

Salt Lake Teens Write
Forms in Blue

Volume 10
December 2020

Salt Lake Teens Write is published by the SLCC Community Writing Center
All inquiries should be directed to:
SLCC Community Writing Center
210 East 400 South, Suite 8, Salt Lake City, UT 84111

Salt Lake Community College (SLCC), The Salt Lake City Public Library, and the SLCC Community Writing Center (CWC) are not responsible for the opinions expressed in Salt Lake Teens Write, nor does the writing represent any official position of these organizations. Individual authors are solely responsible for the opinions expressed herein.

Each author retains copyright individually. Reprinting of this publication is permitted only with prior consultation and approval from the SLCC Community Writing Center.

This edition of Salt Lake Teens Write was compiled and edited by Kati Lewis, Arthur Packard, Kanalu Francis, and CWC Staff Members.
Cover art created by Kellen Hunnicutt.

Salt Lake Teens Write: Forms in Blue
©2020



The Salt Lake Teens Write (SLTW) program is a series of three intensive, three-week-long writing workshops intended to help teens develop their skills and passion for creative writing, and to provide a platform for teen writers and artists to further develop their writerly voices and artistic endeavors. As a collaboration between the SLCC Community Writing Center (CWC) and The Salt Lake City Public Library, SLTW is facilitated by the CWC's Youth Program Coordinator and Associate Director with support from librarians.

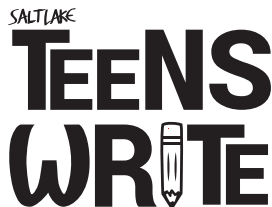
If you'd like to participate, the three separate writing workshops that encompass the entire 2021 program are as follows:

Spring Cohort: Science Fiction: Online Every Tuesday (5-6 p.m.) and Saturday (11 a.m.-noon) from March 2-20, 2021

Summer Cohort: Fantasy: July 2021, Dates and times TBD

Fall Cohort: Horror & Monsters: October 2021, Dates and times TBD

All teens entering grades 9-12 this fall are eligible to participate in all three of the cohorts. At the end of the year, all the writing cohorts come together to collaborate on an anthology publication and public reading to celebrate the different texts they have created during the year. This current anthology is a representation of the works that several cohort members created over the course of 2019-2020 as well as works from other teen writers and artists across the Salt Lake Valley.



Contents

Unity of Nature	8
<i>Kayle Orantes</i>	
These are Just Pants	9
<i>Logan Rusho</i>	
Competition Days.	12
<i>Kayle Orantes</i>	
The Backrooms and Cold Lasagne	14
<i>Francesa Vales</i>	
Duet	21
<i>Indy Rose DeBirk</i>	
Eternity.	22
<i>Maeve Remke</i>	
I am Michaela	26
<i>Michaela Walker</i>	
Beauty	27
<i>Chloe Raymundo</i>	
I am... And What I Will Be	29
<i>Eric Nguyen</i>	
Escape into the Unknown	31
<i>Kayle Orantes</i>	
I am.	32
<i>Savannah Carbine</i>	

A Worthless Adventure	34
<i>Lucy DeMoux</i>	
Blue.	36
<i>Trin Martin</i>	
Life in the Hands of an Artist	37
<i>Trin Martin</i>	
Peace in Paradise	38
<i>Kayle Orantes</i>	
I am.	39
<i>Scott Sorensen</i>	
Dragon Blood Part One.	40
<i>Maeve Remke</i>	
Cat-Dog-Knife Demon	45
<i>Finn Allred</i>	
Monstrous Beauty	46
<i>Bridget Raymundo</i>	
Little Goddess	47
<i>Bridget Raymundo</i>	
An Adventure Like No Other	48
<i>Kayle Orantes</i>	
Descent.	53
<i>Audrey Hall</i>	

Figures in Bubbles. **59**
Lucy DeMoux

I am: A Memoir of an Asian-American Teen **60**
Dans Nguyen

Fear. **61**
Kayle Orantes

Dragon Blood Part 2 **62**
Maeve Remke

Rose on a Typewriter **66**
Emma Flanigan

I am from Wires **67**
Emma Flanigan

You Want More **68**
Dani Sires

39 Alternate Names for Humanity **76**
Finn Allred

Moonlit Lake. **78**
Kayle Orantes

Blooming. **79**
Kellen Hunnicutt

Unity of Nature

Kayle Orantes



These are Just Pants

Logan Rusho

You walk into a DI, sighing as the wave of air conditioning hits you like a sack of bricks. It's swelteringly hot outside, heat waving off the black asphalt, and you're here for jeans. Already a horrible prospect in general, there's a good deal of people in the clothes section to boot.

