

sps 7·8

vol 3 #3



*If you are likely to be offended by the true-to-life situations
and frank language contained in these stories*

**The literary magazine of the 7th and 8th grades
Somerville, Massachusetts
Summer 2018**

sps 7·8 **vol 3 #3**

**The literary magazine of the 7th and 8th grades
Somerville, Massachusetts**

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Contents

fiction

The Lockdown

Joselyn Torres.....3
A.D. Healey Elementary School

Accepted?

Jasmeen Kaur.....7
A.D. Healey Elementary School

The Other Half

Gianna Amari.....15
A.D. Healey Elementary School

The Convention

Patrick Walsh25
A.D. Healey Elementary School

The Mysterious Gifts

Joseph Amari.....32
A.D. Healey Elementary School

Return to

<http://happeningnoweverywhere.com/>

The Lockdown

Joselyn Torres

I walked into the crime scene with my briefcase in one hand and nothing in the other. I continued to walk until I was right in front of the yellow caution tape and Officer Bender.

“Hello Mr. Woet,” Officer Bender said with a straight face.

“Hello Officer Bender, what is today's case?”

“There was an ill man in the building with a gun and one of the dead is in the janitors' closet.”

“May I?” I said with a stern questioning look on my face.

Officer Bender nodded as he lifted the caution tape. I walked toward the closet with long steady steps. The door was already open. A lifeless corpse was lying on the floor with his back against the wall but his head hanging low. Officer Carronsin walked up behind me.

“It's such a shame he had to die at such a young age,” she said with a doleful expression.

“Yes it is, can you tell the name and age of this young boy?”

“His name is Jerry Hofetcin, 12 years old.”

“Thank you.”

I slowly walked up to the body and crouched to identify the wounds.

“Gunshot to the face,” I whispered to myself.

I grabbed my camera to take some pictures of the body. *Flash.* I looked at the picture and a shiny object caught my eye. I looked away from the camera and looked around the body to see what made that bright reflection. There it was. Next to the boy's right hand was a phone, which I carefully picked up and noticed seven messages from someone named Noah. The phone didn't have a passcode so I swiped to the right and started reading the messages from the beginning.

* * *

Snap. The tip of my pencil had just broken. I looked up from my test and raised my hand. Mr. Bagondy looked up from his book and questions, “Yes, Noah?”

“Uh...My pencil broke, can I get a new one?”

Mr. Bagondy slowly got up. Mr. Bagondy is a short, white, overweight man. He barely had any hair. I almost felt bad for him, because his wife divorced him.

“Here you go,” Mr. Bagondy said, sounding a little depressed.

“Thank you...” I mumbled under my breath. As I started to continue my test, I felt something hit the back of my neck. It was Alexandria. She was trying to get my attention. I turned around to see what she wanted.

“What’s the answer for question five, A?” she whispered.

I turned to see if Mr. Bagondy was looking, and turned back around. As I opened my mouth, I heard a loud sound. “*BEEP BEEP BEEP...BEEP BEEP BEEP.*” I turned around to look at what was going on. Some kids were talking to each other and some kids were looking at the speaker.

“Attention teachers and students, we are having a lockdown. Teachers turn off all your lights, close the blinds, and lock the door. Make sure there are no students in the hallway,” said Mrs. Brown, the principal, on the loudspeaker.

Mr. Bagondy quickly walked to the light switches and turned the lights off while opening the door to see if any students were in the hallways. No one was in the hallway. He quickly locked the door and turned to us. “Everyone please quietly go to the corner of the room by the sink and sit down on the floor,” Mr. Bagondy whispered. Students started to walk toward the corner of the room.

“We’re all gonna die,” said James, joking around.

“Be quiet James, that’s not funny,” Janellis replied, a little scared.

James rolled his eyes. I quietly sat on the floor next to Alexandria. I took out my phone and hid it behind the student’s back in front of me, so the teacher wouldn’t see.

“Hey, what’s going on?” I texted Jerry. Jerry was my best friend, he was two classes away from my class.

“I don’t know, I think there is a suspicious man in the building,” Jerry responded.

“Oh great. Is anything going on in your class?”

“Not really, just Jessica and Clara crying their eyes out right now.”

“Geez, I wonder how long this is going to last?”

“Same, hopefully long enough so that I can skip the rest of math class.”

“Lol.”

20 minutes passed

Boom. I looked up from my phone and saw some of the girls crying. It was a gunshot. I began to shake. I turned over to Mr. Bagondy. He was terrified and covered in sweat. I looked back down at my phone and noticed a message from Jerry.

“Did you hear that too?”

“Yeah, everyone is scared shitless in my class right now. Do you know where the sound came from?” I replied, hoping the sound wasn’t near my class.

“I’m not trying to scare you or anything, but I think it came from your sister’s class.”

“You better not be messing with me, Jerry!”

“I’m not I swear, I’m so scared that my eyes are starting to tear up.”

“I hope my sister’s OK.”

“...Shit! The shooter is outside my classroom door!”

“What is he doing?”

“He is pounding on the door and saying ‘Open the fucking door or you’re dead’.”

“That’s terrible!”

“Noah...If anything happens to me, pls tell my mom that I love her.”

“Jerry don’t say that, you’re going to live I promise. Once we get out of this school me and you are going to go to the amusement park and going on every single ride like we planned.”

“Thanks dude, not trying to make things weird, but you’re the most bestest friend anyone could ever have.”

“Not trying to make things weird either but you too.”

5 minutes passed

Boom...Boom boom boom...Boom. I heard five more gunshots. This time even closer. My eyes started to tear up. I felt like I couldn’t breathe. I heard screaming coming from Jerry’s classroom. A single tear rolled down my cheek. **Boom.** I jumped. My heart was beating so fast, it sounded like a gun was going off in my ear. I quickly texted Jerry to make sure he was okay.

“Jerry? Jerry, are you alive? Hello?”

“Yeah, I’m alive, but I’m out of breath.”

“What happened?”

“Everyone is dead, Noah! I’m the only one that survived in my classroom. I ran away into the hallway while the man was shooting everyone.”

“Omg...Where are you right now?!”

“I’m in the janitors’ closet.”

“Good, stay there and don’t move. Shouldn’t the cops be here?”

“Yeah, I wonder why they’re not here yet?”

“I’m going to call them, I can’t wait any longer.”

10 minutes passed

I just hung up the phone after talking to the police. I was a little relieved, but still terrified. I couldn’t stop thinking about all those kids that died. I felt so bad for their families.

“Did you call them yet?” Jerry asked.

“Yeah, they said they were gonna be here soon.”

“Okay, good.”

Five minutes passed

“Noah?! I’m screwed! The guy is outside of the Janitor’s closet. I think he can hear me,” texted Jerry.

“Fuck! Try to be quiet Jerry. Try to hide behind something too.”

“Alright, I’m going to hide behind the mops and brooms.”

“Don’t be loud.”

“I know, I know.”

“...Noah”

“Yeah?”

“He’s looking right at me...”

“Jerry...”

“Noah...not trying to be weird...again but I love you man...pls don’t forget to tell my mom I love her too.”

“NO! You are not going to die Jerry! Don’t stop texting me!”

Boom.

* * *

My eyes started tearing up. My face hardened as I had put the phone away in a ziplock bag. I continued taking pictures and putting pieces of evidence in ziplock bags. Once I had finished I got up and went to Officer Bender.

“I just finished taking pictures, Officer Bender. Do you think you can tell me where the boy’s parents are?”

“They are in the front of the school talking to some police officers right where the ambulance trucks are,” he replied a little confused.

“Thank you.” I walked to the back of one of the ambulance trucks and found Mr. and Mrs. Blake. I greeted them with a polite hello and introduced myself.

“Hello Mr. and Mrs. Blake, I’m Mr. Woet.”

“Hi Mr. Woet,” Mr. Blake said shaking my hand.

“Since your son is unconscious I think I should tell you now...”

“What is it now?” said Mrs. Blake, concerned.

“Your son’s friend Jerry...He’s dead.”

Tears started forming in Mrs. Blake’s eyes. Mr. Blake pulled her in for a hug.

“My goodness, Noah is going to be devastated. I don’t know how I’m going to tell him.”

“Maybe you could start off by—”

Noah slowly opened his eyes and looked very scared.

“Mom? Dad? Where am I? What’s going on?”

As they started telling Noah what happened, I walked away to give them space.

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Accepted?

Jasmeen Kaur

The dark gloomy hallways made the atmosphere feel depressed. My arms shivered with goosebumps. The bell’s ring lingered in my ears. I heard them coming. They were running in every direction. I felt like a stampede was going over my body. I needed to get out of this Hell. I needed to get out of high school.

“Ryan, hurry up! We’re both going to be late,” my best friend Emma shouted as her hand waved back and forth. *Ugh. Math class.*

“I’m coming! Wait one minute!” I yelled back. I quickly tied my old ripped Nike shoes and rushed over to Emma.

“Finally. Let’s go,” Emma sighed. Math class was my least favorite subject, even though I was good at it. There were too many numbers and symbols that my brain couldn’t handle. I placed my hand on the rusty handle and opened it for me and Emma.

“Ladies first,” I smiled. Emma and I had been best friends since third grade. We got into fights sometimes, but other than that I loved her. She was a hell of a friend to be with. She was the opposite of me: funny, cute, curly-haired, confident and straight. I walked into the same tan classroom I’d been going to for the past three years. I only liked math class for one reason. *Him*.

“Hey Ryan, come sit next to me,” Conner smiled with his pearly white teeth while he patted the open seat. I nodded as I walked towards him. He looked amazing today, like he did every day. *God, I loved him*. I adored every aspect of him. His perfect teeth, calm green eyes, curled fluffy hair and his pink, plump lips. I walked over to the empty seat next to Conner and took out my notebook.

