

## Midnight Melancholy

Chase Androllick  
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I lay motionless, sprawled in sombre sedation on top of the bed, still in my work clothes from the day. Alone in what used to be our room, I stared blankly at the overbearing dark of the ceiling, hopelessly waiting for the release that seldom ever came to me anymore, only visiting briefly from time to time. Sleep. Like every other night since she left, I knew this would be another long one ended conversation with the clock on my phone. It was one of the few things that still talked to me other than my own thoughts.

Midnight. 2:37am. 4:42 am said my phone in its mocking silence. The empty remark echoed through the depths of my conscience like all the other voices wandering within, screaming so softly in my mind, a painful reminder of my insomnia. Yet no one else would ever hear its caustic sarcasm, an unborn whisper to anyone outside my quaint little cage. Our long drawn out bouts of its poignant derision left scarce few clues of its passing: sallow bags under my eyes, a hunched posture, and a pallid face devoid of expression, one that far closer resembled those of the long deceased than of the living. No, I was the only one that received such exclusive treatment from the slab of plastic buried deep in my pocket. I was after all, the king of my own little purgatory, servants catering to me with every drawn breath, down here in my mental prison.

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The memory, like everything we shared together haunted me, bleeding depression. It was an open wound, an ever weeping gouge of the countless months since past. The memory of what once was, or at least of what I thought used to be; how this cell used to be Elysium. With her, everything used to be full of colour, vibrant with life, and what I thought was love. How wrong I'd been. How blind. If only I'd known then, but it was far too late, nothing could mend the damage done, not now, not ever, and in truth, nothing had changed since then. My psychiatrist was wrong, time hadn't healed a thing.

For the first time in nearly six hours in my sullen stupor, I moved. I rolled my lethargic body over to the side of the bed and tentatively, stood up. My limbs were like lead weights dragging me down to the floor, blood coursing through me like mercury; I could scarcely move my legs, only managing a slow shuffle to my window, a gait like that of what you'd expect from a walking corpse. The blinds parted between my slender fingers, it was the dead of winter, and asides from the soft lambent glow emanating from the sparse scattering of lonely street lamps dotting the neighborhood, pitch black in the

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street outside my apartment. The other houses lay silent, not one showing a flicker of life. The biting cold seeped through the glass pane towards me, pricking the tip of my index finger. It was clear sleep wasn't coming tonight; I would have to look for it.

I pulled on my leather jacket and snow boots, and went out the front door. Maybe I could find sleep in the park. So many others seemed to. I stepped outside to feel the chill of winter, the frigid air enveloping my body. Little flakes drifted down from the dark clouded sky, covering the ground, without a breath of wind to disturb the night's slumber. Even with my jacket, it didn't take long for the cold to tighten its numbing grip on me, no longer just my caressing my face, but embracing my entirety with its emotionless, dispassionate touch.

The park was silent, empty but for the lofty, stoic spires of the pine trees standing tall around the area, like dour sentinels observing everything below from so far above, waiting, watching me. In the middle of the park was a small clearing, a little wooden bench beside an old antique looking lamp post, its light faint and wan, barely keeping aglow. I approached the bench, and slowly sat myself down. I hadn't noticed before, but I was now shivering uncontrollably, my thin hands stiff and flushed a bright pink. I could barely feel my feet, much less my toes, yet I'd never felt so calm in my life.

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My vision was growing darker, sleep was coming soon, I could feel it, but not soon enough. I didn't want to wait any longer, I was done waiting. I wanted to sleep, and here would be the perfect place, where I wasn't alone anymore. The cold would never leave me, not like everyone else. Hand madly quivering, I reached deep into my left pocket, my numbed fingers picking out my only friends left in the world, they would help me sleep now. I popped the tablets into my mouth, and in seconds my body was a feather, weightless, as if at any moment I could just drift away on the slightest fleeting breeze. My sight slid into a swimming blur, my breathing slowed to a whisper as the last of the winter air in my failing lungs binding me down to the earth parted from my blue lips. I was free, everything would be alright now. I finally found sleep.

# She Does Fear

What is fear to her?

Fear is no matter how hard you try it "isn't good enough".

It feels like everyone is judging you every second everyday, no matter what you do you and who you are with, you always feel lonesome all the time.

She always had the fear that "if she loves and cares about someone they won't care and love for her back".

She fears that everyone that she loves or loved will eventually leave her to go to a better place.

She fears that if anybody sees her crying, they'll call her weak and worthless.

She fears a lot of things but one thing she fears the most is to love herself.

Fear is not only just being afraid of spiders, heights, bugs, or flying.

Fear is something that gives you anxiety; it scares you to the point where you know you just can't do it anymore. No matter how hard you try, you're still afraid,

Things that make you cry and makes your anxiety so high that you can't breath.

It makes you feel like a failure, like you just gave up on everything that you hope you could just "get over" and "let go" but you can't. You're trapped inside that box that is slowly suffocating you. You are the only one who sees it, the only that could feel it, with no one to help despite the pain and effort she fears to let anyone in.

Fear is everywhere and everything, it's the worst thing you can imagine.

That is what fear is to her.

# My Journey

I came to realize that those words you say to me replaying over and over inside my head  
whispering nonsense in my ear.

Screaming inside my skin, begging me to let them out with the blade I once used several times.  
They say to me, "everything is going to be okay, I'll help with your pain, but everything will turn  
red."

Music telling me "do not listen to them, listen to me, their not worth it, you can make it through  
this."

Tears falling down my face as if it was a waterfall. More scars in my memory than my skin has  
ever shown. Fighting a war inside my mind and hoping it finally could come to peace. Is there  
any hope left? Hoping not to hear those words that shattered my mirror into millions of pieces.  
Fear as high as mountains she dreams to climb one day, knowing what is on top that, could fix  
the broken mirror that was left on the side waiting to be picked up.

The words will finally stop whispering and screaming inside my head and skin. No blades were  
needed up there, the war will end slowly, not all at once, the scars will finally start to heal.

Those words you speak no longer tear my mask like it was paper.

The mask I once wore is now gone and now it's gone; I can see the top of this mountain!

I shouted with happiness and pride, I no longer needed the mask to show me that those words  
no longer replay in my head, It's no longer covered with shame.

Alexis Baptiste

Grade 11

NorKam S.S

Slowly I started picking up my mirror piece by piece. Putting it back together with the touch of these soft lips on the mirror; it was fixed like it was never broken. So to answer to my question;

Yes there is still hope left, a lot of it.

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## You hurt me

Do you care?

Do you care how I feel?

You say you do,

But you don't show it.

All you give me,

Is full of pity and you judgemental stares.

...

You hurt me.

You insisted that you didn't,

Like you refused to believe it.

You tell me that it's going to happen eventually,

That I should move on.

But I can't.

You took my heart,

And refused to give it back.

**Word count: 72**

## Chaotic Nature

Who am I?

Why I'm your inner destruction.

A part of yourself,

That you hide.

A shame you hate,

But can't deny.

