

KNIGHT WRITES



VOLUME 3
2020 – 2021

Cover Designed by
Kaylee Martin

FOREWORD

This magazine is in dedication to the students of North Fort Myers High School and their beloved teachers, friends, and family who helped shape their writing. All entries are the students' original work. Our staff is incredibly proud of the work these students have produced and continue to be inspired by their creativity and dedication.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

The following students were awarded in the LCSD's Aspiring Authors Contest:

10th: 3rd place fiction:

Laurana Gonzalez

Biting Behind the Mask

11th: 1st place memoir

Tallulah Mikita

Silver Cinnamon

12th: 2nd place fiction:

Emily Reichling

The Last Act

12th: 3rd place fiction:

Angelisa Hernandez

What Is Dead May Never Die

YOUNG WRITERS

Many students here at North Fort Myers High School are being published through Young Writers. Thank you to the English teachers who helped inspire their short stories. Congratulations to the following writers:

- Valerie Lucas
- Melanie Sarmiento
- Madison Peltier
- Jenna Brady
- Hannah Holmes
- Francis Garrison
- Abigail Dalesandro
- Emily Reichling
- Cadence Blakely
- Benby Dailey
- William Hatchel
- Zachary Clark
- Zachary Roazen
- Hazael Troche
- Jaeda Leisure
- Erik Pedraja
- Carlos Troche
- Danielle Lattig
- Cooper Stone
- Alezander Gonzalez
- Corin Scrudato
- Colton Bostwick
- Angelina Pimpinella
- Aliya Morgan
- Thalia Montrueil
- Sabrina Sanabria
- Rocco Johanson
- Sara Eng
- Keila Creus
- Krish Shah
- Quinn Strosser
- Kassandra Cooper
- Allysen Corporan

Biting Behind the Mask

by Laurana Gonzalez

I rush through security. She's coming. My heart was beating out of my chest, starting to make me feel claustrophobic as my hoodie and jeans somehow feel heavier on my body. I continue to drag a hand bag and regret sinks in as it wasn't a backpack. Though I didn't exactly plan this situation, I should have known better by now.

The thought of that old perfume entering my nostrils disgusted me. She considered it expensive but I considered it a waste of money. She would really do anything for the luxury look, when in reality, she was rotting on the inside. If I saw her again, I promised myself that I'd make sure she was forever gone. All the memories that perfume maintained haunted me. Remembering the first night I arrived to her house filled my head with the sense of how welcoming she was and how warm her arms were. The smell of pumpkin candles and wood filled the luxurious apartment.

"Naya!" I hear behind me.

The first time the police questioned was the first time her manipulating mind games revealed themselves. She still dressed up then and you wouldn't know a thing. You'd be blinded by her beautiful, diamond earrings and flashy bracelets. Her pearly white smile would seduce you before the thought of her doing harm to a fly would cross your mind.

"Flight 462. Final call for Flight 462. Any passengers for Flight 462, please report to terminal D11. Any remaining passengers for Flight 462 please report to terminal D11."

The voice thundered through the intercom, almost as if God himself was talking to me. I began sprinting to the empty terminal and it was obvious I was the last one.

"Naya!"

I heard suitcases being knocked over and angry complaining behind me.

I was very smart but yet, naive up until the day I watched her slit her boyfriend's throat. The day the mask came off. I'm not sure if it was the first person she had ever killed but the tears that filled up my eyes censored the body, leaving only the silhouette of a bloody, lifeless corpse. I began to squeal and sob as her voice boomed through the apartment, telling me to shut up and get the bucket from the laundry. Once she heard me rumble nervously through the mops and brooms, she pushed past me and yanked on the grey mop handle.

"You idiot!" The smell of faint rose filled my presence and her breath smelt of smoke.

When I came back to the living room, blood outlined the marble tile cracks in the kitchen. She handed me a knife... I was ten years old. I had no idea what she wanted me to do with it. I watched as she began cutting into his skin, almost as if she was dismembering Thanksgiving turkey leftovers. Was she expecting me to do the same? A ringing sprung in my ear. Could I go to jail if I helped her? I was scared if I didn't help, I would end up like him. My body grew weak as my grip on the knife lessened and my eyes got heavy.

"Cut, damn it!" She screamed and spit on me. I couldn't breathe deeply as I felt my body hit the ground before it went numb. The ring of the metal hitting the tile rang deeper in my ear. I handed the flight attendant my passport and ticket. She put it through into her computer and scanned it. The satisfying beep put a smile on my face.

The lies she made me state ran through my head. "Victor's out of town on a business trip for a while," when really, his body was chopped up into pieces, ten feet underground in four different cities and parts of him were thrown off the bridge. So yes, technically, he was out of town.

"Naya Akone, you are ready to board. Have a safe flight!" she exclaimed as she handed me back my ticket. I picked up my carry-on and began to walk.

I was finally out of her grip. Out of the grip of her boney hands that got colder over the years as she slowly lost her mind as well as her money. As she would poke holes in my hand with one of the knives she had on display if I was reluctant to go to my "uncle's" house where my skirt was pulled up too far for comfort. Where a head rub would be the start of a night that would end with my mouth being covered as I scream in pain. When it was all over, I'd be taken out for ice cream after she had received her two hundred-dollar bills from my "uncle". Once she went bankrupt, all she ever made me do was take trips to my "uncle's" house.

I sometimes think it's not her fault. She lost everything after she lost my father to cancer when I was a toddler. She slowly became mentally ill as she had to start selling everything to pay back the debt they were in with hospital bills. She overdosed one night while I was asleep and I woke up to a police officer asking me if I had seen anything. From there, they brought me to a doctor and eventually placed me into the foster care system. I finally saw her again at eight years old, once she was apparently now mentally healthy enough to be my guardian but I barely remembered her. The house was still beautiful but from the outside. The inside was empty as all the grandeur furniture had now all been removed. She clung onto her designer pieces of clothing as it was now the only thing that tied her back to my father's riches.

One night, she had an episode, saying we needed to move and that we couldn't afford it, even though my father had already paid off the house. She put the house up for sale within the next week and moved us across the city to live with a man she had been seeing. I think she just couldn't stand being in the environment anymore where she used to be a different person. A healthy person.

