

A serene landscape photograph of a lake at sunset. The sky is a mix of soft pinks, oranges, and blues, with wispy clouds. The water is calm, reflecting the colors of the sky. On the left, the dark silhouette of trees and a shoreline is visible. The word "Arête" is written in a large, bold, black serif font across the middle of the image, partially overlapping the sky and the water.

Arête

ABOUT ARÊTE

ARÊTE SERVES TO COMPILE A VARIETY OF FINE ART—WRITTEN AS WELL AS ARTISTIC AND PHOTOGRAPHIC— FROM THE TALENTED STUDENTS WHO DEFINE THE LASSITER COMMUNITY. THE STUDENTS SHOWCASED IN THE MAGAZINE HAVE WORKED DILIGENTLY AND HAVE HAD THE COURAGE TO SEND IN THEIR WORKS. LASSITER DOES NOT HAVE A CREATIVE WRITING CLASS, SO ARÊTE HAPPENS TO BE THE NEXT BEST THING. WE HOPE THAT YOU ENJOY THE EXPRESSIONS OF LASSITER'S TALENTED STUDENTS.

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Me and My Mind By: Tess Adams

(Award Winning) Artwork by: Talia Olson

A wise woman told me,

Why keep your thought in a cage?

Do you think in there, they're safe?

Try writing them down, see what they can do.

Those nagging ideas might surprise you.

How can I write what can't be put into words?

Besides, I don't think my voice would be heard,

For I am just a child, only 17, not some wise old bird.

I've lived in the same place all of my life,

And so far the peach state has been treating me right,

But my experiences are limited, not full of adventure and flight.

Another face in the crowd, another leaf blowing in the wind,

This is what I say I must be,

Yet as I sit in my chair, tapping these keys,

Drowning out the buzz with lyric-less music,

Reaching so deep down I think I skipped my heart

And ended up at my knees,

These words began to spill out from me:

I am not you, and you are not me,

I don't know what you can expect from anybody, really,

Except who they are, and what they could, should, will be.

People think I am strange,

But what is normal?

I like video games, puzzles, alone time, and food.

I like cold weather, my family, sleep, and making art.

I like the silly sound of a kazoo,

And isn't nature beautiful, too?

That doesn't sound too strange, you may ponder,

But once my tangled mind begins to wander

And my energy intertwines with my insatiable hunger

For a way to expel what I am about to hold inside,



An abstract thing in which I take a bit of pride,

You may begin to see

Just how special I am.

Hear me squawk while others talk,

See me twist and hop while others walk.

I speak my own language, you know,

Scendeladoo da bap tap til guercha smock.

How about you?

You must have one too,

For we can't all say the same things.

That's plagiarism.

Plus conversations would be super boring.

Speaking our minds is easier than we think,

Because what do we speak from if not our minds?

You and I have different voices,

Different patterns of speech.

We're all the same in that we're different,

So you're just as strange as me.

I can't believe this is what I wrote with my mind in my knees.

Theme for English AP

By: Emma Odak

Dr. Blanchard said,

Go home and write,

A pastiche by Friday.

Langston Hughes wrote the foundation for you,

So use it to guide what you say.

But it cannot be straightforward.

I am a high schooler, ignorant by default, and still growing.

I learn through assimilation, accommodation, and discrepancy,

And pick up things worth unearthing.

Buy my values bias my fervor.

The ideologies I christen are regulated by engagement and latency,

Into a higher tier of memory, turned by the opinions of thinkers like Emerson,

Then Stephen, Plato, and an honorable mention: Susskind,

My hero Leonard Susskind, who guides my approach to this paper

And gives me the conviction to sit down and write this page:

Only those austere in nature can force themselves into 'knowing' what's true,

Especially at seventeen, our age. But I think to be

The project of origin, Universe, I am guided:

Guide you, guide me—we two—you, me, interact by concept.

(I hear vacuums too.) Me—subdivided?

Well, I fancy writing, drawing, theorizing, and pretending to be elsewhere.

I like to have friends, interact, counteract, and be my own king.

I like unparalleled aphorisms more than my birthday,

Or words of fancy—adret, analgesia, or accolade.

I guess being decided DOES make me like

The embodiment of Nick Carraway's cynicism.

So does this page fall short of the American Dream?

Being as I am, I want to give it a lively beam.

But it will be

Simply a part of you, Universe.

I am of you--

Yet you not of me, as I wish you to be.

That's science.

Sometimes it is theorized that the universe was

never meant to host consciousness.

And that I amount to naught but a cosmic accident.

But I'm made from you, that's true!

As mankind learns from you,

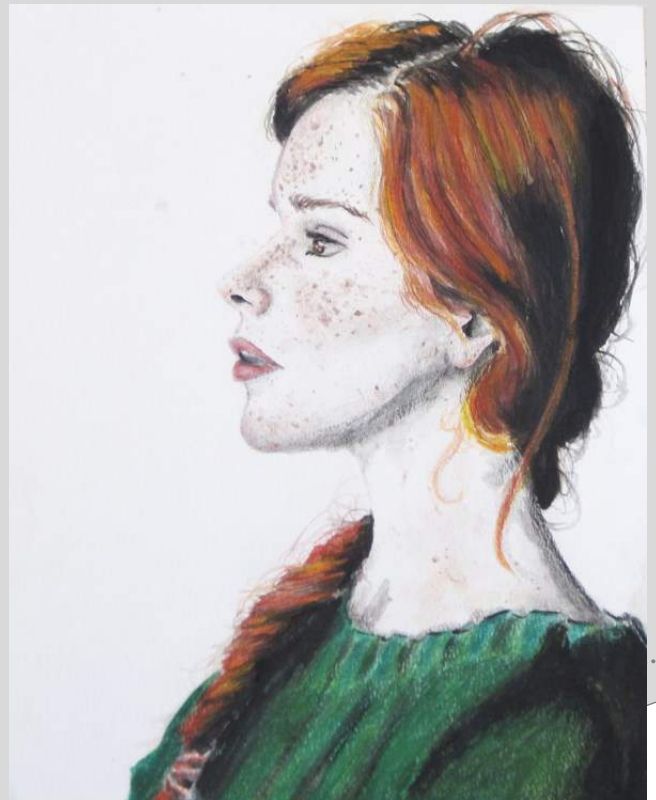
We leave tracks for the future together—

For you are indifferent—and exist forever—

And unlike our findings, we inevitably all weather.

This is my page for AP Lit.

Artwork by: Mia James



My Kind

By: Lauren O'Malley

My teacher assigned,

A page of poetry

That didn't have a rhyme,

But tells the class

A bit about your kind.

Your kind? Is there such a thing?

I guess I am my own unique being.

I come from a family who likes overachieving.

I grew up in an area afar from believing,

That crime and drugs could have any sort of meaning.

I am given the things I need to succeed,

A good time, education, and protection,

Maybe a little more than I need.

All that surrounds me helps me to be,

Something unique, my own kind of me.