Pretty blue pride

A narcissism,

That you have more self-importance

By Meisya Bevan  
KSA, grade 11



Green-eyed envy  
A desire,  
For something you can't have.

Starving yellow gluttony  
An indulgence,  
For your insatiable hunger.

Rose pink lust  
A craving,  
For pleasure in you body.

Bloody red anger  
A ruthless need,  
For justice, for vengeance.

Sparkling gold greed  
A selfishness,  
Of things you don't need

Slow indigo sloth  
An indolence,  
To describe your reluctance, and your laziness.

I'm your sins,  
Your disgrace.  
I'm a hidden scandal,  
That you don't want to face.

**Word count: 107**

By Meisya Bevan  
*RSA, grade 11*

## The Compound

The screams were the beginning of the end. They made blind acceptance impossible, stripping away the innocence that comes from giving up control.

The elderly woman came to herself slowly. Flashes and cries originating from the other side of the door had awoken something inside of her. She took stock of the situation. A nail was cracked under her reassuring gloves, frail hair was in her eyes and her breathing was ragged. Although she was uninjured, one thing was indisputable; she couldn't stay here, in her room, no matter the temptation. She glanced back as she slid open the door with a gloved hand, realizing she might not see this place again. It had been her room, though the concept of ownership had become fuzzy. It was strange that the only record of her time here was the slight divot in her narrow mattress.

Outside the sliding door, other nameless workers lay on the monotonous stone of the hallway, none moving. The long, thin scars they all wore like a uniform had multiplied, leaving wet spatters everywhere. She stood there for a long time, clutching the marks etched into her arms. Clicks and explosions echoed from the distance.

Looking down, there was something curious about her gloves. Their texture had changed. They went from being smooth to catching the light. They almost seemed to push it back out.

When her hands had been unlined and uncovered, this texture had covered everything. It brought to light her detached memories of a place outside of these walls, not that such a place existed. With empty space above her, she had felt a word that she didn't understand anymore: Freedom. These memories were from before she was afraid of everything, when she still had agency in her life. That was before They had found

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her. She wasn't quite sure who They were. They lurked in the spaces between her dreams, when she retired from the bland life of work that the compound demanded. She was half convinced that the memories were a fiction designed to make sense of this place. The truth could easily be that she had always existed here.

Thinking about all this was so hard. These thoughts, along with escape attempts had stopped troubling her long ago. Her mind had been blissfully empty. Now she had far too many questions.

As she went further down the hallway she saw it again. A texture that brought back things long buried. She knew it had a name, but like hers it had been lost in the abyss that was her memory.

A roar of voices momentarily drowned out the omnipresent clicking and the cries. She turned down a dark side corridor, made of the same dull stone that was her world. Wetness seeped into her glove as she walked down the hallway one hand trailing against the wall. She stepped around a corpse. Her first thought was "I'll clean it later."

That could come after her current, task. Her gloves were comforting; they kept everything at a distance. She had been waiting. The time for scrubbing had passed.

One of the Minders stepped into the hallway, unfurling to twice her height. It was the same shape as her. That's where the similarities ended. Instead of skin hardened by cleaning products, it was made of miniscule wire wrapped around and around itself until the final product fit the hallway exactly. From a distance it seemed to have metallic skin. Claws were the only solid metal on its whole body. A sort of head followed her movements despite its lack of eyes. It clicked twice with its claws, prompting obedience.

## The Compound

“Sweet, you should sleep.”

The term of endearment brought to mind her fatigue. She was tired. Ever so tired. Her limbs dragged her towards the floor. Her eyes nearly closed with the weight of her exhaustion. There was something wrong. Although the only thing she wanted to do was sleep, the surface her feet rested on was streaked with more of the disturbing wetness. It was distracting.

“Yes.” When was the last time she had spoken? Her eyes flicked up. The lines on her hands matched the Minder’s appendages. She only found familiarity in the worst places. There was pain there, a feeling that tasted of the blood that had traced itself down her back, intertwined with clicking.

The Minder had not moved. It swept the hallway for movement, not seeing her as a threat. The texture filled her hands now, as strong as before she had lost whatever had made her herself. She threw her gloves on the floor.

It was beautiful. She remembered its name now, Blue. Fighting. This was something she knew. Her body still knew the motions despite its age. A spark balanced on her finger. The Minder had no chance to react. Docility was all that had been expected of her for much too long. She sliced her hand through the air and the Blue followed. The Minder joined the smears of deep burgundy. She picked up her red spattered gloves. She still needed them.

Continuing down the endless corridor, she passed the sliding coverings, each evenly spaced and grey. A corner interrupted the monotony. The screams were farther away

## The Compound

when she finally noticed droplets of a different texture. Orange. It contrasted with the grey of the hallway.

It leaked from her hands, sparking, familiar.

The Orange had left a trail of flames leading to the burning Minder's corpse.

"Good"

The shape the word left in her mouth was deliciously vehement. It belonged to her. She pulled the gloves off. A chill crept up her spine. This was wrong. So wrong. She held them over the fire for an instant. Without them her hands were free. Throwing them into the flames was a release.

Where were the cleaning products? The fire was nowhere near big enough.

# Danica Davidson Gr.11 NorKam Senior Secondary

## Falling Star

Five seconds, balls flying, bats swinging crowd cheering.

"Come on I got to make this count for my team. . . for my family."

her eyes swooped over her team narrowing on the ball as it sailed out of

the pitcher's hand her grip tightened. Her eyes closed the opposing team eyed each other and

shrugged, "You got this Alkira." her teammate smiled. "Now!" her eyes flashed open, contacting

the ball sending it on a one way trip out of the park, the opposing teams' jaws hung open. Her

team on the bases ran home Alkira right on their heels. The buzzer sounded her team

surrounding her, "Great shot Alkira! After all these years I still can't figure out how you do it."

Summit told her, "Okay you guys it's time for or team photo" Sparrow called herding them over.

They shuffled into position medals gleaming, smiles all around.

Two years later. . .

Alkira's sixth year in baseball was going to end victoriously as always. So she thought. It began

on a bone-chilling Saturday afternoon, "Well I'm off!" she announced brushing by the pictures

tacked on the wall, "Have a good day!" her mother called after her, "Will do!" Sparrow awaiting in

the car, "So where are you headed this fine afternoon?" Alkira smiled, "Over to Summits. He and I

have a project to finish, he's expecting me to be there by 12:30. So come on let's get a move on."

Sparrow bowed his head, "As my princess wishes." Alkira gently punched her dad's shoulder.

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"Come on dad I'm sixteen now." he smiled, "That's exactly why I said it." she opened her mouth to

argue then cracked a smile pushing her dad playfully into his door.  
"Let's go. You already wasted enough time."

he gasped and looked hurt, "Little old me? Why I'm offended." he said in the girliest voice she ever heard and looked away her hand over her mouth to keep in from laughing out loud, his head appeared in her peripheral vision waiting for her outburst. No such luck his smile drooped and he backed his head out of her sight and started to pull out of the driveway.

Her stomach hurt

trying to keep in her laughter but she held that was until the turn onto the highway. Her dad whimpered and that was it her laughter exploded from her mouth and her dad started to smile again.

