

sps 7·8 vol 4 #1

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



Winter/spring 2019

sps 7·8 **vol 4 #1**

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

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submissions: current 7th and 8th grade students and those entering 7th and 8th grades in September are encouraged to submit your fiction, poetry, essays, critique, and other writing beginning now. Email your work to happeningmagazine@yahoo.com. Scanned original artwork to be considered for illustration or covers may also be submitted.

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The Poetry Wall: A large selection of poetry from students in all grades appears online at 12zine.com. Please visit and read.

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East Somerville Community School

I Too

Milton Flores

inspired by Julia Alvarez and Langston Hughes

I too sing America

I speak from a small country,
With Salvadoran blood inside of me,
Speaking Spanish at my house,
Going outside and speaking a different one
Hanging out with friends at school,
I was born in America but raised as a Hispanic,
2 cultures in my brain,
Very happy for where I'm from
Coming from the *pupusas* and the *horchatas* at my house,
And the pizza or hot dogs outside,
My body is split in half mentally but physically I'm one

I too sing America.

© 2019 Milton Flores

Don't Cry

Mohammed Miahjee

It was 10:00 A.M. I heard someone knock on the door. I moped to the door and opened it enough to make a small crack. I peeked through because I didn't want the person to see me shirtless, with frizzy black hair, and shorts. I looked up confused for a second and realized. He had a grey sweatshirt, long curly hair, and baggy jagged sweatpants, with his shorts showing under them. It was my brother. It's been three years... But I held in my tears because I wanted to show him that I was a man. I gave him a hug and let him in. I told him to sit on the couch in a Bangla-English way because he would always yell at me if I didn't at least try to speak Bangla.

But this time he told me, "It's fine, you can speak English." That was the first time I'd ever heard him speak English.

"Wait here, I'll go get Mili." I stuttered.

I didn't care to knock because I knew she was sleeping. I opened the door and walked up to her bed and shook her awake.

"Leave me alone, it's Saturday," she groaned.

"C'mon wake up. Milar is here!" I exclaimed with joy.

She looked up at me with her eyes squinted and one eyebrow raised.

"What?"

Then my brother came into the room and she threw herself out of the bed. She ran and squeezed Milar to death.

Milar asked, "Is Mom home?"

"No, she's working right now," Mili said.

"Okay, let's talk while I check out the house?" he said happily. So we walked around the house and I showed him the leftover PlayStation 3 games he left in his closet after leaving.

"Those games bring back some memories. I left those because those were all the ones you broke when you were five," he said with a chuckle.

"I never broke any games..." I mumbled.

Then my sister came in and said, "Yes you did! You broke his first PlayStation 3. Remember?"

“Yeah, you somehow always find a way to break my games so I had to put them in the closet. But even when I put them in the closet, you found out, *somehow*, and managed to reach them and break my games,” he replied, a little annoyed. After that, I admitted to a loss in that argument. We continued to walk back into the living room where the TV and Xbox were sitting.

Milar hated Xbox’s. To the bottom of his heart he just hated them for some odd reason, but I think it might have to do with the fact that Sal used Xbox and Milar used PlayStation. And I know they hated each other. They would always fight about who is better than the other. It’d get to the point where they would fight seriously at like 12:00 A.M.

Milar said, “Oh my God. Why do you guys have an *XBox*?”

“Sal gave it to us with the connect and I use it since my computer is kind of broken,” I replied with regret.

“Okay, I’ll give you a new PlayStation 4 when I come back and look at your grades so you don’t have to play in misery,” he said with a smirk.

I felt really nervous after that. I didn’t have the greatest grades, but that didn’t matter right then and there.

“Also, what is this about with your broken computer?” he asked with confusion.

“I was playing a game and then my computer just went black. Now it’s stuck in the loading screen,” I said with embarrassment.

“See, what did I tell you? You always find some way to break anything,” he said with laughter.

“Let me go check it out, and I’ll see what I can do for you when I come back to visit next time.” I was full of excitement when he said that.

We walked to my room and I turned on my computer. He looked at what was wrong and started rambling about what he should do to fix my computer. I couldn’t understand most of what he was saying, but it sounded to me he was going to be able to fix it.

After that, we went to the couch and he asked me, “So how is school? Are you getting good grades?”

I took a second to think of a lie, because I didn’t have good grades. “I’m getting mostly M’s which are basically B’s.”

He replied in a serious manner, “Listen, anything under an A is not passing. School should be the easiest thing in your life but also your first priority. I want you to start getting A’s or I won’t get you a new PlayStation 4 or fix your computer. Do you understand?”

I took a deep breath thinking I don’t actually even have that many Ms. But I said with confidence, “Okay! I’ll start getting E’s which are basically A’s.”

“Good,” he gushed.

My sister was in the kitchen making food for my brother, and I went to the cabinet to get a Butter Nutter. We sat down and started to eat. My sister was bragging to my brother on how she had all A’s, and that got me really jealous. So I started bragging about a video game I was playing. “Hey, Milar, I got a twenty kill streak on Roblox Battlefield 1,” I boasted.

He looked at me with confusion. “Cool... Is that like the Lego version of Battlefield?”

“No... It’s Roblox Battlefield. It’s not just a game that looks like Legos,” I complained.

Then he looked at me and said, “Okay, sure.” After that, he decided to change the subject. “Where is dad?” he asked.

Mili said, “He was kicked out by mom again because he wasn’t working,” but I was a little confused because no one told me about that because we still saw him on Sundays.

“So, do you guys ever hang out with him?” he asked with worry. I yelled, “Yeah! On Sundays.”

“What do you guys do with him?” he replied... still worried.

“He makes me memorize these Arabic lines, then we go to Subway and eat. After that, we go to his house. Then Mili and Dad sleep while I play games on his laptop,” I babbled. We ended the conversation at that because he finished eating. He walked to the couch and started putting on his shoes, and Mili asked, “Are you gonna move in? Or...?”

“I’ll be visiting time to time, but I’m not sure what I’m going to do currently,” Milar said with uncertainty.

“But if I get a better job, I can probably move in soon. But for now, I’m not so sure.”

Our chairs dragged their feet across the floor as we pushed them under the table. Milar’s shoes were making small thumps as we

walked onto the carpet from the dining room. The sound of Milar's sweatshirt ruffled as my sister hugged him. I ecstatically jumped into his arms and tried to wrap my legs around him. But they just slid right off his back. He swung his arms around me, and spun me. I felt the gentle wind ruffle through my hair. He dropped me down, and I thumped my feet to the floor. He slugged himself to the door and sighed, "Goodbye," but then, with confidence, "for *now*..." We just nodded holding our tears. The door creaked and cracked as my brother slowly walked through the door. The door just hung open because he forgot the door didn't fall shut all the way on its own. It fell back half way into the door frame and creaked again. My brother's shoes made a clap every time he took a step. I could hear his hand grind across the railing of the hallway as he walked. Every step he took down the ripped, cheaply painted blue stairs felt like a stab in the heart. My sister just still, trying to keep a straight face. So I walked up to the door and closed it shut. The living room went silent...

© 2019 Mohammed Mialjee

Breathing

Thanimul Chowdhury

"Where is it?"

"It went behind the table"

"Wait, I see it! There's two of them!"

We saw frogs hopping around my aunt's room. We were in Bangladesh so I guess that's what was common there, mostly on the village side. My uncle was trying to look for them everywhere, but they were nowhere to be found. Then, I saw something in the corner of my eye. Low and behold, there they were.

"There it is! Behind the vanity!" We rushed toward them. Gone.

"Shit!" I said angrily.

"Whatever, we're probably gonna see them again later," Reshmeen said

I sat down on the bed and grabbed my phone. I started playing Dancing Line.

"Can I play?" Reshmeen asked.

"No," I responded annoyingly.

“Come on, just one time!” she said stubbornly.

“No! Remember last time I let you play, my phone went from 100% to 50%!” I yelled.

“Please. I promise I won’t do that again,” she asked again.

“Fine.”

I passed her my phone, hoping that she would only play one round. Nope. Every time she loses she always says,

“Okay, one more time, I promise,” and I kept saying,

“Fine.”

She finally gave my phone back. Then I looked at the corner of my phone. 10%.

“Reshmeen!” I yelled. I was so pissed. I pointed at the right hand corner of my screen.

“Calm down, you’ll live,” she said, not caring.

I walked out of the room. I was so annoyed. I went into the room I was staying in, grabbed the right end of my charger, and put my phone on the charger. I left the room and went into the hallway, to see my uncle holding a broom and my sister holding her phone. She was taking a video.

“What’s going on?” I said. I was very confused.

“We just saw a huge bug. I don’t even know what kind of bug it is,” Reshmeen explained.

I HATED big bugs. I would always scream every time I saw them. I would always see flying cockroaches the size of a Pringle chip on the city side. We were on the village side so they didn’t have a lot of flying cockroaches, but they did have some unknown insects.

“Well, where is it?” I ask.

“It’s behind Nanubia’s door,” she says. Nanubia is what we call our grandfather.