I ponder the thought of what makes me, me,

Asking God -- what would you like me to be?

Of course, that's my task to figure out,

Sometimes it's clear, but other times I have doubt.

I think about the things I enjoy doing.

I like to learn, swim, eat, and sometimes laugh too.

I am serious, wacky, confident and shy.

I enjoy a challenge,

But I don't like living life on a line.

At this crossroad in my life,

I look across my desk and,

Wonder how you – my instructor – could understand,

Not knowing what is next.

You see, I am a part of my own kind.

The kind that separates you and me,

But in the end, is it really a separation?

You've been where I am,

And I am going to where you are.

We bond when we are together,

But really don't see that far—

Into each other's' lives

Because you see –

Time is the difference,

It is what separates the now and what it is supposed to be.

This here is my kind of me.

Artwork by: Junhee Park



Six Word Memoirs

Aggressive car singer in the making.

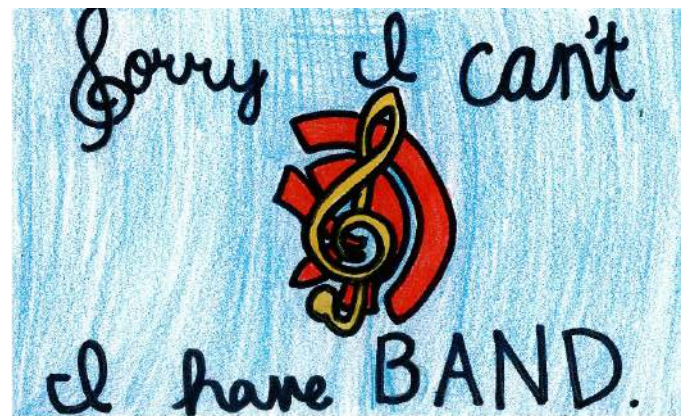
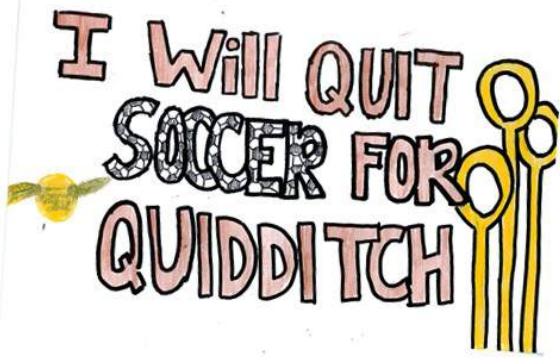
Not weird, just a limited edition.

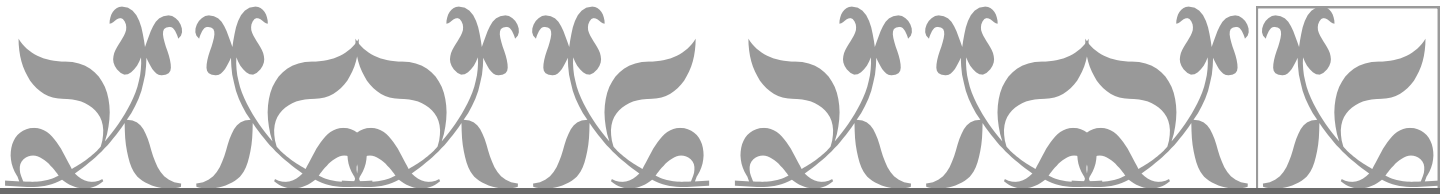
I am a book no one opens.

Ask me again in a week.

Please coach, Don't make us run.

Ignorance is Bliss and I am unhappy.





The Peacock's Lesson: Cobb County Writing Fair Winner 2015

By: Alex Burke

Once upon a time in the lush South African rain forest there lived a very proud and vain peacock named Patrick. Patrick spent his days prancing from pond to pond staring at himself in awe at his bright, beautiful green and blue feathers. Every time animals would walk by, Patrick would stop them and ask, "Can you believe how beautiful my feathers are?" The animals would reply, "Yes, Patrick, they are gorgeous. Do you want to play with us?" Patrick would reply with a sneer, "No, I do not want to ruffle my feathers, and besides, I don't play with ugly animals." Meanwhile, up in the tall African trees the monkeys of the rain forest hung around. The smartest monkey Marti was laughing and swinging from branch to branch.

One day Patrick and his cool, stylish friends were sitting around the clearest pond when they heard about the annual rainforest ball, which was being held the following night. Excitedly, Patrick and his arrogant friends planned their outfits for the party and gossiped about how they would look much better than the other creatures at the ball. Marti the monkey overheard them talking and decided it was time for somebody to teach Patrick a lesson. He swung down and stood in front of the vain birds. "Patrick," exclaimed Marti, "did you hear about the new plant that just arrived in the forest that can make your feathers longer, softer, and extremely vibrant?" Patrick replied, "No! Where can I find this miraculous plant?" Marti promised, "Don't worry about that. I can bring it to you." Patrick smiled, "Okay, but just for me. My friends don't need to look as good as I do." Later that day Marti found Patrick still sitting by the pond, so he eagerly gave him the magical plant and went on his way. Patrick, still looking at his reflection, said to himself, "I can't wait to be the center of everyone's attention when I arrive at the party." Patrick picked up the plant and quickly ate it, cackling as he slowly fell asleep.

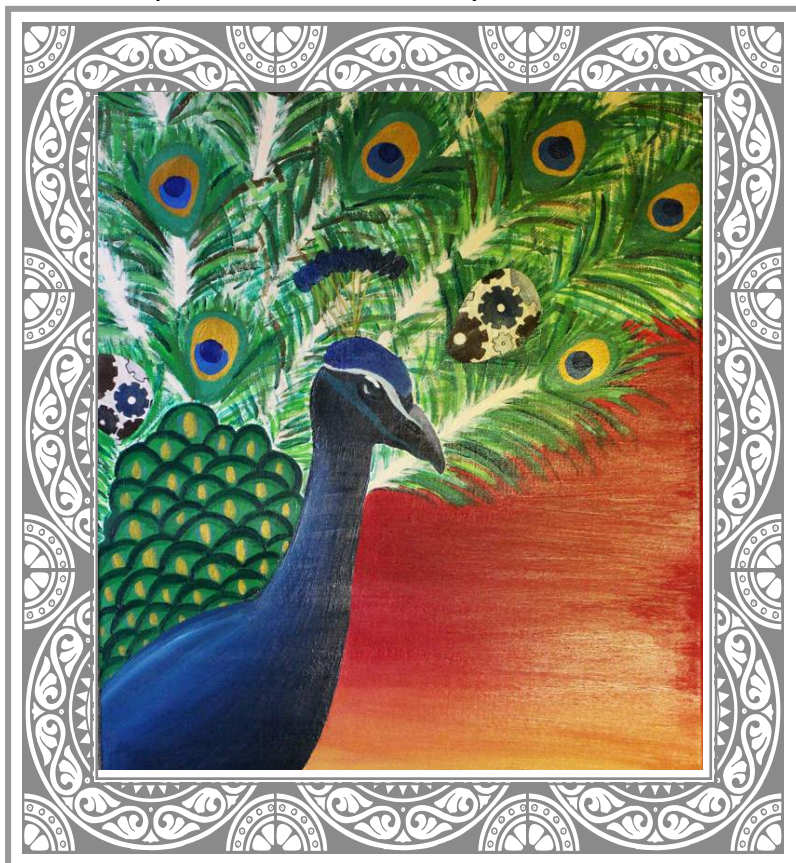
The day of the annual ball arrived and Patrick stretched his slender body and felt a cold breeze. One of his few friends, Polly the peacock, called out his name, "Patrick, hello Patrick, where are you?" Patrick answered, "Polly is that you? I am over here by the tree." Polly grew closer and suddenly screamed when she saw what was supposed to be Patrick, except all of his feathers had fallen off.