I felt safe now as I headed for the jet bridge. I had been ready for years now to leave that home and now I finally could. With my one-way ticket to Paris in hand, I had my future on a piece of paper. I might be sleeping on benches for a bit but who was going to complain if it was Paris? Maybe I could get a job at a small bakery, selling French pastries all day and little cups of hot chocolate. After a long day, I could sit on the edge of River Seine and practice my French. The beautiful language would slowly flow off my lips, becoming more and more fluent by the day. Live a Paris romance with a kiss under the Eiffel Tower and wandering the streets, hand in hand. Feel safe in someone else's hold.

I feel heavy breathing behind me. The same scent of that God damn perfume. Before I turn around, I feel something wrap around my neck. As my esophagus pushes further into my throat and I pull on the hands that are responsible for my very little respiration, I catch a glimpse. The dark fur on her she called hair. It was raggedy from the horrible haircut she gives herself when she goes through an episode. Maybe her mild bipolar wasn't just mild because she was able to pass off as a mentally healthy person and had wigs to cover up for her psychotic act behind closed doors. The old denim shorts on her that were now blood stained from the blood I am starting to cough up. Before my vision goes out, I connect my eyes with her. Bloodshot. Lord help me. Help me kill her before she kills me.

“Silver Cinnamon”

by Tallulah Mikita

A chill indeed has a scent. A blood-freezing, chaotic scent which strikes fear into the victim who has the fortunate luck to drown in the depths of a chill. A peppermint, warming scent which engulfs a fiery hearth of a heart and nostalgically cradles the psyche. Both are the same, both are conjoined, and a chill is the link between the two.

Frantic and freezing fingertips shake from the metallic squeeze of the cold. Every cell of blood is overrun by the choking smoke of it. Violet colored fingertips are only an appetizer to the jagged cracking of chill-painted flesh, drizzled with the plump crimson sweetness of syrupy blood. Nightmarish is the coppery infused chilly smell which invades the senses. As if every piece of the body can catch a whiff. My eyes sting with the scent. My grooved fingerprints can touch it. Thick and obsessive, but insisting and inevitable. Chill is the scent of choking with the taste of gasping breaths. The scent of the sight of pinkish welts appearing on the jagged flesh. The scent of the touch of searing wet warmth of the engorged violet fingertips.

When the watery blue pills cease to work, either from irresponsibility, voluntary defiance, or deterioration, the chill returns, but it is passionate and persuasive. It is cinnamon upon the tongue or salt rubbed into a wound. The scent is convincing and charming, like a leading voice above a comune. It tells the mind that ‘it is me’ and me alone. The chill is the redeemer, the savior, the wisdom, and the leader. The chill is the mind and the mind is the cinnamon burn. It comes in occasion, a surprise visitor. Yet it is muffled when the prescriptions come to call.

That chilly scent returns, years later, in the cramped warmth of winter. It is the pine of the little Christmas tree, the burning meat on the stove, and the chocolate savoriness of a warm mug between the palms. Fingertips grow pink and pliant from the cozy chill and the chill is a cooling, calming azure. Jumbled, mumbled thoughts of before are muted by the laughter and music of the winter chill. When family and food is the scent of the chill. Warm hand holding and embraces engulf what used to be a mind of destruction, deprived and indifferent.

Even in the warmth of July, there remains a winter pocket. Where laces of white and black are knotted and violet fingertips are gloved. Noses grow sniffly and red in the industrial winter air, but the heart grows warmer, the thoughts more debonair. Scents may be muffled, but one scent is fighting for attention. Its a familiar, familial chilly embrace. Yet, it is new and sweet and sugary, like a peppermint stick. The eyes that I see are the color of tree bark in the winter woods of years ago or perhaps the warmth of scorching coffee on an icy Christmas morning. The hand that I shake is small and pink, unsure but exquisite nonetheless. My mind is my own in that moment, because despite all frustration and errors and fear and destruction, I cannot allow myself to be robbed of this touch, this chill. For it is the kind of chill which shivers up your spine from excitement or from happiness, the kind of chill which I cannot discern from a single sense. The chill is my blood, pumping a rhythmic symphony in my veins. The chill is the eyes piercing mine own, transmuting my mind into a cacophony of silver bells. The chill is my heart, beating in time with my thoughts.

Indeed, a chill is a scent. Yet, it can evoke many different memories. In a quiet, lonely moment, my mind may revert to such nostalgia, but through a new and loving hold the scent may cradle my tired head.

The Last Act

by Emily Reichling

Gracefully, but quick-natured, she picked up her flowing dress and dashed out into the garden full of sunflowers. Her grandmother's favorite.

The memories flooded her cluttered mind as she picked up the pace, jumbled thoughts sending speckled bumps in shivers down her spine.

Gosh, I am so stupid.

How could I believe anything?

How could my parents believe anything?

Words could barely escape the thin lines of her pressed lips as she bumped into someone, pages flying out of the books that were sent straight to the ground.

"Oh, I am so sorry, Your-" She looked up at the ocean eyes that she found herself staring into daily. "Griffin."

"Addy, what's the rush? Cecilia is getting her crown today. Aren't you happy?" His smile could send her flying, but not today.

"Oh, yeah, except that it's all lies." Scoffing, she turned her back on him and stomped off towards the sunflower field behind the magnificent castle.

The bocce balls were scattered across the fields with the sticks leaning against the benches. Picking one up, Adelaide knocked the bocce ball, sending it flying into the dense trees that surrounded the castle, securing them from the rest of the world.

"Addy, what are you doing?" Sophie, her pale pink dress flowing in the gentle breeze behind her, called out to Adelaide, giving her a little fright. She was lost in her thoughts. The other beautiful ladies followed behind.

"Sophie, it's awful. The royal family is a lie. Cecilia has lied to all of us. It's all a lie!" Adelaide yelled at Sophie, wanting to disappear immediately after.

"Woah, girl. Calm down. Tell us what is a lie." Sophie's perfect Australian accent effortlessly spoke the one word Adelaide had been muttering to herself for the past hour when she discovered the truth.



Art by Tate Williams

"Sophie, The Greyson's lied to us all. They lied to the people of Bolvington, telling everyone that they are the true rulers of the city; that they deserve the crown when they stole mine and my parents' memories ten years ago and threw us to the wolves." Adelaide took a deep breath before continuing the story to her friends. "Ten years ago, the Mitchellson's were given this swirly blue potion that wiped their memories, switching places with the Greyson's, who were jealous of their power. So, the Mitchellson's continued with their everyday lives as the family that the Greyson's were supposed to be."