Then there it was. The huge, huge bug. I screamed. Not too loud so everyone could hear. My uncle hit the wall with the broom. Missed it. It goes to a corner where the wall meets the ceiling. My uncle hits it again. Dead. It falls on the floor. My uncle picks it up. We already knew what he was gonna do. We ran for our LIVES.

“Oh shit, Oh shit, Oh shit” I repeated while I was running. We went into my aunt’s room and closed the door. I sat on the bed for less than a minute. I go back to the door and open it a little. I peek through the little opening. He threw it away. “Phew!” I say, acting as

if I just ran away from being murdered. I let him in the room. We all hang out on the bed just using our phones. Then our aunt comes in the room with some news. “Mom, she’s sick,” she says to my uncle. My sister and I weren’t paying attention. But my sister kind of listened. It was something about our grandmother.

My sister and my uncle dashed out of the room and got to the other room where my phone was charging.

“Wait what’s happening?” I say as I was getting off the bed. I was so confused. I dash to the other room. I see my grandmother lying down with her head resting on my mom’s lap. It looked like she had trouble breathing. Everyone was in the room. My aunt was on the bed behind my mom and my grandfather was massaging her feet. My other grandmother (my grandfather married two women) was standing right next to me. I was on the verge of tears. But I didn’t cry because I didn’t want to cause a scene. I mean my grandmother has been with me for my whole life, I’m not ready to lose her now.

“What did she eat today?” my mom asks. I don’t know what they said she ate. They were talking in Bangla. One of my uncles told me to go get a glass of water. I got up from the floor, got out of the room. There was a gallon of water standing on the table. I grabbed a glass, opened the gallon, and poured some water. I quickly went into the room and gave my uncle the glass of water. He gives it to my grandma and then leaves it on the floor. 10 minutes pass and she still can’t breathe. This was the night before the *mehendi* ceremony for my uncle and we were all worried.

“Go to sleep,” my uncle says. He didn’t want us staying up all night.

“Yeah go, go,” my aunt says.

I didn’t want to go, I wanted to stay here with my grandma. But if I didn’t go, they would yell at me and I didn’t want to get in trouble. So my sister and I went to another room, across from my aunt’s, and slept there. But I couldn’t get to sleep. All I was thinking about was my grandmother and it brought me into silent tears. I wake up, it’s the day of the *mehendi* ceremony.

“Thanimul wake up, don’t you want to see the buffalo being cut?” my uncle says to me. It’s a tradition to sacrifice a whole cow or buffalo for a *mehendi* ceremony. I mean there was going to be a lot of people coming.

“Ugh, can’t I see it later?” I say. I was annoyed that my uncle called me so early in the morning

“What do you mean later? They’re cutting it now!” My uncle says to me.

“Ok, ok I’m coming,” I tell him.

I got up, and off the bed and went straight outside without brushing my teeth. I see that everyone was there, even my grandmother. So I go to her and hug her.

“How are you feeling?” I ask. I was worried.

“I’m fine, I’m fine, don’t worry about me. Today’s all about your uncle,” she says to me. We both smile at each other.

Night time comes around. A specific group of people have to go to my aunt’s *mehendi* ceremony, including me. I put my Punjabi on and look at myself in the mirror *eh I look ok*. Then I pass by a room in the hallway and everyone is in there. I was thinking to myself, *what is going on?* Then I hear my uncles telling everyone to get out. I see my grandmother, she’s sick again. Once again she was lying down on my mom’s lap. My mom was ready to go to my aunt’s ceremony. I rush down and sit next to her.

It was time for the people to go and I was still sitting next to my mom. My grandmother asks my mom in a low voice, “Why is he still here? The people are leaving.” My mom tells me to go and says that she would stay there. So I leave.

We were all outside and the cameraman told us that everyone should be holding a present. They gave me a present that I had to give to my aunt when we reach there. Then they tell us to go in a line from small to tall. They faced the camera towards us and told us to start walking.

All I could think about in the whole car ride there was my grandmother. Even when I was there, I acted like I was having fun but I really wasn’t. I was so worried and scared what would happen. We went back to our village and celebrated our uncle’s ceremony. I saw my grandma. She looked totally fine. Then for the next few weeks, she seemed better and nothing really happened to her.

A month after the wedding, we had to come back to the United States. I was sad. I was going to miss my family there, especially my grandma. My uncles and my grandparents were gonna come back the next month but I still missed them. As soon as I reached the

U.S., the first thing I did was download Messenger. I talked to my whole family there. I video chatted with my aunt. I asked her about my grandmother. She said that my grandmother was doing better.

In September, after school, my mom and I were both home at the same time and we decided to go to my grandparents' house to clean the place up before they got here. A couple of hours later, my dad said that he was going to the airport and he was going to pick them up. I was excited. My mom and I waited for them to get here.

"They're here!" My mom yells at me from the kitchen. I dashed outside and I saw them. I hugged my grandpa and my grandma.

"Assalamualaikum!" I say to my grandmother, hugging her.

"Walaikum Salam!" my grandmother says to me.

We go inside. We were all talking and eating. She never got sick ever, ever again and I'm happy for that. © 2019 Thanimul Chowdhury

New Family

Kayala Nayak

Bing Bing

I looked at my phone. I had received a text from my uncle. I knew that I shouldn't open the text as I was in school. Mr. Stephano was letting me use it as a calculator and I didn't want to risk having it taken away. I couldn't resist opening the text. I was already on edge waiting to get a text telling me that the baby had arrived. My uncle's wife, Julia, had gone into labor the night before. I was very nervous. My foot was tapping a fast beat on the tile floor and my hand twirled a pencil around my fingers absentmindedly.

Once I clicked on the notification, a picture showed up. In the photo was a little baby, just born. *Finally!* I thought. Julia had Braxton Hicks contractions (fake/false contractions) about a week ago. My family was waiting for the news with bated breath.

"Hey! Don't look at texts at school!" Mr. Stephano called.

"Oh sorry, I got a text saying that my cousin was just born," I said, hoping that he wouldn't take my phone. I showed him the picture.

"Oh dude, nice!" he said, giving me a high five.

When I finally got home, I didn't bother to change into something nice. It was November 13th. I had stopped trying to look good in school by mid-September. I was wearing an old tie-dye shirt with a circus logo on it and my sister's sweatpants. My sister did try though. She was wearing a grey long sleeve shirt and black skinny jeans with her hair all wavy and fancy.

At around six, my sister, mom, and I drove to the hospital. We got a little confused when trying to find the room where the baby was. After spending almost five minutes running around, we finally found the right hallway. Once our uncle texted us and told us the room number, we ran to find it.

When I opened the door, I saw Julia holding the smallest baby that I had ever seen. He was tiny, not just small like a baby, he was *tiny*. My uncle jumped up to hug us and give us tea but suddenly I was extremely nervous. I was good at holding cats and other animals, not *babies*. *What if I dropped him?* I really didn't want him to cry.

We all crowded around the baby. He was adorable. My mom rushed to hold him, she was amazing with babies, after all, she had two of her own. The baby was eventually passed to my sister and I knew that I would be next.

When it was finally my turn, my mom had me sit down on a chair with a pillow on my lap. She placed the baby in my arms. He was so small. I was scared but I immediately knew that I would have to kill anyone who ever hurt him. I was his *choti didi*, which means the younger of his older sisters.

I was stiff; I didn't know what to do. I had never held a baby before, I had heard that you have to be really careful and I didn't want to accidentally hurt him. He was so small and fragile, his eyes were barely open. He started to cry and I completely freaked out, I passed him back to my mom as quickly as I could. *What did I do?* I thought to myself, I was so embarrassed.

Once he stopped crying, my mom gave him back to me.

"Just do Alu Nelu," she said. Alu Nelu was a dance that my grandfather did. It was basically just bouncing and stepping side to side but it had this magical ability to make babies fall asleep. He used to carry me on his chest and dance until I fell asleep. He used

it on my sister before me. I think he even used it on my mom and her brothers. Over time, I learned the dance. It worked on every animal or person that was small enough to hold. I had tried it on cats, dogs, even some goats and a baby pig; I hadn't tried it with a baby yet, because I had never held a baby before. That dance was truly magic.

I started doing the dance, humming the song that goes with it. I stepped in rhythm with my humming and held him close to me. My grandpa said that the key to keeping a baby happy is to keep it surprised. Although the dance was very repetitive, it was probably surprising to a newborn. The baby stopped crying and started to fall asleep. It was working! I felt a wave of relief rush over me when he closed his eyes and lay still in my arms. I hadn't realized until now how tense my shoulders had been, how my eyebrows were pulled together in a concentrated frown. I relaxed my shoulders and face, telling myself to calm down. I kept dancing until the baby was asleep, then I started to sway. I was relieved that it hadn't gone horribly. Everything after that was much more relaxed.

We spent almost three hours in the hospital room, eating chocolate, drinking tea, and chatting. I wanted to stay longer but I had school the next day. The drive home was peaceful. I was glowing with excitement.

When I got home, I couldn't fall asleep even though it was late. I couldn't wait to see the baby again. I looked through all of the pictures I had taken and posted some of them on Instagram.