Patrick was scared out of his mind and wondered why she was freaking out, so he



asked, "Polly, what is the matter?" She responded, "Patrick, I think you should come with me to your pond." They walked to the clear pond where Patrick admired himself daily. Once they got there, Patrick looked in and nearly fainted when he noticed his body barren of his previously magnificent feathers. He turned to her with tears streaming down his face and wept, "Who could have done this to me, and what did I do to deserve it? ...MARTI, that is who did this!" The few remaining friends of Patrick showed up because they had heard about what had happened and wanted to see for themselves. Patrick looked so sad, but that didn't stop his friends from laughing and making fun of him for being naked. Patrick asked nervously, "Are you guys going to still go to the ball with me?" They replied scornfully, "Are you crazy, you have never been uglier. We can't be seen with you." All alone Patrick sat next to the only thing he still had, his pond. He thought long and hard, as he sat by himself, about how he felt and he didn't like it. Suddenly, he realized this was the way others must have felt when he treated them badly. At that moment all Patrick wanted was a friend, but now he didn't have any. Then, Patrick saw a figure swinging past him in the trees. He realized it was Marti. Marti climbed down and asked, "Patrick, why are you not at the ball?" Patrick said, "Well, you know that plant you brought me? I ate it. It made my feathers fall off and now I am ugly and nobody wants anything to do with me." In shock, Marti remarked, "You see, Patrick, that is not true. I will be your friend because it is not what you look like that I care about. It's that I know you can be a good peacock if you choose to be." Patrick, with sorrow covering his face, looked up and said, "I know that now, and I am sorry for everything I have done to hurt your feelings. I am going to apologize to the others even if they don't chose to forgive me. I am going to start new and try to make amends because I know I was really mean." After the ball, Patrick announced for every animal to please gather near the pond. As soon as they all arrived, Patrick gave a personal apology to each of them. Then when he finished, he picked up all of his beautiful feathers and threw them into the pond, and they slowly disappeared. Smiling, Patrick said, "By the way you are all beautiful, inside and out, so don't let me or anybody else ever make you think otherwise."

Artwork by: Kate Browne



Light

By: Mathew Martratt

Stared out into the horizon as day transformed to night
Too tired to sleep, too weary to fight
The sky was pitch black, filled with icy wonder
No clouds in sight, yet I still heard thunder.
It was too dark to think, too loud to feel,
Too many emotions for any of them to be real.
But I passed my thoughts to take a short breath,
I'd given everything and anything I ever had left.
I shivered and shook like a house without a purpose,
And I thought to myself how I was truly worthless.
Then I peered out into the open abyss,
Feeling as though something must be amiss.
I stared and stared at the countless stars that filled the sky to the brim,
But I couldn't cough up a word.
These stars looked like nothing I had e'er seen,
Nothing I had ever heard.
They seemed unending, but everything must seamlessly come to an end.
And I thought back to people I gave up and people I chose
You complete me, you make me new,
My reason for being nothing is me without you
Everything must have an ending, this is true
Everything must have an ending, except my love for you.
The space of the earth and the limit of the sky
The speed of Velocity at which we can fly
But there is one thing that knows no fences,
That deserves to take chances
Without looking back at circumstances
That has all reason to fight
This is the beauty of Light

Artwork by: Claire Schulz



A Veil

By: Shori Sutton



Soft blond curls fall loosely around her shoulders.

A thin veil, the shade of champagne, emits the faintest scent of
lavender,

Shielding an alabaster face from a more repelling society.

Smoky clouds overhead and car horns blaring,

Doors slamming... send souls retreating.

But behind the veil, the sun continues to shine.

She'll never know. She'll never see.

Tight curls line a silken, mahogany face.

Jilted, crestfallen, and dissatisfied.

The veil does not exist here.

The veil does not shield, but rather its absence mocks.

The sky sighs in its gray shackles.

Overwhelmed by the wail o' sirens and slamming doors,

She retreats.

She has seen it all, the things she had never wished to witness.

Artwork by: Justin Castro

Expectations By: Joseph Anderson

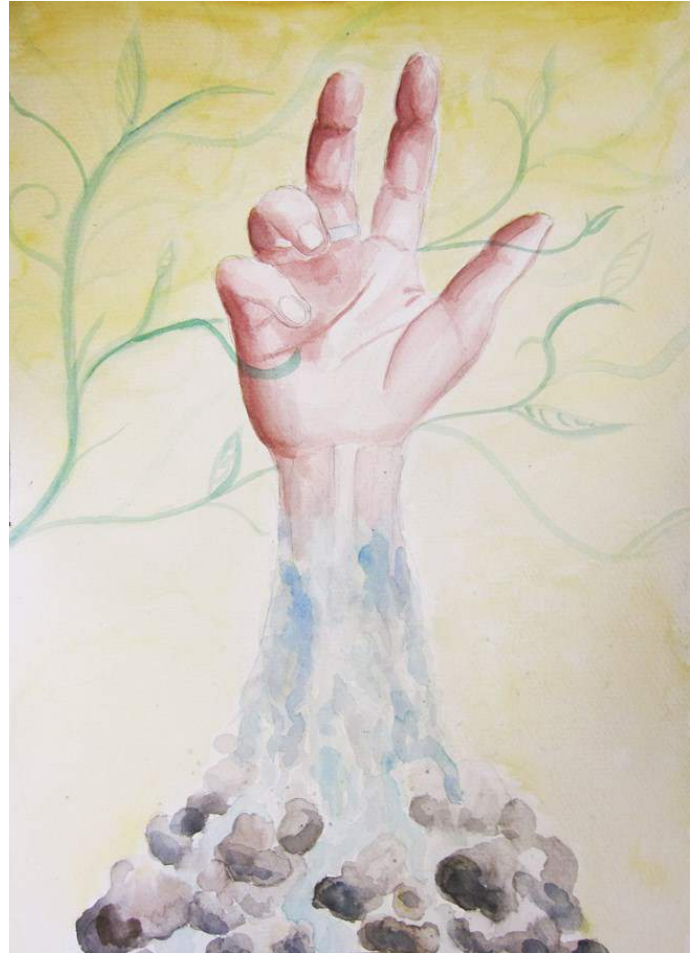
Artwork by Kate Browne

Born to be a scholar I was told,
 Expectations grew when my body refused,
 Never good with history or the art of language,
 But mind on standby for music, science, combat, psychology, and medicine.
 I was ignorant of my surroundings, caring for only me,
 But raised with one and middle of five,
 My mouth learned to remain closed and mind sharp,
 And become the aegis of my family.

