spinning with each other in the blissful moment that they now can share. She plants a kiss on his lips.

“Clem, you know what we are?”

“Happy? Laughing? *Illegal?*” He chuckles after the last one.

“Not quite.”

Friga tilts her head up into the sky, listening to the jovial concourses in the streets.

She knows what they are.

Free.

Colorless to Colorful

By: Megan Kynaston

I live in a world where everything is black and white, my world is unlike your world. When I look around my world is all black and white and that is what I see every day. My name is Nena Flores, and I live in a world where we all see the same thing and none of us know the difference between color and

not. I walk around every day thinking what life would be if everything wasn't just black and white. My school is pretty much the same every day, all about how our society is one of the best one in the world because we don't need color to express ourselves. My parents try to keep me happy but what I want the most is to go find a world with color and happiness.

"How was school today Nena" My mother asked me at the dinner table

"It was good, just always the same" I said back as we ate our dinner

Dad was not there, but I'm kinda used to it just being me and my Mom. My Dad works really late at night and by the time he comes home, he has to go to work again. I miss him so much, but he never supports that I want to live in a world full of color and life. I try to be like everyone else but it's just really hard. I went to bed that night thinking what a world full of color looks like. Eventually I fell asleep, then in the middle of the night I heard a strange noise coming from the kitchen. I figured it was just Dad coming home from work. Then I heard it again and then I heard talking.

"I promise you she's here" someone had said

"are you sure she would be so far back into the past to where all they see is black and white" another person had said, it sounded like a woman.

I just kept hearing them talk and talk about someone they were looking for, I kept hearing them say that this girl would not be so far back into the past. I didn't understand. I got out of bed, put on my slippers and quietly snuck down the stairs to see who it was. I crept down the stairs, I tried to be as silent as I could, but then the floor board squeaked. Whoever they were all came to the bottom of the stairs, there were three of them, one girl and two boys. I just froze and sat there staring at them, then I came back to reality and ran to my room. They all ran up the stairs after me, I quickly got to my room and locked the door.

"Hey, whoever you are, open the door, we don't want to hurt you," the girl said through the door.

I didn't reply, I stepped away from the door and took a breath. Then the door burst open and one of the boys came up to me and grabbed my hands.

"Who are you?" the other boy asked me

"Who am I, who are you, this is my house" I snapped back

"Who we are is none of your business, now answer the question" the girl said

I didn't talk for a second and the boy who was holding my hands tightened his grip, I finally caved.

"My name is Nena Flores, now your turn who are you?"

"Wait your.... I'm Lucia Gold and these are my twin brothers, the one behind you holding your hands that Jack, that one over there is Topher. We need you to come with us" the girl had said

"Wait, hold on, you're here because of me?" I asked

They all just looked at me, and stared, Jack let go of my hand and I went to sit on my bed. I can't go anywhere I don't even know these people. I stood up to think for a moment, I had turned my back to them. Could I go somewhere where I had no idea what to expect or with people I know nothing about? I turned around to tell Lucia that I could not go because I needed to stay there for my parents. Before I could say anything Jack and Topher ran behind me pushed me to the floor, tied my hands and put a shot of something in my back

"As I said we need you to come with us" Lucia said in a rude tone of voice

I couldn't move, they pushed me out the door and into some ship. We started to move and then all I could see around me was color. I was in shock because I had never seen something as beautiful as this. They helped me out of the ship and the sun was shining yellow rays, the sky was a brilliant blue. Everyone was happy, as the boys were helping me walk, everyone was looking at me, like they were in shock, just as much as me. We went into a red building and up to floor number 25. We got out of the elevator and I saw someone sitting at a desk staring outside

“Miss.Flores, welcome to your future” He said

“Who are you and what am I doing here?” I asked

“I’m Mr. Rodney Wood and we need your help” The man said

“What help would I be” I said

“Your the one who created our colorful world, so it had to be you” Mr.Wood said

“I created this? This wonderful world that is full of life and color.” I asked

“Yes and unfortunately this colorful world is dying, in the future you make the world you always wanted, once you did so, you got married and had three kids but tried to give other world the happiness that we have and died doing so” Mr. Wood said

I sat there listening to what he was telling me, I created the world that made everyone happy, but died in the process.

“We need you to help the world that your older self created to stay colorful” Mr. Wood said

“Yes of course, I would love to save a world so beautiful, did you know my older self?” I had asked

“She was the love of my life, seeing you just bring me back to her, and these three where or are her and your kids, she insisted that we named her first girl lucia” Mr. woods said

I was in shock, the people around me, are and will be my family. They untied me and I looked out into the window and I saw that the color from the world was feeding and turning into my present. They gave me a notebook that looked like the one I have at home. I opened it and found my handwriting. I read and read but found nothing and I could understand how no one could figure out how to fix the color, then It hit me

“I think I know how to fix your situation” I said

All four of them said “how”

“Not everyone is happy enough to make the color stay, like you guys for example, you're all sad because your wife or mom died before you could say goodbye. Like in the past or my time, everyone is not happy that because none of us have a reason for us to stay happy”

They all just stared at me, then started tearing up. Lucia just started to cry, came up to me and hugged me. All of them just hugged me in a big group hug, that eventually got me crying, I stepped away from them and thought of the life I must have lived.

“Well, it’s time for me to go back to my time” I looked at them “I know your mom and wife would have been proud of all of you, I am not the wife or mom you grew to love but I hope to be in my future, I can’t wait to marry you, and have our three beautiful kids.” I said, starting to cry.

We all hugged one more time and then Mr. Woods opened a portal for me to go back to my time. I looked back and smiled, waving goodbye but not forever.

I'm laying in my bed, was it all a dream or did they put me here on purpose so that I would think it's a dream. It didn't matter if it was real or not, I saw the future that I wanted and I had saved it. The rest of the week I went to every single house asking every single person what would make them happy. Most of the time they would slam the door in my face but I knew that they would come around eventually. Slowly the ground around my house started turning a weird looking color, I grabbed my notebook and started to write everything down, including the way to fix it and a little note for my future kids to remember me by when I die. Hopefully they see it, I hope that the world will change to so many different colors. I wrote down every single one.