“Hey Conner, what’s up?” I whispered, making sure I didn’t disturb the class.

“Nothing much. Life has been pretty boring these days. You?” He whispered as he chewed on a piece of chocolate that he had snuck into class.

“I’m not sure. Uhm, can we hang out after school? I really need to talk to you.” I looked down at my blank paper. Conner knew something was wrong. He shook my shoulder and looked deep into my eyes.

“Are you okay? What happened? And yeah, we can go.” Conner furrowed his brows. I slowly sighed.

“Yeah, everything is fine. It’s just that—”

“Conner and Ryan! Stop talking and take these notes. It’s going to be on the test.”

Mrs. Collins interrupted. Conner carelessly scoffed and rolled his eyes. *Bad idea, Conner*. Mrs. Collins eyed down Conner and squinted her eyes.

“Unless you want a detention with me after school Conner, I suggest that you stop rolling your eyes and do your work.” Conner and I picked up our pencils and started writing. After fifty minutes the bell finally rang and I could finally leave. Conner told Emma that we were both heading out somewhere and that we would all call at seven tonight.

“Just don’t forget to call us alright? You never remember,” Conner pouted.

“What? I never forget,” Emma asked, confused as always. Conner and I exchanged the “Mhm, sure” looks to each other.

“You guys suck. I hate both of you. Especially since you two are leaving me alone. What the hell am I going to do all by myself?” Emma complained.

“You can try doing your homework for once,” I laughed as I gripped my backpack.

“You see, I could but I don’t want to,” Emma explained.

“How are you in all honors classes again?” Conner asked with an eyebrow raised. “I don’t even know,” Emma said. I checked my watch. It was 2:45 P.M.

“Alright, we’re going to leave now. Bye, Emma!” Conner hugged her.

“Bye Em’. Talk to ya at seven. I hate you,” I said sarcastically and smiled.

“I love you guys, bye,” Emma said in her high pitched voice while she waved. I walked over to Conner’s BMW with him by my side. My heart beat so fast when I was with him.

“Alright, so where are we going?” Conner asked as he struggled to put his seatbelt on. *Where were we going?*

“Uhm...” I thought for a few seconds.

“Let’s go to J.P Licks,” I smiled.

“You’re paying,” he giggled. On our way to the ice cream shop, I looked out the window. I saw the bright lights shimmer on the trees. The snow fell directly down since there was no wind. The holiday season was the best. I absolutely loved watching the smiles that came from clueless children as they sat on a fat white man’s lap and asked for something outrageous as a present for Christmas. It was saddening to watch their parents lie to their children about something as stupid as Santa Claus. I shouldn’t be talking, my parents were Christian.

The second I opened the car door, I felt the snow gently fall on my cheeks. The freezing weather quickly made my hands feel like they were turning numb. Conner and I quickly walked towards the shop; we didn’t want to freeze to death.

“Let’s share a small cookies ‘n cream,” Conner suggested. I nodded in agreement. We waited in the long line of people. There were mostly couples. *I want to be like them.* I took a seat at an empty table and waited for Conner to get the ice cream. I watched him come towards my direction with his knuckles covered with ice cream.

“Here ya go.” Conner took the spoon and placed it on top of the mouthwatering ice cream.

“So, can we talk about the thing now?” Conner asked as he bit his lower lip. He only did that when he was nervous or serious.

“Yeah, just let me eat the ice cream first.” A smile appeared on my face, the ice cream tasted so good.

“So...” I began.

“I want to come out to my parents.” I looked up at Connor’s face.

His eyes widened.

“What?” He looked so shocked. *It’s not that hard to believe.*

“I’m sorry. That was rude but, your parents are very religious...” He trailed off.

“I don’t care. I need to. I can’t keep this secret forever. Yesterday they were talking about how I’m going to marry a beautiful woman. I had to stand there and pretend like I was straight.” I nodded in disappointment.

“Well, your parents are really caring, so I think they’ll be fine with it. My parents were fine when I told them,” Conner smiled. I looked at him with a confused expression plastered across my face.

“Conner sweetie, your parents already know that you’re gay.” We both started laughing really hard. “I hate you,” I said as I kept laughing.

“I love you too, Ryan,” Conner made kissy faces at me.

“No, but seriously, what am I going to do? How the hell do I tell them? What if they don’t accept me? Will they kick me out of the house?” Questions kept running out of my mouth. My heart started to beat fast. My eyes got watery and turned red.

“Ryan, stop. You’re overthinking. Just take a deep breath. Everything is going to be fine.” Conner held my hand. I got goosebumps again and my cheeks turned a light shade of pink.

“You’re right and wrong. First of all, my parents are homophobic. Second of all, things could turn out the way I want it to go, but I highly doubt that.” I rolled my eyes as I took another bite of the ice cream.

“Ryan. I really do think that everything is going to go well. You’re their only child—”

“Their only child who is gay.” Conner just rolled his eyes and continued talking.

“They have to accept you. It’s who you are. They can’t do anything about it besides accept it. If they don’t like you being gay, who gives a fuck what they think? You’re gay, Ryan. Their opinion on that does not matter. If they kick you out, then you can live with me! We’ll be a happy gay family!” Conner cheerfully suggested while putting his hands up in the air.

“It’s not a bad idea...” I laughed at his stupidity. He giggled a little too and asked, “So, when do you plan on telling them?” Conner politely asked.

“Today, at night. They’ve been in a happy mood lately. It’s the best time. The sooner the better,” I calmly smiled. Conner bit the insides of his cheek. He didn’t like my plan.

“Do you want me to come with you? Just in case?” he asked.

“Actually, yes. Come on, let’s go. I want to get this over with,” I said with certainty. *Am I actually going to do it?*

“Oh, wow okay, uhm, let’s go then.” Conner kept pausing. I threw away the empty cup and left out the door.

We walked over to the parking lot, without saying a single word. We were both scared of what was about to happen. I was just happy I had Conner by my side. He’s always been there for me, I loved him so much. He started the engine and drove. I looked down at my lap, which made my circular glasses move down my nose. I took out my iPhone and opened iMessage. I texted my mom that I was coming home soon with Conner. I wanted her to make dinner for Conner, too. She texted me back saying how delighted she was to have him join us. *Just wait till you hear what we’ve got to say.*

“Ryan, are you okay?” Conner asked with his eyes still focused on the road. *I’m about to tell my homophobic parents that I’m gay. Of course I’m not fucking okay.*

“I don’t want to talk about it.” I felt so guilty. I didn’t know why, but I just felt it. Conner had one hand on the steering wheel and one that held onto my hand. *Poor Conner.* He’ll have to hear all the yelling and arguments that my parents and I will have. Conner slowly parked his car in my garage.

“We’re here,” he said. I stepped out of the car and felt a bit nauseous. I knew it was because I was nervous, so I didn’t think much of it. We walked up the glossy wooden stairs and rang the doorbell.

“Mom, it’s me!” I shouted. I heard footsteps become louder, it was my dad. We watched as the brown door opened. It revealed my honey-skinned father with blue eyes.

“Conner!” he cheered. He went in for a hug from Conner. “How are you? Come inside guys” he said as his hands guided the way.

“Haha, I’m good Mr. Edwards. Thanks for letting me stay for dinner,” Conner thanked. “No problem. Come sit down,” my dad said.

“Dinner’s almost ready guys!” my mother shouted from across the kitchen. Conner and I sat on the leather chairs at the dining table and gave each other worried looks. He saw that I was beyond nervous so he smiled and rubbed my thigh.

“You’re going to be fine,” he reassured me. I nodded and twiddled with my fingers. I saw my mom come over with plates in her hand.

“Here you go, guys,” she smiled.

“Thank you,” Conner and I said in unison. We all began eating our casserole.

“So how’s school going guys? All good grades?” my father asked while he neatly ate the food with his fork.

“School is going great. A lot of people are turning nice,” I lied.

“I can’t believe how rude some people can be at times. I was watching the news the other day and they were talking about how a kid nearly died because he got bullied at school. It’s unbelievable!” my mother exclaimed.

“Guess what school was it at? A Catholic school! Don’t parents these days know how to raise their children?” she said in anger. *I don’t know, do you?*

“I saw that too, honey. Thank God the bullies were caught and expelled.” He shook his head side to side. “God is always there to help people. He’s amazing,” my father smiled.

“Mom? Dad?” I looked up at them.

“Yes, sweetheart?” my mother replied.

“I need to talk to you guys about something.”

My mother and father looked at each other in confusion. “What is it? Is everything okay?” My father asked, placing his cutlery down. I looked at Conner, he nodded.

“You’re scaring me, Ryan. What is going on?” My mother looked terrified. *It’s now or never, Ryan.*

“I’m gay.”

The room went silent. I heard my heart pound in my chest, eager to explode. *Thump. Thump.* My father’s eyes widened. His neutral face quickly turned into a furious one.

“You’re what?” he roared. *Fuck. No. No. No. Please, dad.*

“I—”

“Shut up!” He was more than furious; he wanted to kill me. I felt a lump form in my throat. My nose started to burn.

“Please, dad I just—”

“I did not raise you to be like this. You can’t be gay!”

My mother stood up. “Elijah, calm down. It’s just a phase. All teenagers think they’re gay.”

“A phase? A fucking phase? Is being sexually attracted to boys just a phase, Mom?” I shouted. My father’s eyes popped up and stared directly into my eyes.

“Don’t you dare raise your voice on your mother like that,” he pointed at me.

“I’m taking you to the church tomorrow morning. You can’t be gay,” he declared.

You’ve got to be fucking kidding me. “Do you actually think that you can just pray the gay away? Wow. You guys are unbelievable! Just accept the fact that I’m gay!” The veins on my neck popped out, which made them clearly visible.

“We can’t accept something you’re not!” my mom yelled back.