What will the choices I make do to this world?
 What should I do, what should I do?
 Turning twelve, my curiosity kept growing but I never did.
 I take my brother's hand and show him what I have learned.
 While in turn, he shares it with his to-be-born blessing.
 If her hand is to be held, what shall she do with such wisdom?
 My wish is for my hope to be theirs.
 My wish is for God to guide them.

Graduation is not done in a day, or week, or month,
 But years of labor.
 Back, bus, bed, one-hundred eighty days.
 One-hundred eighty days times four.
 The cycle will end soon, give me a little longer.
 I will toil through lectures and lessons for bells, eight times.
 But on that day, I will wear that hat and gown.
 But on that day, I will know my endeavors were completed.

My bi-weekly hospital salary mailed,
 In the mansion where my doctorate hangs.
 Tithe, bills, and family.
 Mother, Father, Wife, Son, Daughter.
 -Splash- in the water I go, but no intention of coming back on the boat,
 Fear grabbed me and swallowed.
 But no complaints,
 For it was God who was brought me this far.
 And it was He who called me.



The Game

Bennon Bembenek

Moist, soft dirt, lined with newly powdered chalk
The crack of the bat alerts fans of a base knock
Some chew gum, while they chatter and talk
Others stay quiet like a predator on the stalk.

Sunglasses and ball caps shade the sun from their eyes
As marshmallow- like clouds run all over the skies
The pitcher winds up and throws strike one, two, and three
The loud scream of an umpire is what the fans came to see.

It's the bottom of the ninth and everyone is watching the batter,
The hitter's adrenaline makes the ball seem even fatter
This moment where players grasp onto fame
But at the end of the day it is still just a game.



Artwork by: Hannah G.

Time By: Kathryn Hayes

Time: the measurable period during which an action, process, or condition exists. In life, there is an exact amount of time for everything. “A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.” (Ecclesiastes 3:2-8) There is a past, a present, and a future. Always has been, always will be, but if you use your time correctly, you will live your life without any ‘what ifs’ or any ‘oh wells’.

Time is free, but it is priceless. You cannot own it, but you can use it. You cannot keep it, but you can spend it. But once you have lost it you can never get it back. The time has passed for things such as playing with toys, throwing temper tantrums, and wearing diapers, but the time has also passed for procrastination of school work and letting my grades slip. It’s too late for the people I used to call my friends, because they spent my time stabbing me in the back, or using me to get a guy. There is no more time for me to face my fears by running away from them, or switching schools just to get away from a bully. The time has passed for me to put my hair up in a high ponytail with a bow and shake my pom-poms for the fans in the crowd, pumping them up. There is no more time in my old house, with packing up and leaving; the chance of making new memories there is behind us. Sadly, there is no more time left for Bryce Pope, who was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and nothing left for that Monday when the school seemed so empty without him.

Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, and today? Today is a gift; that is why they call it the present. Use it wisely. The present is for a four point GPA and every assignment done to the best of my ability. It is time for people who care about me as much as I care about them and friends who spend their time making good choices. Now time is for faith, not just your average faith, but your, Oh Yeah! I know Kathryn Hayes, she’s that Jesus freak, kind of faith. This is the time for a new house, new neighbors, and new memories. The present is for floor burns, smelly kneepads, and sore legs from all the time I spend at volleyball. For the wins and the losses and all the bonds formed with my teammates from all the time spent together. The time now is for laughing out loud and spending time with friends, for staying up all night while watching chick flicks with friends and crying into ice cream containers over stu-

pid things, for forgiving those who have wronged me because I never know when I will see them again. For being a strong, independent person just making my way through high school and having a good time while doing it. It is time now to forget the past and embrace what awaits me.

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams. It is not time yet for college visits, college applications, or SAT prep courses. It is too early for being number three on the Vanderbilt University volleyball team. It isn't time for, "paging Dr. Hayes" or working all hours of the day. It is

not time yet for holding hands or going on dates. It is too early for "til death do us part" and "for better or for worse." It is not yet time to be called Mommy or Grandma. You are not defined by your past. You are defined by your future. Why? Because you still have control of your future. Use it to the best of your ability.

Life is said to be a confusing concept to gasp, but the only thing confusing about it is when people don't take what life gives them and use it. You only get a certain number of times around the sun, use that time well. Time in the coin of life. It is the only coin you have, and only you determine how it is spent.

Artwork by: Sara Bastian



A Girl's Journey

By Shanetta Cummings

She was born 7 pounds 3 ounces,
Screaming and crying,
Held with gentle care,
And tearing and laughing.

Eyes open, but not saying a word,
She viewed everyone and learned of the world.
How people yelled, laughed, and cried,
And how she didn't have a care at all.

Oohs, aahs, and looks were how she "spoke",
Until she stated those fateful words,
"Mama, Dada" she uttered out and then giggled
And her parents desperately urged for her to repeat it.

Growling, gurgling, giggling, grinning,
She constantly amazed her loving parents.
Wobbling and trying what she did best,
Learning to walk was no easy test.

Pre K began and friendships formed.
She believed in Santa, the Tooth Fairy, and the Easter Bunny.
Questions among questions were asked everyday,
And she learned to count and spell her name.

Year by year she grew older,
Learning lessons and getting stronger.
Until elementary school came and began,
And she picked up many new tricks and games.

Middle school brought a time of worry,
Princesses weren't cool and hanging out with her parents was boring,
She had friends, but were they truly?
They never helped her and really were bullies.

Middle school ended and high school started.
She was no longer a loser being bullied.
Beautiful, kind, and smart to boot,
Everyone loved her, adored her, respected her.



High school progressed and she became class president.
Earning all A's and being intelligent,
She applied for colleges of many types,
And got accepted to all of them.

College wasn't a time for fun or laughter,
Days of tests, discussions, and teachers' lectures.
But she needed to live, to love, and to enjoy.
So she let go of the reigns and began to have fun.

She graduated among laughter and cheers,
Much much like her birth, her parents had fears.
Where would she go, do, or be?
How would they protect her from the things she would see?

She moved to sunny California,
The "Golden State" and the Golden Gate Bridge.
She taught young students science,
How the world worked and how to love it.

Her life of students, while rewarding,
Made her sad and full of yearning.
She met a man who was tall and strong,
Who let her win arguments even when she was wrong,
Who loved her for all she was or could be,
An adored her like she was a queen.