"Addy, what are you trying to say?"

"I am a Mitchellson, Soph. I am the princess, not Cecilia."

Shocked, Sophie took a step back, feeling around for the bench handle so she could stable herself, but instead bumped into one of the ladies behind her.

"Sophie, please believe me," Adelaide pleaded with her best friend.

"Addy," Sophie took a deep breath, trying to collect her thoughts, "It all makes sense. Cecilia never fit in as princess and the servants were always scoffing whenever the Greyson's asked for something, calling them 'needy'. Addy, I am so sorry."

Sophie embraced Adelaide into a tight Aussie hug. The other girls embraced Sophie and Adelaide, reassuring Adelaide all was well.

"Wait, how did the Bolvington people not question anything?" Sophie looked puzzled, searching for a reasonable explanation for the lies that were spread.

The other girls nodded in agreement, all wanting a quick response to the question they have been wondering themselves.

"They tried to wipe memories, but there were too many people so they did the next best thing -- make them believe they died. There were so many different illnesses that were being discovered that the people immediately believed the lies."

Before anyone could mutter another word, Mary, the event planner for the coronation, burst through the castle doors, clicking her pen aggressively, her eyes dashing across the fields. Adelaide dragged Sophie to the ground, shielding them from Mary's direct eye line, the other girls following suit.

"Adelaide, I know you're out there. We know you know the truth, so come out from hiding so I can speak to you personally about the matters."

Sophie seemed to question Adelaide's sudden movements as she reached for a red bocce ball, carefully bouncing it in her hands before tossing it towards the forests, sending an echo as it knocked against a tree. She turned towards the girls, appearing to have a sinister grin growing upon her face. Everyone but Sophie understood immediately as they picked up the scattered bocce balls and began tossing them deep into the forest, letting the echoes ring against the bark.

"My last act," Adelaide whispered.

Mary, frightened, called for backup on her walkie as she ventured deep into the overgrown trees, shielding her from the girls and their quick-witted escape. They ran straight into the entrance of the castle closets behind the heavy double doors of the church where Adelaide's father was waiting for her return.

"Adelaide," Her father gathered her into an embrace, "what took so long?"

"Mary. Don't worry, she's busy."

Her perplexed father shrugged it off as he glanced behind Adelaide to see Sophie and a whole gang of ladies in waiting. Adelaide could tell by the look on her father's face that he was questioning everything.

"Long story."

Her father, King Bernard, nodded in agreement and then pushed Adelaide up to the front next to her mother, Queen Eleanor. Adelaide glanced up at her mother, the piercing blue eyes were not passed down to her, but they were striking as ever. Her friends fluttered into the church through a back door. The ceremony was beginning.

Adelaide's hands shook with every passing second. Her mother grasped the shaking hands, a sense of reassurance waving over Adelaide's mind. Comfort.

"Ready?" Eleanor whispered to Adelaide, a small smile appearing on her face.

"As ready as I'll ever be." Adelaide shook the nerves away, releasing one final breath as the double doors opened, revealing the cluttered church, heads whipping around in their direction.

At the front of the church, near the altar, the Greyson's stood, flabbergasted by the scene they were witnessing before them. The priest stopped his coronation speech as he began the descent towards the middle of the altar stairs. He, too, was appalled.

"Everyone, I am King Bernard Nicholas Antoni Mitchellson, the rightful ruler of Bolvington."

What Is Dead May Never Die

by Angelisa Hernandez

The sound of an untuned piano chord startles you awake. Rubbing tired eyes, pulling your head up from your desk to see the students around you rise and turn their faces away from yours. You mumble in confusion and get on your feet, stumbling a bit as you haven't fully focused your eyes to alertness. The piano, or whoever is behind it, continues to stab the same key in a manner that reminds you of morse code. It brings you unease, the same key somehow produces a different tone every time it is pounded, the next one as eerie as the last.

Wake up.

Your eyes open to a hand against your face, a thumb caressing your cheek. You recognize this face but cannot put a name to it. You open your mouth to speak, letting out a small whine instead of words. You are shushed before you can continue, not that you knew what you were attempting to say in the first place. It just felt needed, natural, like it was written already. In this memory. Memory?

A slap hits your face.

"Hey!" a hand waves in front of your eyes. You're on concrete, somewhere else now, a sidewalk it seems. You rub your face where the impact occurred, but there seems to be no pain, instead, you feel a throbbing in your head. You try to speak again, but no words come out. You simply rub your head as a hand reaches out to you. You take it with your free hand, pulling yourself up with the help of this stranger. Before you can regain consciousness, you fall into the tall person's arms, unintentionally gripping to their shoulders to steady yourself. You smile. You didn't mean to smile. Why are you smiling? Who are you?

A kiss is placed on your forehead.

A phone. Brightness hits your raw eyes in the darkness. You stare at the messages on the screen. Everything is blurry, foreign. Is this mine? Why is it so difficult to see? You make out a few words on the bright box. Liar, love, done, and something about May. Did something happen in May?

"May I?"

You're ashamed to admit your eyes wandered as the figure standing in your path reached to pick up the book you dropped. 'Well, this is cheesy,' your subconscious comments. You seem to be moving your mouth, speaking, but you can't hear your own words. You aren't in your shoes this time, in this... memory? You watch, observing from another point of view. Are you even you? Looking around, you realize you are in a body that is not your own. This is new.

Your marker squeaks against the whiteboard as you put the finishing touches on your little

doodle. It was cute; you wonder whose conscience you're in now. It feels like you, but new. You know more. The piano chord plays again. It's tuned now. A chorus of symphonies fills the room but no one else seems to notice. No one in the room seems alive. They breathe but produce no life. You wonder what that means. A shimmer blows by your eyes. You're here again. Your original conscience. You seem occupied, talking to a face your current conscience cannot seem to make out. Just a blurry head on a tall, skinny figure. Other faces litter the room that you recognize but can't understand from where. They start to disappear. Slowly they fade away, body and mind. As if they never occupied the space you observed now.