As I reread everything in my notebook, that 15 year old me wrote, I wonder what would have happened if I didn't make the color come to this world . I'm still trying to keep everyone happy after 10 years of going to what is now my present. I keep trying to convince the places around us to do this but

they keep rejecting me. I won't stop trying until my last breath and if that what it takes I will. See you in the future.

Out of Ash

By Aidan Brereton

Out of ash came many. Reborn for the purpose of saving this god-forsaken world. Long dead soldiers, and civilians alike, their pasts erased from memory, only their form remaining, a husk of who they once were. Cursed with undeath, set to die, and come back until their purpose was fulfilled. Until one of the People of Ash could relight the flame of rebirth. They are called Cinders.

Her eyes opened, seeing nothing, but the cracked and rotted wood of her coffin. Holes had opened, spilling the earth above her into her underground cell. She moved her arms, and noticed the cracked, and ashey look of her left hand.

Why does my hand look almost charred?, she thought

Visions of flame entered her mind, and her hand went alight. A small flame sitting in the palm of her hand, warm, but not burning her or the box she was in. She looked at it closely, and came up with an idea. Placing her hand flat against the top of the box, she attempted to light it on fire. After a little while of it not doing much more than slightly charring the surface, she screamed in frustration, and the fire expanded, and filled the coffin. The wood surface, as well as her whole body was alight with flame, and her vision went dark.

Some amount of time later, she was conscious again, but around her were just the burned remains of the wood, and the earth, being held in place only by the fact that it had been sitting like that for so long.

Did I die? I should have burned alive. She thought.

She began clawing through the dirt, trying to reach the surface. She clawed up, the dirt moving beneath her fingers, as she desperately pulled herself towards what she had decided was the surface.

Suddenly, her hand felt cold, and she felt the air on her fingertips. She clawed desperately upwards, and pulled herself from the dirt like a zombie. She sat on the floor, and breathed a sigh of relief, finally losing that feeling of claustrophobia, and she suddenly felt free.

Who am I? Why am I here, and why was I in that grave?

She looked around, and saw something that caught her attention. Her own headstone.

Solara

Valiant soldier and mercenary

Burnt to ash in the war with the dragons

Solara. That's who I am, but why am I here, and how?

Resting against the side of the headstone is a katana, sheathed, the rope used to tie it on resting on the top.

She picked it up, and gently slid the blade from its worn scabbard. The blade gleamed, a scorched, but smooth texture showing on the blade. It was in almost pristine condition, other than the scabbard needing a little work, after being in the weather for so long.

She looked her old blade up and down. Looking at each centimeter of it. There was a connection that she could feel, an attachment to the blade. She looked at the dark scorch marks running along the blade. They danced like shadows of fire from bottom to top.

She looked at her charred hand, and attempted to get it to light, as it had before. A small flame began to form in the center of her palm, and grew to the size of a tennis ball, floating in the center of her palm. She took the flame, and pressed it to the blade, running her hand from hilt to tip, slowly arcing across. As her hand left each area behind, it stayed lit, the entire blade engulfed in flame.

How am I even doing this?

Throwing the blade into its scabbard suffocated the flame, and she wrapped it loosely onto her waste. She stripped some cloth from her clothing, and wrapped her charred hand, to hide it from anyone else.

A path led out of the clearing, so she began walking. As she left the clearing, she saw a cliff set in front of her, and when she got to the edge, she looked out onto the vast world beneath her. Castles spread before her, into the distance, walls crumbled, and towers leaning. Small villages dotted landscapes directly below her, their thatch roofing dotting the open fields of sorrow.

Looking further down there was some kind of large altar. Not seeing any other way to go, she continued towards it.

As she neared the entrance, she suddenly felt a presence nearby, as a loud thunk echoed through the silence. Solara leaped backwards, rolling onto the floor, pulling her sword from her waist, as she stood. A crossbow bolt hit the ground where she was standing, moments later, shattering in half against the cobblestone.

Over in the distance, was a creature, appearing almost human, but with sallow graying skin, and a hollow, empty look behind its faded eyes. She rushed the creature, as it loaded another bolt, and slashed down through its wrists, and back up its chest in two fluid movements, as if she had done that same move, a million times over. The crossbow hit the floor, and the creature shrieked, and sunk into the floor. A white smoke poured from its body, and was sucked into Solara's. The smoke gave her strength, and rejuvenated her.

The creature appears to have been human at some point, but is no longer human by any meaning of the words.

I hope not everybody is like this. There must still be someone left in this god-forsaken world.

Leaving the body where it lay, she turned to enter the ruined courtyard. Sitting in the center of this large circular arena, was a large suit of armor, a sword pierced through its chest. One side of the courtyard was torn to pieces, and was left open to the cliff side.

Examining the set of armor, she grabbed the large blade, and began to pull it from its chest. It appeared old and rusted, the blade curled. As the end of the blade came out of its chest, the armor began to stir, and stand up onto its feet, towering above Solara.

She leaped backwards, and readied her sword, sliding her hand across the blade, igniting it with flame. The suit of armor, grasped the oversized halberd planted in the ground next to him, and used it to stand.

He leaped off the ground, towards Solara. She rolled to the side, just avoiding the halberd, as it came down. The cobblestone splitting, and chunks going flying. She rushed towards it, slashing her katana into his hip, cleaving the metal in two where contact was made. A soft, now charred, flesh was beneath, grafted to the metal of the armor.

The champion swung around, at Solara as she ducked beneath it, and came in for more swings, a stream of fire following the blade through the air. Each hit from this monstrosity caused the stone to crumble, and shatter. As the armor grew weaker, a dark mass emerged from within it, and a giant mass of black ooze flew out of the armor, and shattered the helmet, and upper half of the armor set. The black ooze, swung its head in circles, trying to swallow Solara, as she dodged to get behind the beast. In one swift movement, she rolled between its legs, and then shoved her charred hand upwards, through the plating, and into the heart of the creature. She ignited her hand with a rage built inside her, and the creature started screaming, as its body caught flame, and it burned from the inside out.