I already knew that I loved that baby, even though I had just met him.

© 2019 Kayala Nayak

Devil Child

Leeann M. McGrath

“I hate her, Mom!”

Ok, so you're probably wondering *who* the Devil Child *is*. Let's take it back to March 30, 2007. It was a slightly chilly day and I was sitting on the couch watching my favorite T.V. show at the time, Teletubbies, holding my two toy kitties: Doctor Kitty and Baby Kit-

ty. I hear a brief knock at the door and my grandmother walked over, picked me up, and we went to the door. I had a *huge* grin on my face because I thought there was something at the door for me because well, I was an only child 'til my mom walked in the door with a big thing. I didn't know what it was so I just called it a crib. My mom walked in holding the little "crib," my grandmother put me back down and went to help my mom. As a three and half year-old kid well let's say, I thought it was a gift so I was going to snoop around. My mom starts to walk to the couch so I followed. I sat down next to the little crib and looked inside. My grin turned into confusion and sadness. I did *not* know what that thing was, plus, I had this strange vibe coming from that little thing, so I did what any terrified three and a half year old would do, I got off the couch and ran to my mom.

"Mommy, what is that thing?"

"Leeann, that's your new baby sister, Kathleen."

As soon as I heard "baby sister" come out my mom's mouth, I just wanted to cry. I jumped off the couch, walked very, *very*, slowly over to the little baby. Looked her straight in the eye, and I *swear* she gave me the death stare. So, at this point, I wanted to stay far, far away from this demon. I started to avoid this kid 'til that same day my mom came up to me and said, "Leeann, honey, can you play with Kathleen for a little I feel like you will get along great."

I had no choice but to say I would play with the demon. My mom placed Kathleen into her rocker and sat on the couch with her phone ready to record something, actually, she recorded most of what we did, even walking to the couch. I stared at the demon for two whole minutes 'til I looked at my mom thinking she was going to get this thing away from me but, nope, I was still next to *it*. I knelt down so I was at level with her face. We looked at each other for what felt like hours 'til *CHOMP!* she bit the tip of my nose. I was in shock and could not move. The baby was still snacking on my face. Tears started to roll down my cheeks.

"MOMMY!" I cried.

My mother ran over, she pulled me close to her 'til I stopped crying. I didn't stop crying until dinner, which was only in about ten minutes. But still, that was a long time for me. After my mini-meltdown was over I vowed never to play with that baby, *ever*. After

that, I wanted nothing to do with anything but eating and going to my room. I ate my dinner and went straight to my room without another word. That night I couldn't shake off what happened. It was like she hated me or something. I didn't get how a newborn baby hated someone when they couldn't do anything on their own. I tried to brush it off and go to sleep.

“Leeann, time to get up!”

I heard my mom and knew that it was time for breakfast. I jolted out of bed and ran to the dining room where my mom was at the stove, but there was no baby anywhere.

“Mom, where's the baby?”

“Kathleen is still asleep because little babies need more sleep than us.”

I was confused. *Is she not human, is that why she needs more sleep?* I didn't pay any mind to it after that, I was just happy I could eat my eggs and not have to deal with that pest. So, I ate with a great big smile on my face.

WAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!

I had no clue what *that* even was. My mom left the room and came back out with a screaming kid in its diaper.

“Lucky,” I muttered under my breath.

My mom fed the baby, changed the baby, and sang the song *I* liked to her. I felt like that demon spawn was going to replace me. I wanted to get rid of it so very bad but I was too small to do anything.

About a year passed and it was June 7th, the day I turned four years old. I was so happy that nothing could ruin anything. My sister was one so I didn't think she would do anything to make this a bad birthday. Mom sat her next to me.

“You two play nice, okay,” she said with a big smile.

I paid no mind to her 'til she started to talk and spit and draw on the picture that I was making for my grandmother. I lost my temper. I snatched the crayon out of her hand, stood up, tilted her head back and shoved the crayon up her nose as far as I could. I smirked as she started to cry and hold her nose. I sat back in my seat and started to draw. After a second my mom came running into the living room to my sister's side asking me what happened. As a four-year-old I didn't know what lying was so I told the truth.

“I put the crayon in her nose because she messed up nana’s drawing!”

She forgave me and said “it’s okay you didn’t know better.” I looked at my sister to see she was red. My mom called my grandmother from the other room so she could watch me. She picked Kathleen up and ran to the car. I sat waiting by the door for two hours until my mom walked in holding my sleeping little sister and she seemed fine.

The next day my cousins came over. They’re a lot older than us so it was hard to play with them. My mom was sitting on the couch with my sister talking to my aunt and uncle. So, I was stuck with 14-year-old Jenny and 15-year-old Ralf. I was thinking, how am I supposed to play with *them* they’re so old. They were both on their phones so I asked my mom to take us all out to the backyard. She took us so I decided to grab the dog’s leash.

“Buba, come here boy!” I yelled as loud as I could.

Buba, who was our pit bull puppy, came running down the stairs and ran out the back door to the yard. I put the leash down and ran outside myself. I didn’t take the toy cats with me because of Buba. When I got outside Buba was running around, Kathleen was in a bassinet, and my mom was working the grill. My cousins, on the other hand, were still upstairs on their phones. I paid no mind to it and hopped on my little bike and had a blast.

“Leeann, go get Jenny and Ralf. The food will be done in a minute.”

I ran upstairs and yelled their names. They didn’t answer. I yelled even louder but *still* no answer. I was done with them. I walked over to them and yanked their phones away, then ran. They ran after me, but somehow a 5-year-old was faster than a 14 and 15 year old. When they finally got outside they were out of breath. I wanted to laugh but I was nice and didn’t. I gave them their phones and went to the little table that my mom has set up for cookouts. I didn’t eat much because I wanted to play with Buba so I fed most of my food to him, *sorry mom*. I left my sister and jumped up to play with Buba when, *CRASH, SPLASH*. I turned around to see Kathleen throw my whole thing of bubbles that I was saving for later spilled on the ground. My eyebrows creased, my teeth were clenched. I wanted to cry but I didn’t. I took a deep breath.

“I HATE HER, MOM!”

My mom had no words, just picked up my sister and smiled.

“Mom, tell me why, why does she hate me so much?”

“Leeann, your sister does not hate you. She is just experimenting with different things.”

That's when I realized something, my mom may be right, she is only 1-year-old and does not know better so, she could not be all that bad.

Well, boy I was wrong. Today when I am 13 and she is 11, I still think about these moments and I should say my sister has not and I repeat, *NOT* changed one bit, no sir. She is *still* the devil child, well, at least in my eyes. I don't know about what others think of her but from her older sibling, she is a *dang* devil point blank.

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The Great Macaron Failure

Katarina Dvornik

“Any ideas?”

I put my hands over my face. I knew I didn't have any good ideas, but I wanted to have some so much that I half believed I could find something by sheer willpower. “No,” I sighed. “You?”

Avery shrugged. We had been sitting on her couch since we got back from school. “Well, we could do something for one of our teachers.”

“That's a *great* idea! Like, make them a card? Or what?” I was bursting with creativity.

“I was thinking we could bake something for them,” she elaborated. I smiled, almost smelling the sweetness of whatever confection we were about to make. Even though we were inexperienced bakers, I was sure we could work something out to last us the afternoon.

“How about ... a cake?” I suggested.

“Nah, it'll take too long.”

“Um, cupcakes?”

“*Everybody* does cupcakes. They're too generic,” Avery explained.

I sighed. “Cookies?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“But they’re so ... not fancy.” I was unthrilled by our choice. I thought of all the messy, garish cookies I’d crafted at birthday parties and home. They were just too simple, I decided.

“Well... we could make macarons.”

Macarons! I thought of macaroons, the coconutty morsels I had sometimes at Passover Seders. “Yum! But... do you have any coconut?”

“What? Oh, no... *macarons*. They’re French little sandwich cookies that you can make in lots of flavors,” said Avery.

“Oh, I know about those.”

We selected one of her cookbooks and looked at the recipe.

The Best Macarons, it said in bold print. We did notice that it recommended this for more experienced bakers, but we looked at each other and shrugged. “It’s probably fine,” Avery said.

The first thing we did was make the whipped cream. After pouring the cream and sugar into the beater, we sniffed as the delectable smell wafted through the room. “Mmm...” I sighed. The cream looked wonderful, so we stored it in the refrigerator to chill. If you were to ask me now when things started going wrong, I would say that this was it.

The recipe called for almond flour. Avery and I searched frantically around her kitchen and pantry, but there was none. After some deliberation, we decided we’d just shred some regular almonds in the food processor. We did notice that the chunks were a little bit big, but we looked at each other and shrugged. “What’s the worst that could happen?” I said.

Then, we had to separate the eggs. I volunteered to try it, even though it was my first time doing it. I wasted two eggs before Avery gave up and took the job upon herself. We added the eggs into one container and began beating them. Then feeling satisfied, we waited.

And waited.

And waited.