The light turned and they started to turn Alkira clutching her stomach and wiping away her tears of laughter she couldn't stop, her cheeks beet red, "Okay that-" she paused and the laughter came once again. A pickup truck wasn't paying attention to the lights thinking it was green he maintained his speed and drove right into the passenger side Alkira let out a cry of agony and their car spun

towards the ditch, where it hit the curb and rolled coming to a stop the car upside down.

Sparrows head slammed back against the headrest and his eyes closed. Vehicles whizzing by, horns honking, sirens blaring. He opened his eyes everything blurry he could hear somebody's footsteps

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as they made their way over and a voice appeared almost unreadable, "Hello?!" he answered back a paramedic ran over to their vehicle, "Don't move!" the other medics came down, half cleaning up any other hazards, the other heading over to the passengers side, while two more stayed up preparing the stretcher. "My name is Jace and I'm trained in first aid. Can I help you?" he answered his voice raspy. Jace called over a couple other medics to help take him out and do a rapid body survey. Fortunately he had no life threatening injuries they helped him hop over towards the vehicle but before they could help him in, "Alkira! I got to see her." they nodded and took him over towards her. The medic on his right called to the others to bring down the stretcher they called back and started down the hill.

Not long afterwards they were in the back of the vehicle and on their way towards the hospital. He watched as his one and only daughters chest slowly rose up and down, "What have I done?" he asked looking at her. Her face half cloaked in blood, from mid thigh blood streamed down her leg.

"Dad. . ." she let out a whisper he grabbed her hand and squeezed, "I'm here. I always will be." her eye just barely opened, "What. . . happened?" he smile sad, depressed. She looked over at him, "Are you. . . okay?" she asked, "Alkira. . . I'm sorry this is. . . my fault." he said tears glinting in

his eyes but Alkira's eyes' were already closed. Once arriving they were herded to separate rooms, Egypt was phoned once she hung up she ran to her car and rushed to the hospital then being asked to wait outside Alkira's door. The wait was torture to her until Sparrow placed his



## **Danica Davidson Gr.11 NorKam Senior Secondary**

### **Falling Star**

hand on her shoulder and she jumped to her feet ready to fight, "Easy there tiger." her hands dropped, "Honey, you're okay." she hugged him and they kissed. "Not much longer okay." he told

her with a smile and she helped him sit down then joined him her head on his shoulder, and not meaning to they both fell asleep.

"Egypt, wake up. We're allowed to see Alkira now." her sapphire eyes' flashed open and nodded,

"Okay let's go see her." her mother glanced around, "Alkira, are you awake?" she sat up wincing as she did. "Morning." she flashed them a false smile, "What's on your mind?" Egypt asked and they sat down at the end of her bed. Alkira lifted her knee looking away from her parents and out the window tears glistening in her eyes'.

"Oh! Why hello Ms. and Mr. Emeraldheart." the doctor addressed. They turned, "Now that you are

both here, it would be the perfect time to talk to you about her condition. Alkira you're free to get changed while I talk to your parents." she didn't move and the doctor and her parents stepped outside. She could hear the mumble of their voices and knew what he was saying, after all he already talked to her about it.

20 minutes later. . .

The doctor knocked on the door and she answered, "I know you're done. So why not come out here?" she twisted the door handle and it swung open Sparrow and Egypt turned her mother's

## Danica Davidson Gr.11 NorKam Senior Secondary

### Falling Star

hand shot up to her face hovering over her mouth. "Your leg it's really. . . gone." Alkira was dying to walk back into the room she couldn't stand to face her parents, she turned and her mother ran over embracing her in her arms' her dad followed, "It's going to be fine. . ." Sparrow felt Alkira's body tremble as she cried, she backed away falling onto the floor with a loud thud she wiped at her eyes' and looked up at her dad. "How can say "it's going to be fine?!" she shouted.

"Because of this injury I'll. . ." she choked and slammed her fist into the ground, "never be able to play any sport I love!" her tears splashed onto the floor, ". . . never again."

Sparrow and Egypt helped her back into a standing position he brought her closer with his good arm while Egypt supported him. Encircling her even more as he stroked her head as she cried into his shoulder he looked down at her, "Listen to me." her watery eyes' shining like emeralds he smiled, "You're brave, strong, and very big hearted. You don't like to see other people unhappy even if they bully you 90% of the time. You always make sure that you never hurt others but-"

her mother helped Sparrow sit down and she brought her into her arms. "even you can't take this on alone. We'll always be here for you." Alkira looked at her parents and wiped away her tears. "

"Keep on living even though the road you follow is rough, let hope power my engine."

she smiled this time for real.

"And that I shall."

# The Night Children

Mary Falade, Gr. 11, Norkam Senior Secondary

It was spreading, causing the destruction of the respectable reputation he had worked so hard to construct. Years of his charismatic charm, impeccable attire and flawless pandering had been forgotten, and all due to one little mishap.

The rumours had appeared out of nowhere, or so it seemed. Alistair had done a very thorough job indeed, but he was a fool if he'd thought that he could conceal his betrayal. His brother had the most to gain if the Officials came for him. It was merely a little adventure; but aristocrats don't have adventures, especially not after sundown.

He sat upright in bed, staring at the metal covering behind his window, which served its purpose, hiding the outside world from him. His sight was compromised in the darkness of his bedroom and somehow it was more unsettling than the darkness outside. His mother's words from that very morning kept him awake, replaying themselves in his head.

"I sacrifice everything to raise you and your brothers, and this is how you repay me? You ungrateful little rats!"

"But, mother," the second to youngest of his brothers, Jeremiah, had whined. "We didn't do anything!"

She'd ignored him, as everyone always did.

"I expect this from your brothers, but not you, Montgomery." His mother had never looked more aged than at that moment. Her makeup had been rushed and every crevice and shadow of her skin was free to proclaim the immensity of her weariness. She flung an exasperated arm towards her husband. "Don't just sit there, Kelseigh. Discipline your son."

He closed his eyes, refusing to recall this moment, but the memory played like a picture-show on the inside of his eyelids. His father had placed his newspaper down and turned, for the first time that morning, towards his eldest son. Montgomery's resolve had faded at that instant. He'd seen his father this way once, when Alistair had leaked information that had robbed much of their fortune. Of course, he had been the one to reveal this to their father and his brother had finally exacted his revenge.

"How could you?" His father had snarled. "Involving yourself with children of the night?" He shouldn't have been out at night in the first place. It was the most enforced law; the one no one dared to break. For years, the sun had belonged to those who could afford it, and those who could not, dwelled only in the darkness of the night. But, despite his pretense as the example of golden obedience, he had never much enjoyed the day and the jewels it offered.

Sunlight and warmth had always seemed dull compared to the temptations of the night, and after years of simply wondering, he had finally dared to crack open the front door and step through it an hour after midnight. Well before he'd left behind the residential area, he'd heard the sounds of foreign chatter and alien music.