The fire began to creep up Solara's arm, the charring on her hand, spreading through up her forearm until it reached her elbow. She ripped her hand from its chest, screaming in pain from the burning in her arm. The massive beast crumbled to the floor, and evaporated, leaving a destroyed set of armor behind. The white smoke from before, flowing from it, and into Solara.

The bandages she had previously wrapped her arm in were bright with embers along the edges, but remained unscathed, her clothing holding the same embered state.

She stumbled through a large set of doors, opposite of where she entered the chamber. Up the next hill was a large, worn-down cathedral. She walked up the cliff, slowly.

Entering through the large open doorway, was a dark circular chamber. Thrones lining the opposite side, one sat front and center above the others. Below was a bowl of ash, and a woman. Intricate metal plating covering her eyes.

"Ash. Welcome." she said

"Where am I? Why am I here?" Solara said questioningly, as she walked down the stairs towards the mysterious woman.

"You are Ash. Born of cinder. Set to bring back the lords in order to reignite the fire, and allow us to hold onto the golden age of gods. This is Firelink Shrine."

"I am supposed to bring the renegade lords back to their thrones. The lords who have already reignited the flames before?"

"You're the last one who can, along with the others of Ash."

Solara sat on the steps, unsure of what she needed to do. "Where do I even start? How do I accomplish this?"

"The sword you pulled from the chest of Gundryr. Place it into the bowl of Ash, and ignite the flames."

Taking the coiled sword, Solara placed the tip into the bowl of Ash, and it lit with flame. She touched the hilt of the sword, and her vision filled with smoke.

Deus

By Vincent Jessop

When I was just a young lad, my mother would recite these incredible stories of heroes and villains, fighting for what's right and what's wrong. These stories filled my imagination and my world, allowing me to see the good in everything. She taught me to love what was not loved and cherish what was. She was a hard-working woman, working various jobs while still finding time to raise me in the

ghetto of New Delta. It was a vast and great city on the edge of the known world, trapped between the land and the sea.

Although my mother did what she could for me, some of her jobs required her to do terrible things. She slowly, over time, succumbed to the darkness of society. Slowly growing a monster in the depths of her soul. She had started smoking blade-leaf, a powerful psychedelic drug that snuffs out even the brightest of lights. They say that it gave the users a powerful high, instantly addicting with the first hit. My mother lost herself in the drug, putting it first before me.

After a while, she stopped working, scouring the ghetto for a hit of blade-leaf. Soon after, we couldn't pay the rent on our apartment and was evicted. With no house and no money, my mother went crazy and became obsessed with blade-leaf. She eventually grew tired of scouring the streets and turned to the one thing that she had loved more than anything.

I kicked and I screamed but her grip was that of iron. Her once beautiful skin was now grey and slack, her hair was now streaked with white, and what had been her gorgeous green eyes were now sunken and transparent.

"MOMMA!!" I screamed, sobbing.

She dragged me down the road, onlookers looking in horror and disgust. I clawed at her fingers and finally got free crumpled to the ground sobbing. I gazed up and into her eyes and horror consumed my mind.

In her eyes, there was no remorse and no love. Only a pair of sick, crazed eyes willing to do anything for one more hit of blade-leaf.

Mother reached down and grabbed my leg again, pulling me across the harbor despite my desperate pleas.

"NO MOMMA!! I PROMISE TO BE A GOOD BOY! PLEASE!! I DON'T WANT TO GO!" I scratched and clawed at the ground trying to get away, warm tears flooding out of my eyes. With a grunt, my mother tossed me onto the boardwalk to the feet of a trader, who was patiently waiting with a bag of gold and a smile on his face.

I laid face first in the wet mud, rain pattered around me and lightning shook the sky. What was once the Ancient Temple now lay in ruins and chunks, scattered across the vast countryside. My body racked with pain, bruised and battered from the horrific fight.

His steps sounded as if they were war drums, shaking the ground and plunging the cold sting of fear in my chest.

"You've grown since the last time I saw you." said a deep rugged voice, laced with malice and hate. The fear took hold of my body, paralyzing me in place.

"After all these years, I never thought I would see this day" He gave a slight chuckle, finally coming to a stop in front of me. He grabbed me by the hair and lifted me so that I was face to face with him despite clawing at his ginormous hand.

Rameses Barrocki was a goliath. He was taller and bigger than most men, easily dwarfing even the strongest of warriors. He had dark hair and dark green eyes, his skin was torn from history's battle scars. He was also extremely muscular and extremely deadly. His skill in combat trumped any of those who opposed him, but his overwhelming intelligence was his greatest weapon. He was strategic,

cunning, manipulative and deceitful. His combat skills were impeccable, wielding a great warhammer to suit his mighty strength, and he bore no armor. He was a ruthless King.

And a warrior of death.

Lightning illuminated Barrock for a brief moment, casting an eerie shadow across his face, revealing a horrific smile.

“I almost feel sorry for you, you almost got away” He brought his other hand and firmly clasped it around my throat. With his other, he snatched the menacing warhammer strapped across his back.

“This will feel unpleasant but do not worry, it’ll be over soon.” he smiled like a maniac “Everything will be over soon” Laughing hysterically, he squeezed his hand tighter, cutting off my air. I struggled furiously in his grip but he just kept laughing. My vision started to blacken, and my memories flashed before my eyes like a storybook, making me wish I was never here. Making me wish I would not have to say that word to him.

With the world going dark and the presence of fear flowing through my limbs, as the last attempt, I pushed out my final breath.

“Father”

Letter by Letter

By Sarah Sprague

Abe Bates to Starling Bates
31 May 2001

My one and only Starling,

How are you and Stella doing? Has she grown? What is she up to? Tell her I miss her. I’m sure she is shaping up to look just like her beautiful mother. I will try to write as much as I can, please remind Stella I love her, and I love you just as much.

Make sure my sister knows her husband James has gone ballistic and been involved in one or two fights already, the two of us have not talked at all. I hope she makes the right decision about the divorce.

Much love to my beautiful wife and daughter,

Abe

Starling Bates to Abe Bates
14 June 2001

Abe,

Stella and I are doing just fine, she is not up to a lot because she is still trying to figure out how to live without you here, as am I.