The eggs weren’t beating. Every few minutes one of us would go to check on them, but they made barely any progress. We were starting to get seriously concerned. Finally, after what was probably 20 minutes but felt like 3 hours, they just barely began to beat. Im-

patiently, we dumped the almonds into the bowl and mixed them. The egg whites looked okay, but they were mixed in with ugly brown specks—the almonds! I started to panic, but Avery reassured me. “We can fix it with food coloring,” she soothed. We looked for the liquid food coloring. Unfortunately, all we could find was a set of gel colorings.

“What color should we make them?” I asked. “Maybe a blue or a purple?”

“Ooh, how about a galaxy theme?” Avery suggested. “We can color it purple, and then add designs.”

“And we can mix blueberries in with the whipped cream!” I finished.

We smiled at each other, glad to be prepared.

We added in some red and blue food coloring. “Hmm, not blue enough,” Avery said. She squeezed out some more blue.

“Now it’s not purple enough.” I added more red. We squeezed out more of each until we were happy with the color: a fine pastel lilac color.

Avery suggested, “Why don’t we add some extra flavor? We could put some honey in.”

“That sounds great: honey blueberry macarons,” I agreed.

Avery’s mom, who was sitting in her dining room, called out to us, “I wouldn’t do that if I were you. Adding honey will ruin its density!” But we looked at each other and shrugged. Then we found a container of honey and mixed some in squeeze by squeeze. Finally we were ready to pipe. We laid out wax paper and found a measuring cup to trace around. Then we Sharpied on circles. A couple of times we messed up and ended up drawing on the metal cup. But in the end we had about 12 mostly uniform circles.

We began loading the almond mixture into Ziploc bags to pipe with. But when we brought the bags into the light, we saw that they were a completely different color. Instead of being a pretty purple, the mix was a sludgy bluish color. “It looks like *cement!*” I complained. I wanted to stop now, but I knew we had to keep going. We each made a small hole in our bag and squeezed out a little. Immediately the sludge flattened out, not holding its shape. Avery frantically placed on a knife as a barrier and kept piping. It was no use. The macaron mixture was flattening as fast as we could pipe it,

and we were getting tired. On top of that, the mixture was insanely sticky, and all over our hands. At that moment, I just wanted to give up. I knew Avery did too. All I wanted was to sit down and pretend this whole fiasco never happened. I was hot, I was sticky, and I was ready to cry. All I had wanted was some time with my friend. We wanted to give our teachers some appreciation. We hadn't asked for this.

We stood for a few minutes, swimming in our own thoughts and frustration. Then, we each took a deep breath. "We'll get through this," I told Avery. She nodded and we washed our hands. We managed to separate some of the blobs into better shapes. We also added blue food coloring in designs, which came out very nicely. We were very proud of our work. Then we put the cookies in the oven.

"EEEEEE!" we squealed. We were almost done.

Avery's mom warned us, "Remember to check on the oven." We agreed to, but we weren't particularly worried. We relaxed for a little bit, but then Avery's mother came to check on them and realized that they were getting too hot! We quickly pulled them out of the oven, but a few were browned. We chose the nicest cookies out of the batch and saved them for the teachers. Avery would assemble those tomorrow before school, so they were fresh. Then we assembled some for us, Avery's mother, and my mom when she came.

They were hideous. The ugly cement color was accented with yellow-brown burnt bits. The almond bits were still visible in the cookie, and little bits of wax paper still stuck to the cookie. It was a sorry sight, but we still wanted to taste them.

Avery and I each took a macaron. My stomach flip flopped. I held my breath as I lifted the macaron towards my mouth...

And then I took a bite. It wasn't bad. I cheered! The honey and blueberry were delicious together, and the whipped cream complemented it all. It was far from perfect, but at least it tasted good.

When my mother came to pick me up, she looked at the macarons and laughed. We all joined her. It *was* pretty funny, after all. Now, when I look back and remember this, it does make me laugh. It was tiring and it tested me. I didn't expect it to taste good, but even when I was ready to give up and not give it to my teachers,

there was something that gave me hope. It was a day to remember, and I will never forget it.

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Fiction

Distant, Then Gone

by Ellie Churchill

I wonder if she's done anything about dinner. This was always Cassandra's thought when she would come in the door at six o'clock after soccer, sweaty and hungry. And the answer was the same every time.

There were no smells or sounds coming from the kitchen. Down the hall, her mother's bedroom door was closed. *I guess not.*

Cassandra's mother was a detective. She was always busy, especially now with her secret case that apparently was too confidential for Cassandra to know about.

She let out a sigh, put her stuff down, and continued into the living room, where a Nickelodeon show played on the T.V.

"Hi Cassie!" Anna exclaimed, enthusiastically.

"Hi Anna. How long have you been watching T.V.?"

"I don't know... since 4:30 maybe?"

"Anna. You know that I only want you to watch an hour of T.V. per day. You're too young to be getting obsessed with screens."

"I know. I'm sorry. There's just not much homework in first grade, so I got bored."

Cassandra sighed. She wished her mother would pay more attention to Anna. "Well maybe on Saturday I'll take you to the library."

"Yay!"

Cassandra knew that Anna wasn't excited about the library specifically, she was just happy to get out of the house and be around people.

"Cassie, I'm hungry."

"I know, I am too. Let's see if I can get Mom out of her room."

Cassandra went down the hallway and stopped in front of her mom's room. She reached for the doorknob, but before her hand

reached it, she realized it wasn't a good idea. It wouldn't be good if her mom were grumpy.

"Anna, I'll make some pasta. We'll just save some for Mom."

They were definitely eating a lot of pasta lately.

About an hour later, Detective Jane Ashford emerged from her bedroom to have some dinner. She found her older daughter still at the table, waiting for her.

"Hey Mom," Cassandra said curtly. She knew they wouldn't be able to talk for long, because her mom was most likely just going to take some pasta and retreat back into her room. "Can I have a sleepover with the twins this Saturday night?"

The twins, Naomi and Leyla, were Cassandra's best friends.

"Cassandra, this is your dad's weekend, you know that. I can't talk now, I have to keep working." With that, Jane Ashford retreated back into her room, as predicted.

* * *

"*Beep beep. Beep beep. Beep beep.*" Cassandra's alarm surely had to be the most annoying alarm in history. It also could've been because it was 6:00 A.M. She forced herself out of bed, put on her running clothes, and headed out into the warm San Diego morning. She knew she had to be a good runner and have good endurance to perform well in soccer.

After her run and a quick shower, she came out to see her mother in the kitchen, making coffee.

"Cassandra, I can't believe you go on a run *every morning*."

Cassandra shrugged. *How late did she stay up last night?* She wondered, looking at the bags under her mother's eyes. She didn't really want to know.

After walking with Anna to Madison Elementary School, she continued to the high school. She glided her way through her morning honors classes, and then headed to lunch. She saw the twins at their usual table with their other friends, so she walked over and collapsed into her seat with a yawn.

"Why are you so tired all the time?" Leyla asked.

"Being a dual soccer and academic star isn't easy," Naomi replied.

Cassandra definitely was tired, but she would never admit it, not even to herself. She was also in a bad mood, because she only got a one hundred percent on her biology test. Her rival classmate Sam had gotten a 102. It was really getting to her. She always had to win, and always had to be on top. This was going to bother her for a while.

After picking up Anna from the elementary school, Cassandra rushed into the house to get a snack before rushing back to the school for soccer practice.

“Mommy! Mommy! We’re home!” Anna exclaimed excitedly.

Cassandra chased after her in horror. “Anna! You can’t bother her, you know that!”

But Anna had already burst into her room.

“Sorry Mom I...” Cassandra started to apologize, but her mother’s chair was empty. She let out a groan of frustration. If her mother wasn’t home, she would have to stay with Anna until she found a babysitter, and then probably be late to soccer practice.

But thanks to the twins, she was able to leave just ten minutes later.

“Thank you guys, you’re such a lifesaver!”

“No problem,” Leyla said calmly.

“Now go, don’t be late!” Naomi chimed in.

* * *

This time, when Cassandra came in the door later that night, sweaty and hungry, she smelled food. She was in a bad mood again, because her team had lost the scrimmage, but this improved her mood a little bit. Finally, her mother had come to her senses! It smelled like ordered pizza, but it was better than nothing. However, in the kitchen, she instead found the twins.

“What are you guys still doing here?”

“Your mom never came home,” Naomi said gravely.

“But Anna was hungry, so we thought we’d order a pizza!” Leyla was more cheerful.

That’s weird. She’s never this late coming home, Cassandra thought. She decided to call her mom’s work. It was her mom’s partner detective, David, who picked up.

“Oh hello, Cassandra. How’s your mom doing?”

“What do you mean? I thought she was at work,” Cassandra replied shakily.

“No, she never came in. I assumed she was really sick. She’s so dedicated, that would be the only plausible explanation.”

Cassandra hung up the phone and slammed it into the receiver, tears coming to her eyes. She started breathing faster too, and sweating. Her anxiety was setting in.

Her hands were almost too shaky to dial her father, but she eventually did.