You're alone now. You, the true you. Not the conscience you began with, but still the same soul. It's lonely here. You wander the same spots. To the bed, to the desk, you scroll around a computer, doing seemingly nothing, but recognizing that something was getting done. This repeated itself in a constant cycle of boredom. Your mind has no occupancy, yet it runs at paces that could not be described in human speech. None of the words that go through your brain can be deciphered, of course. You could easier jumble a dictionary and put it all back into its original positions before you could untangle the crevices of your mind.

Mind and memory. What a confusing, fascinating thing.

You hear the chord again. It's untuned; it is foul. It screeches.

You rush your hands to your ears to mute the noise. Your throat is raw, your vocal cords are breaking. The scream continues.

The Shades' Tale

by Daniel Koester

In a world full of various shades,
Scars reappear, thought to have fade,
Once again, they hold the blade,
For the hope of a brighter dawn, the chance of a new day.
Thus tales are revealed, forgotten to time,
And are rewritten here, through words and rhymes.
The Shades fight for what is right once again,
As history is repeated and retold.
There sits the unintelligible evil ahead,
Justice anticipates for what shall unfold.
Fire and Flames flash the Shades' eyes.
Times of the Dire and the Pain, the fear the end is nigh.
This great strength of rage sits in the palms of their hands.
However, their hearts are no longer caged, so they take a righteous stand.
To vanquish and rid the world of that illegible evil,
Can be done with the power of their own will.
And inevitable fate that the Shades shall prevail,
Seen and written here, the Shades' Tale.



Art by Adrianna Green

Lilac And Lavender

by Francis G.

I stood there alone,
In a dark void of a room,
Choking on velvet petals of violet colours,
Crying tears of your favourite shades of green.

The air was thick and muddy,
The light was dim to none,
Noises seemed silent split in pieces,
Nothing moved for what felt like years.

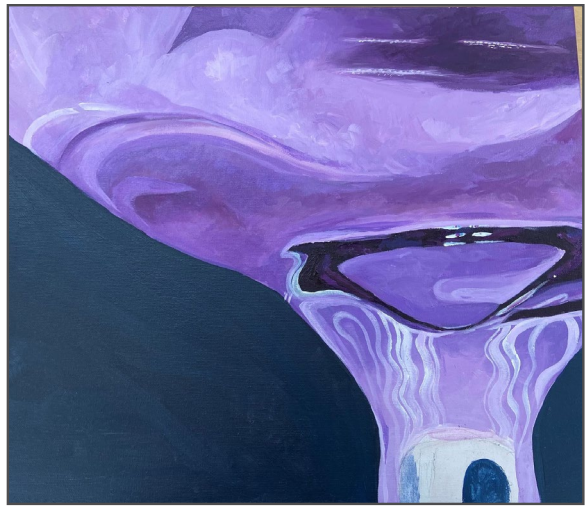
I succumbed to a feeling of pain,
Building up a tolerance for something unseeable,
The scent of lilacs and lavenders from stained eyes,
I called to nothing, in hopes that someone would appear.

My voice was harsh, sour like a lemon in colours so bold,
I was drowning in fruited blossoms of feelings deemed unacceptable,
I was cut by thorns I willingly let ruin me,
I hadn't slept nor smiled since I was told these feelings wouldn't last.

I had given up, no longer crying for help,
I decided to try and suck it up and survive,
I seemed of decay like mushrooms,
I was forgotten in a forest of teens.

Until you came, and brought out the sun,
You blossomed my heart back to beating,
Stitched up the wounds on my arms,
And took lilac and lavender and turned it to vanilla.

You were the very thing I called out for,
You are the warm wind in my hair,
You are the sun that helps me to grow,
You are my still beating heart.



Art by Mickayla Misamore

Reading - A Tiring Escape

by Emily Reichling

Paper cut
Another paper cut
Trying to turn the suffocated page.
All the black dots mixing together.

Another paper cut
Thumb throbbing
Why won't it stop?

Oh, a cliffhanger!
Plot hole after plot hole
Missing answers,
Disappearing characters written off the pages,
Only to never be heard from.

But wait...
There she is, three books later
Distraught from the turmoil
Of her friends leaving her behind...
Cliffhanger!

Beginning, middle, end.
The same old stories,
Just a few rewritten thoughts to not plagiarize.
Genre upon genre,
Chapter after chapter,
Rewritten, but still the same.

Why do I cry over the forgotten?
Why must I continue as things are left broken?
Why? Why? Why?

Unanswered questions rack my brain
As the heavy block in my hands snaps shut.
Tossed across the room,
Screams echoing in the halls,
Finally, it's over, time for another.



Art by Chloe Lange

Carousel of Dreams

by Candelas Distefano

The top spins and spins
as clouds form in,
blurring your vision
to a world that you don't notice because

you're spun so fast, feeling queasy -
and the world tilts on its axis
while you hold on tight,
desperately clinging to the sight

of flying, soaring above these dizzying clouds
and overlooking what lies underneath,
while rain pours beyond the edge of the ride
and you're spun faster and faster

until you're flung off -
hurtled into a heap on the soaked grass -
but you're addicted to dreaming and so
immediately clammer to get back in line.



Art by Keishla Dejesus

Lazy Lab Wondering

by Emily Reichling

Laying in the silence
Waiting for the humans
Peering,
Gazing,
Listening for the bang of the drum.

Swirls of my ignorant thoughts
Wrapped like a present
As I remain perfectly still,
Anticipating their sudden return.

The bang of the drum echoes
And the soft, black ears perk,
Listening for the banging footsteps to step in.

"Gentle", they whisper as I bounce and claw,
Seeking for attention,
But the constant words flood my mind
As I remember the nuisance that has replaced my love.

The gentle paws claw once more,
But I Receive little attention
So I return to the mushy pillows,
The indent of my body remained exactly where I once napped.

The beautiful human stepped in
And jumped on the cloud
Engulfing me in a squeeze
Pleasing my attention level.

With one, long lick on the face
Her eyes light up in joyment.
Then she disappears,
Ignoring my pleading eyes for her to stay.

Once again,
I'm left with the swirls
My mind jumbled in mush
As I remain hushed.

My echoing barks filled the claustrophobic rooms
As I patiently peer out the small, dirty windows
Scanning,
Gaping,
Ears perked for the familiar slam of the car.