“For the past year, I’ve been waiting for this day. The day that I could finally confess to my parents. Do you know how painful it was to sit in those family dinners and talk about my supposed marriage with another girl? I felt like I was somebody else, like I was trapped. I was pretending to be someone I was not. It broke my heart. I’ve been through so much, just to tell you two words. If you guys loved me, you would accept who I was.” I choked as I spoke.

“Honey, we do love you but—”

“But what, Mom?”

“God doesn’t approve of gay people...” She trailed off. *That’s it.*

“I don’t care about what God thinks about me. I never did! You guys forced me to be Christian! I hate God. I don’t believe in him! I don’t believe in—” I quickly ducked down.

Crash.

My father tried to throw a glass plate at me.

“Mr. Edwards!” Conner was filled with rage.

“Conner, you are not a part of this family! You need to go,” my dad yelled.

“No, I’m not leaving. We both are.”

“W—”

Conner looked at me with uncertainty. He quickly took my hand and ran out the door. We rushed to his car and started to drive.

“Where are we going?” I worried.

“Anywhere but a place where you’re not accepted,” he quickly said.

“Ryan, turn off your phone,” he said in an assertive tone.

“What, why?”

“You wouldn’t want your parents calling you a fag at the place we’re heading to,” he said in all seriousness.

“But, where?” I asked, still concerned.

“You’ll see when we get there,” he smirked. After a few minutes, we arrived at Faneuil Hall.

“Is this the big surprise? Shopping in Boston,” I scoffed.

“Just follow me,” he said. I did what he asked, and couldn’t believe what I saw!

“Oh- oh my god. Conner! Just look at how beautiful it is!” I said while my eyes gazed at the tall Christmas tree. The lights were everywhere. It wrapped around the Christmas tree oh-so-perfectly. I couldn’t keep my eyes off it. The bright golden star on the top filled my heart with happiness. There were so many ornaments. Red, blue, gold, purple and so many more. I couldn’t take my eyes off it for even a second.

“Ryan!”

“Ye—”

Conner grabbed my face with his head tilted and kissed me! His soft lips fell upon mine and I didn’t move. I couldn’t. My heart was beating so fast, *what do I do? Omg.* I eventually pressed my lips against his and felt the tenderness. The smell of his strong cologne lingered in my nose. I heard people singing Christmas carols in the background. His peppermint chapstick tasted so good. I pulled away and felt how hot my cheeks were.

“Your cheeks are red,” he giggled while he looked at his shoes.

“I know,” I whispered in embarrassment.

“Oh my God!” Conner exclaimed. “We forgot to call Emma.” He hit his forehead.

“Kissing you was better than answering a stupid phone call,” I blushed. Conner’s cheeks turned red.

“Shut up,” his elbow playfully hit the side of my body.

“Conner,” I licked my lips.

“Yeah?” He raised an eyebrow.

“Will you be my boyfriend?” I quivered as I bit my lip. It was getting colder.

“Yes! Yes! Yes! Finally!” he cheered. “I have been waiting for you to ask me that question for months!” he cried out. *He liked me for months?*

“Well, now you don’t have to,” I laughed.

Epilogue

The first few pages of this new chapter in my life are going pretty well. My parents still look at me like I am a deranged monster whenever I kiss Conner, but I don’t care. I don’t know what I was so worried about before. A lot of people at school accept who I am when I come out to them. But, others give me death threats. People tell me to kill myself, just because of the gender I love. The person I love, Conner. My mom still cries time to time, she wishes that I would somehow turn straight. But, they don’t realize that even though I’m gay, I’m still their child. And, although they don’t accept me, they’ll still have my back. I have thoughts about killing myself multiple times. But, there is no point of ending it all when I know there are still people that are having the same struggles as me. People that are gay. People that are happy with who they are. People like me.

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The Other Half

Gianna Amari

Prologue

Asher made his way into the patient room of Millstone Hospital where his father was. His dad struggled to tilt his head to the side as he heard footsteps approach his bed. “Hi dad, how are you feel-

ing?” Asher asked as he walked over to the end of the bed and sat down beneath his dad’s legs.

“Better,” Asher’s dad mumbled without moving his mouth. Asher lifted his head up to see his dad’s eyes which were cold and dark. Asher could tell his dad was lying about how he was feeling. Asher stayed in silence for a few minutes until he stood up and walked over to his dad. He noticed a small white box next to his father’s head on the pillow he rested his head on. Asher reached out his hand to grab the box. He looked at the box as it sat in his hand. Asher slowly took the cover off the box to find a golden necklace with half of a puzzle piece. A little note was at the bottom of the necklace. He read the words, “Always connected.” Asher smiled and leaned over to give his dad a kiss on his head.

Chapter 1 Knocks in the Dark

His eyes were glued to the glass pane as he watched the cold Seattle rain blow in every direction. The wind was blowing at gusts of fifty MPH and the temperature was dropping fast. Asher Winston could see the formation of his misty breath stick to the glass pane. He huffed and puffed thinking it was funny that his breath could stick. Of course that was his twelve year old mind doing all the work. Besides that, he was a gifted youngster. He was one of the best and brightest at Shady Oak evidenced by the gold statue on his bed stand: A 1983 gold edition science fair trophy which was awarded to him for having the best science fair project at the local Millstone festivals just last year in the hot smothering days of August.

He focused back on the ongoing rainstorm, his blue eyes sparkling and alive as drops of rain trickled down the pane. Asher was a big fan of rainstorms as they offered him a chance to stay inside and build stuff with whatever he could cobble together. He liked to cozy up on cold rainy days, because it reminded him of the old days when he and his father played cards in the kitchen when it rained.

Millstone, which was a small town only a few miles outside of Seattle, was in the midst of a major rainstorm and a cold front was moving in fast according to the little radio that was in the corner of his dorm. The radio crackled and sizzled as a booming male voice echoed throughout the barren room. His room was usually full of

other kids but this time it was empty and for once, he could hear himself think. All of his roommates had left for the next door party, unknown to the warden and other orphanage workers. The male voice spoke and Asher listened as he was intrigued by the weather report.

“Hello folks, what a cold day in Millstone!” The weatherman's voice started to sound even more deep and gravelly, almost sinister. *“This is Buck Hemingway live at the local HQ in downtown Millstone and boy do we got a doozy on our hands!”* Buck chuckled.

“This storm is gonna stick folks. We're possibly looking at flooding and torrential downpours heading deep into tomorrow night. The wind isn't dying down anytime soon either, so bundle up and stay inside folks!” Buck let out a loud cackle, sounding like a deranged witch, but he was only a man.

“Good night folks.” The radio wound down and Buck was no more, much to the pleasure of Asher, who might have loved the daily weather reports, but not Buck Hemingway, who gave him the shivers with his loud cackles and bellowing voice. According to the town gossip, Buck used to prey on little kids but it had not been proved yet.

Asher turned his attention away from the window, finding himself kind of exhausted. He figured he could nap for thirty minutes until the clock struck twelve, when it was finally his birthday. Asher left the window, his sights set on his bed. He kicked up his feet, plopped his bum and threw himself onto his bed. The bed was hard, the sheets were brittle and robust, but it was a good night to sleep in. After all it beat sleeping on the streets.

Asher was twelve, going on thirteen, but it felt like just yesterday when he was found on the streets and forced to live in a hell hole: Shady Oak Orphanage. He was six back then, and it was right after he escaped the clutches of his mean aunt Jamie. He closed his eyes but he was immediately interrupted by a voice. It was the Nanny.

He hoisted himself up much to his dismay.

“All by yourself, again? What a little surprise,” the Nanny chuckled.

“What do you want, Ms. Grump?” Asher let out a sigh.

“Where are the other kids?”

“I don't know.”

Ms. Grump approached his bed stand picking up a picture of his father.

“You miss him, huh?” she laughed. “You sad that you don't have a daddy to hold? A daddy to tuck you in? A daddy to wish you Happy Birthday.” Her cackle sounded worse than Buck Hemingway's.

He laughed to himself thinking that Ms. Grump and Buck made a good couple, but a gross one at that.

“What are you laughing at you little skunk bag?”

“Nothing.”

“You're a piece of shit. Have a good birthday, Asher.” Ms. Grump chuckled on her way out of the room.

When the door slammed shut, Asher stuck up the finger and laughed. He lay back down and thought about what Ms. Grump had said to him about his father. He turned over on his side to his bedstand to look at the picture of him and his dad which was in a metal frame. All of the memories appeared in Asher's head. He grabbed the picture frame and held it tight to his chest. “Why did you have to die?” He felt empty that his father was gone and wanted to cry in his pillow. Asher rubbed his eyes to prevent tears from flowing down his rosy cheeks. The room was ice cold, causing his cheeks to swell up like roses. As he looked at the picture more carefully, he spotted a necklace both he and his father were wearing. In the picture, Asher wore half of a puzzle piece and his dad wore the other half. At that moment, Asher realized he still had the necklace around his neck. He looked down to see half of the puzzle piece rested on his chest. He touched the surface of his gold necklace which was smooth. Asher never took his necklace off which made him forget sometimes that he was actually wearing one. He continued to look at his necklace as he thought about the day his father gave it to him.

Asher looked back at the clock to see that there were only seven minutes left until it was Wednesday: his birthday. He decided to get his boxed cake out of the little fridge placed in the room near a cabinet of all snacks and goods. Asher had snuck out of the orphanage a few days ago, walked down the street and bought a boxed cake in a little shop for only five dollars. Asher swung both his legs off the bed and pushed himself off the mattress to stand up. He yawned and

turned his head to his bed wanting to go to sleep, but he first had to celebrate his birthday by himself, like he did every year since he came to the orphanage.