“Dad. It’s Cassandra. Mom never got to work today, and she’s not home, and she never misses work if she’s not sick! I don’t know what to do! What do I tell Anna, and who will stay with us tonight...”

“Cassie, calm down. I’m sure she’s fine. I’ll come over until she gets back.”

Cassandra’s skin crawled. She hated when he called her Cassie. Only Anna was allowed to do that. She also hated the calmness in his voice. He obviously wasn’t in love with her mother, but didn’t he at least care about her a little bit? They had lived together for twelve years, after all.

But, her father did come over. And slowly, his calmness level did go down.

* * *

The next evening, Saturday, Jane Ashford’s disappearance had become a missing persons case. On Sunday, four of Jane’s friends came over. She’d known them all the way back since the new mom’s group they were all in together, fourteen years ago, when Cassandra was born.

They brought soups and casseroles and baked goods. They were of course trying to help, but this was not helpful at all to Cassandra, because she knew that this was what people brought when they were trying to help with grief. But they weren’t grieving. Yet... No. She couldn’t think like that, it wouldn’t help anything. What she had to think about was finding her mom, and that required extreme measures.

She was going to go through her mother’s stuff. Maybe the criminal she had been investigating was responsible for this? If Cassandra did this, she would be disobeying direct orders, but these circumstances were different.

Jane's friends Sarah and Laurel had been there when Cassandra woke up, taking care of household things. She assumed the other two friends, Sofia and Krista, were coming later. Cassandra had been noticing that Sarah and Laurel were the most dedicated friends, but of course she would never say that out loud. Sarah had even temporarily closed her bath product business to help Cassandra and her family.

The door to her mom's room was a little bit open. With a deep, shuddering breath, Cassandra slowly pushed it open, with a long creak.

There was someone at the desk. Sofia. She turned around, a bit startled.

"Hi Sofia. I didn't know you were here!"

Sofia sighed. "I'm sorry Cassandra. I know this looks strange. I just thought, maybe if I knew what she was investigating, and maybe if it had something to do with this..." her voice trailed off.

"I was thinking the exact same thing. We can look together."

She could tell Sofia felt a little weird about looking through her missing friend's stuff with that friend's daughter, but again, desperate times call for desperate measures.

From what they could see, it seemed like Detective Ashford was investigating some sort of drug kingpin. She called him D.K., for Drug Kingpin. Jane wasn't known for her creativity. Cassandra was pretty sure Jane had kept a folder with information and leads on her suspects in it, but they couldn't seem to find that. *I bet she hid it somewhere*, Cassandra thought. *Why does she have to be so secretive?* So even after Sofia left, Cassandra looked more. She couldn't find it, but she did find something different. Her mother had a theory that D.K. was based right there in San Diego, in some sort of warehouse. If only she could find that warehouse...

No. She was being ridiculous. Finding her mother was dangerous, and it wasn't her job. Maybe a shower would help her get rid of these thoughts.

The only problem with that was they were completely out of both shampoo and conditioner. They usually got some for free from Sarah's shop. She decided to call her.

"Sarah? We're completely out of bath products. Can I get some from your store?"

“Sure, I’ll bring some over.”

“But I like to pick it out, remember? We try a new scent every time.”

Sarah sounded a little strained. “Okay, I’ll meet you there.”

The store was in walking distance, so Cassandra strolled over there while Anna stayed with their dad at the house. The door to the store opened with a little chime from the bell. It smelled amazing in there.

Sarah was standing there stiffly. Why was she being so strange? *My mom’s disappearance must be hitting her hard*, Cassandra thought.

“I was thinking we could try lavender this time,” Cassandra said.

“Really? Well we don’t have any up here. Is that what you really want?”

“Yes please!” When Cassandra became set on something, she had to have it.

Sarah sighed.

Cassandra wondered, *why was she so irritable lately?*

“Just stay right where you are,” said Sarah.

She heard Sarah clomp down the stairs to the storage basement. Cassandra had very acute hearing. She could even hear all of the clicks of the locks unlocking. Wait, *all* of the locks? Why were there so many locks? Why does she need so much security?

All of a sudden, Cassandra’s curiosity took over. She felt her feet moving towards the basement. Her hands started sweating. Anxiety. *No, she said not to go down there, she said to stay up here!* But still her feet kept moving, quietly down the stairs. She carefully tried to open the door, but Sarah had re-locked it. But why?

She put her ear to the door. There were voices coming from the warehouse. The warehouse...

Her heart was beating, and she was sweating even more. She started breathing hard, despite her attempts to quiet herself. And again, her body took over. This time it was her hands. Her hands slipped her phone out of her pocket, and dialed David, her mother’s partner.

“David! It’s Cassandra. Listen, I’m at Sarah’s bath product store, and she’s been acting weird. The basement is locked like five times and I can hear voices...”

The door swung open, and Sarah was standing in it, furiously staring her down. Cassandra dropped the phone in fear.

“I told you to stay in the store,” Sarah said in a voice that was eerily calm.

With extreme strength, Cassandra’s entire body took over and despite her mind’s protests, she rammed Sarah out of the way, and ducked into the warehouse. Her daily workouts had finally paid off. But there she saw her mother, Detective Jane Ashford, tied up in a corner like a classic hostage. Jane’s eyes got as wide as saucers when she saw Cassandra standing there, and Cassandra had to grab the wall to keep herself from fainting.

The warehouse door slammed, and Sarah walked in, almost laughing.

“Fine. You found us out. Congratulations.”

“Uh... us?”

To answer her question, Sofia came out of the shadows. Shocked tears came to Cassandra’s eyes.

“But Sofia, you were helping me...”

Sofia laughed. “I was trying to steal the suspect sheet, you idiot. You’re mother had just figured out who D.K. is.”

Her mother. Her mother! She had to go to her mother! Cassandra started to run over to where her mother was in the corner, but Sarah grabbed her and slammed her against the wall. She heard her mom gasp in horror.

“Don’t make me tie you up too,” Sarah said.

“You were covering for D.K.? Why would you cover for him?”

She laughed. “It’s not a ‘him,’ Cassie. What do you think this huge warehouse is for? What do you think is in those boxes over there?”

A wave of realization came over Cassandra. She felt so stupid.

“What about Krista and Laurel?” Cassandra asked, fearing the answer.

They both laughed. “They have no idea,” Sarah said.

She had to get out, she had to get her mother out, right now! She hoped that David had believed her and sent backup. Surely they would be here soon!

And, sure enough, she heard footsteps. They were coming! They were saved! As the footsteps approached, she could see the panic rising in Sarah and Sofia's faces.

But, Sofia was doing something. She was reaching into a bag. She was pulling out something black and shiny.

"I have no choice," she said.

And before Cassandra had quite realized what was going on...

"**BANG!**" The gun went off just as the police banged the door open.

"**NO! NO!**" Cassandra was very loud, but she couldn't hear her own voice. Everything was blurry, and in slow motion. There was Detective Ashford, collapsed on the floor, blood spilling from her chest.

"**BANG! BANG!**" One of the officers had shot Sofia right away. She collapsed, right next to Jane. The officer ran over and took her gun.

Sarah tried to run out through the door, but it was no use.

"**BANG!**"

There were now three bodies on the floor. Cassandra felt especially dizzy. The ground seemed to come up to meet her body. Everything went black.

* * * *

She woke up in the hospital.

"Oh, thank god!" Her father ran over to the bed.

"My mom, where is my mom?"

Her father sighed. "Cassie, the bullet wound was right through her chest. She didn't survive."

"Don't call me Cassie!" She let out a sob. Her mother was dead. They had lost this game, but this time the game was real. And she hated losing. But winning just seemed so unimportant at that moment, because all she wanted was her mother back.

Cassandra had always thought that if her mother was gone, it wouldn't really make much of a difference in her life, because she seemed so distant. She knew now that she had been wrong.

Her dad came over and hugged her, even though she had snapped at him. She felt bad about that too. He had only been trying to help.

"Anna would like to see you," he said.

Anna! Anna was way too young to lose a parent! Cassandra filled back up with grief, this time for Anna. “Does she know everything that happened?” Cassandra asked. It also wouldn’t be good for Anna to know the whole twisted side of this story.

“No, we only told her she was shot, and she didn’t ask any questions.”

Cassandra sighed. “She can come in.”

Anna stood in the doorway. “Hi Cassie.”

This was scary. Cassandra had never seen her like this.

She hopped up on the bed with her, and started crying into Cassandra’s shirt. “I can’t believe this happened, Cassie.”

“I know Anna, me either. But we’ll get through it together.”

And Cassandra knew this would be a long recovery, as she had just lost the biggest game of her life.

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Wake

by Natalie Covin

“What *is* that?” I screamed, likely about as startled as whatever was sitting beside my bed, watching me. Janet and Ilana bolted up the spiral staircase and into my room to see what had happened, as I normally didn’t shout as if my life depended on it. Strangely enough though, when they asked me what was wrong and I pointed to the eight-foot-tall floating jellyfish in my room, they both agreed to take me to a therapist.