Art by Kaden Fisher

Decision Day

by Emily Reichling

Hesitation
Shaky hands
Fear, so much fear
As I clicked on the update,

But a little hope
From light hopeful discussions
Alumni full of reassurance
That the acceptance was in my hands.

Comfort and warmth
From an old grey blanket
Ripping and shredding
From rough play of sweaty dogs.

Focused on the burning screen
Every single word blurred behind the fresh tears.
A single, garbage decision
Regretting to inform me.

Hopeful lies...
Now full of discarded knowledge
Of this gorgeous school
That regretted sending me their final decision.

That beginning line
"We regret to inform you"
Flashes in my brain
Like a jumbotron displaying commercials.

Swirling thoughts of why...
Why was I not good enough?
This useless knowledge of the school
Gone down the drain like soggy chicken from dinner.

Through waterfalls and scattered brains,
Through the comfort of my mother's sayings,
A little girl wished upon a star
Only for her whole world to grow very far.



Art by Michelle Glarum

From His Perspective

by Francis Garrison

Running faster and faster, footsteps like a running horse. Beating in some melody or another, losing my breath the farther I go, my left arm numb, unable to move, bleeding. I think it can smell the trail of blood. Feeling the warm smoke fill the air, hearing its roar echo through the woods. I am not safe. I fall, tripping on my own footing. It catches up. Quickly. I pick myself up, my arm blasting pain through my weak body. The air gets hotter, its smoke surrounds me, the flapping of its wings violently blows the leaves off of the trees, and in one fell swoop, its claws slash and tear the back of my cloak.

Stumbling from the impact, I quickly lose hope for me, when I hear it cry out from behind. The smell of metal, the voice of another being. I stop, panting, and turn around to see her. A woman, similarly aged to me, with long brown hair, and one long streak of grey. Similar to my height and with ears resembling mine, but less... Pointy? She holds an axe in her hands, the dragon laying in front of her, blinded and weak, bleeding out. She turns to me, and speaks in a rough but melodic voice.

"Are ya okay, sir? Ya look like you've had quite the fight for your life there." She drops her axe, and comes toward me, reaching in her bag for something. She pulls out a small white box, and gently grabs my broken arm. "I noticed your robe is broken, are ya a wizard, by chance? I'll try to be gentle with ya, okay? I assume ya don't know any healing magics due to your arm looking like it's been bleeding for a while."

She opens the box, numerous items for healing stuffed inside. She pulls out what seems to be a bunch of herbs wrapped in twine, and begins to hold it to my arm. Swiftly, like a candle blowing out its flame, my arm regains consciousness, feeling like it was prior to the dragons attack. "That should do ya good. I ain't too good in medicinal work, with what bein' on the farm an all. I'm Abilene, I live in Raspel city, not too far from these woods here. And what 'bout ya?"

Her accent thick like maple, I speak up.

"Raspel city? I've never seen you before. I'm Kaden Sunstone, son of the Raspel city's head counselor. You don't quite fit the bill for a high Elf such as myself. Considering you used a handed weapon and healed my arm without any sort of magic. Who are you exactly?"

"Questionin' my authority aintcha? You sound just like the counsel. I live on the apple acres near that big fancy magic building. My family produces the mass majority of the apples in Raspel, you've likely tasted them at least once, we produce the best apples there are; and just so we're clear, I've seen you around plenty of times in that building. I don't 'fit the bill' because I'm a half Elf."

This woman, her sarcastic tone, her thick accent, alerted my heart. Her intoxicating expressions, the smell of sweet apple pie, her aura is so beautiful. Surely I can get the headmaster of the academy to allow her in, and when I surprise her with the acceptance, she'll fall in love with me too!

Holding my hand out, I ask her if she'd like to walk back with me, as she walks over and picks up her axe, putting it in her bag. We walk back towards town, and after walking her to her acre, she tosses me an apple off the closest tree and wishes me night. After she disappears through the trees, I turn and head into the Rospel City Academy of Magic, and find the headmaster walking through the halls.

After hours of discussion, he finally accepts to let her in to the school. He gives me a scroll, and instructs me to give it to her early 'morrow because the moons will shortly rise over the city. I run out of the building, hiding the scroll, and quickly approach the castle where my father lives, and collapse on my bed, tearing off my robe and tossing it into the trash, before falling into a deep slumber.

Sun rises, and I bolt out of bed, grabbing my bag and glasses, and making my way straight to the apple acres, finding Abilene hard at work, and calling her over. Watching her walk over, I see a confused look on her face, before it becomes a small smile.

"Howdy Kaden, how uh, are ya?" The sun dappled leaves cast shadows around her silhouette, dancing around her bewitching statue. With shaky hands I reach through my bag and hand her the scroll. Observing her face, she seems far from impressed. Looking up to me, her radiant voice echoes through the air.

"This is lovely and all, Kaden, but I'm afraid I'm not too interested in those funny magics you do. I'll have to decline." Before my mind can comprehend what's happening, she rolls the scroll back up and snaps it between her knee, the scroll disintegrating into thin air. She waves, and disappears back into the trees.

My blood begins to boil, that wench just rejected me! Does she not understand who I am? I could've given her the world! How dare she! I'll make her pay for that! Stomping away back to my palace, I devise a plan that'll make her crawl back to me. The sun gives its Au Revoir and the moons bestows its presence on the city, where I hide myself in a soft cloak, disappearing into the night.

In my hands, I hold a small box containing an amulet that I had spent hours crafting, with a big ruby and a smaller emerald to make up a resemblance of an apple, the amulet that will protect her from my plan, and lead her right to me. Sneaking on to her farm, swiftly dodging the looming trees, I hear laughter and see lights from a big farmhouse in the middle of the forest. Peering through the windows, I see her and her family eating dinner.

Promptly making my way around the house, I find a room that resembles hers, and unlatch the window. In silence, I find a small table near the bed, where I place the box and escape, closing the window and waiting. Minutes pass when I hear her door open, seeing her walk in, and get ready for bed. She picks up the box, and puts on the amulet.

Rushing my way back around, I find a small bundle of firewood. Perfect. I pull out my wand, focusing my attention on the firewood, and all the wood in the acre, before setting it all aflame. Escaping the burning heat of her farm, I rush back home, and wait for my princess to come back to me. Days go by without word from her, but I find out the rest of her family had died in the fire. Her body was not found, and there was no trace of her anywhere. Conquering my magic, I track her by the amulet, finding she's thousands of miles away in a town I've never heard of or even seen prior to this.