Businesses, designer shops, and factories had been replaced with theatres, open markets, and finger food restaurants. Instead of the familiar yellow light of the sun, he had witnessed colourful neon signs, some simply for decoration, others advertising various sorts of dealings, from cheap clothing to fortune telling. Montgomery had been taught to ignore the nightlife and all the sins it

held, but he could hardly understand why. There was so much laughter and joy; things that daytime lacked.

Despite the lengths he had taken to become the ideal day-dwelling citizen, he had finally given in to his shameful temptations. It was true that the night was a world of crime, disorder, and sickness, but it was also a paradise that offered exotic food, strange tales, and even stranger people.

He had spent his night at a jazz concert with a blue haired boy and tattooed girl. His world didn't have jazz, bright coloured hair, or decorative body markings, which they had found interesting. They had appeared quite enthralled with his life which he'd found rather vexatious. The blue haired boy, Timothy, had displayed fascination with Montgomery's learning institute. It seemed he was quite dissatisfied with his own education. Montgomery hadn't even been aware that the night time offered school. The girl, Coralie, had gushed on about how sophisticated he'd sounded and had attempted to mimic him. Often, he had tried to ask some of his own questions; he had a lot of them, after all.

He wondered why they strolled about holding ropes by which they commanded tamed animals. Why was Timothy was not clad in pressed suits and stiff hats as he always was, and wore instead a simple shirt and a pair of intentionally torn shorts. Why did Coralie paint her lips red and chew relentlessly on a piece of sticky substance she called "gum"?

His inquiries were endless, and despite the typical aristocrat's motto which stated that "curiosity killed the cat", he found that he had a desperate need for answers. It was almost as

"The Night Children", Mary Falade, Gr. 11

Norkam Senior Secondary

urgent as his longing for the bright synthetic lights and upbeat music of a world he had been denied all his life. He swung his feet off his bed and in a few steps, found himself at his door. His feet carried him out onto the landing and down the grand steps into the foyer.

He did not sneak about quietly and with the calculated moves he had the first time. The world already knew of his transgressions, and if they no longer wanted him, then he would not remain. His hand fell firmly onto the door knob as a voice came simultaneously from behind him. His youngest brother, Micah, stood at the top of the stairs, his small figure without detail in the darkness. He uttered just three words. "I'm telling mother."

Montgomery said nothing, only opened the door, and stepped into the brisk cold as the warning tone of the alarm rang throughout the house. Instinctively, he looked skyward and thought the stars shone brighter than the sun.

## Black

Black.

Black is everything I see. Black is everything I feel. Black is everything. I sit cowering in my closet, waiting for the man who is in my house to leave. I hear his footsteps creaking down the hall, getting closer and closer to my room. I don't know what he is looking for, could it be just money and other valuables? Hopefully. Or is he looking for me? As I ponder this question, I realize something: whether he is looking for me or not, I have to get out. He is bound to open the closet when he comes to my room, and only God knows what he would do to me.

As I slowly begin to open my closet door, the room I see is not what I remember as my room. Shadows loom over everything and even a single step seems impossible. The cold grip of fear holds me in my place, and I hear the steps getting closer. I have to move but I can't. The steps are even closer now and they are coming straight for my room, but then, nothing.

They have gone past my room. Shuddering, I step out of my closet, wondering why the man had skipped my room. I slowly open the door to my room and peer into the hall but see no one. I am sure I had heard someone. I decide to make a dash for the stairs, but before I do, I find it in myself to look inside the next room. Nothing is taken. Nothing is changed. Nothing is even moved. What had he been looking for? My heart drops as I realize he must be looking for me. As I move closer to the stairs, my gaze falls in the open bathroom, and finally I see something that has been taken: my medication. However, I am still confused. Why would he take that of all things? It had been unopened and full though, maybe he was an addict looking for a fix.

I can hardly believe what I am hearing, this man is in my house, is he not? I reach down to grab my cell phone but my hand is greeted by the cold steel of a gun. How had that gotten there? I haven't touched my gun for years. Then I remember my neglected medication. Finally, it hits me: I really am in this man's house. The man's conversation with the police is reduced to a buzz in my mind as I realize what is going on. My room looked different because it was not my room, the man wasn't trying to find me, he was trying to get away from me. And my medication is still on my bathroom counter. Unopened.

I feel him coming, the other me. He brought me here and he wants to kill. I try to stop him but I can't, if I could only warn this man to get out of his house. But I'm too late, it's out of my control now.

I have to kill that man. I can't remember how I got downstairs but it doesn't matter. He has to die. I broke into the house and hid in the closet to wait but then everything fades to black. He must have knocked me unconscious and dragged me down here. I jump out from behind the table and run to confront the man. When I find him in the kitchen, he tries to run, but it is too late for him. I tackle him to the ground and dig my 9mm pistol into the back of his neck.

"Please," he pleads, "please don't kill me."

I can't remember exactly why I want to kill this man, but I know it's too late to back out now.

Before I shoot him, a loud knock at the door draws my attention, "Police, open up!"

"Please," the man begs once more, whimpering like an animal.

"See you in hell," I tell him as I pull the trigger.



After hearing the bang of my gun, the police break down the door and open fire, but I feel no pain, only peace.

Black is everything I see. Black is everything I feel. Black is everything.

Black.

**Charlotte Pax**

"Marry me."

I glanced up from the firefighter in the bed before me. One of a squadron who came into the hospital when a burning building collapsed with a few of them inside it. The man I was working on currently didn't appear to have any major burns, and his buddy, who was standing on the opposite side of the bed from me, appeared a little worse for wear.

"Excuse me?" I asked once I convinced myself that I did not hear him wrong.

"Marry me." He repeated.

"Sir, I think you need to get back to bed." I insisted, beginning to walk around the bed to make sure he complied. James, the man I was stitching up just a few moments ago, giggled softly at his friend.

"Nope. Not until you say yes." The man grinned at me, revealing dimples that it was hard to tear my eyes away from. I put my hands on his shoulders and gently pushed him backwards, so he was forced to sit on the edge of the bed, before turning around and continuing to stitch up a few deep cuts on James.

"Ha!" James laughed at his pal. "Carter, you just got rejected." His giggles continued and were so infectious that I couldn't help but smile.

"I did not. I just haven't gotten an answer yet." Carter drawled from behind me.

begin. His replies grew more boisterous as the day wore on. He seemed to think that he was wearing me down, and that I would say yes sometime soon.

I didn't see Carter for a while after one of our encounters. At first I was relieved, however I soon became worried. It got to the point where I checked to see if he was discharged. I hated to admit it, but I missed his southern drawl coming out of nowhere, and his warm presence filling the room. I barely knew him at all, but I think I liked him being there. Before I realized what I was doing, I was rushing down to the parking lot to try and meet Carter before he left the hospital.

Fate was with me, because I managed to rush outside in time to see most of the firefighter squadron getting back into the fire truck. James was just stepping into the vehicle, and Carter was only moments behind him. Still not knowing why I was doing all of this, I did something that was probably rather stupid.

“Carter!” I called across the near empty parking lot. He immediately turned around and started walking toward me.