You sigh, send a long-suffering look towards the equally long-suffering employees, and head towards the pants.

Now you wouldn't say your fashion taste is bad, per say, but definitely *eclectic*. So the butt-ugly beige jeans catch your eye, and you hope to every god you've ever heard of they're in your size. You know they're terrible, you *do*, but the jeans are so tacky that they've gone from awful back around to amazing.

Upon reaching them, ignoring the perfectly ordinary black and blue and white jeans, you're positively delighted that they look to be in your size.

(You ignore the weird eye on the button, and the fact that the belt loops aren't actually belt loops.)

(You ignore how dense they are when you take them off the rack.)

(They're just pants.)

You take the hanger off the round rack with horrible glee in your eyes, making a beeline to the changing rooms. Unfortunately, there wasn't an actual tag on them, but they look close enough that even if they don't fit *super* well, you're planning on buying them.

You do want to try them on, though. Send a selfie to your friends, make them join you in tacky-beige-pant-hell.

(*They're just pants.*)

There's a single dressing room open, thank god. You head in, pulling your phone out of your pocket in anticipation.

Trying on pants is always a hassle, but also.

These are so damn awful that you can't *not* try them on.

You shuck off your normal pants, slightly distressed from wear, and pull on the beige pants.

(You ignore how weirdly warm they are inside.)

(You ignore the weird noise that you swear just came from the pants.)

(They are Just Pants.)

And, oh, they're as glorious as you hoped—you snap a few delighted pictures, sending them off to various friends and inspecting them with growing excitement. The pants are just horrible to look at, boot-bottom cut with red (?) stitching and fake pockets. The belt loops are fake as well, fused down with the rest of the pant.

You can't quite identify what fabric they're made out of, but it's certainly not denim.

(You ignore the fact that your legs feel damp, that the insides were red, too, the button seeming to look around of its own free will.)

(Just pants, just pants, just pants—)

A few people respond to you with equal parts horror, disgust, and delight. The pants are pretty bad, but they're growing on you.

(Literally, literally, oh god, they're not just pants, they're not just pants—)

(They're Just Pants.)

You can't bring yourself to move. You're enjoying wearing the pants, now.

(Just pants just pants just pants justpantsjustpantsjustpantsjus—)

You can't bring yourself to move at all, actually. Your phone is in your hand, and you could just as easily respond to the texts from your friends as you could walk out of the dressing room.

Which is to say, you can't.

(Justpantsjustpantsjustpantsjustpants—)

The background noise of the DI is both so loud and so quiet you can't hear it at all. The jeans—they're not jeans, they're not just pants, they're not—

(They're wrapped around you, wet and moist like a *mouth*, oh Jesus.)

They Are Just Pants.

You don't hear your phone dropping out of
your hand.

You smile at your reflection.

(The pants smile at your reflection.)

You slide open the latch of the dressing
room door, take a step out.

(The pants slide open the latch of the
dressing room door, take a step out.)

They are just pants.

(You are just pants.)

Competition Days

Kayle Orantes

Pencils sharpening

Tips breaking

Noses blowing

Repeat.

Tuning into the noises that encompass me

While I

Sit

Wait

Watch

Wonder if I should go over my answers again

Wonder if I did it too quickly

Wonder if I can finally get that 1st place prize

All while

Pencils are sharpening

Tips are breaking

Noses are blowing

Anxiety fills me while my imagination runs wild

Worried

Curious

Full of wonder and hope

Wishing on a star to beat the kid next to me

Each time learning, growing, aiming for the high score

All while

Pencils are sharpening

Tips are breaking

Noses are blowing

The Backrooms and Cold Lasagne

Francesca Vales

My feet felt like bricks as I dragged them up the steps to my house. The large, ominous oak door stared at me, daring me to open it. I put my key in the lock and paused, the air was stagnant and heavy. I held my breath as I opened the door. "Louis, why are you late? Why didn't you call?" Sure enough, I got the response I was expecting.