They got married and had two beautiful children,
A house full of laughter, crying, and smiles.
She never could have been happier with anything else,
Though she often had to face some tests.

She lived to have a wonderful life,
86 years of memories, happiness, and even strife.
She lived and grew and made mistakes,
But who is anyone who doesn't face any tests?

She exited the world much like she began it,
Among laughing and crying relatives,
She had viewed everyone and learned of the world,
And took her last breath and entered the dark.

Artwork by: Emily Bordas

Music Works Wonders

By: Parag Kalay

Music! How I love hearing your beats and rhyme

Pumping me up whether it be before a game

Or keeping me in my senses and tame

So good I would need to put on repeat all the time

To live without the presence of song

Feeling completely alone would be the hunch

Loneliness I aim to completely expunge

Could music ever be wrong?

Music is very scientific

Notes have patterns and those patterns are math

The patterns then turn into an amazing path

That's why music is for those who are specific

Put on those headphones and jam out

And when you sing, make sure you don't doubt

Artwork by: Tess Foose-Kutty



Lost Chance

By: Heila Asgarian

*You're the one who passed me by,
You're the one who caught my eye,
All it took was just a glance
For me to think of a possible chance.*

*I'm the one with hope to spare,
Sometimes thinking life's not fair
For how could I see someone like you
And not envision something so true*

*People say I'm crazy,
That fleeting emotions don't last,
Trust me, I don't care what they say
This is nothing like the past.*

*I may have seen you only once
But this time is different, you see.
How can this fluttering feeling be wrong?
I know you belong with me!*

*But yet a doubtful little voice,
Somewhere deep inside my head
I can't escape this sinking feeling
This insecurity- incredible dread*

*I struggle to get my mind together,
As your beautiful eyes land on me
I turn away; another day
Maybe I won't let you flee.*



(Award Winning) Artwork by: Maggie Andersen



The Black Daffodil


By: Paul Shao


Why would I say that the daffodil was black? Well, it shouldn't have been. It supposed to be brightly yellow and blossom as if it was always in its exuberant spring time...

I didn't quite remember the time when I moved here with my family, we were just like a new grass seed accidentally planted in the soil, where thousands of grasses grow and show their verdant appearances. We settled in one small apartment located on one narrow street far away from the golden-painted route sign which had the name "Chinatown" on it. We shared one room with a kitchen that was nicely designed so that I could actually do my homework on the hearth while Mom got the dinner ready, and then we had our dinner on the hearth, mostly standing, because the hearth was too high for the chairs to reach. Dinner was usually simple, but it was usually delicious no matter what it was made of. My mom always told me that she had used some magical ingredients to bring the food that was "dead" back alive again; later on I got to know the real facts.

Outside our apartment were the crowded streets and roads themselves, where we could usually see sellers beside their stalls trying every method they could to attract the busy pedestrians. The fruit and vegetable sellers would splash more water over their wares, which would make their products all look as fresh as they could be. Those who were trying to become fancy to little kids in their self-designed, special, funny costumes were the toy sellers, and they were even sometimes imitating what some toys act like, which would eventually give me a great laugh. My friends and I usually just walked in the street toward random positions, passed by a few stalls, picked up items with great observations from touching them to even smelling them as if we were the potential market sellers. At first this gave the sellers some hope, but later on they just drove us away with trite threats and frightening stories.

Our street was like a magical place, where I could nearly find anything that I wanted to have, and gradually the stuff that I hated and hesitated in buying became my favorites in carefully-decorated fashions. I was once asked to buy some life necessities for our home, but then I just passed through a small, old book store where it not only sold books, but actually flowers, cigarettes, wines, and more than I could ever expect. I was attracted to one of the notebooks with plain, white covers... as fancy as suspicious snow falling beautifully from the sky. Without even a look that could last more than a few seconds on the book itself and its price, I spent the money to buy it, thinking I had actually earned quite a profit for myself, and then I just held it tightly in my arms as the destiny was finally fulfilled. I did get hit by parents for that, but after the blaming and criticism, I still could give a pretty sufficient and reasonable excuse for myself and the book, as I circumspectly analyzed every page with great care, preserving the seedlings from real nature. After considering for a long time, I decided to draw something to notify others that my own notebook was an extraordinary one, belonging to an extraordinary person. Only with black





pens at hand, I looked up on the wall and found the calendar with a few pictures of daffodils in sprightly yellow, so without any other good material for me, I tried my best to copy down one of the daffodils, the one that was on the very edge of the vase, stretching and growing its position out of the tiny space provided.

I named the notebook the Black Daffodil, showing others that I was quite a strange kid to give such a name even with a little bit of sinister information inside, but for myself that was just my dear world where I could write whatever I wanted to write.


My school was located just one block away, which actually gave my friends and me a lot of time to play and enjoy “fun”. The so-called “fun” was actually the short trip to another street nearby, where candy shops and clothing stores had their narrow positions, but they had been luring us into their sweet “trap” since the moment they came into our vision. The owner of the candy shop was quite a woman in her middle age, not good-tempered, but just trying to indicate that she was a talented maker of candies. New orders and specialties would be placed in the window, the only part of the shop that the woman would attempt to clean. What costumers saw wasn’t always the tasty lollipops or sweets with perfect and adorable decorations, but the shop owner standing behind the items and back at the counter, sending out anxious and sometimes even wild signals to convince others to buy. A temporary passer-by could just ignore it and walk off as if he just experienced one ironic, out-fashioned, old play in a small theatre himself, but for a relatively permanent resident like me, I eventually just tried to get away from her and later learned to play jokes on her; sometimes I just melted under her strong will like a deadly sun ray that forced me to buy.

We held enormous festivals there every month, like the lunar festival; people got together and enjoyed the sight of the beautiful moon which was mostly covered by black cloudiness deep in the sky. We would take our seats out, and someone would place a long piece of table on the street with plates and bowls with a few pieces of moon cakes and pies probably from several years ago, so nobody would actually try them. One time when one of my friends ate a little bit of it, he tried his best to swallow but then had to spit it out, which gave us a good laugh. At that time, stores and shops were all trying to use great discounts to attract customers. The cake sellers would use ingredients from a black bottle to decorate cakes which seemed to have been left for a long time yet magically appeared to be tasty again. Likewise, the flower sellers used paint on their flowers- to bring the flowers back to life. It was our own fabulous festival, when no other foreign visitors came.

One day in class, the teacher suddenly talked to us kindly, unlike on normal days, when she yelled at students and punished them meanly. We felt strange and even a little bit nervous about what was to happen at first, and then we just recognized that the teacher herself was in her proudest pink dress, like someone who was going to dance in front of her students.

“My boys and girls, today we are going to have a special guest who is going to check on our education






but never mind what he is here for; prepare your best manners and be polite and quiet in class. If anyone does well, I will buy him a box of candies.”