“What's up babygirl? Is everything okay?” He sounded genuinely concerned, but evidently saw something on my face that made him stop a few feet away from me.

“My middle name is June.” I still had no idea what I was doing, but there was no turning back now. Before Carter could do anything but scrunch his eyebrows together, I

continued. “My favourite colour is burnt ember, not only because it is an amazing shade of orange, but because I like the way it sounds coming out of my mouth.” The edges of Carter’s lips started to tip upwards. “My favourite word is carbaminohemoglobin, because it sounds bouncy.”

“Okay.” Carter said quietly. His lips were spread fully now, revealing the dimples that I liked so much. I didn’t respond, and instead opted to keep going.

“I have a cat named Cauliflower that supposedly has magical cancer fighting powers, according to the person who gave him to me. My right foot is bigger than my left. My favourite animal is a giraffe, because in my head I always imagine that the babies are born with really floppy necks, and they look like those inflatable men on the corner of used car lots.” I took in a deep breath, and realized that James and the entire rest of the firefighting crew was watching me, but I couldn’t stop. “I collect dream catchers. Dozens and dozens of dream catchers, and hang them all above my bed, to collect all of my good dreams and hopes and thoughts. Sometimes, when I think a dream catcher cannot hold anymore good things, I give them away to people who need more good in their life.” I took another deep breath. “That’s not enough. Not nearly enough.” Carter started closing the space between us. “I still can’t marry you, but maybe a date would be okay-” Before I could finish Carter had wrapped his arms around me, picked me up, and spun me around in a circle before putting me down again. He turned

Kaila Hindle

Grade 11

Norkam Secondary School

"Charlotte Pax"

and hurried back towards the truck, a large grin present on his face. Just as he was about to leave he looked over his shoulder at me.

"You'll marry me one day Charlotte!"

A strong wind blows in, scattering around dust that rises from the hard-packed ground of the tent. A small figure moves lithely inside, leaving light prints on the floor. A hand reaches from the figure's cloak, and secures itself around a dirty object sitting on the coarse bed covers. The object is shaped like a rod, with intricate designs and shining jewels running up and down its sides made of glass. The figure silently tucks the shaft into its heavy cloak and exits the tent, just like the silent, deadly wind.

*Two years later*

The Day of the Empress is celebrated by everyone in the Qoon region: from the small, isolated villages of the North to the busy, cluttered towns of the south. However, the capital is the busiest during this festive day: its dusty streets are crowded, the chatter of thick-robed visitors and sandaled natives mingling with the clang of pots. The only audible voices are those of the cloaked men milling about, with the exception of the occasional high-pitched laugh interrupting the flow.

Amongst those noisily wandering the streets, a hooded and heavily cloaked figure trods along the worn lanes. Its shoulders are hunched, and its presence is unfelt. Without any hesitation and what seems like practiced ease, the figure turns into a slim doorway wedged between two large ones. There, under the safety of the crumbling ceiling, it takes off its hood. From underneath the dark hood an oddly familiar face emerges: it looks like that of every other man on the streets. However, his hair is an

## The Empress

exception: the colour is of a blazing, rebellious red, which is sure to be noticed amongst all the dark heads in the streets. The man straightens his frame, squaring his shoulders and holding his head high with confidence. He then begins a slow ascent up a flight of rickety stairs, his footfalls as silent as death. Reaching the top floor, he throws open the only door to reveal a cozy room lit by a burning fireplace.

Inside, it looks like a merry tea party of some sort: there are men sitting in plush chairs with drinks in hand, chattering intensely. There are enormous bundles of loose-leaf papers at the foot of each chair, mostly yellow and crinkled with age. The men, despite their differences in appearance and attire, are talking animatedly to one another- until the man with the red hair enters the doorway. Suddenly, everyone instantaneously swivels around in their chair and stares at the open door, fear openly visible in their eyes.

"What are you doing?", the robed visitor asks, his whispery voice barely audible over the thundering crackle of the fireplace.

"Oh, in the name of the Empress, Gawn! Stop appearing so silently everywhere, it scares the life out of me! I honestly thought you were the Kryon," a crisp voice rings out. It belongs to a short, round man sitting near the back of the room, surrounded by a small entourage of men. His bearded face is smiling, and his hands wave the visitor over. The rest of the men, now completely relaxed, begin to resume their chatter.

## Dogtags

Julye-Anne McKenny  
Grade 11  
Norkam Secondary

Every stomp of my combat boots in the mud splashed up onto my camouflage trousers and made a revolting sucking noise when I again lifted up my foot. My face too, dripped with paint, sweat, and rain. I was in the middle of the column, marching through a training exercise with the rest of my squadron in March, tromping through the North of Quebec. The barracks were still four hours away. Just one foot in front of the other and ignore the pain; the throbbing of my heels and cramping in my calf as we ran.

An interminable period of time later, as the cold is setting in, the only sound has become the steady, constant ragged huffing of our breath. My dog tags jingle against my chest and the bouncing keeps me company. It's sure none of the rest of my squadron does. I can hear them talking in hushed whispers up ahead as we near the compound. The lights shine dimly a sick yellow and light up the bog and the filthy snow on the outskirts of the parade ground. The guys ahead are shoving each other and enter the barracks full of good spirits, laughing despite the hike we'd just taken. I chance a smile myself; maybe tonight I'll play a game of cards with the boys.

I was shunned though, as soon as I entered the mess hall. Conversation stalled when I passed, but I persevered and approached a group of cadets with a deck of cards open. "Mind if I play?" I asked. The four of them exchanged a few queer looks before replying.

"Yeah, sure, take a seat, man." So I sat down and drilled my bitten fingernails onto the plastic tabletop as they dealt me in. We played rounds of twenty-one and tossed banter around the table. "So Eddie, what'd you do to get sent here? To the military of all places." Someone I didn't know from across the table asked. I shrugged and flipped my cards in, busted again.



## Dogtags

Julye-Anne McKenny  
Grade 11  
Norkam Secondary

"I got kicked out of school for breaking a guy's arm because he disrespected one of my friends. I was tired of him being up in our faces. I didn't mean to break his arm! He just, fell in the wrong direction and I couldn't stop him once he was in an armlock." They dealt me in again. The guy who asked made some noise of uncertain assent and went back to his cards in sullen silence. I looked quizzically at him and the others looked at me with disgust. After that no one really talked to me, much less approached me. I played on though, to kill time, no matter the palpable tension or awkward feeling in the atmosphere. Nothing felt right though. Every word was a struggle. No one talked to me until I really nagged, and I was tired of the effort needed for a single conversation. Why wasn't I enough for these people to include me in their jests?

I'm sure it was my own fault in part, that these people weren't like me; that I couldn't talk or act the way I needed to in order to fit in. But the way talking hushed when I passed or approached was incentive enough for me to stop trying. It didn't take long after that first evening of floundering sociality until I took to my own.