Asher slowly walked over to the fridge and pulled the black handle to release the cold air trapped inside. He reached for the boxed cake and bit his bright red chapped lips as he quickly took the cover off the box. The one-layered cake was covered in red thick icing and decorated with white and red sprinkles. The words **Happy Birthday Asher** were printed on top of the cake. Red velvet was the cake flavor: Asher's favorite. Asher placed the cake on a small wooden table in the room and began the search for the matches to light the one candle on the red velvet cake.

The time was now 11:56. A small yellow flame now flickered and danced above the red striped candle. The yellow flame grew and caused the wax of the candle to melt, dripping on top of the cake. Before the hot flame went out, Asher started to hum the tune of the song Happy Birthday and then mouthed the last words, "Happy Birthday to me." As he tried to blow out the candle, the air in the room stiffened and the candle didn't go out. He felt shivers run up his back and turned from the candle, still lit, to the window. Outside, the wind gusted and roared causing the branches and leaves to rustle. The lights started to flicker and Asher ran to the switch to flip the switch off and then on. Thankfully the flickering stopped, but all of a sudden Asher heard a knock against the window.

"Who's there?" Asher gasped as he peered into the creeping darkness that swallowed the room whole.

Chapter 2 Mr. Winston

The rain poured down hard as puddles riddled the alleyway. The brick buildings that formed the deserted dark alley were tall and narrow, making the alleyway a suffocating endeavor for any lost soul looking for a way out of Skinner's alleyway. In the distance, a hobo slept against a trash can. His back was up against it and his head bobbed back and forth. The man had had too much to drink.

A raccoon had climbed into the trashcan to fetch its food hoping to bring it back to other hungry raccoons hidden somewhere in the alley, but before the raccoon scurried back to its family, it began to

sniff, finding a liking to the hobo's rotten filth stench. The furious beast began to climb on top of the sleeping man like a monkey in the deepest darkest bellows of a jungle. As the raccoon burrowed into the hobo's shirt, it began to claw at the man's chest scratching and gnawing until the man let out a blood-curdling scream.

"Aahaha," the hobo burst to his feet, but quickly stumbled as his leg was broken. The scream had awoken a man not that far from the hobo in the alley. This other man had been lying unconscious, face first on the pavement, but was now awake and alert.

"What the hell," said the other man as he jumped to his feet, looking around before he spotted the hobo. The hobo was still lying against the trash can whimpering.

Steve Winston approached the hobo, "Hey buddy. You okay?"

But there was no response.

"Hey buddy?" Steve asked again. There was still no response, only the cries of the hobo. Steve reached out to touch the man who was drunk, rotten and in pain. As he reached out to the hobo, the raccoon darted off into the shadows, which were engulfing the alleyway as nightfall approached.

The hobo could feel the wind on his hand and he jumped back hitting the back of his head against the brick wall. To the hobo, he couldn't see or really feel Steve. It was just the whistling of the wind. The hobo looked around to see who had just touched his shoulder.

"Stupid raccoon. Stupid wind," the hobo muttered.

"Hey can you hear me?" Steve asked. He could feel his stomach drop. The hobo stared into the distance and began to whimper again at the bloody wound on his chest from the raccoon.

"Shit," Steve mumbled to himself. "I'm still a freaking ghost and this guy can't even hear me." He stepped back, darting for the alleyway exit, but slowed down once he spotted a mirror.

The small mirror had a little crack. He picked up the mirror and put it up to his face where he could see large gashes and burns that covered all of his face. "I still look like shit," Steve sighed. He looked down at himself and noticed he was wearing a black tuxedo with black dress shoes. His hands had been covered with burns and he had long curly nails that looked like a witch's tongue. Steve continued to walk through the alley and came upon a white plastic bottle of acid. He picked the bottle up and it reminded him of when he got acid thrown all over his body. Steve shivered at the thought of

what happened to him and he dropped the bottle. The liquid spilled out of the bottle onto the pavement and Steve quickly stepped away.

Steve used to work at the Millstone police station. He was a police officer. One day he was called on his walkie-talkie to report to Toph's Pond in the small town of Millstone. Steve pulled up onto the rocky road and looked out his window to see a dead body laid on the gravel rocks near the pond. He got out of his car and examined the body. The woman who was dead had purple markings around her neck. As Steve got up and turned around to walk back to his car, a woman pointed a gun at him. Steve pulled out his gun and pointed it at the woman. She pulled the trigger and no bullet came out. He ran to her and tackled the woman as she tried to fight back. She was later found guilty for the murder of the woman that had died near the pond. Her angry brother Tyler Sawyer found out the news and planned an attack on Steve. A couple of days later Steve had picked up some food for himself and his son and as he put the bag of food into his car he was tapped on the shoulder. "You put my sister in jail, asshole!" Tyler yelled.

"I'm sorry, what?" Steve asked with a confused look on his face.

"You deserve this," Tyler took out a bottle of acid from his bag that he had been carrying on his back. He turned the cap of the bottle.

"What are you doing?" Steve stepped back and stumbled. He was too late. Tyler poured the bottle over Steve and acid flew out. He screamed in agony as the liquid burned his face and the rest of his body. The cops were called and Tyler was arrested.

"I gotta get to Asher...I'm here for a reason...It's his birthday...It's my last chance to show him that I care. And then maybe this stupid curse can be reversed and I can be with him again. Get him out of that shitty orphanage."

The bottle of acid didn't just bring back memories of his death, but it also reminded him why he left the Realm. He needed to find Asher.

It didn't take long for Steve to get on his way, in pursuit of Asher and the orphanage. As Steve walked along the sidewalk, he imagined what his son would say or how he would react once he saw his father. Steve smiled at the thought of seeing his son. Suddenly Steve grabbed the back of his head as it started to throb in pain. The im-

age of the Queen from the Phantom Realm suddenly appeared in his head. “How can I help you, Queen Adalynn?”

“You are not supposed to be among the living and I found out you are. What did I tell you about escaping the Realm? How did I not find out you escape every year on your son’s birthday. Come back to the Realm this instant or I shall send my troops.”

“Screw you,” Steve shouted and the pain in the back of his head disappeared along with the image of Queen Adalynn. He saw a shadow on the wall of a building. He knew it wasn’t his and he had a feeling it was one of the troops from the Phantom Realm coming his way. He knew he had to hurry. Steve began to run as the rain fell harder onto the ground. People around him hurried under roofs, ran to their cars and took out their umbrellas, but Steve just let the drops of rain splatter on his head. The large gusts of wind blew past his burnt face which made it hard for him to breathe. Steve rounded the corner of Wells Street and ran a few more feet until he reached a big brown three-floored building with tiny windows. Steve decided to check each window of the building by climbing. He first took his black dress shoes off. His feet had long claws. Steve began to bury his nails into the wall and brought his legs and feet up as he climbed.

He was on the second floor when he peeked through a window and saw on a brown wooden door a sign on which was printed the words, **Asher, Erik, Billy, and Archie**. “Is this it?” Steve asked himself. As he continued to peek into the window he saw a figure move across the room. He spotted the figure wearing a gold necklace that had half of a golden puzzle. Steve looked down to see he was also wearing a gold necklace around his neck with half of a golden puzzle. “That’s my son,” Steve beamed with joy. He paid close attention to what his son Asher was doing. He saw Asher try to blow out the candle on the cake and then the lights flicker. “It’s now or never.” Steve clenched his hand and knocked against the glass window.

“Who’s there?” Asher asked.

Chapter 3 The Medallion

Steve saw Asher come towards the window so he went to the side where he would not be seen. Asher looked out the window to only see the rain pour, branches rustled and leaves stuck to the pane.

“Whadya doin’?” she slurred. “Try’n’ ta feed your dad?” Ms. Grump struggled to speak as she tried to keep her balance as she strolled into the room. A strong scent of drink filled the room and Asher put both his hands over his nose and mouth. “Ya lied ta me, Asher, and you should’ve told me.” Ms. Grump swayed her arms as she spoke. She strived to keep her eyes open as she stared into Asher’s frightened eyes.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about Ms. Grump.”

“Ya know damm well whad I’m talkin’ about.” Before Asher could speak, Ms. Grump walked right up to him and lifted her arm in the air, swung it back and struck Asher across the face. A loud clap filled the room and then the room went silent, leaving Asher in tears. The side of his face was left with a red mark and stung. Asher touched his cheek softly, but he took his hand away from his face quickly. He ran to his bed and buried his face into his sheets to cry. Ms. Grump was too drunk to even realize what she had done. All of a sudden the window opened and a cold breeze came into the room which made him shiver as he continued to sob, and Ms. Grump shivered as she still struggled to keep her balance.

Asher lifted his head up from the sheets to see the shadow of a man standing in his now dark room. Asher quickly stood up and hurried over to the corner of his room farthest from the man. The man saw him, but had not done anything. Instead he made his way to the drunk woman who now sat on one of Asher’s roommates’ bed. The man stopped in front of Ms. Grump, lifted his hand and slashed her face with his sharp claws. Asher could see shadows but could not tell what was going on. The only sound Asher had heard was the screeching and weeping of Ms. Grump. Ms. Grump’s beautiful face now cut open with dark red blood, oozing from her face down to her body then to the white carpet. She plopped on the bed as the blood still continued to drip. She rolled onto the floor still bleeding out. The man wiped the blood from his claws onto his black suit. The man in the darkness emerged from the shadows leaving Asher to see his monstrous face. He took his gold necklace off and held it up for Asher to see. Asher recognized that necklace and looked at his own and realized they were the exact same. He took off his necklace and walked over to the man in a black suit. “Dad?” asked Asher as he wiped the tears from his eyes. Asher ran over to Steve, wrapped his arms around his dad’s back and hugged

him tight for the first time in nine years. Asher's hug was warm as it made Steve squeeze him back. Both of them did not want the moment to end.