Your sister is visiting soon, that is so terrible for James; he was such a humble man. I hope you're feeling ok, what happened was tragic and I would never dream to wish guiltiness upon you..

Love love love,

Starling and Stella

Starling Bates to Abe Bates

21 June 2001

Dearest Abraham,

Stella and I are concerned, we haven't received a letter from you in 3 weeks now? She misses you, and I can't keep re-reading your last letter to her before she goes to sleep. She is catching on quickly for a six year old. Your sister, Rachel, was just visiting here, she mentioned that she finalized her divorce with James. Have you seen him since he was detained last? She still comes off angry at him, but is very obviously concerned. If you do see him at any time - please tell him to write to her.

Stella is growing fast, probably an inch since you were arrested, and maybe a little more since you last wrote. Rachel and I took her to get her hair cut off, its shorter now, she looks just like your mother. She has taken up dance from Ms. Shires down the street and is absolutely in love with her new pink ballet slippers.

Everyone misses you, and everybody has forgiven you so if it was the guilt that kept you from writing, there is no reason for it.

Love to you from Stella and I.

Abraham to Starling

20 June 2001

Dearest Starling,

I do miss you and my daughter Skella greatly, how are you doing my love? Is your hair still that beautiful raven black that I always loved? I hope you still curl it tight like you did before I left, it looked its best when it was curled.

I have seen the great James Robinson once or twice, he is in prison like everyone else, but he has really never looked better. I talked to him about writing to Rachel however he seemed appalled even by the mention of her name. I can't blame him, she said some dreadful things to him.

My love, the guilt was not keeping me away, my pencils had run out and I have finally located a new stash, you can expect more and more letters from me.

Sincerely, Abraham Bates

Starling to Abraham

24 June 2001

I'm glad you're ok, I didn't know it could take so long to locate a pencil, and you must mean *Stella* not Skella. That new pencil must be perplexing your grammar? Or you've been using again.

I surely hope you're cracking some new prison humor about my hair because you know I would never dye my hair, and I haven't worn it curly in nearly three months. Have you sincerely forgotten what your own wife looks like?

I thought James had gotten into fights? That you two never really talked? You said he looked terrible, is he taking medication now? And what could Rachel have ever said that would offend him to the extent of being "appalled"?

You're signing off your letters different now Abe, you seem mixed up, please write after you have gotten sufficient sleep would you? We're all worried about you.

Love to you,
Starling and Stella

Abraham to Starling
30 June 2001

My Starling,

Please excuse all my spelling errors, my number one priority is far from grammar. And of course I am just kidding about your hair, you caught me. I could never forget your gorgeous face.

Oh dear I forgot I had told you all that, James has passed his violent stage and has grown into a better man. He doesn't need medication for that, tell Rachel to stop writing to him because he told me he has been writing to a new woman.

Yes i'm just trying to change things up a little bit, I hope that's alright. Nothing better than old besides new. I've gotten plenty of sleep now so you shouldn't worry.

From, Abraham Bates

Starling to Abraham
2 July 2001

Abe, why have I just gotten a call in regards to your death on June 27th? Please tell me it was some petty teen prank? Abraham please write back as soon as you can.

Love I think,
Starling

Starling to James
9 July 2001

James,

I assume you don't want to hear from me however I am concerned. I received a call about a week ago concerning Abe's death? I have been visiting Rachel and have not had a phone, and my car is broken down. Is there any confirmation of him being gone? Or am I being brutally punked? Please write back as soon as you can.

Starling

James to Starling
12 July 2001

Dearest Starling,

Yes, your husband was killed on the 27th of June. It was me as Abraham you were writing to, now that he's gone we can finally start life together. You, me, and Ella. I'm sorry I played you for so long, I got a high from talking to you and I was afraid you wouldn't like me as James.

My love for you envelopes my every move and thought, I hope you will come to your senses and visit me. I'm freshly divorced, and you're freshly widowed. Fate?

Come visit me Starling, James

James to Starling
21 July 2001

My Starling,

I'm sorry if I scared you off? I'm sure if you would write back you could see that I am far better than your Abraham.

I love you Starling, more than he ever could. You deserve nothing but the best and I hope you will make the right decision. I can give you everything you want and more, I would break these prison bars for you.

So much love,
James

James to Starling
30 July 2001

Starling,

Is everything alright, I hope I'm not burdening you with my letters. Maybe I did come on too strong, but that is because of how strong my love is for you. Please write back, I need to talk to you again. Please, you have been given due time to mourn, and now it's time to move on and move forward with me.

Love, James

James to Starling
5 August 2001

Starling I killed your husband and I hope to receive gratitude sooner or later from you.

James to Starling
2 January 2002

I've been transferred, my new location is written on the back of this letter, write to me. I will always be waiting.

Love, James

Ocean Tide

By: Dylan Reitz

The sand was pitch black, hot as Hades, and smelled of ash. The ocean was blue, majestic, and angry. I could see the trees bending to every asking will of the wind. I could smell the midday meal being cooked, with all of its spices and sauces. I could feel the ocean calling my name, it was longing for a friend.

I ran toward the water, it looked as if I was giving the water a hug. We played for hours me and him, he kept splashing me with his waves, and I would dive into them. We were happy playing with just the two of us, until my dad came and told me it was time for lunch. The ocean didn't like my father's request very much, he pulled me close, he dragged me farther from my father. My father called out to me as my new found friend pulled me away, deeper and deeper into his ever growing arms. He raised me high into the air, I didn't know if I was in danger or if my friend was teasing my dad for telling me it was time to leave him. I could see everything from up there, I could see the birds in the trees, I noticed my sweet mother had made me a plate of food, I saw my dear grandmother watching rise up into the air with a horrible look of fear in her eyes, and I could see my father running back to the shore to avoid the all angered power of the ocean. The next thing I knew was that my friend had dropped me.

I fell farther and farther down the roaring wave, I felt alone and betrayed, and at that moment I knew my new friend was going to kill me. I hit something hard, I saw red, a lot of red, but then nothing. I saw nothing, I felt nothing, I couldn't breathe, I was scared, but out of the darkness I saw a light.

