

The Mask

It started out as a trend. It was the coolest trend of the late twenty first century. A superstar known for crazy clothing wore a realistic mask that made her face look perfect. The mask quickly became popular because it was easy to wear and it made anyone look perfect. Now everyone thirteen and up wears them every single day. It became a rites of passage for teens. Everyone gets their own mask on their thirteenth birthday.

This brings me to my story on my thirteenth birthday. I had finished opening presents. It was time to see my mask. I carefully opened the lid of the box it's kept in. I put the mask on and looked at myself in the hand held mirror my parents had given me. My eyes were now green instead of blue. I looked polished like a new doll. I was supposed to be overjoyed by my perfect appearance. Why did it feel so wrong?

That was three days ago. I still feel wrong wearing this mask. I can't explain the weird feeling I get when I'm wearing it. But it could have something to do with a weird incident that happened in class a week ago. My friend started talking to me about how great the government was. Everyone else in the entire class seemed to agree with her, no one had a different opinion. Afterwards, I realized that I was the only person that was not wearing a mask because I have a late birthday. I don't trust my mask anymore. One good thing about the mask, is I get take it off before I go to bed.

"Sky wake up! You are going to be late!" my mom yelled from the kitchen.

"Why?" I replied still groggy from sleep.

“Because you have school.”

“Give me five minutes.” I said as I got dressed. I grabbed a muffin and my bag and I got into the car, forgetting my mask. At school people kept giving me weird looks. My friend came up to me and asked, “Where is your mask?”

“Oh my gosh, I must have forgot,”

The school bell rang to get to class and I am called to the principal’s office.

“Where is your mask Sky?” he asked.

“I forgot it because I was running late,”

“You know, it’s illegal not to wear your mask in public and I know you don’t want to get in trouble. So I called your parents to bring you your mask” he boomed.

“Um okay,” I replied confused about why he was making such a fuss. I got my mask from my parents and started walking back to class. Suddenly someone whispered.

“Hey! Over here!” I walked closer to find a boy without a mask in a shadow cast by our school.

“What were you thinking? If you stop wearing your mask you will get locked up. Are you a rebel?” the boy asked.

“I just forgot my mask at home. I am not a rebel.”

“But you must not like wearing the mask, right?” he asked.

“That’s...” and suddenly something stops me from speaking.

“Take off the mask,” he said.

"... True." I say when the mask is off my face. "Why can't I say that wearing the mask?"

"We can't talk about this here. Give me your mask and follow me," I hesitated before giving him my mask. He put it into a secret compartment containing at least a dozen more.

"Don't worry your mask will be safe in here. By the way my name's Luca."
We walked through old doors into abandoned basement underneath the school. Inside there was one big room with several tunnels leading into darkness. Lots of people were busy rushing around looking at maps and using old technology to communicate.

"Now will you tell me what's going on?" I asked.

"The mask changes what you see, what you say, and what you think," Luca said

"This is why we plan to make a public demonstration to make people notice these problems. I think you can help us."

We walked over to the biggest table in the room and he said to someone, "John let me introduce you to our solution. This is Sky". I was confused for a moment. How could he know my name?

"Hello, Sky, I am the leader of this operation. How can you help?" John said in a low voice.

" I can answer that," Luca said matter-of-fact. "You are going to a government sponsored youth program tomorrow right?"

"Yep," I reply.

"The event is being aired on TV," he said.

"I understand," John said.

"Sky, will you help us take a stand against the government?"

"Yes," I said seriously.

The next day I went to the program. Once the awards began I walked up to the stage pretending I won something. John's friends held back security and stole a camera to broadcast this to the world. I took off my mask and broke it in two.

"The government is using all of you through the masks. All I want is freedom to wear what I want. Break your mask and join the fight!" People started whispering to each other. Then a few supporters in the crowd broke their masks and started clapping.

A security guard broke free from John's friends and grabbed my wrists pulling me away from the stage. I kicked his leg and the guards grip loosened just enough that I broke free. Two more people broke their masks. I ran through the crowd. Once I found my parents and we left to get to a safe location. I realized these might be the first steps to freedom.