"It's good to see you, son," Steve smiled as he patted his son's head. Asher and Steve let go of each other after two minutes and they were now face to face. Both of them held the necklace tight in their hands. They held up the medallions of the golden necklaces each of which was the half of a golden puzzle. Steve and Asher slowly brought the two medallions together. Asher held one half of a puzzle piece and Steve held the other half. As soon as the two medallions connected, Steve fell to the ground and screamed as the pain rushed through his body. His burnt face began to slowly turn into the face he had before he got acid thrown at him. His long curly fingernails and toenails started to disappear. Steve was becoming the man he once was.

The bedroom door slammed open and five troops from the Realm barged into the room. They gathered around Steve as he turned back into a human. "What's going on?" Asher yelled. All the troops took out a gun and raised it up in the air to shoot. "No, don't do this!" Asher cried as he ran to his father. One of the troops pushed him back. At the same time all five guns went off and the bullets flew through Steve's chest sending blood everywhere. Steve fell to the ground. The troops backed away as Asher ran to his dad and bent down on his knees to hold his father's hand. "Say something...Please! Please!" There was no response from Steve and Asher knew it was over. "I love you Dad," Asher dropped his head onto his dad's wounded, bloody chest. He held his dad's hand for a few minutes and cried. "Get out of my room you assholes!" Asher turned around and clenched his fists up in the air. The troops walked out not to be seen again. They had done their job, which was to kill Steve, ordered by Queen Adalynn. Asher reached over his father's dead body and took the medallion he held in his other hand. "Goodbye Dad," Asher continued to cry and got up to leave the two dead bodies lying in the room. He closed the door behind him and made his way out of Shady Oak Orphanage and promised himself he would never step foot into that hellhole again.

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The Convention

Patrick Walsh

October 8, 2017

Ryan Geller tapped his fingers against the oak desk. A sigh of boredom freed from his mouth, and his stomach bellowed. After eighteen hours of starving himself, Ryan decided to surrender. He stepped up from his mesh chair, releasing yet another sigh. The sigh was short-lived, as the bottom of his foot came in contact with the pointy edge of the queen's cross. The black chess piece made a tiny indent into the heel of Ryan's right foot. Although the mark was small, the pain was unbearable. Ryan let out a loud screech, wincing as a wave of pain came over his foot. Enraged, he screamed, "Son of a bitch!" He grabbed onto the wall behind him, reaching for his injured foot with his one free hand. Although he was exasperated, he collected himself and began taking deep breaths. *In through your nose, out through your mouth.* As the pain began to vanish, Ryan let go of his foot and walked toward the kitchen.

When he reached the doorway of his large craftsman kitchen, he began to contemplate what he would serve himself for dinner. Peeking over the granite counter, Ryan spotted a ketchup stain on the wood floor. Hanging from the edge of the counter was a large butcher knife. The European sauce dripped from the tip of the knife down to the light oak wood, leaving a noticeable mark.

Ryan quivered as a chill ran down his spine. Suddenly, a rush of both fear and inspiration came over him. Ryan sprinted over to his laptop, nearly tripping over his folding chess table in the process. He relaxed himself on his chair once again and opened his computer. "Hurry up," Ryan hollered at his computer. Inspiration had struck, and he wasn't going to let it slip away. The second he entered his password, the tab that he had been on for two months opened once again. Today was different, however. Today, the tab would no longer be vacant.

As he wrote, Ryan repeated the words on the screen under his breath. "The knife jabbed through his chest, coming into contact with his heart. Alice laughed as her husband winced in pain, before collapsing to the ground. She ripped the knife out of his chest and draped it on the counter, letting William's blood drip onto the white

carpet.” Ryan let out a sigh of relief, as he had finally reached the story’s climax. As his heart rate began to decrease, Ryan let out another wheeze as he realized he could live in peace once again.

When Ryan started lowering his computer’s screen, he heard something. He remained quiet, hoping the sound would appear once again so he could identify it. The noise was familiar to Ryan, but it was a sound he rarely heard. Suddenly, the small beep appeared again. Ryan, however, soon found the source. The low-toned buzz was coming from his computer. When he pushed the screen upwards, he saw that he had received numerous emails. He slowly raised his right eyebrow and tilted his head to the right. *I don’t get many emails.* He moved his finger all around the mousepad until the white figure moved across the screen. He pressed his right index finger into the left side of his touchpad and the email opened. Ryan’s eyes moved across the screen as he read what the message said.

“Dear Mr. Geller,

The National Writers Committee would be honored to make you the Guest of Honor at the annual Winter Convention in New York City. If you accept this invitation, a limousine will arrive to pick you up at your home in Boston. Please respond to this message as soon as possible. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mr. Jake Smith, NWC President.”

A smile appeared on Ryan’s face as he finished reading the message. He jumped out of the comfortable chair and started celebrating. He ran all around his empty house, skipping and throwing his hands up in the air as he moved. After about five minutes of celebration, Ryan ran back downstairs and once again seated himself in his chair. He moved his finger on the touchpad once again, stopping when the mouse hovered over the “Reply” button. He quickly began to type a message.

“Dear Mr. Smith and the National Writers Committee,

I would be honored to attend your annual celebration this year in New York. Thank you for the invitation and for sending a limousine out here to pick me up. It is truly an honor to even

be considered a “Guest of Honor.” It will be the perfect opportunity to announce the publication of my final novel. Once again, thank you very much.

Sincerely,
Mr. Ryan Geller.”

Ryan quickly sent the RSVP to Jake, letting him know of his decision. As he closed the “Mail” tab on his laptop, Ryan’s eyes glanced over to the clock at the bottom-right corner of his laptop. The tiny hand laid on the twelve, while the large hand stood between the ten and the fifteen. Realizing that he’d been awake for nearly two days, Ryan decided to give up. He trotted upstairs and quickly jumped into his big, empty king-sized bed. As his eyes closed, he felt himself fall. For the first time in months, he was able to sleep.

December 19, 2017

Little white specks fell from the sky as Ryan strode out of the long, black vehicle. His chauffeur slammed the door behind him and hustled back to the driver’s seat. “Thank you Robert. Have a lovely day!” Ryan hollered to the other side of the car. A distraught Robert grunted in return. Twisting the key in the ignition, the entire limousine came to life. Within seconds, both the driver and the automobile were gone.

Ryan pushed through the glass door of the New York Plaza Hotel. He wiped his feet on the polyester carpet, hoping nobody had noticed him dirtying the tapestry. Ryan was instantly overjoyed. The smell of garlic and onion radiated from the kitchen, while the black and white curtains draped around the windows complemented the lobby perfectly. Approaching the front desk, Ryan spoke to Jake, who had been sitting next to the desk.

“Hello Ryan! I’m so glad you could join us,” Jake uttered.

“I am too. I’m so honored to be attending this year,” Ryan replied.

“I apologize for not inviting you in prior years. It just wasn’t your time.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Oh, nothing. Forget about it.”

“Okay.”

“Just remember to be down in the ballroom by 7:30 tomorrow night. That’s when the feeding begins.”

“The feeding?”

“Yes, the feeding.”

“In Boston, we call that supper.”

“Well, New York City is a unique place. And it’s loud at night.”

“Thanks for the interesting information. I’ll catch you tomorrow.” Although expecting a response from him, Ryan watched as Jake twirled in the opposite direction. He strode his large feet, dressed in dark leather shoes, in the direction of the elevator, as if he were late for something. Ryan lifted his eyebrow in confusion. *Hmmm, that was weird.* Ryan continued walking forward until he reached the front desk. The woman at the front desk lifted her head from her hand and sighed. Her long gray hair waved in her face and over her mole. The brown blemish sparked an idea in Ryan’s mind. “Hello, ma’am. I would love to chat but I must go up to my room and use the bathroom. Can I have my room key please?” Ryan asked the desk lady.

She grunted before responding, “Of course, sir.” The woman’s voice sounded very scratchy, as if she had just smoked her second pack of the day.

“Thank you miss. My name is Ryan Geller, here for the winter NWC convention tomorrow night.”

She giggled. “Good luck with that.” She handed him the key to his room. He shot up the stairs quickly. Going up each of the flights, he saw several of the world’s famous writers. Stephen King and James Patterson resided on the third floor. Mike Lupica stayed on the fifth floor, while S.E. Hinton had been entering her eighth floor suite. He continued to run up the stairs, stopping at the eleventh flight. The door whipped open as Ryan slid the plastic card into the lock. He threw his bag on the large, queen-sized bed and pushed the zipper. His laptop flopped out of the filled bag, landing upside down. As he opened the laptop, he came to a shocking revelation. He had not charged his computer. A tear rolled down his face as he realized that he wouldn’t be finishing his story that night. He kicked his bag off of the bed and jumped in face first. The tears poured, and eventually, he began to doze off. Loud snores appeared from his mouth as he finally drifted off.

December 20, 2017 - 7:30 PM

“Okay,” Jake calmly stated. “Now that everyone is here, we may begin the feeding.”

“Why do you call it that?” Stephen King asked.

“Oh, you’ll see, Stephen,” Jake smirked at Stephen, making the world-renowned author uncomfortable. “Okay. Everyone sit down and we will begin.”

Ryan moved around the room, looking around to see if there was an available chair. His eyes wandered until he spotted a beautiful, old-fashioned chair. The arms of this chair were about half the size of the arms of the other chairs, but Ryan didn’t put much thought into his decision. He sat down on the chair and got comfortable. As he glanced up, he noticed that Jake had a small remote in his hand. “Wait, what’s that thi—” Ryan was interrupted by the loud sound of a lock clicking shut. His jaw dropped as he turned his head to see his colleagues and inspirations locked to their chairs. Hinton and Patterson looked around, wondering what was happening. King sat in silence, observing what was going on. Lupica, on the other hand, was much more impatient than the other authors. “What the fuck do you think you’re doing, Smith? You’ve got a lot of nerve doing this,” Mike screamed, hoping that Jake would either unlock him or apologize.