The light grew closer and closer, I could see faint details of the thing that was in the light. As I looked closer, focusing on the body of this beast, but upon studying the thing further I noticed that it was not one, not two, but 3 animals. One was a turtle, it was huge, green, and beautiful. Another was a jellyfish, ever moving, calm, and majestic. The final one was a shark, mean, scary, and powerful. As they swam to me they told me to grab onto one of their backs, so I did.

They showed me every detail of the ocean, every piece of coral, every fish, every sea volcano, they showed me everything. I was sad when the turtle turned to me and said that they had to leave me, I didn't want them to leave I was loving the exploring of the beauty of the ocean, but they left anyway. There I was yet again all alone, but I felt a force pushing and pulling me towards the shore, and before I knew it I was staring at my body with my father giving me mouth to mouth, the rest of my family sat crying or waiting. I decided that I had to return to them, and leave the ocean, but before I left I promised my new friend that I would return to him some day.

Just like that, I was awake. My father giving me painful chest compressions, I started coughing, and he stopped. I was immediately met with hugs and kisses from my family and I was happy to be back.

Colorful Rain

By Fabian Sanchez

It's the year 2318, my great great great grandfather collected rain from the year 2020. He collected rain to test an almost 3-century experiment. Weather in 2020 with all the climate change and world problems. For example, like the stuff Trump and Iran, Australias' fires and other natural disasters. Humans barely survived the second decade of the year 2000.

The year 2029. That year humans evolved incredibly fast and found a brand new material and hidden parts of Earth, greatly advancing humans. The material was called "Kankaron" and it allowed humans to gain more knowledge about the universe and other impossible goals to reach before. For each unique human 1 of the five main forces of natures was given to them. Those being known as Fire, Water, Wind, Earth, Lighting. Five clans were created, the five clans were divided by the 5 main forces of nature. Only people with the ability that corresponds to one of the 5 forces were to be allowed into the clan. Humans got addicted to using the Material and overused it. They thought the more they used the material the stronger and smarter you can get, which lead to corruption.

Before corruption, the 5 clans lived in peace with each other. The addiction to the Kankaron grew greed in people's hearts causing them to lose sight of who they truly are. Eventually, The 5 great forces began to lose control and get as much Kankaron as possible. Causing breakouts of war and division into 5 separate clans. The war between the 5 forces of nature was deadly. It brought much pain and tears to many people of each clan.

Me. My name is Arthur. I was said to be the chosen one to stop all wars and bring peace to earth once again. I was born in the clan hidden to all the rest. The Hidden Rain Clan. The Hidden Rain lived with no corruption and only wanted peace, the only clan who wasn't taken over by greed from the Kankaron. My parents were from different clans. My mother is from the Fire clan whilst my father from both the Lighting and Water Clan. When I was born the hidden Rain clan chose me to be the one to save us all.

I have within me the power of all 5 forces of nature. I've never used my power until the age of 12. When I fell off a cliff and caught myself using the 5 forces. I am now 16 years old. On the day I turned 16 my father had passed away but had intrusted me with a necklace that held some kind of liquid that was foreign to me. My father's last words were "Use this liquid to stop the wars."

Today I finally figured out what my father meant. The liquid was rain from the year 2020. Unique to the rain found in my time. I had to find a way to use the liquid but I couldn't understand what. The 5 forces of Nature had been informed about me, I was dangerous to all of them because I possessed the 5 powers in me. They formed a pact to exterminate me. The 5 forces of Nature had found the Rain clan.

The 5 forces and I began the end of all wars. Both the 5 forces and I were evenly tied at first. I was backed into a corner where they all attacked simultaneously and I nearly died. I grab the liquid which I put in a necklace around my neck. I opened it and put all of my power into the rain. It started to glow brightly, every color that could possibly be was in the rain. It shot up in the sky and went into the clouds, the clouds turned colorful. It started to rain. It wasn't any ordinary rain, it was colorful rain. At least a single drop landed on all humans. When the colorful rain when touched a human infected with Kankaron was turned back into normal humans and the world was back to normal. I died saving the world because I had used all my power. The world was finally at peace again...

OR WAS IT?

The end

Flash Fiction

Her Favorite Flowers

By: Kaydee Jacobson

"Daisy Morris will be missed," the man's voice seems to ring, even though the crowd has long dispersed. To the young man, there seems to be no noise, no color, no feeling. He looks at the ground with tears in his eyes, looking like a small child once more. He kneels down and sits there, with her favorite flowers clenched tightly in his hands. "I miss you already," he says, choking on the emotions that fight inside of him. He lays Daisy's on the grave, and leaves his hand on her gravestone. Suddenly he feels less alone, but doesn't realize that his mother sits patiently, lovingly beside him in a garden of Daisy's, softly holding her grown son who mourns her loss.

The First Rainshower

By Natalie Vu

It had been a long time since they had seen rain. It had been so long, in fact, that everything had perished long ago—even the trees that had previously had access to groundwater were dried out.

Everything in the area around consisted of dead yellows and browns, drooping stems and crumbling leaves, and the occasional boulder stood grey among the dead.

Visitors—friends going on picnics, lovers on dates, even wandering animals—had stopped coming where, before, they had all come to see the gorgeous flowers that blanketed the land and blossoming trees that swayed elegantly in the wind. Where there had been regal reds and proud purples, there were now tainted tans and ashen alabasters.

That time where life thrived was filled with a plethora of vibrant, brilliant colors. The past was radiant, and the present was only a shadow of what it had been. From here, it seemed as if life—or, rather, the lack thereof—would continue this way into eternity. It seemed as if there would simply be no future.

Years and years had passed, and there was no change within the present.

Just when the final remnants of the last dead flower crumbled into dust, a small drop of rain touched the dusty land. It had fallen from the sky, as raindrops do, and darkened an insignificant, lifeless spot of dirt.

The very first raindrop in ages.

Then others followed, big and fat and rejuvenating. They poured onto the earth with vigor, filling the world with cool, crisp water. The rain penetrated deep into soil, touching and stirring the roots of shriveled up trees. Seeds drank greedily, collecting life inside as they readied themselves to sprout at last.