This has to be wrong, right? Rospel City is surrounded by thick tall walls that no one can enter or leave from. How is she out there, alone, with nothing but my magic to protect her? The amulet must've been found in the rubble and stolen, but that doesn't answer where or why she disappeared. The amulet was set to bring her to me, not some town thousands of miles away.

I gather up the important things in my bag, put on my cloak, and set out to find her. Find my Abilene, the apple of my eye. She's out there somewhere, and I need to save her. Save her like she saved me. Then, in that heroic act, she'll fall in love with me! Yes, indeed, Abilene will be mine.

Voice of a Child, Figure of a Man

by Emily Reichling

"Hello? Is someone there?" A squeaky child's voice awoke from the chambers below the fallen orange and yellow leaves that crunched below her feet. "Hello? Is someone there?"

Her black combat boots stepped up near the cracked, misshaped well, and looked over the edge, leaning her body over to get a better perspective.

"Hello?" She called back, her voice shaking as the fall leaves crunched underneath her feet. The pale Autumn air breezed through the holes of her sleeves, nipping at her goosebumped skin.

"Help me, please." The little boy, sounding barely seven, pleaded, begging for his life.

Caelen twisted to the side of the well and noticed a knotted rope, shredded at the edges, laying underneath some leaves, as if it was tossed there and left by someone. She tied it around her skinny waist and wrapped one frayed end around the rusting pole above the well that held a tin can for water. She slowly began to descend deeper into the abyss of the well.

"Please, it's extremely cold." The little boy sounded frightened, his voice becoming shakier each second as the winds gave out all their strength, turning Caelan's ears a rosy pink, sending chills down her spine.

She took a soft landing at the bottom of the empty well, the leaves crunching under her boots, along with some twigs snapping. She swiveled around, facing a dark, claustrophobic tunnel that had no apparent ending. She whipped out a flashlight from her unzipped bag and began the exhausting trek through the tunnel, towards the little boy's voice.

"Hurry. I'm freezing." The little boy called out, his teeth chattering against the echoes of her boots in the walls of the cave.

As she neared the end of the tunnel, the gaping mouth of the cave opened up into a dimly lit cavern, full of oddly shaped rocks and boulders. She rocked the flashlight across each side of the cavern, searching for the little boy.

"You found me!" The little boy called out from the other side of the cavern.



Art by Wolfe Enmon

Caelan whipped around, her neck reeling in pain, as she flashed the light towards the shaking voice. It flickered in and out as she froze, time suddenly stops. Instead of seeing a little boy, she locked her hazel eyes with the pale blue ones of a tall, 20-something-year-old man. His hands were out in front of him as he whispered what sounded like a spell. An evil grin formed on his face as he took a couple of steps towards Caelan, allowing the sunlight from the cracks of the rocks above to shine down on him. Caelan, gasping for air, her lungs collapsing, took a few steps backward, stumbling into the rocky wall, landing on the sticky leaves on the hidden ground.

“Silas.”

Gossamer in the Night

by Valerie Lucas

Suddenly everything was silent; he stood still, not knowing what to do next. He had stalked through the forest night after night, bow and arrow in hand, only to find nothing- not the hooting of an owl, not the roar of a bear. The villagers had sworn the wood was inhabited by a fearsome beast, yet the hero had seen no evidence of one. Indeed, the forest seemed lifeless and bleak, with nary a glimpse of something alive. T'was as if he was being watched by invisible, omniscient eyes that never blinked. And yet, the noises of nature had still made themselves known- wind rustled through the trees, leaves crunched underfoot ... water even made its babbling sounds in a creek to his left. But as he ventured farther into the dark, dreaded wood, all became overwhelmingly silent

The hero had an unseen movie for being in the woods. He had been camping in a glen not a five-minute ride from the creek when he saw her. A slip of white, gossamer through the trees.

At first glance, he thought her a ghost, but as she flitted between the tall rowan trees, he saw that she was really a beautiful young woman, with hair the color of spider silk and skin the same pale shade of white as the newest moon-beams. He called to her in jest, but the hero was only given a smile in response before his lady ran from him and disappeared. He rose, to give chase, but changed his mind as the weather turned and became a cold, fierce, driving rain. He chose to seek shelter in the nearby village, riding a shaggy grey pony through the unflinching downpour.

Upon arriving in the village, the hero was besieged by townsfolk, for he was a hero of great renown. They offered to stable his little horse for free, which our hero refused to allow. He paid his own way, and refused to be beholden to any man. He did, however, offer to help the villagers any way he could, for was a King's Man, sworn to protect the kingdom from all threats, both of their world and others. And so, the villagers brought him their troubles, and told him of their misfortunes- told him about the fearsome beast who lived in their woods. This, and his kind heart, is how the hero found himself standing stock-still in a dark, dark wood chasing the path of a girl he only half believed was real.

The hero stood, letting the sudden silence wash over him in a wave. The forest was dark, but as he inched along the path, moonlight began to filter through the branches of the rowan trees above, and, shocked, our hero came to a clearing. Stepping off the path, the hero approached the small open space, ringed with fungi and flowers smelling sickly sweet. He trod on a stone, and like the great Morgan Le Fay herself, the ghost-white girl appeared, again bathed in moonbeams, and stardust. She blinked, once, twice, and then beckoned for the poor hero to follow her. And follow her he did, just like so many doomed heroes before him. She had him in thrall, like so many others had been before, and just like so many of those other heroes, this King's Man was doomed.

Our hero, now doomed, continued on this leftward path, guided by his own beautiful Virgil, though it wasn't Hell he was in for. The moonbeam girl led him out of the forest, and together they crossed the left-curving creek. Together, they ventured in the night, until they came to a cluster of small hills; curiously enough, the moon shone brighter than before, and the hero could better see his surroundings- the hills were dotted with toadstools and clovers, and an odd dark purple flower that was again, sickly sweet. He turned to his lady, and noticed her eyes were the color of belladonna in springtime, and his bow, long forgotten, felt heavy in his hand. He dropped it, and followed his girl dressed in gossamer to the place beneath the hills.