Every parade march, every evening in the mess hall, every camping expedition I learned to hold my own and look out for myself. I am my own first concern. The rejection of my fellow soldiers/comrades hurt for more time than I'd care to count, but as the days turned to weeks, and then to months, I learned to get over it. I held my dog tag clenched tightly in my fist as I slept and woke to an aching hand with the balled lines of the chain etched in my palm. When I couldn't take that anymore I slept with my knife clenched. I found that the cool metal helped me keep a cool head. Every night that I stayed up late, unable to sleep, I took

## Dogtags

Julye-Anne McKenny  
Grade 11  
Norkam Secondary

my knife and painstakingly carved three tiny words onto the back of my tags. It was difficult to work under the dim, lacklustre light of a camp lantern and I managed to cut myself quite a few times, but after some hours the words "I belong too" appeared jaggedly. They were three desperate words that got me through basic training and everything that came after. I would twist my tag back and forth whenever I got the chance and watch my words appear in the light. I belong too. I was learning to fight for the people who didn't feel that they belonged. My fate doesn't depend on what others think. As long as I know that I belong too, I'll be okay. Maybe another day I'll belong even more. But, especially, in the thin tents in the north of Quebec, in the blistering cold winds that push us around in our mummy bags; I belong too.

## Behind The Camera

Sam was at the park to take picture and there she saw him, coming in through the lens of her camera. She saw as he stood there smiling and laughing with his friends, that's all she did was watch him. Every once in awhile she would click the button to take a picture of his captivating smile as his eyes held a certain gleam in them. She was completely in awe as she just watched him through the lens of her camera. She was to frightened to go utter any words to him, for she had never seen someone so stunning so awe worthy. But she wasn't thinking what normal young girls think when they see a cute guy, not all she was thinking was how he would make an amazing model for some photos she had been planning to take.

Yes, he would make a lovely model. His tall frame, with a bush of curly brown hair, the same colour as tree bark was placed on top of his head, then there were his eyes. This is what captivated her the most, his eyes were so amazing that she couldn't help but get lost in them. His eye seemed to hold a thousand shades of green in them, around the outer rim of his eyes were lighter and slowly as it got closer to his pupils it got darker.

She then gulped down her fear and slowly made her way over to him, right as she arrived behind him and was about to tap on his shoulder, he said goodbye to his friends and turned away. She let out a loud squeal sound, scared that her back was going to meet the pavement. She held her camera close to her chest to protect it from breaking. Yet instead of hitting the pavement she was meet with an arm wrapped around her waist. She looked up at the captivating stranger and murmurs a thank you.

He then stood, saying, "Sorry about that. I didn't know you were behind me,"

"O-oh no. It was my fault I'm the one that came up behind you," She somehow managed to say,

"Oh, and why did you do that?" He asked with that amazing smile.

"Um, well, you see I'm a photographer" She says holding up her camera, "and I have been looking for a model to do a photoshoot with, and well I saw you standing here. So I wanted to know if you would like to be my model?"

"I would love to be your model." He then pulls out his cell phone and unlocked it, then handed it to me. "Here you go, put your number in my phone then later I'll call you to see when we can get together and talk about this whole modelling thing,"

"A-alright," She says and take his phone and puts in her number. When she gives him back his phone, he looks down at it and smiles once more. He looks back up at her and says, "So I'll call you later Sam," He then turned to walk away then before he walked off he turned his head so he can look at her and says, "Oh yeah, my name is Leo."

The next day Sam woke up to her phone ringing. She sat up and answered the phone with a grumbled, "Hello?"

"Oh did I wake you?" A male voice came in through the other side of the phone. Sam was taken back and looked to see who called but she didn't see a name, only a number.

"Um, who is this?" Sam asked,

"What am I really that forgettable?" the guy asks with a chuckle, "I'm just kidding. It's Leo,"

"Oh, right. Sorry you woke me up," She replied with a blush,

"All good, so when and where do you want to take these pictures?" He asks,

"Well, anytime is good for me. And I was thinking we could do it at my house, because I have a little studio in my basement,"

"Okay. So would today be good?"

"Um sure, anytime works for me," She says as she climbs out of bed.

"Alright. Text me your address and I'll be over in a hour," And with that Leo hung up. Sam quickly texted him her address. She then hurried and got ready and by the time she finished the doorbell rang.

She ran down the stairs and to the door. When she opens the door she sees Leo standing there in a grey shirt and loose jeans and a duffle bag. "Um hi," Sam says awkwardly.

"Hi," He says back and they just stand there awkwardly. Then Leo says with a chuckle, "So is this the part where you kill me and hide me in your basement?"

Sam's eye widen and she stuttered, "W-what?"

"Relax I'm just kidding," He laughs, "But are we going to stand here all day or...."

"Oh, right. Um, yah come on in." Sam says as she opens the door wider and to let him in. Leo looks around then says, "Nice house you got here."

"Oh, yah. Thanks, me and my mom lived her when I was growing up, and I just didn't want to give the place up." She says and then they go back to the strange silence.

"So should we get this thing started or what?"

"Um yah fallow me," Sam says and leads Leo there.

Leo and Sam then spend the next few hours laughing and talking as they do there photoshoot. Leo then laughed at a joke Sam said, as she continued to laugh Leo slowly made his way over to her. Leo then takes the camera out of her hands and says, "Now it's your turn,"

"Leo, no," Sam says as she continues to laugh,

"Why not?" He questions her,

"I don't like being in front of the camera, I prefer to be behind it," Sam mummurs,

"You're to beautiful to be behind the camera all the time dearling,"

## In His Eyes

Page 1

Talia Smith

Sa-Hali Secondary

Grade 11

In his eyes, she was beautiful. She was the most beautiful woman in any room. In a room full of international supermodels even, his longing eyes would still desire to be intertwined with hers.

When the many layers of concealer she wore plastered on her face could no longer mask her sun-kissed freckles, she thought they were hideous. He thought they were beautiful, how they sparkled when she rarely was outside on a hot summer's day. Instead, she would lean against her bedroom window, quietly reading away the lingering days of summer break. She would patiently watch how everyone else her age would be outside tanning on the humid grass, or seeking out shade under the nearest palm tree. For a moment, she would secretly envy the extensive amount of friends they each had, and all the countless, amusing activities they would do together. Later on, when the fantasies would end, she would continue to harshly scorn herself that she couldn't be the same way, how she *had* no friends to lounge around out by the pool, and order piña coladas alongside.

He loved the way those prominent freckles of hers brought out the rusty undertones engulfed in her auburn eyes, especially on the days when she forgot to hide



In His Eyes

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Talia Smith

Sa-Hali Secondary

Grade 11

them away with her various collection of blue contacts. When the few things that brought her joy in life did manage to bring a colossal smile upon her skin, she did her best to smother it before it became public knowledge. Yet he was always prepared; he never missed the chance to spot her award-winning smile, and the matching dimples that shyly followed behind. She always feared that her natural strawberry blonde waves were more frizzy than curly, wondering if they would make her stand out more already than she felt she did. He didn't take them for anything less than perfection, though, the way that they delicately framed her heart-shaped face as they cascaded down past her shoulder blades.