It was raining so much that the ground grew slick from mud—mud that was loose from lacking roots to hold everything together. Rivers of brown water ran amok, sweeping seeds all over the land and spreading the new flowers out wide.

The renewing rain gave life hope. Leftover dead parts were washed away, giving room for a new start.

Where the past thrived and the present withered, the future would flourish.

And it was all because of the rain.

Life in the World

By LJ Apisala

As I walk through the line of life, steadfast to the point of strife, I continue to build forward with multiple experiences, after every one of those, it always comes with consequences. Yet we still take steps after all the struggles, oh how deep it is to overcome it, and let it fade away on a road pile of puddles. A person of will is always consistent, a person of share and stories will never be hesitant, a person of self growth and humility will never be distant, a person of love and strength is intricate, a person of kindness and integrity has no definition in there mind of being violent, a person of respect and gratitude is delicate, and a person of patience and hope continues to believe and endure. People come and go, although everyone has a different role. They can be looked up to for any reason, but never trusted as a model. Yet, the dreams and hopes we have are as clear as a glass bottle. When we fear so much we can never overcome a trial. However, when we believe in ourselves so much we are final. Let that be a sign of hope. Therefore, as we

hang on to tight our hands hurt from the rope. When we have no paths, our hearts turn dark and cold. Yet, with a little light we can finally do every little part and never fold. To anyone, everyone has a different life story, for anyone, everyone chooses a different path, of anyone, everyone starts a new chapter, with anyone, everyone makes mistakes, and that is where perfection is never near anybody because we learn in different ways with different perspectives. In the weak, people still dig for a motive, but in the strong, people dig for something active. As we continue to live as usual, our lives matter to others with a mind of casual. Yet, a mind changes everything and still leaves a sight. A person chooses everything but forgets overnight. As we appear to introduce the light, the darkness fades and our souls ignite. Day by day, our spirits keep a fight, with nothing to fear and with nowhere to stop but to keep holding on tight. We roll onto the given portion of courage, which is the total opposite of rage. Yet when we do go forth in everything, a different number is turned over for a page. In that case, it'll always show the differences of age. Yet this is where and why I still choose to be steadfast to the point of strife. So that I may still continue to walk and run in that line of life.-Lj Apisala

Hugging Buildings

By Sophia Goodwin

His hand ushers me to sit on the ledge. My feet are shaky. I can see large shadows in the windows. But, the glass is thick, wide, glossy, hand print covered. The cushion is leather. Thousands have sat here before.

“Put your hands out,” his weight rests against the glass.

I shiver. Below, the northbound train pulls into the station. The doors open. Out floods the passengers and the unknowingly brown colored train is filled with unknowing, soot covered, bland clothes, and long, trench coat wearing, people. They leave untouched by the snow and fill the adjacent streets.

I could have easily been another passerby on the bridge. “It’s getting dark, we should catch the next train,” he says. I reach my hands out upon the glass.

The “Other” Side

By Lea Seo

There it was. I had finally found it. The hand mirror. It was on the floor at the foot of the bed in my sworn enemy’s bedroom. I better grab it while I still have the chance I thought.

This mirror has the significance of transporting an individual to a mirror reality, an alternate universe where the people have contrasting personalities. For example, if Sally was known to be the sweetest and kindest girl in the school in our reality, then on the other side of the mirror, Sally would be seen as the most atrocious bully in the school. Contrasting personalities and reputations.

Back to the story. Right when I had grabbed the hand mirror, I immediately ran out of the house. If she were to find me in her room, then I would never see Jason again. Jason. Someone I met in the alternate universe. In my world, he’s known to be an arrogant punk with no morals whatsoever when it comes to his ambitions. When I first came across the mirror, I met the

“other” Jason. Someone who was kind and considerate and quite athletic. I wanted to switch the two and have “other” Jason join me in this world. I can only think of the endless possibilities of a bright future with him.

The Storm's Asperity

Anonymous

The roar of thunder rolled through the valley, signaling to an impending storm. The clouds lit up with the surge of power as lightning cracked. Static hung in the air making one's skin tingle. Everyone rushed home to their shelters of warmth and calm, but she stayed outside admiring the way the clouds formed and how the lightning twisted. It reminded her of the souls of people. Deformed and always changing, never what you would expect.

Rain began falling, small delicate droplets gently drumming against her skin and the roofs. It was completely silent, the sound of pattering rain drowned out the noises of life. It was peaceful, but foreboding. Nothing good lasts long. The air turned cold and the wind came and stung her skin.

The rain fell harder, the pattering became pounding. Lightning lit up her vision, thunder boomed and shook the earth. The storm approached it's climax. A tree cracked and splintered, it fell towards her. She screamed and ran for safety, but she wasn't fast enough.

The smell of rain lingered in the air for hours afterward. Life began to return as the clouds melted away into oblivion, birds sang, crickets chirped. The only evidence of the omnipotent storm of the night before was the broken willow tree and the water mixing with blood and debris into the storm drain. The earth was ready for a new day full of hope for the future.

Poetry

A Colorful Future

by:Tyson Mikesell

Red like a ball that
My dog plays with he loves it
We play together

Orange I am not
Even going to try on
This one well I did

Yellow like the sun

Like a polka dot on the
Dress of a girl

Green like the earth
All the things on the earth
Like forests done

Blue is like the sky
The water ocean and sea
All joined with earth

Purple stripes down
A shirt with white straight down
The middle of it

Colors in the Mist

By Hailee Sumpter

How could the future be colorful?
When all the color has fled and the world is so bleak,
How can anyone find color anywhere?

Let me tell you a little secret.
Color is everywhere you look.
In everything you see, there is color.
Even on the most bland days, with mist and clouds obscuring the sun,
There is color.
You just need to know where to look for it.

On those days, when the world seems impossibly black and white,
Cool colors are the most abundant, to be sure.
You can find green hiding beneath the mist, in the grass.
Blue can be found in the mist, as the day lightens in the morning.
There can even be some purple, from the just visible mountains,
Or the small flowers one can find.