I let out my breath.

"Olivia, I'm sorry," I looked at the floor with the usual, daily, shame.

Olivia walked around the corner and met me in the entryway. I set my briefcase down, sighed, and ran my hands through my hair. I looked up and all I saw were her eyes, stern and worried, a worn-out green. Her hair was tired and sad, like a waitress that desperately wants to quit her job. Everything about her was simply boring.

"You have to tell me what time you're coming home. No more of this. You make me worry." She turned away and headed back

towards the living room. I sat down and started to take my shoes off.

"Oh, your dinner is on the table. It's cold by now."

I knew that. This is the routine. I come home, she's mad, I eat a cold dinner and sleep on the couch. Usually, she starts an argument at some point during the evening, and after that, I have a smoke.

* * *

I felt tears start to well up in my eyes. Every time I look at him, I see a broken man. I loved him, but that stopped. He's boring. Plain. Simple. And that infuriates me. I'm completely lost. The wine has been going faster.

Before heading up the stairs I see him slouched over his cold lasagna, and I can't decide if I feel pity or anger. I don't know why I'm crying today, this is the routine after all. I work hard on a dish that Louis will like,

he comes home late, eats his cold dinner and smokes a cigarette, he says something snarky and we start to argue, I polish a bottle off, and he sleeps on the couch.

I changed into my pajamas and laid on the bed, staring at the ceiling like it would give me answers.

All I want is for him to paint for me while I play my guitar. I just want that one more time, then I'm leaving. I let myself cry, it was a much-needed moment, but it helped nothing. I got up and walked to the bathroom. Staring myself in the eyes I see what I see in Louis. A broken spouse, addiction, hopelessness, and lost dreams. I just want my husband back. I want myself back. At least I could recognize my own faults, unlike Louis, who, with every new day, collapses further into himself.

I decided to pour myself another glass of wine. I headed down the stairs and passed Louis on the way to the cabinet.

* * *

"Put that down, you've had enough tonight," I told her bluntly without turning to look at her. I know she knows that.

* * *

"I'll put it down when you take that cigarette out of your mouth," I sarcastically remarked while pouring myself a glass. The bastard couldn't even look me in the eye, he just sat there, puffing away like a fucking chimney.

"Calm down," his words were shards of glass.

"Don't tell me what to do Louis! Don't!" I yapped, he finally turned to look at me. I reached forward, about to splash my wine on his stupid clean white dress shirt, but decided against it. I sat the glass down and practically ran away.

* * *

"What's gotten into you?" We fight, sure, but it never got physical. Her once emerald green eyes seemed to have faded what was once a precious gemstone is now a plastic sequin without its sparkle. Her posture isn't what it used to be, and I no longer saw her as my sweet Olivia, she was just another middle-aged woman, with thin lips and dark under eyes.

"I could ask you the same thing," I retorted.

He's not the same, as if someone put a cool tone filter over his life. His gray streaks in his hair aren't flattering anymore, and he only ever wears the same clothes. This isn't the man that I fell in love with, but this is a man I'm supposed to love.

* * *

I stood up, brought my dish to the sink, put my cigarette out, and decided to follow her upstairs this time.

The wooden stairs looked warped by the shadows, almost as if the lack of light was heavy.

I'm going insane. Yep. This is it. Stairs don't just bend, this must be a hallucination.

I took a step, it creaked, I was nervous and practically shaking for seemingly no reason. "Don't you dare follow me," she called down the stairs.

With the next step on to the now unfamiliar stairs, suddenly the empty, swirling stomach feeling of falling backwards filled me, and I braced for impact and closed my eyes. Weird. How could I be so damn clumsy? Under my hands I felt carpet, but our floors

were hardwood.