Jake looked down at his shoes and laughed. Looking up, he yelled, “You haven’t seen anything yet, bitch!” Jake put his finger down on the large, red button on his remote. Suddenly, a huge metal rod came barreling down from the ceiling. Mike turned his head up, screaming at what he saw coming down on him. The rod cracked through his skull, passing through his entire body. In a matter of seconds, Mike Lupica had been split in half.

The authors still alive in the room became frantic. They thrust their arms back and forth to try and escape the restraints. However, their attempts didn’t help them. Tears rolled down Susan Eloise’s face as she looked at Mike’s bloody corpse. Sobs came from her mouth, while Jake began to laugh. Although he hadn’t been locked to the chair, Ryan didn’t move a muscle. His heart raced as he saw Mike’s dead body and heard Jake’s maniacal laughter and Susan’s cries. During all of this, Stephen just looked across the large dining table, avoiding making eye contact with Susan. Suddenly, Jake’s laughter stopped, and he soon went into a fiery rage.

“Shut up you rat! Or you’ll be next,” Jake warned.

“No! P-p-please, I’m s-s-sorry,” Susan begged between sobs.

“I wish I could say I’m sorry for what I’m about to do. Oh well!” As Jake moved his finger to press the button, James, who had been watching this whole ordeal go on, stepped up.

“Hey! Listen you little weasel! You better not press that damn butt—” James began to yell, but was interrupted by a large metal bar, similar to the one that killed Mike, going through his head. Screaming in pain, James and Susan felt every ounce of pain as the cold metal ripped through their skin and muscle. Across the table, Jake’s finger was pressed down on the same red button that had killed Lupica.

Stephen’s blood began to boil. Although the writer killed numerous characters in very gruesome ways, he never imagined it happening in reality. A single tear ran down his face. Noticing his mentor crying, Ryan had decided he had seen enough. He looked around the room for anything that he could use as a weapon. Moving his head back and forth, he had noticed there was a vase about fifteen feet away from him. After mentally preparing himself for what was to come, Ryan began to speak. “Hey bitch! This party sucks. You should really get some entertainment next year,” Ryan exclaimed.

Jake quickly responded, saying, “You wanna talk like that to me?”

“Yes I do. I dare you to try and kill me.”

Jake smirked and turned to Stephen. “Well, Stephen. It looks like you’re gonna get to see something entertaining.” Moving his finger, he turned back to Ryan. Jake pressed the button as hard as he could, waiting to see the Guest of Honor die. Hearing the click of something unlocking, Ryan quickly jumped out of the chair. Seconds later, another large metal bar fell from the ceiling, smashing through the chair. A face of shock appeared on Jake’s face. “How did you escape the restraints?” Jake furiously yelled. Without responding, Ryan ran over to the lamp. Jake shifted his eyes back and forth, from Ryan to Stephen, then down to the remote. Realizing what Ryan was planning, Jake pressed his finger over the button. He smiled a big smile, then began yelling at Ryan, “Say goodbye to your mentor!”

“Not so fast,” Ryan uttered to himself. With the vase in his right hand, he yelled, “Look out Stephen!” He pushed his hand behind his head, pushing it forward with all of the strength he had. The vase flew through the air for seconds. Jake hesitated when he noticed the flying decoration, but had made up his mind. He placed his finger over the button, but didn’t have enough time. The vase knocked the remote out of his hand and onto the floor. Bits and pieces of metal flew across the table and onto the floor next to the button, rendered useless by the destruction of the remote.

Ryan sprinted out of the dining hall as fast as he could. As he ran, he smelled the familiar scent of onion and garlic coming from the kitchen. He continued to move his legs, ultimately finding himself in the kitchen. Now walking around the chef’s station, he had realized that no one was there. He walked in front of the oven, grabbing a metal frying pan from the cabinet. The sounds of large feet squeaking on the floor startled Ryan, so he ducked down behind the oven.

Ryan looked at the clock on the oven. It read 8:59. *Only an hour and a half. Three, maybe four brilliant people killed, in just an hour and a half.* Ryan kept his eyes on the clock. The green light was bright in the dark, empty room. He continued staring at the clock, pondering his next move, until he heard more squeaks, coming from his right side. He looked over the right side of the oven, seeing nothing. He sighed. *Thank God.* Turning back around, he saw a tall, masked figure standing, looking down at him. He had known this person all too well. The blood splattered on his suit made it obvious. It was Jake.

Ryan bashed Jake’s knee with the pan and jumped up, nearly head butting him in the jaw. Jake, however, didn’t flinch at all. He didn’t wince in pain, either. He sprinted to the opposite side of the oven. “So are you gonna be a pussy now?” Ryan yelled. “Come over here and fight m-m-me.” As Ryan spoke, he felt something poking his neck. Turning his head to see what had been obnoxiously touching him, he saw what had been standing behind him: another masked man.

“If you wanna fight so bad, then let’s fight,” the man whispered to Ryan. The man shoved the knife through Ryan’s chest, coming into contact with his heart. The man removed his hand from the handle of the knife and ripped his mask off, revealing his true identity.

“J-J-Jake? W-W-Who’s that t-t-then,” Ryan asked as he died.

“Isn’t it obvious, Ryan?” Jake asked. He walked over to the unknown man, ripping his mask off. A piece of Stephen’s cold skin came off with the mask. His cold, lifeless corpse was hanging on a wire over the oven.

“N-N-No St-St-St-Stephen.”

“Goodbye, Ryan.”

Ryan was only able to mutter two more words, “F-F-Fuck y-y-y-you.” Jake ripped the knife out of Ryan’s chest and placed it on the counter. His blood dripped from the tip of the knife down to the cold floor of the New York Plaza Hotel kitchen. Jake laughed his maniacal laugh one last time before walking out of the kitchen. Ryan took his final breath as the sound of his enemy’s laughter ran through his ears.

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The Mysterious Gifts

Joseph Amari

“You’re on cleaning duty, Swan!” the teacher demanded. As I got up out of the wooden chair, a crack started to appear on the chair. I quickly walked to the front door, hoping not to be noticed by the teacher. As I walked through the doorway, I quickly turned, to then come upon my teacher’s vast cold dark eyes staring into me. I shut the door behind me and headed for the stairs. As I sprinted up the stairs, I could feel the fatigue set upon me. As I reached to the top of the eighth deck, I could hear orphans mourning as they were being cursed at repeatedly. As I opened the large wooden doors, I could feel the ocean breeze flow through my body and the water hit my face as one of the orphans forcefully slammed her mop into the soap bucket. As I walked through the crowd of orphans, a tall man stepped in front of me.

“Take this and get to work immediately!” the worker shouted. He shoved the dust mop into my chest, causing my feet to lose balance, and suddenly slipping on the imaginary ground of air. I hit the ground head first, causing me to become dizzy. The worker slowly hovered over me and spit into my face. As the worker walked away,

I got up slowly and wiped the spit off my face. I looked down at my necklace and found spit smeared all over it. As I used my red sleeve to wipe off the spit, a small little picture slipped out from my locket that was attached to the necklace wrapped around my neck. The picture swayed back and forth as it hit the wet floorboards. I picked it up and started to examine it. A smile appeared on my face as I thoroughly looked at the faces that appeared on the picture. It was a man and a woman. It was my mom and dad.

“Rest in peace, Mommy and Daddy,” I whispered to myself. As I started mopping the wet floors, I heard a gunshot. The deck became surprisingly silent and my body froze. I couldn’t seem to move my limbs.

“Time for lunch, runts!” the worker declared. We were all sent to the cafeteria which was on the lowest deck of the entire ship. As I entered the cafeteria, I could see armed men in black and brown suits holding their guns at a certain angle. They had black masks over their faces and grenades attached to their belts. When I walked up to the counter where the food was being served, I noticed that the lunch lady was staring at me. She had a crooked nose and warts from her chin to her forehead. Her hair was falling out of her head and snots were dripping down from her nose.

“Next!” the lunch lady ordered. I grabbed a divided tray and placed it in front of my chest as I waited in line for my food. The lunch lady forcefully placed a bluish, yellowish piece of bread onto my tray and poured mashed potatoes into the circular section of my tray. As I walked away, I could hear chittering and scratching. I slowly looked down at my tray and wept. There were small black beetles playing in my mashed potatoes. I almost hurled, but I kept it in. I noticed my friend and waved to him.

“Swan, come sit with me!” he shouted. I dashed over to his table, slid down the bench and placed my body next to his.

“Clitus, I have missed you so much,” I wept.

“What’s wrong?” Clitus asked.

“I don’t want to be here anymore. I have been here since I was three years old and I can’t stay here any longer!” I replied.

As Clitus was about to speak, there was a loud bang. Clitus and I quickly turned our bodies around and saw Merlot standing next to the pile of trays. The trays were scattered all over the ground and the food was everywhere. Then I saw at the corner of my eye that

Merlot quickly stood up and ran. The guards stood in front of the door and stopped him from passing through.

“Merlot is going t-t-to the ch-cham-chamber,” Clitus stuttered. The guards took Merlot by his legs and dragged him slowly across the floor. His torn clothes sapped up the dirty food on the floor and his long pants burned as it rubbed up against the floor.

“Stop. This isn’t fair!” Merlot screamed. I was frightened. My stomach started to get tingly and my hands became clammy. The food I had consumed wanted to come right back up. The twelve years that I had been here, I had never experienced this in person.

“What is the chamber?” I asked.

“It’s buried way below from where we are sitting. It’s never to be found by us. The only person who controls the chamber is the Warden,” Clitus responded. I gulped loudly. “When you are sent to the chamber, the Warden tortures you. He burns you. He poisons you. He makes you suffer!” Clitus gradually said. My eyes widened and my mouth expanded.