As we were going to wash our face and reorganize our desks, the first girl who was just getting out was pushed rudely backward by the teacher. The teacher gazed at us, as if everything got back to normal. “Put dirt on your face and shirts; make your hair like a mess.” She pointed at somebody who was wearing clothes that could be a good comparison to her, as we giggled and wondered what was actually going on. The teacher turned to the rest of us, asking us to do the same thing. A student who was sitting beside me stood up and asked the reason for that, but the teacher only repeated once again and left no other response. Finally seeing that the class was still waiting and not moving, the teacher screamed loudly, as she couldn’t contain her meanness any longer, “Do it, or get expelled!”

We were always expected by our parents greatly to achieve high scores to get into a good college and find good jobs, but the teacher was actually spending most of the time yelling, criticizing and complaining and at the end of the class, she asked somebody to write down some sentences for a hundred times for punishment. While the parents always seemed to ignore our reports about the teacher, when they walked past the teacher, they showed up smiling, dramatically amazingly, the couple who were just arguing about their kid would end their strong altercation immediately and smile at the teacher while the teacher pretended to have seen nothing of it. The teacher, showing up majestic-looking, which she always did, only stopped criticizing one person a day in class; rumors were that the student whose parents sent the most luxurious and expensive gifts to the teacher on her birthday would be the one who got praised most by her. Our family looked rather new to the whole urban area. On the day we went to school, we just saw the teacher criticizing the students and their parents’ modest gifts while they all just looked down at the ground... feeling sorry for such unreasonable blame. Ever since that time, whenever I questioned and doubted the teacher at home, they would always say to me, “When in Rome, do as Romans do.”

There were only 5 minutes before the guest arrived, and everything was finally in its perfect place: the classroom looked as if it had been a messy storage room that had been used for storing animals with dust and ashes on desks and floor; the light bulbs that were hung from the wall seemed to be a century old-shining in their most extinguishing light; and at last, most of us looked as if we were children suffering from serious diseases and struggling for survival under the harsh pressures of poor families. Now, the teacher looked like a flower in its full and greatest blossoming, surrounded not by vivid green grasses and leaves but tons of garbage and trash.

The guest was an American in his middle age and in his business-like formal suit. When he first stepped into the classroom, he looked at us as if it was kind of a joke or comedy show, but when we were asked to applaud tolerantly for his arrival, he seemed to stand still in the original position, not moving an inch until the teacher told some students to help him sit. The class went through nicely and smoothly, because the teacher wasn’t even teaching anything, probably as the guest would never have understood our language, but she did use chalk to write on the dusty board where she seldom wrote. The guest, while look-



ing at the teacher for a long time, glanced and stared at us with a great amount of concentration of curiosity, writing something down in a chart quickly at the same time. At the end of the class, we bowed to the guest gently, watched him as he walked out of the classroom and left in his car. We knew that the teacher would yell at us again for our dissatisfying actions from her point of view.

It began snowing outside the window, and when we went out, we had to wrap heavy cloth over our heads and ears, shrinking our hands tremblingly into our pockets, but I was excited, as another important event was just close at hand.

At a church nearby, children and their parents were beginning to gather, waiting in an orderly line which appeared to be surprising. The church held its annual Christmas gift exchange often in a simple and special fashion: We waited and chose the present which other people from other regions placed there as gifts, and after we chose it, we smiled and thanked them as a gift of positive feedback. I was considered less experienced in selecting the gift. Usually the gifts with excellent covers and




(Award Winning) Artwork by: Polina Mikhina

packaging did not actually hide the most valuable items inside. During the first year, I was feeling lucky enough to choose the biggest pack but later only found a small book inside which had definitely been used for quite a few times. Since then, every year before I chose something, as classmates suggested, I would shake the package first, listen and determine what was actually in it. I then chose one that might be kind of plain, but in it I always found good treasures and surprises.

I was told that in the past Americans who had given their gifts would come and bless and pray for us, but gradually, fewer and fewer of them showed up, and finally nobody but Chinese flooded anxiously, both kids and their parents, into the hall of the small church.

There was one time when I was walking on the street after picking up the gift. By coincidence, an American tourist came along, confused and lost in his direction to his destination. I couldn't understand what he was asking me about, but when he showed the place on the map with a symbol of forks and knives, I knew he must be talking about the Great Chopstick Restaurant on Yuan Dei Road, so I led him all the way along. He was happy and relieved to have somebody at last to give him correct guidance. When we came to the door of the restaurant, as he was going to thank me, I was dragged backward by someone on the back; it was one of my best friends, who told me not to talk with Americans and ignored the man's



thankful expression.


All at the very end of that night, one of my friends' words had impressed me so far, "They don't like us, and never provoke them!"


News about Chinese in American papers was no longer unfamiliar to me, ever since some scandals about Chinese had taken place. Friends felt like every one of us was looked down upon even more. Some sighed, some complained, and some in return turned against Americans, blaming them for only indicating Chinese's disadvantages.

These discussions and seemingly pathetic conversations went on, yet life here didn't change a lot: who scolded continued his curse words; who sold continued his "new refreshing skills"; who ignored continued just hanging around. I sometimes just sat at the table, imagining that one day I would walk on an American street and not feel injured, no whispers of "Look, Chinese on our roads,..." Eventually, I simply adapted to the truth that I was hated by them.

Nothing was changed until that very afternoon a year later. While I was out on the street playing with my pals, dogs from some families grew suddenly out of control and chased people. Afraid of being attacked, everyone except me rushed away in a blaze of anarchy, while I rather foolishly stood still, forgot what to face and what to do. A long time passed before I opened my eyes again; I was lying on the street, and my knees, bitten by the dog, were actually bleeding. I tried my best to help myself up, but I was just losing energy quickly and dizziness came straight to my head. Afraid of being laughed at by my friends and being blamed by my parents for bringing so much trouble, I leaned myself against the wall, expecting dramatically to face my fate alone. Several Chinese passed; they might have seen me and heard me beg for help, but they went stoically on their path. The wind of coldness slapped and stabbed into my face, and I felt how an ant would feel when it was on a weak leaf on a lake, about to be submerged by a wave.

It was then an American passed by, perhaps just another tourist, I hesitated to ask, but just as I predicted she would just go in the same way as others had, she turned to me, speaking in a surprised tone while seeing I had been injured so badly. She was followed by her kids: a boy who was probably 7 and a girl a little bit older. The woman turned to her kids, telling them a few words, and then together, they took my arms and helped me up. I was sent to the nearest church for nursing. On our way I felt nervous and stressed, but on their faces I could only sense care and love. Thanks to them, my wound was wrapped up and I felt much better. I looked at them, even wondering if they had given up all their original schedules, since they had accompanied me for a while, trying to find somebody that knew me, even with the language barrier. Before they left, I felt something burning inside my heart. At that moment, I felt shame for not knowing any English words even to express thanks and appreciation, but then I saw them smile at me, and I knew what I should do—I smiled back. The theory that stood in my heart that "I was hated by Americans" began to shake and collapse.