Opening my eyes, I realized this was not my house. It smelled of mildew, the off-yellow carpet was almost damp, and the monotone yellow wallpaper matched. The ceiling was littered with flickering fluorescent bulbs, their hum was maddening and it hadn't been a minute here yet. Could this be a basement I didn't know about? I must be dreaming right? Am I dead? Questions raced through my mind as I stood up and hesitantly started to explore. Each room was identical to the next, with pointless walls and doorways that lead to more of the same. I pulled out my phone to dial 9-1-1 but there was no reception and no internet.

"Damn it," I said aloud.

I started to walk faster, each identical room seemed to mock me as I tried to escape. They didn't even give me the courtesy of having small differences, the only things that changed were the sizes of the rooms and where the doorways were. It was rude of this place. The same thing over and over again was infuriating but familiar. I was eventually sprinting, stopping to decide left or right, then dashing. That room looks the

same as the last, a maddening, disgusting yellow wallpaper kissing the edge of the worn cheap carpet. An orgy of buzzing, walls, and floors surrounded me and made its way into my ears, lungs, my entire body felt consumed by the repetition. I was a mouse running through a maze, unaware of what cruel experiment was to be tested on me. I stopped at the nearest wall, feeling hopeless but knowing that this was somehow real, or at least it felt real.

"Why, why WHY?!" I slammed my fist into the wall, then sank to my knees.

"What is this?" I whimpered.

I turned around and gathered my head into my knees and began to sob. My crying fit in with the humming of the lights, it was a sick melody, a repulsive song, and strangely rhythmic. I looked up at the horrible, plain acoustic tile ceiling and wailed, each random water stain seemed to laugh at me. I continued to sob. I've never felt this weak before, but the loneliness was familiar.

It was loneliness that had faded, like a cold piece of metal that warms under your hands.

I was okay with it.

I was not okay with being trapped and confused.

I don't know how long I spent there, but eventually, I returned to walking. As I grew tired I dragged my feet and blinked slowly, breathing deeply, ignoring the dank air reaching further into my lungs.

After God knows how many hallways and rooms, a figure was standing before me, about eighteen feet down this hall. They were wearing a cloak, and their face was obscured.

I was so caught off guard that I almost screamed, but instead turned and started to run away.

"Whoa, wait up there, Louis! Why are you so scared?"

I turned back around and cautiously approached the stranger.

"Who are you and why do you know my name? What is this place? Can you get me out?" My thoughts took control of my words and everything came spilling out at once. My mind was a broken faucet.

"Slow down old man!"

"I'm not old," I retorted.

"Age doesn't matter here anyway. I'm the Resident, and these are the backrooms! I help guide people who get stuck here." The Resident lowered their hood and I could see their face, it was surprisingly normal and plain, but I couldn't place age or gender.

"Well, what is 'here'?" I gestured around to the monotone scape that surrounded us.

"It's not hell or purgatory if that's what you're asking. Follow me."

I was too tired and confused to refuse. I followed the Resident as they explained to me what The Backrooms are.

"I mean I would just have had you Google it, but there's no reception here,"

"Yeah, I know. So can I get out of here?"

"Well, that depends on if you learn your lesson. I can tell you're pretty out of it, just, come with me, I'll show you something."

We came to a room that only had one doorway leading in and was otherwise closed off.

The Resident stopped me from walking in, and a scene appeared. It was a translucent vision of Olivia and me.

It was what happened before I arrived here, the lasagna, the cigarette, and the wine. Once Olivia left and the vision faded, the Resident spoke.

"So tell me about Olivia."

"My wife?" How did they know? At this point, I had so many questions that I decided to ask none of them.

"Yeah, for now. What's your plan? Your next move?"

"Well, I love her..."

The Resident cut me off. "Ah-bup-bup-bup there's a 'but' coming after that and there's your problem. Are you going to leave first?"

"Uh," I was devoid of any coherent response.

"You see, you seem to think that it's all Olivia's fault and you can't take the blame for anything. You're just as bad as her, Louis. Maybe even worse. Your heart is broken, but hers is shattered. Do you lay awake every night crying? Because she does. Everyone is

at fault here, and everyone is a victim. Shall we walk?"