“We are escaping tonight. At the dead of night. We are leaving this orphanage and never returning. I cannot bear to spend another day on this disgusting ship,” I whispered to Clitus. Lunch ended and I decided to take a trip down the hall. As I walked down the hall, I came upon a room on my right. There was a large sign on the door. It read “The Warden’s Office.” I stood there waiting for all the orphans to disappear and the guards to leave. It was strange. I have never seen this door and I had been here for more than a decade. The halls emptied and became silent. I walked up to the door and breathed heavily. My hands became clammy and goose bumps started to grow on my arm. I brought my hand to the doorknob and twisted it slowly. As I was twisting it, it stopped turning. “Damn it,” I whispered to myself. Then I heard *thump, thump, thump* as I stood there in the gloomy hallways of the *Little Talents Orphanage*. I immediately started looking around and found nothing to hide in. The beating of my heart started to increase rapidly, my body temperature became hotter, and I couldn’t move at all. Seconds later, the guard was visible and came rushing toward me. His gun was raised and his hand was on the trigger. He released the trigger and the bullet came rushing out of the barrel. Then everything slowed down. Life slowed down. The movement around me slowed down. The bullet stopped rushing at me, instead, it started to move very slowly. Suddenly, the

bullet did a one-hundred and eighty degree turn and it started moving in the opposite direction. Life resumed and the guard was on the ground. My mouth was wide open and I couldn't speak in words about what had just happened.

As I slowly walked up to the guard, I stepped in a warm puddle of blood. I quickly glanced at the body and I could see a hole in his head. *What just happened?* I thought. My breathing became heavy and my arms and legs moved rapidly. I quickly searched the halls and found a closet. I dashed back to the body and dragged him by his legs. It felt as if someone were pulling my arms out of their sockets. My face turned bright red and I could feel myself wanting to fall down. I eventually reached the closet. I dragged the body into the closet and shut the door behind me. I wiped my face with my hands to take away the sweat and I walked back to the Warden's office. As I headed back to the door, I noticed the door was slightly open. I sneaked up to the door and started to hear a voice.

"Hitler, I am this close to fulfilling my plan!" the Warden shouted. *What plan?* I thought.

"Brother, I have sent you one hundred orphans with special abilities and you are not doing anything!" Hitler screamed. *Special abilities? Where am I?* I thought anxiously.

"I am this close to becoming the most powerful man who ever lived. Give me a couple more days. The orphans still don't know," the Warden added. I opened the door a crack and started to look around from where I was standing. There were strangely painted portraits hanging on the walls of the Warden's office. The Warden and another man were smiling in one of the portraits. *This can't be happening,* I thought.

"I can't wait any longer! Take their abilities now or I will kill every single Jewish orphan on that ship!" Hitler ordered. As I started walking away anxiously, I heard a squeal. I stood there, wondering what that strange noise was. I quickly dashed into the closet and left the closet door opened with a crack. I kneeled down and peeked through the crack.

"I have some more orphans from the concentration camps," Hitler stated.

"Send them on the boat tomorrow. We are so close brother!" the Warden laughed.

“They left the door opened!” I happily whispered to myself. After the Warden and Hitler left, I dashed to the Warden’s office. I opened the door slowly, trying not to make a sound and then I squeezed myself through and shut the door behind me. I started rampaging around the room trying to find where that mysterious noise came from.

“*Squeak!*” *There it is again!* I thought. I turned around slowly and noticed a large cage with a purple tarp over it. I walked over to the eerie cage and slowly removed the tarp. As I was removing the tarp, I started to see a fluffy object. I threw the tarp across the room and came upon this fluffy roundish ball. It had large turquoise eyes with bright purple fur all over. My eyes widened, a smile grew upon my face and my hand suddenly reached for the cage. As I reached to open the cage, I realized it was locked.

“I need a key!” I whispered to myself. I sprinted to the drawers of the table and furiously pulled each drawer open. As I pulled out the drawers on the bottom, a large piece of paper came flying out. As it swayed back and forth in the air, I grabbed it and brought it up to my face. The paper was goldish brown and it had a large black X in the upper right hand corner. There was a sketch of an island on the paper. *A map!* I thought. I brought my eyes to the drawer the map had come from and found two rusted objects inside that drawer. I kneeled down and picked up the two rusted objects. “They are keys!” I whispered to myself. I folded the map into four sections and shoved it in my back pocket. I walked back over to the cage and looked at the two keys in my hand. *Which one will unlock this cage?* I wondered. I brought the second key to the lock of the cage and turned the key slowly. “*Click,*” The cage flung open and the mysterious fluffy ball jumped into my arms. I caressed the fluffy ball and its eyes looked up at me. The large beautiful turquoise eyes stared into mine and my eyes started to fill up with water. The tears were swimming in my glass eyeballs. Tears started to fall from my eyes and run down my face. My tears landed on the fluffy ball and the fluffy ball started to weep. “It’s okay,” I whispered to the fluffy ball. I put the fluffy ball into my backpack to hide it from the guards. As I walked out, I put the two keys into my pocket and headed for Clitus. *Clitus really likes art, maybe he’s at the art room.* I thought. As I walked toward the art room, I saw Clitus sitting beside the doorway.

“Swan! Come over here!” Clitus shouted.

I dashed to Clitus and asked, “What happened?”

“A-a-a-a boy wa-wa-was shot in the art room,” Clitus sobbed.

“It’s starting. We need to get out of here now!” I screamed. I grabbed his arm tightly and pulled him up.

“What’s happening?” Clitus asked anxiously.

“I will tell you everything but come with me first!” I responded.

Clitus and I dashed to the doors of the top deck and looked around. There were three guards standing outside with guns below their chest but above their waist.

“It’s almost midnight!” Clitus shouted.

“We need to get past those three guards because the boat we are using is right below them,” I replied. “Clitus, I heard the Warden and Hitler talking to each other when I sneaked into the Warden’s office. I heard that all of the orphans, including us, have special abilities!” I exclaimed.

“We have special abilities?” Clitus shockingly asked.

“Yes, and I think we can use our abilities against the guards!” I responded.

“How? We don’t even know how to use them!” Clitus shouted.

“When I killed the guard a couple of hours ago, I think I used my special ability,” I added. I moved my hand to the handle of the door and slowly turned it. As the door opened, the guards lifted their guns and yelled, “You are not permitted here!” I walked toward the guards and lifted my hands and screamed. A powerful force came from my hands and threw one of the guards off the ship.

“Run Clitus!” I screamed. Bullets came flying out of the barrel and ricocheted off the walls. I dashed to a couple of wooden boxes and hid. Clitus didn’t move. He stood there. He stood there in front of guns going off. “Clitus!” I yelled. Bullets came penetrating through his chest and blood started to pour out from his body. His body fell backwards and his breathing stopped. His eyes stayed open and blood was spurting out from his mouth. My blood ran cold and my eyes bulged. I stood up and stared into the guard’s eyes. I put my hand out and turned it slowly. The guard’s head started turning, causing his neck to crack. His body fell and his head banged off the railings. I walked up to Clitus, noticing that the other guard had run away. I kneeled down and kissed Clitus on the forehead. Tears were falling from eyes and the little puff ball living in

my backpack jumped out. The puff ball jumped onto Clitus's bloody chest and stared at me. It slowly waddled up to me with its small little legs and gave me a big hug. I smiled with tears running past my mouth. I got up and I started to hear guards running in the background. "We need to go now!" I shouted. The puff ball jumped into my opened backpack and I walked towards the railings. I looked down and could see my way out of this orphanage forever. I took a rope sitting beside me and unraveled it. I tied it to the railing and threw the rest down, which eventually hit the small boat. I jumped over and slid down the rope and landed on the boat. I quickly grabbed the paddles and started rowing. Once the guards reached the railings, I was already far enough that the guards could never even shoot at me. The Warden was standing in front of the guards and staring at me with hatred.

"Swan, I will find you and kill you slowly!" the Warden screamed. I smirked, and took out the little puff ball from my backpack.

"What shall I name you?" I asked. I thought for a minute and finally an idea came to my head. "Humbert! I like that name," I laughed. I grabbed the puff ball and moved it closer to me. I rested my head on Humbert to keep my head warm. I reached for my pocket and slowly removed the folded map. I opened it and thoroughly looked at it. *Where is this place?* I thought. As I was scanning the map, I heard a noise. It wasn't Humbert. It was something else. I stopped moving the paddles and sat there silently. The noise came back. It sounded like a hissing sound. I looked into the water and could see this glowing animal. It came closer and closer. My hands started to shake and my breathing became heavy. The animal stopped and the head slowly popped out of the water. The water was clear and you could basically see anything. The top half of the body looked like a dragon's head and the bottom half of the body looked like a mermaid's tail. It had yellow eyes and scaly skin. It had large thin wings on its back and the tail was very long. It started to hiss and then it moved its hands above the water. It was holding a book. The creature handed me the book. As I grabbed the book, I could feel the scaly skin of the creature. All of the sudden, the wind picked up and the water became rough. The book opened and pages started moving abruptly. The pages stopped moving and page twenty one appeared. There was a sketch of a creature on this page.

I looked at the top of the page and saw a title. The title read, Meragon. “You’re a Meragon!” I shouted. The Meragon shook its head up and down. The wind stopped blowing, the water became still and the Meragon disappeared. I closed the book and I tried to find a title. The book was blank all over. *What type of book is this?* I thought. As I was staring at the book, I could hear the birds singing. I looked up and saw an island. There were tall evergreens planted everywhere on the island. The small boat hit the rocks of the island and I took a line of rope to tie the boat to the rocks. I stepped out along with Humbert and we set foot on the gravel. I looked at the map and looked at the island over and over again. *Is this the island on the map?* I wondered. On the map, there were tall green trees in the middle and a mountain on the side. I looked to the right and saw a very large mountain. “This is it!” I shouted.