But while there may be more cool colors,
Certainly warm colors are the easiest to spot.
Red, from the occasional umbrella or clothing, is easy to see.
When the sun manages to peek through the clouds above, orange can be seen.
And certainly yellow from childrens' raincoats can often be found.

On the bright days, those colors are easy to see.
No one notices them, however, because they are always there.
The colors are always more obvious the less there are,
If you choose to see them,

So next time you find yourself in the bleak world,
In grays and blacks and whites,
Remember that there is always color somewhere.
Find the color, small though it may be.
With each color you find each day,
You can make every day colorful,
Be there mist or not.

High School

By Grace Hulsing

Backpacks piled in the corner,
Red, orange.
Folders slamming on desks,
Yellow, green.
Pencils flying, taking notes,
Blue, purple.
Welcome to high school.

Color Poem

By: Jade Thurston

Leisure sunlight rises above the mountains
Spreading warmth on our faces
The bitter sweet tastes of pineapple and banana
Set on your taste buds
Mustard birds tweet and scatter
Fuzzy feathers on dry crumbled grass
The smell of breakfast wafting in our noses
As the yokes fry

Provoked

By Sarah Sprague

To think is to race
A voyage which meets no end
Unstoppable thought

Attempting to seal a finish
Your future begins to diminish
The pressure seeps into the pores of the wall
Opening the cup of opportunity although it runs small

To think is to race
A voyage which meets no end
Unstoppable thought

Discolored

By: Tanner Christensen

Eyes are the keepers to the wonders of the world. The film that overlays the world is the filter to one's soul. The colors that absorb these eyes are so well deserved, But many people don't understand the true goal.

Colors hold a shape to them that are often misunderstood, But color truly can show the feelings of all. They can be physical, emotional, or even discolored, Their purpose solely depends on the keeper installed.

A color often tells all the feelings of how a person thinks, Blue stigmatizes sadness, but how so? Why can't sadness be purple, green, or pink? There's no true reason, it's just as green is for go.

Colors tell the world how one feels but how is that fair? Why should someone be determined just by one side? I for one often hide these feelings to hide my own tears. Colors can be skewed, allowing for someone to hide.

A new film now arises, and people can put on filters. A future, a bright and colorful future, Requires one to be open about their own colors, even for a mister. Everything truly comes down to the user.

Light impacts the color and its shade, Similar to how one's circumstances affects their mental state. Happiness and hope can only exist for so long until it fades, Then, all at once without warning, everything drapes.

Color, the pathway to one's soul, is crucial, Ever so crucial, that those diverged are often motivated by fear of disapproval.

The Light in the Distance

By Natalie Finlayson

Fear of rejection
Feelings of inadequacy
Failed aspirations of perfection
Feeling confused not understanding why
Failing in spite of the work put in
Feeling alone and utterly helpless

Challenges faced following one after the other
The desire to surrender grows like wildfire
Wanting to give in for the storm is too great
The trails too much to bear
Unable to see to the end of another day

Afar of a light in the distance appears
Midst of darkness floods everything in sight
A light beckons at the end of the tunnel

The capability of surmounting the darkness soon within reach
Before the darkness seemed too thick too deep
No longer holds the power to retain its captors

At last surmounting the mountain standing so high
A breathtaking landscape below lets in rays of light
Evidence of the challenges that seemed unconquerable
Have now made way for feelings of peace and comfort
Light brings pure joy and love that knows no end

Look to the **light**, Look Up, Look around
Other just like us face fears and doubts
Reach out, be the **light** to the one struggling in the darkness
Traversing their own way through a mountain on a rugged path

Give them the **light** that will enable them to move forward
With courage and resilience they too can experience this **light**
All along and forever there will there be **light**
Never forget the **light** in the distance

A World of Black and Grey

By Kylie Morris

I live in a world of black and gray,
Not able to tell night from day.
I live in a world that's boring and bland,
No freedom, no joy, no water, no land.
This world I live in shrinks day by day,
Fading so fast it might fade away.
But one day I saw a man old and frail
He had a strange face, ears and a tail.
I followed this man, I do not know why,
He made me so curious, he was so sly.
When I found the man alone in the wood,
He knew I would follow him, I knew that I should.
The man smiled at me and held out two things,
They shone in the sun and twinkled like rings.
"Choose a color, the orange or red,
Choose the wrong one and you may be dead.
One holds the power, the truth of the world,
The other holds death and makes insides curled."
The man took the pills one in each hand,
One looked spicy the other one bland.
I reached out my hand so very scared,
Suddenly I knew and was finally aware...
These pills were a trick they were not real,
They only held death not joy not zeal.
I looked at the man and told him my thought,
The reason the pills were a lie and a fraud.
The man then smiled and looked up at me.
"Finally I found the one that can see,

The color is not in a single, small pill,
It's in the soul of a person the strength of their will."
He threw the two pills down on the ground ,
And out from his mouth came a heavenly sound.
The sound of the angels coming down from above
The world came back starting with love.
It returned in an instant, came back with a sigh,
It never had left, we lived in a lie.
The color was truth and all that was good,
And finally someone did what they should.
Now we are happy and joyful each day,
No more living in a world black and gray.

A Hopeful Tomorrow

By: Kaydee Jacobson

Today it seems hard to make it through the day.
I find it so hard to even want to say
The things that aren't making me okay
Playing myself with the thought of yesterday

Though the day seems so very weak
Tomorrow perhaps, I won't be so weak
I won't be so frightened to speak
I won't be ashamed of my fear that I shriek

The idea of tomorrow makes me heart soar, gives me hope
I no longer in fear, guilt, or sadness will mope
Because the tomorrow I love is something like soap
That starts me afresh, helps me balance my life like the tightrope.

A Dusk

By Mia Degn

The present is so dusk
I don't want to deal with it
But I must
So I focus on my dreams
Of what I can be

And sleep I dream of tomorrow
Away from today that was a sorrow
I see pigments of yellow, green and blue
I see orange, red and some purple too
I see hope
She was beautiful
Tall and lean
She was the strongest word you'd ever
seen
She took my hand
So long and bony
Then we trotted off to tomorrow land.