He was not the first hero to be in thrall to her; he was not the only one to be taken beneath the hills. The fairy who took him, however, found him to be different than the others- he was noble and true, not audacious or vain. He was not a prince or a knight; and yet, she consigned him to a worse fate than any of them, a fate that was cruel in its kindness and ruthless in its simplicity. The fairy- for, of course, she was a fairy, she who took him- let him go. She let him go free, and to this day it is said you can hear his cries in the countryside- his cries for her, La Belle Dame Sans Merci

Venice

by Mackenzie Halter

As I had stepped into the unfamiliar lands, my eyes seemed to have landed on the roads: cobbled, the distant sounds of a horse's hooves clacking against the stone which seemed to be pulling along a trembling wagon, and a rickety, moldy wooden structure, seemingly a kiosk for tourists. Beyond the decaying structure was a row of ancient shops, their doors and windows slowly creaking open to lure me into their darkened realms, a thick smoke pouring out of the cracks, forcing my eyes to no longer see the back end of the streets.

I then whip my head over to the laughter of crows, an unnerving aura sounding them as they seemed to hop off the building to dance in the wind, just above my head while the whispering and mumbling of the people that slowly flooded into the now shadowed streets snaked its way into my ears. Their grim clothing contrasting with the flickering flames of the street lanterns, allowing the shadows to grow and swallow up the streets we stood upon. I was here. I had finally arrived after the exhausting twenty years of my standstill and tiring life.



Art by Cydney Muri

Confrontation

by Mackenzie Halter

As per usual in the police department, there was a buzz of officers discussing various cases. I listened in on the different scenarios that were being presented to one another.

"Yeah, just another lost cat being filed today..."

"Really? Thankfully you don't have to deal with the elderly woman that constantly complains about the smallest of things..."

"Abigail." The chief snapped with seriousness, causing me to quickly shift my gaze over to him with a startled look upon my face.

"Yes sir?" I quickly straightened my back as I addressed his presence and showed that he had my full attention when he spoke.

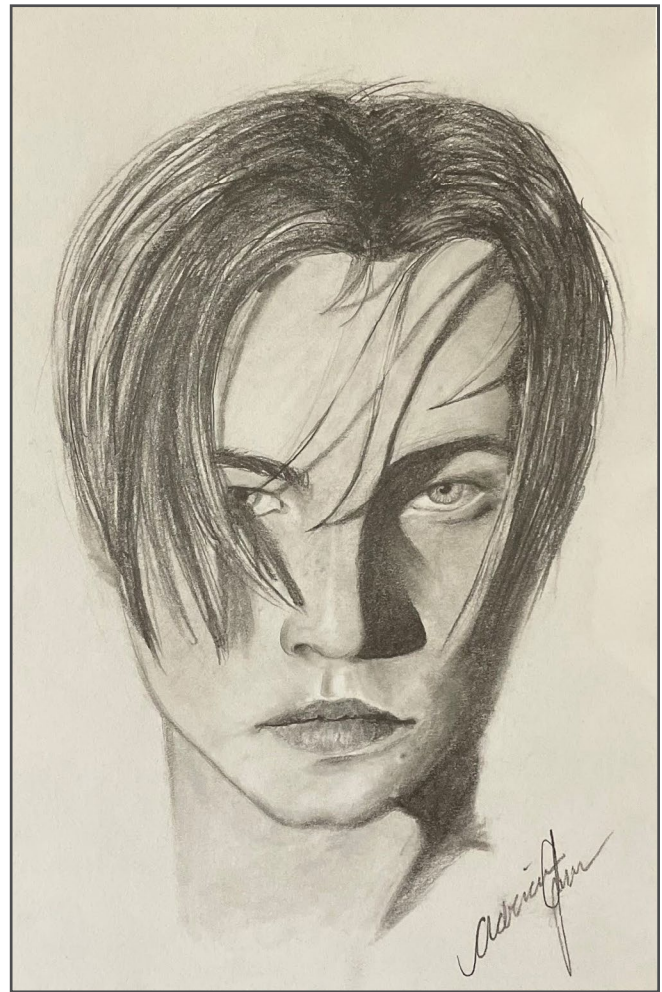
"We've got another homicide that was called in today." As he spoke, he let the thick beige folder drop down onto my desk with a dull thud, papers spilling out of it in the process.

Seriously? Another homicide case? This is... what... the third time this week? London hasn't been this bad since last December in 2018.

A sigh then slipped past my lips as those thoughts filled my head before I solemnly nodded at the boss.

"Right on it sir." My eyes followed his figure as he slinked back towards his office before I turned my attention back to the folder. I flipped it open and was met with the newest case that was thrown on top of the previous ones that were still being investigated. A soft hum rumbled in my chest as I read over the cause of death while ignoring the loose strands of hair that were framing my face.

They all seem to be from a stab through the heart... but there's a carving on the victim's wrist as well. Interesting...



Art by Adrianna Green

I then started to chew on the nail of my thumb out of habit, typically doing it when I'm doing my best to concentrate on the topic at hand. I then used my free hand to grab the laminated pictures they were able to take of the crime scene.

It showcased what seemed to be a broken heart that was engraved into the victim's wrist. The blood that previously oozed out had dried up, leaving behind a textured crimson outline. The sight has caused my stomach to twist up into a knot as I knew whoever had done this was still out there, my mind starting to race,

It could have been a crazy girlfriend... Maybe they were trying to get revenge after being cheated on? That seems a bit extreme... people do tend to do crazy things when they're enraged by something though, so it might make sense...

I then nodded to myself, that being the best lead I currently have for this case, but that might narrow the suspects down a bit too much.

After looking over the newest case and a couple of older cases for a couple of hours, I decided I should go out and get some lunch for myself. With that in mind I raised from my chair and walked away from my desk, quickly clocking myself out before notifying my colleagues of my departure.

"Wonder where I should stop today," I mumbled to myself as I flicked my thumb across the screen of my phone, watching it scroll through my feed. "Panera sounds pretty good right about n- ugh.." I quickly stumbled back slightly after bumping into something that seemed a bit firm.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Are you alright?"

I slowly look up to see where the low, yet concerned voice came from. My eyes then met with ones that reminded me of molten gold. His Brunette hair was threatening to hide them from the world, but thankfully they weren't able to.

"Ma'am?" He spoke up softly with a tilted head as he watched me with confusion since I hadn't exactly responded to his question.