A Little More Room

I wake in an unfamiliar bed, the cold bites my skin as I toss my wool covers to the side. Where am I? My tired eyes rake the room, searching desperately for something of familiarity. Wiping away the dark strands of hair that managed to sneak into the corners of my mouth, I glance sideways out my window to find masses of fluffy flakes, tumbling from a pale sky. A tangle of tall pines, level with my window pane, wave at me from across the way. I am pulled from my daze by a sudden chill upon my legs, causing me to become acutely aware of the deep pit forming inside my stomach. This is not my home. My mind whirls as I try and comprehend that this is where I should reside for the next three months.

The kitchen is a buzz; the scraping of peanut butter on toast, and the string of tiring questions that never cease to escape the mouths of the small. I sit at the table, there, the eyes of a five year old remind me of the ones I left behind.... *Jaida?! Can you play with me? You're the best sister ever!* A stream of silent tears roll down my reddened face. I see the ones I love in everything I do; I am overcome with nostalgia. Yet, I am constantly amazed by the beauty of my surroundings, the kindness that I have been shown, and the mere fact that I have come this far! Wonder and pain engage in a vigorous dance inside my mind; wonder leading with grandeur, but only until pain slithers up and closes in on her elegant frame, taking the lead.

Time tugs at my heart; three months, twelve weeks, eighty-four days separate me from the ones I love. *You are officially in the tribe of crazy, wild, adventurous women! I am so proud of you.* Time's grip loosens. I contemplate this, and time slowly loses touch. Deep down, I begin

to find something inside myself, strength. For I know that I have been given this opportunity for a reason, and I'm not going to let it go to waste. Holding onto a faith that it will get better, and the continuous support of those who surround me, I wholeheartedly begin my *adventure*.

It would be considered naive for me to think that the sadness will dissipate immediately, or at all for that matter. Time will continue to tick in the back of my mind. Nevertheless, I can control my own perspective, and how much I let it affect me. In the end, I know that not only will I become stronger as a person, but so will my faith and the love I share with my family. So, in the meantime, I think I can make a little more room in my heart for the second pair of innocent eyes.

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Grade 10
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So Close, So Far
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So Close, So Far

The trip had been long; thirty hours since she last slept and her body was dehydrated and hungry. She was fighting to stay awake when the bus shook and came to a halt, the brakes creaking at the sudden stop. Leaning over, she wiped the foggy window.

Suddenly, after all her wishes, years of saving, it was right there in front of her. It started with four curved iron pillars, each spaced far apart from the other. Beams of metal criss crossed over a thick, centered piece that reached upwards. These stopped briefly at the first platform, before reaching up to the second, and then to the top, piercing the grey sky. Quickly, she stood up, following the other students, eyes locked on it.

She all but ran towards it, hands fumbling for her camera. Slipping into the long lineup with her friends, she observed every detail. She was solely focused on the view in front of her, but her ears caught murmurs nearby, "*On y va!*".

Looking over the structure, she found it to be different than what she had expected. Most surprising was the colour; the tower was brown. She had anticipated it would be smaller and would blend in more with the pale colours of the buildings nearby. Many nights had been spent dreaming of this moment and she could imagine the view from the top. This beautiful and historic city would be laid out before her.

Seeing the tower, standing there, she felt like she was in another world. It was hard for her to comprehend that this was a real place and not somewhere from her imagination. Here she would experience the world, unprotected by the blanket of security that was her hometown. Standing in the place of dreams, she knew she would not waste this opportunity.

The line of people had dissipated, and she found herself in front, ready to go up.

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So Close, So Far
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Until, she was not going up. Time had run out; the bus was ready to leave. She sighed and walked over to the nearest pillar, hands reaching out towards the cool metal. If she could not go up, at least she could touch it.

Gentle music played in the background as yet another street performer attempted to earn some profit. It was the City of Love after all, so it was no surprise that the music being played was a romantic tune. Unfortunately, it did nothing to ease her disappointment.

Stepping back, she raised her camera instead, turning around and around, trying desperately to capture this moment. Thick clouds started to darken the sky and small drops of rain landed in her hair. Her heart broke a little, knowing that she had come so close to the top. At least she had gotten as far as the bottom. That was farther than she had been before.

Reluctantly, she began to follow the rest of the group headed back to the bus, not wanting to tear her eyes away. She scanned the tower once more, trying to memorize every small detail.

Soon, she was not able to see it through the rain, and sighing, she turned away. One day, she would be at the top. One day she would return to the beauty of the Eiffel Tower.