She never neglected to wear the most loose clothing she could find, after wrongfully believing the lies written over her locker by her many vengeful classmates. He knew the truth, though. He knew that under the multiple thick layers of baggy sweaters she hid under, that she had the most amazing body of all of them. Yet she was content with her fellow students not only thinking, but voicing, their hurtful opinions of her allegedly "fat" self. She thought too humbly of herself, denying her outstanding looks and personality combination at every available chance.

In His Eyes

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Talia Smith

Sa-Hali Secondary

Grade 11

Without hesitation, she took on the title of Plain Jane in a school full of Lady Gaga's, never realizing that she was in truth, a Gigi Hadid inside and out. The thief that stole his smile away every time the thought popped into his head, was the fact that she actually *did* listen to and make truth of, the jarring words critics had written all over her timeline. She cared what they all thought, and that was what completely destroyed her. The verbal attacks aimed in her direction, managed to tear away every last piece of joy remaining inside of her enormous heart to shreds, gone, with no visible point of return.

It didn't take him very long to notice how her face sagged more often those days, that her eyes were often puffy and mirroring her blushed, tear-stained cheeks. It broke his heart to watch her faltering smile fade from limited to non-existent, how the doubters sucked every last ounce of hope out of her, without a trace left to one day restore.

No, she was different now. No longer she was sad and lonely, but rather depressed and broken, only because she didn't have a high enough level of self-confidence to believe that the rumours about her were wrong. That she was something more than the loner girl who sat at the back of the classroom, too shy and scared of rejection to introduce herself to potential friends. That she truly *was* beautiful,

In His Eyes

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Talia Smith

Sa-Hali Secondary

Grade 11

that her unique appearance made her noticeable in a *good* way, in contrast to what others have bullied her into believing. That she should be proud of expressing herself not through a passion for the superficial means of social media and makeup like the others, but instead, through creating inspiring song lyrics and imaginative pieces of fiction. That just because she wasn't the most outspoken or athletic or fashionable person like every other teenager in her grade, that doesn't mean she's anything less of being worthy of simple human respect. Even when she deserved to get everything she's ever dreamed of, which is, ironically enough, to be just like and fit in with all of them, she never did.

Maybe, just maybe, if she was egotistical and self-absorbed like the rest of them, things might have turned out differently in the end. It's almost a good thing that she wasn't like the others though, because we all have to go sometime. At least in her case, when she went, she went with pride, and never faltered in her endeavors to forever stay true to her real self.

He would never forget the day in gym class, when she was forced to wear actual athletic clothing, that he observed the deep, crimson-coloured cuts on her wrist. The

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Talia Smith

Sa-Hali Secondary

Grade 11

moment that he caught sight of her visible pain, he was instantly awoken into the reality of the deteriorating situation. In spite of the fact that he, like her, was too introverted and scared of humiliation to talk to others he wasn't comfortable with, he decided to do it anyways. He declared that later that night, his obsession with her would transform from deep within his thoughts into real life, in order to save her, before it was too late.

But it was too late.

By the time he had caught up to her where she lay, after she had escaped in a hurry off to sob in isolation, he realized that. That she was too far gone, too destroyed inside, too worn down by her fellow classmates to be hopefully retrieved by him. On that day, she had had enough; she had given into the impending pressure and guilt for just simply living, that had heavily weighed atop her dainty shoulders for far too long.

When his gaze reached her still, lifeless exterior, he caught the slightest glimpse of the light leaving her dwindling eyes. Despite his restless attempts to restore her soul back to its former glory, her passing on was inevitable. In her point of view, she was worthless, a waste of space. In the world's lenses, they were happy to have her gone.

In His Eyes

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Talia Smith

Sa-Hali Secondary

Grade 11

But in his eyes, he'd never seen someone look more courageous, more worthy,  
more alive. More beautiful.

I think I saw Hope on the sidewalk this morning. Of course, it could just have been Confusion messing up the date of Halloween. But I chose to believe that it was Hope.

So why did I want to meet up with Hope so badly? Well, first things first. I've got a twin sister, Becca. And no, she doesn't drive me so crazy that I need Hope to remind me that we'll go our separate ways for university someday. I love Becca. But that's part of the problem. Becca's going through a hard time right now. And I can't stand it, because I love her, and don't want to see her like this. But Becca can't just 'snap out of it'. She can't let herself enjoy life. I don't know why, and that just makes it harder. I've forgotten what her real smile looks like, because it's gone. Kidnapped by Self-Discipline, who, by the way, is working for Self-Loathing's new corporation. Just a rumour, but I believe it.

I try to be cheerful. But it's hard, because she won't be helped. And I feel alone. I tried to get her to see our school counsellors, because then, Mom and Dad wouldn't have to know. Why can't they? Becca's embarrassed, for one, and second, they'd be ripped apart, because they love her too, but they're the kind of parents whose philosophy is to let us solve our own problems. They think it's for the better, and it was, when we were kids and the worst we could do was get lost on our way home and have to buy ourselves a map. But now, we kinda need them.

My last thought was to set her up with our neighbour, Humor. He's great, even if he does sneak up behind me and tell jokes whenever I need to be serious. So I asked him to take Becca out to the latest comedy movie. But Becca wouldn't go. She told Humor she was busy.

So you can see that it's been hard to keep my own mood up.

Anyway, I was walking with Becca to school this morning. She still goes, because it would be too suspicious if Mom and Dad found out that she was skipping. There we were, on 9th

“Just being honest here.”

“Well I saw Hope this morning on the sidewalk. And I think she’s just what we need. I’m gonna try this, and hope that it works. OK?”

“Sure. You’re crazy, though. Sorry. Gotta say what I’ve gotta say...”

I roll my eyes.

---

So I text Grief, making sure to use lots of the sobbing emojis to appeal to his compassion. And he agrees to come.

That’s when I tell Becca. Better to ask forgiveness than permission. I just tell her that we’re going to have a couple of friends over to watch a movie. Of course, she demands if I’m trying to set her up with Humor again.

“C’mon. I know it was you the first time,” she says, teasing me for the first time in months. My heart rises, and I think that maybe, she caught a glimpse of Hope that morning too. Maybe she was tired of missing out on life. Or maybe she just really loves teasing me.

“No,” I say, a smile playing on my lips. “It’s not just you and him this time. I’ll be there, and Grief’s coming too.”

“Grief? So basically, you know how to have a good time,” she laughs. She laughs?! Yup. I start to wonder if I’ll need Humor after all. “You know what, Julie? Is it too late to cancel this double-date business?” My heart sinks. “I kinda just want some one-on-one with you.” My heart rises.

“I’m sure it’s not too late. I’ll tell you what: I text Humor and Grief, and you phone the Pizza Hut. You can go for Hawaiian, and I won’t even try to talk you into Margherita.” Becca

laughs, reminded of our old pizza feud. She skips over to the computer to look up the phone number, and I stand there, still grinning ear-to-ear.



# *Puppet*

Terri Teite  
Norkam Senior Secondary  
Grade 11

Her teenage stomach, warping into a knot.

Ingesting copious amounts of alcohol becoming too much for her petite body to handle, taking over any control she had left. Common sense and any feeling left in her body had suddenly slipped out, too far for her to reach.