I left school about 2 years later, and feeling I must see more of the outside world for myself, I went out on my own to further my studies in college. To me, everything was foreign; ironically I lived in America—outside of Chinatown- but I didn't even know how to speak English as I lived there. Eventually, I learned how. I was meeting new schoolmates and co-workers every day, and on the first day of self-introduction, my confident speech actually impressed most of my classmates. Later on I gained popularity, not feeling even a little bit hated.

Still, scandals and bad news about Chinese “hated” actions and behaviors were on the news. It was then that one day I happened to find another student who was accidentally a Chinese as well, but rather differently. He greeted me in the mannered way I could have experienced back in the old days of Chinatown, and he became my most helpful friend ever. When I eventually asked him about my concerns over my childhood problem and his thoughts on being hated by Americans, he just said it was nonsense, and a Chinese could actually succeed there with great effort.

One day I was invited to his house for dinner, and I felt warmth and welcome by his parents and brother, rather than just goodness “on the cover” in Chinatown. I at first thought he must be an extraordinary one to have been so nice among other Chinese, but then I found I was greatly mistaken. They were still many more Chinese who were kind, just like him and his family.


Surprisingly and truly, I found the thought of being “hated by Americans” was a mask to hide one's weakness and fear. It was rather more like natural competition; the strong and the good survived, while the weak and the bad fell, yet the weak and the bad still had opportunities to rise and improve to be the good, but some of them just let it go.

I had been texting my old friends in Chinatown ever since, convincing them to change things around there and come to live like I did, but what I always got was still no response. Something sad just came over me; it was like a seedling forced to grow under the condition of great pressures of rock and lack of water and nourishment from sunshine and rich soil. All of this was becoming clearer to me now.

I took out my previous notebook with the white “snowy” color; it was still blank with no words in it, and memories from the past were becoming harder than ever to write down and think about. It would take a great power to overcome it, as if everything in my childhood seemed like dead water.

“People are still doing what they did and they are still abhorred as they were.”

Why had I said that the daffodil was black? Well, it shouldn't have been. It was supposed to be brightly yellow and blossom as if it was always in its exuberant spring time...



Where I'm From by: Kelsey Doerr

I am from tad poles in every puddle
 From dog noses sticking through the cat door and a book light always on
 I am from butterfly gardens
 (With vibrant flowers
 and maybe a few fairies)
 I am from the bluebonnets along every hot highway
 The shady oaks
 Hiding my yard from the sky

 I'm from corn bread in a cast iron skillet and freckles
 From Zora and Leander
 I'm from peace-keepers and sentimentalists
 And from those outdoorsy and adventurous

 I'm from Everything has a use! and Always use your
 words, not fists!
 And Papa's World War I song
 I'm from homemade stockings and advent calendar quilts
 I'm from Floral City and Kissimmee
 Eighteen minute cake and ground baloney sandwiches
 From old fisherman jokes told by Big Ma at supper

 In the old cabinet
 Under the stairs
 Sit the photographs of my family
 They may temporarily decorate the walls for us to see
 But they will always decorate our hearts for us to carry



Artwork by: Breanna Goldson.0

My Hero

By: Kaylyn Kniery

I first met the Baldwins at an O'Charley's one night a few years ago. I was playing on my Nintendo D.S., minding my own business, when Mrs. Baldwin, who was sitting next to me at the counter, was nice and told me I was being well-behaved. We started to talk and she was extremely interesting. Later that night, she told my dad that he looked just like her brother when he was younger. She and her brother, as well as her husband, were already in their eighties.

We would run into each other multiple times a month; often I would see the Baldwins once or twice a week. Mrs. Baldwin was a sweet lady and Mr. Baldwin was an ex-army conductor. I learned about their lives when I would sit with them over dinner at O'Charley's those many nights.

My parents and I took the Baldwins out to dinner for their anniversary and we ate Italian. They recounted how they used to have a car in their attic and how they had no way to get it down, among other absolutely incredible stories.

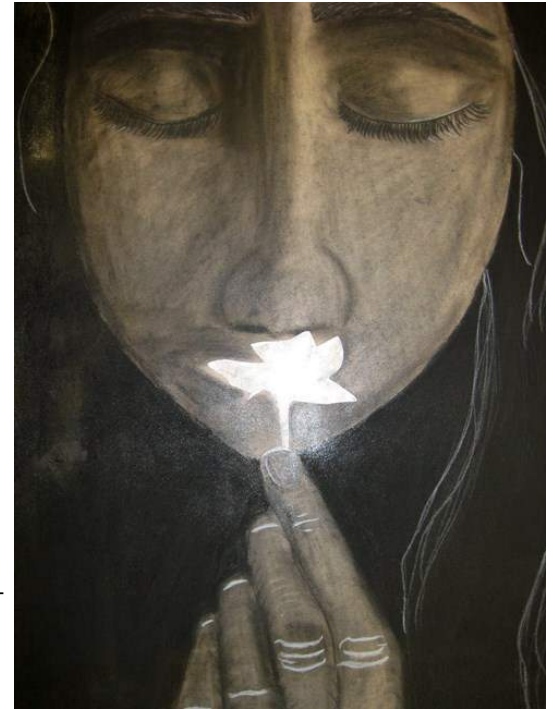
I would tell Mr. Baldwin how I was doing in band on the saxophone, and I would listen to Mrs. Baldwin's anecdotes for hours. She once had a daughter, but she died shortly after she was born. Fortunately, Mrs. Baldwin had three healthy sons. She would always wear brooches, and I told her one of them, a bird, was beautiful; she took it off and gave it to me, and I still have it today.

As the years rolled by, Mrs. Baldwin started to get sick as she aged, but she was strong still. Mr. Baldwin still conducted a band at his church, and we went to see the concerts a few times. He explained how the Juilliard college held a contest for the top space in the school for the person who could best rearrange Rhapsody in Blue without using the piano. He won three years in a row. After Juilliard, he went on to become a colonel and to conduct the army band.

I had started to think of the Baldwins more as grandparents than anything else through the years, and I was their 'Georgia granddaughter'. When Mrs. Baldwin passed away, Mr. Baldwin gave me her pig figurine collection and some of her bird houses. I have a shelf for the pigs in my room; there are over one hundred of them... and counting. The birdhouses are all around my house.

Obama's presidential staff asked Mr. Baldwin if he'd conduct a band for the Fourth of July event on the mall two years in a row. He declined the first year because Mrs. Baldwin had passed away, and the second year he declined because of his health.

When Mr. Baldwin died, it was a sad time. He was in a retirement home for months and he finally passed away. I started playing the clarinet because of Mr. Baldwin. These two were my heroes for many reasons, but mostly because I loved them and they were my family.



Artwork by: Hannah Sbaity

The Waiting Room

By: Eliza Singleton

Dying really isn't all that it's cracked up to be. You don't see any light and there are no pearly white gates. You want to know what there is? A waiting room. But it's not like your average waiting room. There are no *Women's Digest* from last year and *Finding Nemo* isn't playing on mute on some big, bulky TV. Instead, you have to sit in the same plastic chair until the big man calls your number. I had my number memorized down to a T: 103,895th death on July 4th, 2001. I think that's the worst part. I know when I died but not how and I've been racking my brain trying to remember for the past 14 years in this awfully uncomfortable chair.