"Violet"

Isabella Ford

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Violet

Violet's death made everything seem insignificant. School, boys, friends, all the things in my life I once cared about were stupid things to focus on once she was gone. I walked through life feeling just as dead as Violet was or rather *is*. It's scary how the loss of one person can completely outway everyone else. Violet was dead but everyone else was still alive, my family and friends were all there for me but I didn't care, I was alone in my mind.

Violet and I lived in that town for sixteen years. We had memories on every street and in every room. There was no escaping the memory of her. For goodness sake her name was Violet, the colour will never be as bright. I saw her everywhere once she was gone. I would see her through shop windows or turning corners in the school halls. Sometimes, I took off my headphones, thinking I had heard her voice under the music, but she was never really there. The sightings were just my brain's way of comforting me. I longed so deeply to see her again, to just hear her voice one last time, that my brain created the illusion of her.

Violet's funeral was a shock to the system. The entire town was there. I resented the gathering I didn't want people to watch me say goodbye. But while surrounded by the sorrow, things became clearer. I could see it in their faces,

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the grief, and understanding. I saw them awake at three am listening to old voicemails and crying over memories. All of them in pain without her. I saw them struggling to be in a building full of everyone in her life, just the same as I was.

I wasn't prepared to say goodbye, but I was expected to. I stood next to her for quite a while just trying to comprehend what had become of my friend. They erased all signs of the accident, only small scrapes hidden by black lace were left. Her face was the same but she wasn't smiling like usual. She was just lying there empty. This was Violet but not anymore. I expected her eyes to open or her chest to rise, anything. Nothing happened though, she was just a corpse; I was just standing with my best friend's corpse pleading for time to reverse itself. I didn't have anything to give her, nothing to place with her on her final journey. So I left her, I didn't touch her or whisper a goodbye, I simply left. I now wish I had done something more, I wish I hadn't left her with such a dull ending, But time is consistent, it won't make exceptions for me.

Violet's accident taught me what real hatred feels like. When a drunk stranger drives full force into your best friend and kills her on impact, you learn hatred. I hated that man for taking her from me, for being careless; I even hated his family for not teaching him better; I hated everything about him. I spent a lot of time being angry. It ruined me as a person. I lost my sense of empathy; I thought no one could understand pain if they hadn't felt how I felt. Maybe I wouldn't have been so angry if either of them had lived, if Violet had survived

"Violet"

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Grade 10

Westsyde Secondary School

the crash, or if the drunk driver lived to face the consequences. But none of that happened. They both died. Two trails of destruction caused by one mistake.

Eventually, it was pointless to be angry. They were both gone, and I couldn't live my life hating a dead man. It took a long time to realize that, but when I did it was like waking up again. With or without Violet I was alive. I owed it to her to do something with my life. And I did, I lived my life without Violet.

Terrible things still happen and amazing things still happen, but at the end of it all, I still wish I could tell her about them.

The four adults watch their young children play together. A sickly little red haired girl and a brown haired boy dance across the yard, lost in their own magical world of make believe. The girl moves slower than the boy, each step a constant struggle, but she doesn't seem to mind.

"How quickly children become friends," the boy's mother says to the girls parents. She, her husband and their five year old son, Tim, have just moved next door. This is a new city for them and a big change for Tim. She seems relieved that her son has found a new friend so quickly.

The little girl, Maggie, starts to climb up the great, ancient oak that takes up most of the backyard, and the four adults hear her call, "Tim, look!" She points out over the yard seemingly looking at something far out in the distance. "The pirates are coming," she exclaims.

Tim is quick to join her up in the tree. "We must climb higher," he decides. "They must have come to collect us. They plan to take us away with them on their ship in the sky to collect the stars."

Maggie giggles and they climb higher until they are lost in the ancient tree's leafy branches; only small flashes of red hair amid the greenery let the parents know where they are.

“Maggie is very sick,” her father quietly tells Tim’s parents. They haven’t spoken about Maggie’s illness with anyone outside of the family, but, for these two he thinks it best if they know; it is rather obvious that she is not well, though not from the way she behaves now. “We don’t know how much longer we have with her.”

Maggie’s mother attempts to smile, but there are silver tears forming in her eyes. “We haven’t seen her so happy or playful in so long.”

“Not since she was diagnosed,” her father adds.

Tim’s parents seem at a loss for words as they silently take in all of what they are saying.

After a couple of minutes of silence, Maggie announces, “They’re gone,” and she climbs down, landing rather roughly on the ground.