The White of Life

by Lillian Tsubaki

Pink
The color of life
fills my soul with warmth
Its absence brings storms

of blue
Darkness and grief,
heavy and all-consuming
Tempests brewing

froths of white
And yet

a calm
The tides pull inwards and outwards
The shoreline everchanging
Exposing the sandy grit

of yellow,
a pastel of yellow
in the folds of my origami swan
for my sick mom

She liked green
How you could see the wind in the grass
as it swayed before autumn came,
turning the leaves

orange
the color of change
a hope that things would rearrange

knowing that commonalities were once strange

like red

The pricks of IV needles,
injecting her with a supposedly good poison.

Still, the deafening noise

of pink becoming white

is her life draining,

skin cold, I digress

The calm of white becoming lifeless.

Future Life

Madison Chivers

The future's so bright

But yet so dim

It is a world of possibilities

The Possibilities for good and evil

In the future everything can change

Or they could stay the same

The future is exciting

But can be frightening

We have a destiny that is very much unknown

It may be simple or it may be difficult

But we all have a destiny big or small

But we all need to decide where we belong

We may lose people along the way

But we have the memories at the end of the day

The future may be dim

But it can also be bright

We must have hope for our future lives

For with hope our future will come alive

Blue/Ocean

By Megan Watson

I cannot help but stop and look at the deep ocean.
Down, down, down into the darkness of the ocean,
Gently it goes - the abstruse, the bottomless, the inscrutable.
Believe that oceans are shallow?
Oceans are deep beyond belief.
Oceans are cryptical. Oceans are heavy,
However
The cunning freshwater sings like a tropical water
Are you upset by how knavish it is?
Does it tear you apart to see the freshwater so ingenious?

Listening, Racing, Colorful

By Katie Chiara Jensen

In the past life was slower
Moving with ease and tranquility
People found joy in the easy things
Sitting on a porch
Taking a walk
Listening

The present is much faster
We want things done now
Not taking the time to enjoy what we have around us
Running a red light
Yelling at people when they can't even hear us in our cars
Ignoring what is most important in our lives
Racing

My future will be different
I want a life filled with hopes, dreams, and simplicities
To go where I want and see the things I want to see
Be with the people I love
Be what I want to be
Dream as big as I dare to dream
Colorful

As I Lay Awake

Anonymous

go to sleep
you're tired
my mind won't stop running
i'll think of you, me, us
i can't stop, i don't wanna
when you wake
i'll be here again
i'll be here always
even if you don't see it

Perspective

By Katelyn Madden

Stuck without a key Colors swirling
and mixing around me Combining to
form a black entity Holding me from
being free

Binding my hands with chains of dark
Blocking my vision, burying my face in
bark Making me see a twisted reality Not
what's really laid out in front of me

I reach out for a hand to grab
And find that I seem to be alone
This lonely life is quite drab
Until all the colors can be shone

My vision cleared so I could see The
wonderful things around me The
small and simple things With large
and grand around me rings

Overwhelmed by the blinding
lights Of the colorful future I can
see Getting myself through the

nights Then finally truly alive I'll be
For my colorful future ahead of
me.

New Mexico

**By Aedan
Payne**

Your breath makes a cloud of hope
In this frozen over state

It melts away the sinless glaze
While purity takes center stage

Slide a hand across the glass
Lay with me in fields of
grass

Regrow the flowers lost
From the summer haze

Take me home. To where the
river rarely flowed

Planes of yellow dust Settled
into rust

Winding streets and broken lamps
Tells a story of negligence
Shower me in grace

Until I leave this place.

A Colorful Future

By Annette Francis

A colorful future
My future untold
A black one, a white one
A story in gold

A fall, red and yellow
With leaves on the ground
A beautiful picture
Everywhere can be found

A winter so white
It is bleak yet still grand
Blinded by light
Or so cold, I can't stand

A spring full of color
The grass deep and rich
Lightning storms thunder
The sky dark as a witch

Summer is here
Hot just for the beach
Swimming and laughing
A good tan, out of reach

These seasons are past
They are present and future
They're full of new colors
And you are the painter

Pick up your paintbrush
Your paint and your canvas
You are the creator
So make art from your past

Use the colors of yesterday
To draw in today
Better and brighter
To find the right way

The way through the darkness
The bleak view of tomorrow

The white canvas is waiting
For you to color in the future

Tomorrow or Today

By Katherine Robison

Tomorrow

I look down at my throbbing feet,
and I wonder what's next.
I run harder anyway,
and try to forget.
The doctors say
I should be better by tomorrow.
But, tomorrow never seems to come.
I mentally try to stay positive.
This is something I can overcome.
Running is my whole life.
Sometimes I think it's half my soul.
If I had to quit,
I'm not sure I'd be whole.
Tomorrow,
where are you?
It seems I'm stuck in today.
And I never can quite reach you,
though you're only a day away.
Tomorrow,
where are you?
It's still today.
I'm not sure what I'm to do.
Just please promise me I'll be okay.
Tomorrow,
where are you?
I'm trying to forget.
But the doctors say that it's today
and I have to quit.

Today

I look down at her miniature sized feet,
and I know what's next.
This is a flawless moment,
I can't ever forget.
The doctors say she is the perfect baby.
But, she's more than that to me.

She's my heart and soul.
She is my everything.
Tomorrow,
thank you.
I now understand.
Tomorrow,
thank you.
For knowing when not to hold my hand.
For giving me the happy ending,
I was too blind to see.
For realizing I had to let it go myself.
Before anyone else could try to set me free.
But most of all tomorrow
thank you for helping me see my life,
not as a runner.
But as a mom and wife.
~Katie R.

Haiku Poetry

Wishin' for Beach Days

-Paige Miller

The big green leaves
Create shadows over me
My skin is glowing

Stars

-Hannah Heugly

Visions of white stars,
They light the mountain clearly,
Save me from the dark.

Future Heaven

-Hannah Heugly

Blue waves wash ashore,
Green palm trees wind waves me by,
Yellow sun calls me home.

Colors of Life

-Priscilla Quach

A hope of colors
Passing through the dark despair
The future is yours