It was true. Everything they said was true, but I would never admit it, at least I convinced myself I wouldn't. I walked with them, and we came to another closed room.

This scene was similar, Olivia was sitting on the couch, Louis sat next to her and she scoots away.

"What's up, honey?"

"Don't 'honey' me."

"What do you want me to do?" Louis looks desperate, Olivia turns away.

"Give me some space for once in my life."

"But..."

Olivia cuts him off. "Don't start with me. You're the one who gave up on everything, I'm just along for the ride. I'm not stomping away this time, so you need to leave." Louis sighs and leaves.

The vision fades as Olivia runs her hands through her hair.

"How much more of this?" I asked, on the

verge of tears.

"Just one. But first, what do you think?"

"What do you mean? I'm sad, I'm scared, I don't know where I am, I'm just so confused," a tear streaked down my cheek.

"Well, do you want to leave? Not just here, but her? To start over?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's certainly good to hear a confident answer from you for once." "Yeah," I agreed with them.

The next room had a short scene of Louis painting while Olivia plays guitar, both are singing. Louis leans over to kiss her forehead, the scene fades away.

Louis looks at the Resident.

"What was that for?"

"It's what you've already lost. Never forget it. Don't be ashamed of walking away, you're not walking away from that. It's already gone. Release her. Now tell me, are you going to live for you now? Not your job, not your cigarettes. But you?"

"I'll try."

"You better. Get painting again, and start over. You know, most people aren't as lucky as you. Most people never end up here."

"I'm lucky to be here?"

"Yeah, well now you get to start over and learn from your mistakes. I trust you, so I'll show you how to leave."

"Thank you. Wait, if you know how to leave why don't you?"

"Because I feel it's my duty to humanity to help those who have potential. Most people who end up in The Backrooms never leave, in fact, most go deeper, never having learned their lesson. It gets a lot worse than what you've seen, I can promise that."

The Resident led me past many rooms and halls until we came to a wall covered in shadow when it should be well illuminated. I faced the Resident with my back to the wall. "Well, this is it. You did well. Any last words?"

"No."

"Well, see ya!" the Resident said as they

pushed me into the wall.

I landed hard and stood up to see I was in the middle of a small road. Birds were singing, the sky was clear, and for once I was happy. I didn't know where I was, but I was used to that by now. Unshackled, the smell of fresh air quickly took the place of the mildew from that horrible carpet. I was still confused, but relief washed through my veins and filled my body with comfort. I brushed myself off and couldn't help but chuckle as I started to walk. I whistled and looked up at the sky.

Free, alone.

I won't forget my past, but I'll let it go, like a ribbon caught up in the wind.

Duet

Indy Rose DeBirk



Eternity

Maeve Remke

TRIGGER WARNING: description of suicide.

The darkness is cold, oppressive, empty. I feel around without opening my eyes, but there is nothing around me. No hints as to where I am and what happened to me. But what did happen to me? I rack my brain for a memory, for anything. But all that comes up is the smell of gunpowder, the taste of blood. I shiver, and not just from the cold that surrounds me. I curl in on myself, trying to conserve warmth and comfort myself. It offers little aid for both. I take deep breaths, concentrating so intently on the even inhale and exhale that I don't notice the shadow coming towards me until it's standing over me, staring down at me with relative surprise. The shadow reveals a long scythe, which it pokes me gently with. I whimper and scurry backwards, fear clouding the empty nothingness between us. The shadow creature laughs. He walks closer towards me, slowly solidifying into a white-faced creature with a long flowing robe. He pulls a thick black hood over his head and twirls the scythe in his fingers.

"You're early," he says casually, firmly placing the scythe two inches from my face. I whimper again and close my eyes.

"Who are you?" I whisper. The shadow creature answers with another hearty laugh.

"I am your fate," he says. He pokes me again with his scythe doubtfully. "Or at least, I'm supposed to be." He shrugs and re-conceals his scythe in his robe. "No matter. Plenty of space in Hell." He turns away from me and begins walking off, leaving me alone again in the empty darkness.