Tim nods as he lands beside her. “They’ll be back, though,” he warns his face grave. “We need a place to hide.”

Maggie nods her face pale and scrunched up in concentration. “I know” she says. After a brief moment she offers, “the playhouse,”

Together they run toward the playhouse built beside the fence.

“Quick,” Tim squeals, “There they are.” He points at their parents. “They must have only pretended to go away.”

Maggie shrieks and the two of them dive into her playhouse, both scrambling to get to the back.

Maggie’s father gets up and comes over. He peeks in, “What have we got here?” he asks, his voice gruff.

The two of them press further into the back of their hideout. Neither of them can suppress their giggles as they stare out at him.

“It looks like two lost children,” Tim’s mother says, “who have been hiding from pirates all afternoon. They must be exhausted.”

“Certainly, they hungry for their dinner,” Maggie’s mother says.

Maggie scrambles forward and her red pigtails stick out of the opening, “Spaghetti?” she asks hopefully.

Her mother nods. “Can the pirates wait until tomorrow, sweetheart?”

Maggie agrees and climbs out.

Tim climbs out after her and his mother grabs his hand. “Are you hungry?” she asks him.

He nods, his stomach rumbling in agreement. “Tomorrow, we confront the pirates.” He looks over at Maggie for conformation.

“Tomorrow,” she agrees, “as early as possible, by the gate.”

He nods and he and his parents head out to their house next door.

That night Tim dreams of pirates and treasure maps. And sweet, little Maggie dreams of the pirates taking her away on their ship to collect the stars.

Tim is up early the next morning and he waits by the gate in the fence between their yards for the little red haired girl to appear, but his friend never does.

He is too young to understand the meaning behind the awful heartbroken sounds that Maggie’s parents make. After an hour of waiting his mother comes out and tells him that little Maggie has joined the pirates in the sky.

"Poems Of Misty Rose"
Misty McDonald
Grade 10
Desert Sands Community School

"Loss Of Words"

I'm at a loss of words from the loss of you.

Unable to express all my emotions,

I can't find words strong enough for this ache I'm feeling.

All I know is, I can't hold this scream in any longer.

I want to yell and shout and ask the creator why.

Why you? Why now?

Everything happens for a reason,

Although I've been searching endlessly; I can't seem to find out what it is.

You left and I don't know why,

Though I'm seeing you everywhere,

In everything I do; i'm catching glimpses of you.

I've written you so many poems, so many letters

I'm still at a loss of words because,

There hasn't been any metaphors I've come across or collision of words

That describes just how much I miss you.

Or describe just how much this hurts.

"Poems Of Misty Rose"
Misty McDonald
Grade 10
Desert Sands Community School

"Here?"

You're Here, but You're Not

You're not here, but I know you're with me.

I can't see you, but I can feel your presence around me.

You can't speak back, but I know you're listening.

You're here, but you're not.

Breakdown
By: Lane Robinson
Grade 10
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Do you ever feel like you're being watched? Not by someone. Not by something. But by nothing? Perhaps you're standing in line at a train station, or waiting in a crowd to get into a hockey game. The person in front of you is speaking angrily into his phone about some impetuous business deal. The one behind you is standing way too close for your comfort. It's a normal day until suddenly you get those eerie chills. It's starting again and you can't stop it this time. It starts with the hair on the back of your neck rising. Your nerves are on edge and you feel as if somebody is breathing down your neck. Easy to ignore at first, but now your nerves are uncontrollable. A numb sensation moves down your arms and leaves your fingers tingling. Then the whispering starts. It's very faint at first, like a dove calling softly from a nearby tree.

Why is everybody whispering about you?

The room starts swirling with the voices of strangers. Powerless to keep yourself in reality anymore, the voices break into a synchronized scream and the world goes blindingly white. When you regain your vision the line you were standing in is gone and instead you're in a barren landscape. Looking around you take in the scene; to your left is a scorched mountain and to your right is black rock. Each going on for miles, too far for your eyes to see. Your heart starts racing as you try and decide what to do. Blood rushing through your ears, adrenaline pumping through your veins.

Stop. Do you see that?

There's something coming towards you. It's running, speeding, racing to get to you. Just as you see its crushed skull, blood dripping from the mouth like the hanging tongue of a dog, it suddenly disappears. You're paralyzed by fear. Controlled by fear. Spinning around in circles trying to see where it went but it's gone. You tell yourself it's not real and soon it'll be over.