"Alright everyone, it's a beautiful day to pass away. Let's start with the 1st death on July 4th 2001." I looked up at the speaker above me on the ceiling. It was finally here, the day I died. I nudged Roberta, the Hispanic woman whom I had been sitting by since the day I died. She was the 99,456th death on July 4th, 2001 and died from a freak boating accident while on vacation in the Bahamas. Roberta, like all of the dead people in the waiting room, knew exactly how they died. Wilbur Armstrong fell off his roof while hanging streamers, Arlene Burke was shot by a rogue firework, and Tony Strickland choked on a pecan in his pecan pie. Yes, my half of the waiting room was fraught with wildly patriotic deaths. Another thing you should know about when you die is that you have to wear what you died in while you wait. So, I hope my afterlife doesn't have one shade of red, white, or blue. Even I wore a red and white-striped dress with blue-starred flats.

"Señorita Pam!" I looked at Roberta as she gestured to the door. Out came Pam Macy, the very first death on July 4th, 2001, in tears with a man in a white suit holding her at her waist. Plenty of people had come out of the room in tears. After all this was just a waiting room to find out what you were going to do for the rest of your afterlife, and not everyone gets to see if the pearly gates exist. But something about Pam Macy made me think she was one of the good ones, one of the lucky people who got a second chance at happiness. Pam looked up at the man.

"Can I at least say goodbye?" She said though sniffs. He ignored her and pushed her down the endless hallway towards me. By the time she passed me, they had already called a number of people, including Roberta. Some had come out in tears, some had fought their escort all the way down the hall and into the abyss, and some never came back out. Roberta never came out. I waited patiently until they finally said it:

"I'll take the 103,895th death on July 4th, 2001 now." I stood up quickly. Immediately I felt like I would pass out from nausea. I felt almost as if I had been sitting down for 14 years. As I walked down the hallway I could tell the numbers of people had thinned but I

tried to keep my gaze focused on the door. Today was the day. The day I found out how I died. The door lead to another hallway lined with doors packed closely together on each side. One door was open, so I walked into it. The room was completely white with a single black desk and chair and another chair opposite to it. Behind the desk sat a woman wearing glasses with her hair tied in a neat bun.

“Eloise Jane Chapman?”
The woman inquired peering over her glasses.

“Elle is fine,” I said automatically.

“Have a seat. I apologize for the wait.”

“You mean the 14 years I could have been living it up in Heaven?” She grimaced.

“Yes, that. As you can imagine, we reapers have quite a few clients we have to deal with. Oh you know, with all the murders, suicides, and stupid people.”



Artwork by: Mia James

“I’m sorry, did you just say reapers? As in the Grim Reaper?”

“You think one person can deal with all of you people? Certainly not! We have a very organized network of reapers divided into regions.” I tried to ignore the obvious banging in my head and scooted my chair closer to her desk.

“Look, Lady, I couldn’t care less about your regions. I’ve been in the stupid waiting room for over half of my life and I have no idea how I even got here. So, if you could just tell me and then send me on my merry way that would be awesome.” She blinked a few times and then pulled a portfolio out of her desk and pushed her glasses up on her nose.

“Just know, I am breaking a major rule by telling you your profile. People are supposed to know how they died as soon as it happens but I suppose considering recent complications, it may have been overlooked in our IT department.”

"I'm sorry, IT department?" She ignored me and flipped through the pages quickly. Her eyes widened.

"Oh, no."

"Oh, no? What do you mean oh, no?" She dropped the file on the desk and looked at me. After a few moments she sat up and crossed her legs.

"I regret to inform you of this Ms. Chapman, but there seems to be a mistake."

"What kind of mistake?" I asked slowly and leaned forward until I was practically on top of her desk.

"You're . . . not supposed to be dead."

I fell out of my chair. How was this possible? People die every day, but it's supposed to happen for a reason, right? Even if it's an accident, there's supposed to be a reason. I may not remember how I died, but I remember my life. I remember having the fake tea parties with my best friend Kristen, I remember my 8th birthday party when I got my favorite pair of light-up sneakers, I remember my dog Lancelot who chewed that pair of light-up sneakers. I remember my mom and dad. I tried to suppress the flood of memories and got back in my chair.

"What exactly do you mean I'm not supposed to be dead?"

"Well, you see," she said and cleared her throat, "Your profile says you were born on March 3rd, 1991, meaning that on July 4th, 2001 you would be at the age of 10 years old. However, your profile also says that you will attend the University of Pennsylvania, get married, have one child, and die from a heart attack on September 17th, 2074 at the age of 83."

"A heart attack?"

"Ah yes, the quiet killer. It's actually more common in women than men, believe it or not."

"How is this possible? How could you possibly kill me before I'm supposed to die?"

"Well, I didn't kill you."

"Then who did?" I shouted and sprung for my chair.

"Please keep your voice down."

"Keep my voice down? You just told me I'm supposed to go to college! I'm supposed to have a kid! I'm supposed to be killed by the quiet killer!"

"I'm afraid I'm not sure what to do in this situation. As you can imagine, this doesn't happen very often. Well, not at all actually." I sat back down in disbelief.

"I mean do I at least get to go to heaven?"

“That’s the other problem. There isn’t exactly any more room in Heaven.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Exactly what it sounds like. Heaven has reached its occupancy level, so I’m afraid your other options are either Purgatory or . . . well Hell.”

“So you’re saying my choices are either an eternity of suffering or an eternity of suffering? What did I even do to deserve this?”

“Unfortunately nothing.” She leaned back in her chair and began to twiddle her fingers. Then, she froze. “However, I suppose there is one more option.”

“What? Anything! I’ll do anything else!” She opened another drawer in her desk and pulled out a black file. Breaking the seal on it, she pulled out a piece of paper and placed it on the table in front of me.

“This is a contract for our Protection Program. It’s technically still in its trial phase but I think we can bend the rules considering the situation. You will protect a random soul until their death. Basically, you will be their guardian angel.” I looked down at the contract. The font on the paper required a magnifying glass and the sheet itself was the length of my arm. Still, this was my last option.

“Will I have any way of knowing who I will be protecting?” I asked.

“I’m afraid not.” She answered and handed me a pen. It was now or never. The moment I dotted the ‘i’ in Eloise, I was suddenly transported to a grocery store. I looked down at myself and I was no longer wearing my stripped dress and flats. Instead, I wore a tattered pair of jeans, a purple polo, and a green apron. Touching my head, I saw I no longer had blonde curls but instead thick black hair.

“Excuse me, Miss? Could you please tell me where the cereal aisle is?” I quickly turned around, disoriented. The woman looked surprised and glanced down to my nametag.

“That’s funny, I had a daughter named Elle.”