That was two years ago, when I was fourteen, and since then, I tried not to tell as many people if I saw a skeleton dog running down my stairs and following me to school, or an enormous neon blue rabbit hovering above the science teacher’s head. Sometimes weeks went by before I saw something that seemed out of the ordinary around town and I would think they were finally gone, but they always came back.

It took me quite a while before I thought to connect this strange ability to my parents. I had been told they were killed in a car crash just two days before my third birthday, so I have no memory of them. Oddly, I don’t actually have any memory of my life before around age twelve. When I was about twelve, though, I remember

hitting my head hard after falling from the monkey bars. I was knocked out and I woke up in a hospital I had never been to (which was weird because I thought I'd been to all the hospitals within two miles of my house given how much I did things like that). After that, I could only remember little snippets of my life before then. One day, though, I did try to ask somebody about my birth parents.

"Ilana?" I called. After wandering around the house for a while, I decided to check the garden.

"Yes, honey? What's wrong?" That was a good start, seeing as she didn't bother me about calling her "Ilana" instead of "Mom."

"I was just... I was wondering if you remembered anything about my birth parents. I just thought it might be nice to know more about them."

"Oh, sweetheart, I'm sorry, but I can't tell you about them."

"Can't? What do you mean by that?" I blurted out. I never talked back to adults, what was I thinking?

"Well, you're clearly invested in this. I wish I could tell you more, but... I think I actually can't. I cannot remember a single thing about your parents. It's all vague memories blurred together with what could be dreams or details from books I've read. I think this means I'm growing old..."

"Oh, okay. Thanks anyway." I made my way around to the front of the house and opened the front door, thoughts swirling around my head about why Ilana actually couldn't remember a single thing about my parents. The warm smell of vanilla and cinnamon sugar filled the air, but I just couldn't be bothered by it. Even if there were fresh cinnamon rolls on the table, I had to go back to my room and write down what I had just heard.

In my room, I had begun to collect all my thoughts and theories about my parents into one of those... boards. One of those things you see the characters on television using, with all the strings connecting tacks and photos. That way, explaining them would be easier, and I was always better at coming up with ideas when all the information was written down instead of just in my head.

That evening, I decided I was going to ask Janet what she could remember about my parents. If she had the same answer as Ilana, something was probably going on other than just old age. When I went down to the kitchen to find her, she was still knee-deep in flour

and brown sugar. Bowls and spoons littered the kitchen counters, and there were definitely more to come. She looked up from the KitchenAid and yelled over the loud whirring sound,

“Hi, sweetie! I can’t really hear you right now, so if you came down here to talk to me, you should probably wait until I’ve finished mixing this.”

I figured it would be easier to stay there and wait until she was finished than to leave and come back at exactly the right time, so I sat down in one of the chairs and watched the oven timer count down the seconds. After a few minutes of staring down the timer, I heard a small click, and the whirring slowed to a stop.

“What did you want, then?” Janet asked, her voice as warm and inviting as ever.

“I was just wondering if you remembered anything about my parents?” I asked.

“Oh... I see,” she said, reluctantly. “Well, I would love to help you find out more about them, but I can’t seem to remember anything. I suppose my youth really has passed me by!”

“Alright, thanks anyway.” I sighed and left the room.

It made sense if one person couldn’t remember much about my parents, but both of the people that actually *adopted* me from them? It seemed off. I decided to sleep on it since I was actually quite tired. Maybe an idea or some more clues would come to me overnight. I trudged up the stairs into my room, stumbled into my bed, and fell asleep, not bothering to take off my shoes.

*I blinked a few times and opened my eyes to an all-white hospital room. Above me, long strips of fluorescent lighting replaced a few of the ceiling tiles. On the table beside me sat a large basket filled with an assortment of light yellow flowers. The pillows beneath me crunched as I moved, and the sound brought a doctor into the room. After tapping him on the shoulder, to no response, I concluded that nobody else here could see me, so I decided to walk through the halls and investigate the unknown building further. I heard the shouts of doctors, all rushing through the halls at top speed to get to their next patient. They always had somewhere to be or something to do. The most prominent sounds, though, were those of the crying families. I heard a shriek in one room, a long *beeeeeep,* and then the cry of a child in another room. It sound-*

ed as if this child's doctor was almost afraid of him, as if he had caused the death of one of the patients. I watched the child, no more than thirteen years old, walk through the hospital room door and slice open everyone inside. The child's eyes had no light behind them; like he wasn't the one in control. I suppose that makes sense, though. I am in a hospital, I thought. I walked around to the waiting room and stepped out the sliding glass doors. Across the street from the hospital, I spotted a tall, blue school building. Upon further inspection, I discovered it was my preschool! My head flooded with memories from that school - the names and faces of my classmates, building cardboard brick towers, eating fruit snacks and NutriGrain bars. I squinted, trying to read the words on the side of the building. They read:

*West Bridgewater Preschool
382 Sycamore Rd.
Bridgewater, VA*

Before I could investigate the school building any further, the world began to break apart into small shards and I was hurled down into a dark, bottomless whirlpool until...

I awoke to the sound of loud banging on my bedroom door. School. Fortunately, though, today was Wednesday, which meant I had some of my favorite classes: Art and Chorus! I hopped out of bed, dressed, and hurried down the stairs to the door.

I often regarded spending an entire day staring out the window as a waste of time, but this time it proved to be quite helpful. As I watched the small children playing in the lot outside the preschool, I was reminded of the dream I had the night before. That was when it hit me. My old school! I somehow remembered the address, and surely one of the people there would be able to lead me to my parents. I would ask Janet and Ilana if I could take the car and go over to a friend's house, then drive to my old school. It was perfect!



I arrived at the elementary school and walked over to the front desk.

"Hi there, sweetheart! How can I help you today?" the woman at the front desk cooed.

"Hi! My name is Sylvia Armon and I used to go to this school..." My voice trailed off. What was I supposed to say? "My parents

might be magic but they also might be dead, so I'm looking for them. Can you help me?" No, definitely not that. I decided on, "I'm looking for my parents' house but I can't seem to remember the address. Might you have it somewhere?"

"Of course, sweetie," she replied, "What did you say your name was?"

"Armon. My first name is Sylvia."

"Hmm. Ah! Here it is! I can't seem to find your mother on our record, but is your father's name Earnest Eastward?"

That name sounded strangely familiar.

"Yes! That would be him."

"Alrighty. He lives at... 68 Larson drive, Bridgewater. That's not too far from here!"

"Great! Thank you so much!" I turned around and bolted to the door. I finally knew where my parents were! Well, where my dad was. I had to get there as soon as possible. Just then, when I looked up to open the door, what I saw seemed almost too good to be true. Right there, standing across a small elementary school parking lot from me, were my parents. I threw open the doors and ran to them, so excited to finally meet them. I could ask them all the questions that I had wondered about myself and my family for so long!

Across the lot, I yelled, "Mom! Dad!"

I ran and almost crashed into the fence, but my mind was racing a hundred miles a minute. I began to stutter out questions faster than I ever had before. "Are you real? Are you really here? I can't believe this! What are your jobs? Do you have any pets? Can I meet them? More importantly, though, do you guys have... powers? Like, do you see things that other people don't? I have for a long time and I've been looking for you for so long because I don't understand where I could have gotten my powers from."

When I eventually stopped, my mom smiled sweetly, then whispered, "Wake."

I woke up to blinding fluorescent lighting, and as I looked around, I noticed the dozens of doctors and nurses crowded around me. I was lying down in an unfamiliar room and I couldn't hear myself think over the loud whirring sound coming from outside.

"Hello, Sylvia. I'm glad to see you're awake," one of the voices beside me whispered calmly.

“Who are you? Where am I? Where are my parents?”

“My name is Earnest Eastward. Sylvia, you’ve been in a coma for almost two years. As for where this is, we are currently at West Bridgewater hospital.”

“What? B-but what about—”

“I’m so sorry. I can’t imagine what it has been like for you or your family. They have been so worried about you. We have to run some tests, but afterwards, they will be so happy to see you!”

Hundreds of questions buzzed around my head. I was happy to see my family, but the idea of leaving my old family behind upset me. I couldn’t believe that it had all been a dream. That all of my friends and family, the people I had grown to love so much, were just figments of my imagination.

The doctors lead me to the waiting room of the hospital. *I’ve seen this place before*, I thought. As soon as we made it past the wooden doors leading out to the mostly empty waiting room, my family rushed over to me with tears flooding out of their eyes and squeezed me as hard as they could. It took me a little while to remember what had happened in my life before I went into a coma, but if there was one moment that I think brought back the most memories, I’d say it was that one.

The next few years were difficult. They felt like starting all over again, with a new school, a new house, and new friends. Every once in a while, I would see people who I thought I knew, then realize I knew them from memories of the coma. Eventually, I readjusted, but knowing that I had wasted two years doing absolutely nothing and that I would never get them back was still always a frightening thought. One day, one of my friends suggested that I write down all I could remember about what my life was like while I was in a coma. At the time, I thought it was a silly idea, but I can say now, I feel better already.