“Meeppp!” Humbert squealed. I looked back at the map and suddenly a title appeared out of nowhere on the map. The title read, “The Unwelcoming Isle.” Chills ran down my body as I realized I am not in a good place. The skies started to turn grey, the wind started to howl, the evergreens started to sway and the water started to move roughly. As water started to fall from the sky, the book opened by itself again. Pages started moving again. I grabbed the book but a powerful force pushed me away from the book causing me to hit the ground hard. I walked slowly up to the book and looked at the page. There were four large bolded words printed on the page. The words were, “**Leave This Island Now!**” I folded the map up so I wouldn’t have to look at that again.

“Let’s go, Humbert!” I shouted.

“Meepp!” Humbert replied. Humbert jumped into my backpack and we headed into the forest. As we walked through, the world became dark. The trees were dense and there was only one trail visible. There were shrubs, vines and tree trunks surrounding the trail. The ground was muddy and wet. As Humbert and I were walking down the trail, a mysterious creature dashed by us and disappeared as it ran through the dense woods. The mysterious creature had dark black eyes and yellow fur. We kept walking. I looked around and saw nothing. It was silent and dark.

“We need a torch, Humbert,” I said. Humbert waddled to a tree and started pecking at the tree. After about two minutes, Humbert had a long, thick stick of wood and handed it to me.

“Meeppp,” Humbert said.

“Thank you, Humbert,” I happily replied. *How do I make fire?* I wondered. Then Humbert waddled over to me and started kicking me in the leg.

“Meeeeeep!” Humbert yelled. I put down the stick of wood and kept it on its bottom so it was standing. Then Humbert breathed out orange flames making the piece of wood catch on fire.

“Wow, Humbert!” I laughed. I picked up the piece of wood and we continued walking. As we were walking, I started to hear chanting in the distance. I started walking faster to figure out where the chanting was coming from. Then I started to see smoke in the distance. I walked up a little closer and hid behind the tree. I peeked and gasped. There were three insanely large creatures sitting by a fire. They had beaten skin, no nose, long sharp ears, large breasts and long sharp fingernails. They had feet that were curved. It looked as if they were troll-like with a mix of gorilla. All of the sudden, the mysterious box opened again. It landed on a certain page and I moved the torch to render the page visible. The tile read, “**Trogor.**” Beneath the bolded word, there was a bolded sentence that wrote in large letters. “**They see, they eat!**” “*Crack!*” The Trogors stopped chanting, they started to look around. Goosebumps started to appear on my body and my breathing became very heavy.

“Meeeppppppppppp!” Humbert cried.

“Run, Humbert! Hide!” I shouted. The Trogor came stomping towards me and grabbed me by my hair. The Trogor dropped me in front of the other Trogors and started speaking in a different language.

“Meg pon ache no con sr pell!” the Trogor spoke. *What are they saying?* I thought. Then the Trogors started choking. They were choking uncontrollably. *Why are they choking?* I thought. Then I looked to my right and saw Humbert waddling out of the woods.

“Meeeeeppppp!” Humbert screamed. The Trogors started choking on their blood. I put my hand out and turned my hand into a fist. I moved my fist closer to their chest and started squeezing my hand. Their bodies started to shrivel up and they turned into complete dust. I got up and Humbert came running towards me. He jumped into my arms and snuggled with me.

“Humbert, we need to keep moving,” I laughed. I took out the map again and looked at it. “We are almost at the X!” I shouted.

Meanwhile, back at the shore of the isle, a mob of people arrived.

“Come on, we have a girl to kill!” the Warden yelled. They marched into the dense forest and headed for me.

“Humbert, look!” I shouted.

Humbert moved his fluffy head to my direction and yelled, “Meeepppp!” There was a small hut in the distance. It was brown with giant leaves on the top to provide a roof. As we moved closer to the hut, a man came walking out of the hut. He had long white hair and long fingernails. He was extremely tall with very long and thin arms. His eyes were bright red and his ears were sitting on top of his head. Tucked inside his long hands was a long scepter with sharp fingernails wrapped around the scepter. The wind started to pick up again and the book opened up again. Pages started to move and move until it landed on a certain page. The page was blank. The mysterious man took his hand and softly rubbed it on the blank page. Suddenly, words and pictures appeared out of nowhere on the page.

“You must be an Elzard. Half elf and half wizard,” I added.

“Yesssss!” the Elzard hissed. “Why are you here?” the Elzard asked.

“I am looking for this X that I found on this map.” I replied. The Elzard’s eyes bulged and forcefully shut the book.

“Come inside, now!” the Elzard yelled. I grabbed Humbert and quickly ran inside the small hut. As I looked around in the hut, I came upon this chest. It had chains and a lock on it. It was a surprisingly large chest.

“What is inside that chest?” I asked.

“Shh! No questions! Just listen!” the Elzard shouted. I shut my mouth and sat down on the bench. Humbert jumped up on the bench, waddled onto my lap, spun around and cuddled up next to my chest. I started to caress Humbert, as the Elzard walked up to me. “Are you from the orphanage at sea?” the Elzard asked.

“Yes,” I replied.

“What are your special abilities?” the Elzard asked.

“I am still discovering them. I think I can control things with my mind.”

“You need to stop the Warden!” the Elzard shouted.

“I can’t. He killed my friend. I am not powerful enough!”

“The Warden is coming. I can feel it.”

“How do we stop him? He is going to steal all of the orphans’ powers!” The Elzard walked over to the chest and picked it up. He brought it over to me and placed it beside me.

“You have a key in your right pocket!” the Elzard said. I took my hand and reached into my right pocket. I brought out a rusted key and handed it to the Elzard. He took the key and placed it in the hole of the chest. He turned the key and “*Click!*” He threw the chains of the chest and placed the lock beside the chest. As he slowly opened the chest, a bright green light started to come out of it. The bright green light lit up the small room. As I got up off the bench, I started to hear gunshots in the distance. “Use this to defeat the Warden!” the Elzard screamed.

“Where are you going?” I asked loudly. The Elzard didn’t respond. I grabbed Humbert and placed him in my backpack. The Elzard looked at me one last time and ran out of the hut. I followed after him. A dozen soldiers were lined up, holding rifles and shotguns. The Warden was in front of the soldiers with a magical staff in his hand.

“Hand over Swan, Elzard!” the Warden yelled.

The Elzard stood his ground and shouted, “No!” The soldiers standing behind the Warden started marching and lifted their guns. I looked down at my shirt and saw blood smeared all over it. I looked over at the Elzard and saw blood gushing from a hole in his forehead. I walked out of the hut, towards the Warden, and stood there silently.

“Shoot her!” the Warden ordered. The guns went off and I turned into something unique. I turned into something special, something I thought I would never experience. I had magical powers. One body fell down after another. Bullets turned around and went through the soldiers’ bodies. Trees fell down. The ground drowned in blood. I created fire with my hands. I had the bright green object in my hand. The Warden stood there with his men’s bodies laid on top of each other. I threw the mysterious bright green object into the air and raised my hands to the direction of the object. Fire came roaring out of my hands and it hit the object. Ashes came falling from the sky. I looked down and saw the final remains of the object. “You bastard!” the Warden cried. The Warden took his staff and slammed it into the ground. A mysterious force came from the

staff and pushed me into the wall of the hut. Blood poured from my forehead. My head was pounding like someone was beating me with a bat over and over again. I got up but stumbled. The Warden walked over to me and pointed the staff to my neck. The golden staff turned into a really sharp knife.

“Stop!” I shouted.

“You may have destroyed my plans but I can still watch you die slowly!” the Warden yelled. He moved the knife-staff closer to my neck. It started to make my skin break. A little stream of blood started to flow down my neck.

“Meeeeppppppp!” Humbert squealed loudly. The Warden started choking on his own blood. A sharp piece of wood almost like a knife was in the Warden’s abdomen. He dropped the staff and fell to the ground. Humbert was standing behind his almost lifeless body, smiling.

“W-W-Watch you-your ba-ba-back,” the Warden coughed abruptly.

“You are a disgrace!” I shouted.

“You m-ma-may hav-have stop-stopped me but my brother will come fo-for you,” the Warden said as he choked abruptly.

“He will come for me? By the time he gets here, your pathetic body will be lifeless!” I screamed. As the Warden was about to let out another word, his heart stopped and he died. I tilted my head sideways and looked into the Warden’s dark cold eyes. His mouth was wide open with blood running past his eyes from the hard fall. I raised my hand and covered my cut on my neck. I pressed on it hoping the blood would stop. *I don’t feel anything*, I thought. I took my hand away and the cut was gone. The blood disappeared and it was like I was never stabbed. I looked at my hand and realized something.

“Humbert! I can heal myself. I can heal you. I can heal people!” I happily shouted. Humbert jumped into my backpack and we looked around one last time. *I did it!* I happily thought. I glanced back at the Warden one more time, realizing I just started something. *Maybe a war, maybe not. But I do know, if I stopped the Warden, I can save the people from the concentration camps. I can stop Hitler. I can end the Holocaust. I can finally avenge my mother and father's death! I am proud to be a Jew and I will do anything in my power to save my religion!* I thought with a smile. We walked

back to the shore and saw the orphanage boat in the distance. I stepped into the small boat with Humbert and got the paddles ready. As we got closer to the boat, all of the orphans were together near the railings of the boat. They were cheering. We reached the boat and one of the orphans dropped down a rope. I climbed up with Humbert and I smiled at all of the orphans. “We are leaving this orphanage and never returning!” I shouted.

“Where are we going?” asked an orphan.

“Weimar, Germany!” I ordered.

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