You can tell that this isn't real, but it doesn't stop your mind from believing what it sees. Stop. Wait. Listen.

Can't you hear it now? The sound of metal scraping on metal. They're coming closer. Can't you smell them?

Acrid. Sickening. Nauseating.

A smell so bitter that you can almost taste it. Your mouth like sandpaper and your tongue like melting wax as you try to scream for help. The bile churning in your stomach, threatening to come up. They're so close now. Can't you feel that warm breath on the nape of your spine? Their burnt, mangled hands creep onto your shoulder and around your neck. The dead skin peeling off and falling onto the ground in front of you. You can't take it anymore and finally you turn around. They grab you by the shoulder and there's another flash of light.

You're back in the line.

I lie awake at night, thinking of the two of you.
You both yell and scream while I'm feeling blue.
I think it's all my fault, It's because of my mistakes.
I want it to stop, can we all apply the brakes?
Did I do something wrong? Did I mess up again?
Are my grades too low or, did I make a stain?
Can you tell me why I care? Or even why I hate?
Can I walk away, or do I have to wait?

Please don't tell me, that this is all for me!
Please don't tell me, that everything comes free!
Please don't warn me, to never shout or yell!
Please don't warn me, that you once tripped and fell!
Did you know I'm a rebel? I wanna stay inside!
Did you know I'm a bombshell? I'm always being eyed.
Did you think I would be one, of your perfect little girls!?
Did you think I would wear, all your jewels and your pearls!?

I'll get a huge tattoo, I'll get myself snake bites!
I'll disobey your rules, I'll run away in the nights!
I can dye my hair black, and maybe some blue.
I can turn walk away, hope you enjoy the view!
Maybe I need some stretchers, so I can get you mad.
If I drink some alcohol, maybe I can go bad!
Can I smoke some cigarettes, or maybe some weed?
But I don't think that's something I need...

Please don't tell me, that this is all for me!

Please don't tell me, that everything comes free!

Please don't warn me, to never shout or yell!

Please don't warn me, that you once tripped and fell!

Did you know I'm a rebel? I wanna stay inside!

Did you know I'm a bombshell? I'm always being eyed.

Did you think I would be one, of your perfect little girls!?

Did you think I would wear, all your jewels and your pearls!?

I curse the world, I hate all of this mess.

Why do I stay? There is too much stress.

And it's all on you I have to mention.

Maybe If you knew you would pay attention.

But this case has been closed, it is no more.

And putting up this act has become such a chore.

So as I change to who I was all along.

You have to figure out what you did wrong.

Please don't tell me, that this is all for me!

Please don't tell me, that everything comes free!

Please don't warn me, to never shout or yell!

Please don't warn me, that you once tripped and fell!

Did you know I'm a rebel? I wanna stay inside!

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Did you think I would be one, of your perfect little girls!?

Did you think I would wear, all your jewels and your pearls!?

My breaths are heavy, my sight is blurred.

I wanna talk to you but I can't say a word.

I'm filled with my anxiety it's with me everyday.

It blocks my mind, I can't hear what you'd say.

It comes at random, I'll never be prepared.

I'm shaking with fear I've become so scared.

How do I breathe? Why can't I see?

What is this place? Is that tears on my face?

Just stop... take one breath... I am fine.

No I'm not I'm walking a non-existent line!

You can put me down again but I'll get over this.

You'll be something I will never miss.

I lay down, on my cold hard floor.

I shake hard, I don't want this anymore.

Why do I have so many problems?

Why does my lowest point have no bottom?

When my anxiety arrives I can't breathe.

But I'll be fine when it goes and leaves.

How do I breathe? Why can't I see?

What is this place? Is that tears on my face?

Just stop... take one breath... I am fine.

No I'm not I'm walking a non-existent line!

You can put me down again but I'll get over this.

You'll be something I will never miss.

Why does this happen to me? Why can't I be free,

From all of the pain? But what would I gain?

Can't anyone see how much this hurts.

I feel like I'm living on the outskirts.

I only ever see one option to survive.

I got to keep fighting it to stay alive.

How do I breathe? Why can't I see?

What is this place? Is that tears on my face?

Just stop... take one breath... I am fine.

No I'm not I'm walking a non-existent line!

You can put me down again but I'll get over this.

You'll be something I will never miss.