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Double Sided

by Cindy Luxama

My name is Renée Cadwell. I attend lousy Durham High School and have only one friend, her name is Evie Williams. A lot of peo-

ple have thought that I was a perfect little angel but I'm really not. I like to think that I have two sides, one good, and one bad. It was something I was born with, and there's a 0.93% chance that anyone could ever get Scarnopsy. Those who have Scarnopsy have a mutated brain cell that sometimes triggers their brain to do horrible things. I just happen to be one of those lucky people. I'm only on my bad side during rare occasions at school, but never around Evie and only sometimes around my family. Either way, I don't usually realize I'm on my bad side until after I switch.

"Renée? Renée!" Ms. Wilson called my name. "Earth to Renée! I asked you a question!"

I heard Ms. Wilson shouting at me and realized that I was still at school. I looked around and everyone was staring at me.

"Renée, can you hear me?"

I looked at Ms. Wilson.

"See me after school," she sighed and shook her head.

Great. Detention.

The final bell rang, signaling that it was the end of the day, but I wasn't going to be leaving school anytime soon. I walked to Ms. Wilson's class quickly. I felt happy and cheerful which meant I was on my good side. I quietly opened the door to room 106, Ms. Wilson's classroom. Ms. Wilson sat at her desk, typing on her computer.

"Have a seat," Ms. Wilson said without looking up.

I took a chair and sat down in front of her desk. After a few minutes, Ms. Wilson closed her computer and looked at me.

"Renée, what happened today? We completely lost you for the entire hour and a half of class. What's going on?"

I didn't reply.

Ms. Wilson rubbed her forehead, "If something is going on at home you don't have to tell me. But I'd like for you to come to school tomorrow and actually participate in class."

"I'm sorry Ms. Wilson," I said, "I guess I just got a little distracted."

"A little distracted?" Ms. Wilson raised her eyebrow. "Renée, I know this is not like you," she paused, "And I don't want to invade your privacy or anything, but if you feel your symptoms coming back, then you may want to consider talking to your doctor."

I *hate* when teachers assume that every time I zone out it means I'm getting my symptoms again. I wish my parents had never told the high school about me; after all, I was getting better.

"Ms. Wilson, I am *not* having symptoms. I was just distracted. It happens to everyone! Please, can I go home?"

"I'm very sorry Renée, I didn't mean to assume you were having symptoms. I should not have said that. Yes, you may go home. Have a nice evening!"

I walked out of her classroom and out of the large double doors. The cool, spring air hit my face, a relief from the stale, stuffy classrooms I had been sitting in all day. Since I had detention, I missed my chance to ride the bus home so I walked.

After thirty minutes, I finally arrived at my house. I slowly climbed up the stairs that led to the porch and went to unlock the front door when I noticed an envelope in the mailbox. I took it out and brought it inside. The letter was addressed to *me*. I quickly opened the letter and began to read. It was from the Mental Institute for Children.

No way was I going back there.

That night I had a terrible nightmare about the Institute. I had these more often after I left the Institute, but I still get them every now and then. This nightmare was about when I was taken from home and to M.I.C. I was at home, playing with my dolls. Except I was really just pulling their limbs apart. Then these men walked into my room, scooped me up and brought me into a white car. My mom and dad were crying, and so was I. I was terrified, I didn't know who these people were, and why my parents weren't stopping them. After a while, we pulled up into the parking lot of a large, gray building. My eyes and throat hurt from all the crying. One of the men picked me up and brought me inside. We passed several rooms. There were kids in chairs, screaming, crying, some completely silent. They looked about my age, small, weak. Some probably hadn't even started first grade yet. They brought me into a room and strapped me into a chair, then they left me. Hours passed, there were no windows for me to see outside, no toys to play with, no people to talk to.

I shot up in my bed, sweat trickling down my neck. My breathing heavy. I quietly tiptoed to the kitchen, to my surprise, the letter was still on the kitchen counter. I opened it up and began to read.

Dear Renée Cadwell,

Now that you are an adolescent and have been given consent from your parents to be contacted directly by our officials, you will regularly receive letters from the M.I.C. regarding your health. We have noticed something strange in your recent blood test, and our doctors are working to figure out the issue and find a solution as soon as possible. This does not mean that you should worry, for we are finding a medication to help cover any symptoms that you may have. If you do, however, feel any symptoms out of the ones listed below, then take the medications you were provided with and contact us right away.

Sincerely,

Mental Institute for Children (M.I.C.)

I couldn't believe it, something could be wrong with me again. It didn't mean I would have to go back, but it meant that I was still being monitored by the M.I.C. this *whole time!* It gave me a strange, creepy feeling, and I instantly felt as if someone was watching me. *What blood test? What medication did I already have?*

The next morning I told my parents about the letter; they said that they already knew, and were waiting for the right time to tell me. My parents are bad liars. Maybe they didn't want me to go back to the M.I.C., or maybe they didn't want me to know that the M.I.C. wasn't done with me. I wasn't sure. It was Saturday, so I decided to go to Evie's house.

I arrived at the house and rang the bell. Evie swung the door open in less than a second.

"Renée! It's so great to see you!" she said. Evie had a strange, uncomfortable look on her face. "Why don't you come inside, my parents aren't home."

I found it strange that Evie knew that I'd be coming, and it scared me, *what if she found out about the M.I.C. letter and my secret?*

"Are you thirsty?" she asked. "We have soda!"

I nodded my head and flopped onto the giant, soft, gray couch. I closed my eyes and thought about everything that happened last night. I really wasn't done with the M.I.C.. They were still watching me. Of course, I should have known that if you've gone to the M.I.C. once, you're never going to get out. Evie came into the living room from the kitchen. *Should I tell Evie?*

"We have Dr. Pepper, Sprite, and some orange soda. Which one do you want?" she asked.

I shouldn't tell her, I thought, I could lose her as my only friend.

"Dr. Pepper," I replied.

Evie disappeared into the kitchen, but soon returned with two tall glasses of soda.

"My parents are out of town, so there are no rules!" Evie exclaimed, handing a glass to me.

Evie's parents were very strict, so whenever they weren't around Evie took advantage and broke the annoying rules her parents set for her.

"Why don't we go outside?" Evie said, finishing the last of her drink.

"Okay," I stood up and followed her to the back door. We went outside and started playing Frisbee.

It was the fifth time that I had dropped the Frisbee or thrown it in the wrong direction.

"Renée, what's gotten into you?" she asked.

"Sorry, just a little distracted," I replied.

Then I fell to the ground and my whole world went dark.

I slowly opened my eyes. The white light blinded my vision. *Was I dead?* I blinked my eyes a few more times and saw people hovering over me.

"She's awake!" one person said.

"Get the family," another said.

A few seconds later mom and dad rushed into the room and showered me with hugs and kisses.

"Where am I?" I asked groggily.

"Oh, thank goodness you're okay! You fell down, at Evie's house, but you're okay now!" mom said.

“We’ll give her a few more days to recover, but the blood tests are already coming in,” a woman standing a few feet in front of me said. I assumed she was the main doctor.

“Hello Renée, how are you feeling?” she asked.

“Tired, I guess,” I replied.

“OK. I think we should let her rest. We will see you later.” The main doctor and her colleagues left the room with my parents following shortly after.

The next few days went by in a blur. I went in and out of consciousness. When I was awake, doctors would come in and ask me questions, collect blood samples, and do what felt like a hundred other tests. On my last day, a kind young nurse came in to run the tests on me. This time it felt like a regular check-up.

“What day is it?” I asked her while she typed my information on the computer.

“Friday. Did you plan anything in particular?” She moved over to the counter and pulled out a needle-syringe filled with a strange, purple liquid.

“No.” I closed my eyes as she walked over to me.

“This will help you fall asleep.” She applied some numbing spray to my arm.

“But I’ve gotten so much already.”

“Yes, but it is for our last test. Don’t worry, we have to make sure you aren’t falling back into your previous condition.”

“OK, I guess that makes sense.” I closed my eyes and felt the needle plunge into my arm. By now I had had so many needles put into my arm that I didn’t feel any pain. After a while, I finally fell asleep.

A tall woman with dark hair pulled back into a bun walked into the room. She knelt down so that she could face me directly. She told me why I was here, and what I would do. She told me not to be scared. She took me out of the chair and led me to a small, empty room. There was a table, with a chair. On the table, there was warm, tasty looking food. There was a shelf with books, crayons, and paper, and a bed with plain, white sheets. The woman left me in that room. I screamed, I cried, I threw things on the floor. No one came for me.

I woke up in a strange gray room. I slowly closed my eyes, and could still see my nightmare. I opened them again, I was still in the room. Not at the hospital. I carefully got up and looked around the room. The realization hit me, I was back in the M.I.C.

Several hours passed before I heard the door unlock, and Evie came in. She looked scared, and her eyes were red as if she'd been crying.

"How come you never told me? How do you think that makes me feel?" she asked. "Did you not trust me? You're here for something that I don't know about, but obviously you didn't think I was trustworthy enough. But I always had a feeling something was wrong, that you were different from all the other kids."

I didn't know what to say. I never thought the day would come where she found out who I was. I quietly walked towards her and grabbed her throat.