Helpless.

Her body no longer belonged to her. To any man it was looking as an object; a surrogate for enjoyment and a fast, easy way to selfish fun. As she grew up she was told to be careful and safe, be aware of any potential harm that could come her way.

But the adolescent teenager never saw any of this coming, thought it was all fun and games. Her judgment clouded by teenage urges and older male attention. It was all too much for her fourteen year old mind to comprehend.

Too stupid to realize that after tonight she will never sleep soundly again - she will never feel safe while alone with a man. The roughness, the pit in her stomach while the continuous thrusting motion tore every inch of pride and self respect anyone that age could have.

Gone.

The only thought in her mind was the hope she wasn't going to die, the hope that she will make it out alive and become stronger than ever. That this was a memory that everyday she will constantly bury it further back in her mind and try to act like it never happened. Act like - he - never happened.

From that night on, fear crept in her mind as she walked to school, or laid in her bed trying to tell herself it was just a dream. Hiding her body with layers of ratty clothes so no man finds her body attractive enough to take advantage of. In hopes she will never have to relive the terror of that hot July night. But she was “asking for it” with the way he was infatuated with the accessibility of her body. She was “wanting it” by the way she helplessly flirted with him. To her it was the worst night of her life that she has to think about everytime she sees herself. A helpless tear that trickles down her cheek at night is just a reminder that no matter what; she was just an object. To most men she was just a good way to have fun, to be tossed around and shared like the meaningless puppet she is led to believe she is.

Maliah Walker

Grade 11

Sahali Secondary

Bliss

The Morning sun, it's huing glow;

I want to keep that warm feeling of it it's dangerous hold.

It's such a pleasant feeling,

Like the burn of a hot beverage in the hands on a winter's morning.

It is a feeling I crave much like a soothing embrace of a mother to a child.

And it is here that I finally feel safe,

And my heart beats soundly.

Grade 11

Sahali Secondary School

Maliah Walker

Bluffing

Silence is both my enemy and companion,

Comforts and welcomes me with open arms.

I wonder how long I can keep up this foolish illusion,

Never trusting the kindness of others.

Trust is something I do not have.

Like a stranger lurking in the darkness,

I know the truth of what is behind the mask of kindness.

For it is the most horrifying thing of all,

Selfishness and greed.

Assuming I love you,

Your expectations presume what I am to you.

And yet you peer through clouded glass unable to see anyone but yourself.

To save yourself with the sacrifice of others,

Cowardly you run from the world.

You run from me...

Kirsten Zubak

Grade 11

St. Ann's Academy

### A Good Servant

Age: 8

Our village is normally quiet, but tonight, we are so alive.

The bonfire is ablaze. It is the festival of Aodh, the fire god. The fiddler carves out a fast-paced song, and the crowd responds, entranced. My mother hurries me away - I am too young to understand the dancing, but not too young to watch.

A golden-haired girl swirls by me, her dress sparkling in the bonfire light. I reach out, but shouts rise above the song.

The music stops.

I tear away from my mother's hand, scared yet curious, as she yells after me, "Sloane, no!" But the crowd carries me away, towards the bonfire. My eyes find the fire – the screams' origin.

The firelight flickers across the Elders' horrified faces. Shadows chase the running dancers' feet. Amid the madness is Aodhán – untouchable Aodhán stands in the fire, flames licking the brilliant red hair she was named after. The adults around her shriek, but Aodhán is soundless. She reaches towards heaven, arms outstretched.

Then she spots me in the diminishing crowd, expression shifting.

Kirsten Zubak

Grade 11

St. Ann's Academy

### A Good Servant

My hand is snatched, and my mother drags me away, her worries raining down on me.  
But all I see is Aodhán's laughing smile in the last moment.

#

Age: 13

I am to serve Aodhán, Aodh's humanly presence, by bringing her food each day. At least, the Elders tell me this. Her fire abilities appear to be deity-like. However, why she is chained underground is peculiar, especially with her anger. But the Elders decided, so I cannot argue.

Five other boys served her. The first two were injured, the next two disfigured and the fifth was charred yesterday.

A hand claps my back. Elder Cayce looms over me, his wrinkled face solemn. "Sloane, the Aodh deity is in the hearth. Before his earthly form, you must say, "I, Sloane of Baylor, pledge myself to you, great Aodh." Without this, you are not safe. Understood?"

I nod, gangly limbs shaking. Those words did not keep the others safe. What could change?

I venture down to the hearth, bread and mead cup in hand. Underground is dark and cool. Roots brush my cheeks, and dust coats my arms. I'm a trembling mess. Aodhán's chilling smile five years ago replays itself.

Kirsten Zubak

Grade 11

St. Ann's Academy

### A Good Servant

He regards me for a hard moment, then releases me. "Sloane, do not be tempted to release her. Those ropes are enchanted - she cannot burn them; you cannot untie them. Understood?"

I nod.

"Good. Off with you till tomorrow."

He turns, mouth pursed but eyes pleased. A moment passes. All I can see is Aodhán's melancholy eyes. All I can hear is Elder Cayce's warning.

I run home.

#

Age: 16

Cayce has made a mistake. I alone have survived Aodhán - I am the obvious choice to succeed him once he passes. Each day after serving Aodhán, he teaches me about gods and methods of worship. He teaches me the spells of Aodhán's bindings. He teaches me to look down on other villagers.

My mother is proud. Cayce is proud. No one asks me.

I creep closer to the hearth, praying the moonlight won't give me away. My assigned duty is over for today, but I cannot waste another moment. My feet patter down the dirt steps. Cold,

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cold - then warm. I rush to the glow of her ember hair, faint and soft with sleep. For a moment, I think to alert her, but I hold my tongue.

Instead, I touch the ropes. Fingering their coarseness, I murmur the spell. My mind focuses steadily on the symbol burnt into my memory until it appears on the ropes. I back away. Gradually, the bindings unravel; Aodhán's body slumps to the ground only to bolt up a moment later.

Her hair roars to life; her eyes sharpen. "You..."

Staggeringly, she lifts herself only to stumble into my waiting arms. I do not ask her where she wants to be; I simply lead her up the steps.

The moonlight washes over her in a halo. Her eyes squint against the brightness, but Aodhán still tips her head to drink it in. Her fingers press gently against my chest. "Sloane," she whispers. "Close your eyes."

I submit. She feels warm - then hot. The temperature spikes, and my skin blisters. I cling onto Aodhán, but it's no use. I am on the ground, writhing in pain, no sound coming out. I cannot open my eyes.

Aodhán laughs. "Look at the new world, Sloane."

My eyes snap open. All around me is fire. Smoke floats into the sky, overtaking the stars. Flames consume the remains. Searing waves devour the woods. The fire grows eagerly, hungrily.



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And Aodhán stands, eyes sparking with life, hair gleaming with anticipation. She grins wolfishly. "You have served me well, favoured one. Speak if you will."

I clutch at the ash; it seeps out. My mother, Cayce, everyone – gone. I cannot breathe and not because of the smoke. "What have I done?"