"O-Oh! Yes! I'm perfectly fine, I'm so sorry. I should have been watching where I was going." A sheepish grin found its way onto my face as I nervously giggled, mentally screaming at myself,

Calm down Abigail!

I then blink as I heard a soft chuckle rumbling throughout his chest while he watched as I practically squirmed under his oddly crazed stare.

"Alright, if you say so. How about I make this up with some lunch?" A soft smile graced his features, one that could replace a star in a dark night sky, or even the sun peeking out after a rainy day, allowing a small smile to grace my features as well as I nod.

That was how my friendship with Jasper started, but soon, I would have to make the most difficult decision in my life...

After a couple of months with Jasper, I might've started to develop a tiny crush on him. Alright, mauve tiny is an understatement... Anyways, I'm supposed to meet with him tonight!

I stared down at my phone, the address that he had sent me, along with the directions glued onto the screen, reminding myself of the directions I needed to follow,

First a left, now a right, then another left and...

I beamed as I looked up from my phone, assuming that I had taken the correct route, but clearly, I hadn't, as I was now in some musty and dark alleyway.

"Nice job Abigail..." I grumbled to myself as I rubbed the side of my face and let out a breath as I thought to myself before mumbling, "But didn't Jasper say 'Left, right left?'" My gaze then fell back down on my phone, letting out a soft hum as I had realized that I had just taken one of the turns at the wrong point.

I simply shrug it off and tap on the picture that I had set as Jasper's contact before tapping the screen once again, but now on the green dot that allows you to call.

Oh how I wish that I had just searched for the address instead...

As the familiar sound of a soft guitar ringtone echoed throughout the narrow alleyway, my eyebrows furrowed together in confusion.

"Jasper?" I whispered to mainly myself as I started to quietly make my way towards the sound.

I was almost to the source of the sound, making a quick right. What I saw sent a chill down my spine and my stomach to instantly knot up, wanting to force the meal I had earlier out of my frozen and pale body.

There he was, standing over a man's body with a dagger that had the crimson liquid of life dripping from it. Instinctively, I take a step back, my eyes widening in fear as Jasper slowly turned to see me, sirens being heard in the distance.

"Abigail.. I..." He stared at me with shock and disappointment for himself that he was seen like this, biting his lip before blurting out while reaching his hand out to me. "Run away with me."

I look behind myself, the police sirens nearing, along with the flashing red and blue lights before turning back towards the male, my mind racing but focusing on the major question of...

What do I do...

A College's View On a Student's Social Media

by Celeste Schreiber

Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat: a college applicant's nightmare. For a long time, universities and colleges have been using social media to look further into an applicant's true character, but the amount of educational institutions participating in this is actually decreasing. "In the 2015 survey, 40 percent of admissions officers checked social media, dropping to 35 percent in the following year, and now this figure stands at 29 percent," according to Study International Staff, paragraph 19. Colleges need to continue using an applicant's social media to determine their eligibility for admission because it provides the truth of the student's character and it can even benefit the person applying, in some cases.

One of the main reasons colleges should view a student's social media before admitting them is that it can reveal the applicant's true colors. For example, posts of drinking, sexual topics, offensive opinions, and other inappropriate behaviors are not tolerated (Knorr, 10). This kind of activity on a student's social media account is helpful for universities to determine whether or not the applicant is thoughtful and respectable. Universities try to make sure the applicant fits into their ideal type of student idea: one that can help the community prosper, not affect it negatively. In addition to this, in "Social Media Guidance", by the University of Oxford, "harassment" under Section 2(m) of the Code of Discipline, as defined in the University's Harassment Policy; or a breach of section 2(h) of the Code of Discipline: engaging in 'violent, indecent disorderly, threatening or offensive behaviour or language.'" Most of the time, a student who participates in this kind of behavior isn't the most mature, and in some cases, the right fit for what colleges want. It is clear, therefore, that universities need to pay attention to these specific details in order to weed out the applicants that are truly the best candidate for a spot in their school.

Another important factor that contributes to the reason why colleges must view an applicant's social media platform is that it can benefit the student applying. When students submit their Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter to colleges they have the ability to form it as a portfolio that lists their accomplishments or interests. For instance, in the article "How Colleges Use Kids' Social Media Feeds" by Caroline Knorr it explains "If you've actively pursued a specific passion -- say, music, photography, or even the evolution of the shoe from ancient times to present -- and you've cultivated an active, engaged audience on social media, that's a plus. College admissions will see that you have drive and initiative." In this case, social media can only help the applicant with the task of applying to colleges. Sometimes, however, students may not be able to include everything they want on their application or resumé, so being able to have their social media reviewed by the university allows their personal achievements to be seen. Additionally, in Oxford's guidelines about social media, paragraph one states "Social media can bring enormous benefits and opportunities to an academic community, including by enabling global communication and collaboration and promoting healthy and lively academic debate." Along with students, colleges have the benefit of forming connections with the applicants. Universities need to have the ability to really know the students applying, whether the connections last for 4 years or a lifetime. Due to this, they must ensure that social media profiles are looked at before accepting any applicants.

In spite of the previous evidence, some may still argue that when colleges look at social media to determine an applicant's acceptance it violates the first amendment. In fact, in Oxford's "Social Media Guidance" it says "Freedom of speech and academic freedom are central tenets of university life, including in a social media context..." Yes, it is not right for universities to count a student's social media as an "end all be all" in their application because people should be allowed to post whatever they wish. That is an understandable concern; however, colleges actually have the right to analyze a student's behavior based on their posts, as it doesn't actually go against their freedom of speech. "...nothing in this guidance is intended to compromise these fundamental freedoms. When using social media it can be tempting to speak and act in a way we wouldn't face-to-face. Remember that innocently intended comments posted online may be misconstrued, as the written word can lack the nuances of face-to-face interaction," (Oxford, 4). Therefore, it is clear that it is necessary for colleges to look over an applicant's social media before admitting them, no matter the consequence.

In summary, universities should take into consideration social media when a student is applying. This is to ensure or to reveal an applicant's true character and to allow them to showcase their accomplishments or interest in a different manner. When looking at just the application, it is very hard for colleges to see who that student really is, whether there are flaws or not. With that being said, they must make sure applicants' social media are thoroughly reviewed before a life changing decision is made.