Evie's screams echoed in the room, guards rushed in and pulled me away. I screamed with rage until Evie left the room, until the guards left the room, until my throat became sore.

That night, I cried myself to sleep.

Two weeks later, I decided I was going to do something I never thought possible. I was going to escape. I wasn't entirely sure which side I was on, I knew that I was on my good side at the hospital, but switched to my bad side after Evie came to visit. I held a piece of the chair that I had finally broken off in my hand and went to bust open the door. After several attempts, I finally got it open. I sprinted down the hallway to the large open window and slammed the wood into it a few times until it shattered into a thousand little pieces. The alarms went off, and I could see the guards dressed in all white coming towards me, each holding something that looked like a gun. Except, they didn't use guns at the Institute, so maybe a taser. I passed through the opening I made in the window, careful not to let any shards of glass cut my skin. Thankfully, my room was on the first floor, which meant I could escape easily. I ran as fast as I could through the tall grass that rose up to my waist. I was never good at running on bumpy terrain like Evie, and the guards were only a few

feet away. I starting going into a zig-zag motion, to make it harder for them to tase me down. More guards came from the other sides of me. There was no way I would make it.

Until the grass turned to asphalt and it was like I was running on a track field. I could feel my speed pick up as my lungs screamed for air. Up ahead, I saw a large fence that went up about 10 feet high. There was a large sign that read **ELECTRICITY OFF**. Perfect! I was very good at climbing, so this couldn't be a challenge for me. I pushed my legs as hard as I could until I reached the fence and started climbing. I had to climb as fast as possible, or the guards would easily tase me down. I reached the top, swung over the fence and kept running.

I got down to a crawl after running for what felt like the longest time of my life. I could no longer feel my legs. I stopped crawling and slowly stood up. My legs felt like jelly, and there wasn't a single building in sight. Only the road that I'd been running alongside. Not a single car had passed, and it made me wonder if this road was abandoned; that would mean I couldn't hitchhike to the city. I got closer to the road and held my thumb out. My legs wobbled beneath me and I collapsed.

I woke up in a bright room with people hovering above me. *Was I in the hospital this whole time? Was escaping the M.I.C. all a dream?* I blinked a few times to clear my vision, and found that I wasn't in the hospital, but in a soft, velvety chair. There were about 50 people standing around me.

"Oh good, she's finally awake," a woman wearing a dark red dress said. She walked up to me and shook my hand. "My name is Rosanna. Nice to meet you."

"Hello, my name is—" I began.

"We know your name. You just escaped the M.I.C., congratulations. None of us have ever made it that far on our own. Welcome, we are the Escapees of the Mental Institute for Children. The E.M.I.C. You're our leader Renée, it's your turn to shine."

Leader? "I don't understand," I said.

"Ha! I told you it was a bad idea!" one person laughed.

Rosanna shot them a dirty look, “As I was saying, Renée, we are your army, which means you will control us.”

A short man wobbled up to Rosanna with a small vial filled with dark green liquid.

“Drink this, it will help you completely switch to your bad side,” she said, handing me the vial.

“But, I don’t want to—”

“Just drink it!” She opened the vial and poured its contents into my mouth. “There, now tell us what to do and we’ll do it.”

A sudden change came over me. I couldn’t hear what else Rosanna said. There were dark spots clouding my vision, and as soon as it came it went away. I could feel my lips curling up into a smile.

“Let’s make my good friend Evie just like me.”

And just like that my new army got to work. Some stayed behind and gave me food and drinks and anything else I wanted. Others went to search for Evie, while more people went to set up the party I was throwing for after we made Evie evil. It suddenly came to mind that I no longer had a good or bad side, I was just bad. Thing is, it didn’t feel wrong, it felt as if I had been that way my whole life. It felt like it was normal.

In a matter of days, the party was complete. Evie had arrived and was locked up in a cell. There were over a hundred people attending the party. I stood in the luxurious room that I was given and stared into the mirror. I wore a long, sparkly, emerald green dress. The sleek black box that held the serum sat on the wood table behind me. Tonight was going to be a perfect night.

Rosanna stood on the stage and was talking to the crowd to get them riled up. When she nodded to me, I walked up to the polished stage and waved to the crowd.

“Tonight my friends,” I began, “we will be welcoming our new member, Evie Williams!”

Everyone clapped and cheered. I only said a few simple words and it was like I had just given them the best speech they ever heard. I was loving this new attention.

“Let’s bring her out onto the stage!”

We all clapped as Evie was pushed by two members of my “army” onto the stage. She looked as scared as a deer in headlights. I guess if I still had a good and bad side I would have felt some empathy for her, but we were doing this for her own good, and she would thank me later anyway. The two members sat Evie into the chair. Tears were streaming down her face and her whole body was shaking.

“Don’t be scared, Evie, this is for your own good,” I smiled at her, but it only made her cry even harder.

I opened the box and took out the needle-syringe. The fluid inside was the same dark green as the one Rosanna had me drink. I walked over to Evie and placed the needle onto her neck.

“Three!” I shouted.

“Two!” everyone in the room screamed.

Evie shook even harder, her sobs got louder. I looked down at my own hands and saw they were shaking too. I steadied my fingers on the handle of the syringe.

“Please Renée, don’t do this,” Evie cried.

My hands shook harder, the syringe slipping from my grasp. I took a deep breath to calm my nerves and put the needle back onto her neck. I looked at the painful expression Evie wore, she was my friend, my *best friend*. What was I doing? The large double doors in the back of the room swung open, and a dozen guards in white clothing stormed into the room. My whole body shook with fear, they were the guards from the M.I.C. I dropped the needle-syringe onto the ground and began to cry.

I cried because I lost my best friend, cried because I just ruined my whole life, and there was no way back. I let the guards handcuff my hands together and bring me to the familiar, white M.I.C. car. I didn’t put up a fight when they brought me into a new room on the highest floor. I didn’t break anything when they locked me up inside. I would forever be a child of the M.I.C., and there was nothing I could do about it.

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Pain

Douglas Perez

I come to you today
To show you my way
That without no shame
There is no pain
And what will remain
Shall be nothing more but a stain
To remember my past
To show that nothing ever lasts
I cried to him, why did you have to leave?
Pulling from his sleeve
But he was so naive
I felt such grief to see him leave
My pain cannot be explained
It was so hard to contain
But with all pain there is something you must **gain**

© 2019 Douglas Perez

Found Love

Anna Saravia

Time passes by
I've been talking to someone
They make me smile
And makes me think of them
Our small memories

I've felt sad
They're worried
Brought me food
Comforted me
Laughed really hard

Its 1:00 am and I can't stop thinking about you
My heart beats uncontrollably when I'm with you
I feel my face heat up
I smile when I see your texts

Please don't leave me
You comfort me
Please don't break me
I love you

© 2019 Anna Saravia

Soccer

Oscar Diaz

Soccer is a sport that I adore,
I've been playing since I was 4.
It's not hard to make a score,
I'm improved and better than before.
Soccer is my passion,
And now I am a captain.
Now I'm with my team,
We are the main theme!

© 2019 Oscar Diaz

Father

Emely Mendoza

Father, you might not always be here with me, but at least you are in my life. Last time we were together as a family was 3 years ago. You always call to say nothing in particular. The small talk is the only way you know how to say I love you. I do too. I know you do not like talking about your past. I know life has been so rough on you, I come from the same aching blood, I collapse in on myself. I am your daughter.

© 2019 Emely Mendoza

Do You?

Anais Lopez

Do you believe in me? 'Cause I sure don't. You tell me to try hard, you tell me to succeed and to do my best. What does that all mean?

Do you believe in me? 'Cause I sure don't. Don't tell me to try hard, don't tell me to succeed, don't tell me to do my best. 'Cause it's all a joke. What does that all mean? I have done my best. I don't know if you care.

Do you believe in me? 'Cause I sure don't. I try to tell you it won't work. I try to tell you I got this. It's all me. I believe in myself.

Do you believe in me? 'Cause I sure don't. Stop trying to tell me what you say to others. I know you don't care. It was all planned. I can't control you or stop you from saying it. **JUST STOP!** I got this. I know it might be hard, but it's all up to me.

Do you believe in me? 'Cause I sure don't. I've heard those words before. Do they even mean anything to you? Don't lie. Tell me the truth. I know you say it all the time. Just stop. It's me, it's always been me.

IVE GOT THIS.

© 2019 Anais Lopez

Her Eyes

Nicole Lopez

I confront her sad, tired eyes,
I apologize for not being honest with her.
I look away ashamed,
The look in her eyes wasn't what I was looking for.
When I'm ready to retreat,
I walk away from the mirror
And cry.

© 2019 Nicole Lopez

I Too Sing

Nehemie Simon

I too sing a student;
I speak from the
East Somerville Community School.
I also come from a school of diversity,
Where there are a lot of
Hispanic, Brazilian and other nationalities,
Where everyone is welcomed,
Where multiple languages are spoken.
I come from eating Haitian food and from eating pizza,
Where I speak Haitian Creole and English at home,
I speak from a phoenix;
I too sing a student.

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