"Wait!" I say, fear clouding my senses. I leap after the retreating shadow and grab onto the edge of its robe. The creature turns toward me with an intense scowl.

"How dare you. HOW DARE YOU TOUCH ME." He whirls his cape and the scythe reappears in his hand.

"Sorry. I'm sorry!" I whimper, curling back up

into the fetal position.

"Do you know who I am? DO YOU? How DARE you!" The creature touches the sharp end of the scythe to my neck, drawing a bead of blood.

"I am the GRIM REAPER. I am your FATE. How DARE you disrespect that." The Grim Reaper withdraws his scythe, scowling. Surprise forces me to stand and stare at the shadowy figure in awe.

"You are the Grim Reaper? Stealer of souls, second only to God?" I say in awe, staring at the robed skeleton with a new view.

"Yes. I am" The Grim Reaper says with a hint of pride.

"So, if you really are the Grim Reaper, you must know everything? Right?" I say excitement and hope cascading through my blood.

"Correct." The Grim Reaper grins, casually twirling his scythe through his fingers with the skill of an acrobat.

"So you know who I am! You must know what has happened to me!" I am practically jumping for joy, but the Grim Reaper's grin

falters. "Right? You know?" The Grim Reaper shakes his head sadly. "That is not for me to know. You must learn for yourself."

I stare in confusion at the Grim Reaper as he takes a step backwards, away from me. He stabs the butt of his scythe into the blackness before me, and just like that I am falling. Tumbling through the velvety blackness. I scream from fear. I hear the Grim Reaper laugh, but I cannot tell where his voice is coming from. It seems to be coming from everywhere, seeping through the walls and echoing around the black chamber that I am tumbling through.

"Help!" I cry, desperately trying to grab onto anything to stop my descent. But the blackness around me bends away from my grasping fingers. The Grim Reaper laughs again, and just like that he is right next to me, casually drifting through the air as his black cape billows around him.

"This is my favorite part!" He cheers, grabbing onto my wrist. "Hold on!" And with that, he slices open the blackness around us and jumps through the tear in time. I have no choice but to be yanked in after him.

* * *

Gasping for breath, I find myself in what seems to be the inside of a rough, black stage curtain. I whirl around, looking for the Grim Reaper and see him a few feet away, gazing through a long ornate window. I walk up to him and peer through the window as well. I see the shaking back of a boy, probably about my age. The boy is obviously crying. He wipes his nose with the back of his hand and turns, exposing his face. His curly brown hair. His sunken brown eyes. His tear-stained olive skin. I turn to question the Grim Reaper and catch my reflection in the glass. I immediately start screaming.

The Grim Reaper's bony hands are suddenly on my mouth, forcing my head towards my reflection, which is the perfect image of the boy on the other side of the mirror's face. Only mine is covered in blood.

"Quiet!" the Grim Reaper hisses through his teeth. "Are you trying to get us caught? Nothing is keeping us from ruining the entire eternity but the glass of a mirror. SO BE QUIET." I whimper and nod my head. The Grim Reaper removes his hand.

"Why?" I whisper, crying softly. In my reflection, I see my tears clear clean paths through the blood on my face. "What

happened? Why are we here?" The Grim Reaper sighs, but doesn't respond. "I want to go back."

The Grim Reaper smiles sadly, turning towards me. "Back where? There is nowhere to go back to. Besides, you wanted to know what happened." The Grim Reaper goes back to watching the boy... me... through the glass of what I now know is a mirror. While I was looking away, the boy had retrieved a gun from goodness knows where. He holds it gently for a second, gazing at it sadly, hopelessly. He places it on a desk and begins writing furiously on a piece of paper. Tears stream down his face, fast and furious.

"I have no choice," the boy whispers. He walks over to the mirror, gazing through the glass. He lingers for a second too long, making me wonder if he saw us. But he turns away and retrieves the gun. He holds it up to his head, tears still streaming down his face. I watch intently, but the Grim Reaper grabs my shoulder and pulls me away.

"No use dying twice," he says sadly, gently pulling me away from the mirror. A gunshot rings through the black chamber I am in, startling me. I turn back and see the boy collapse on his dresser. I see his face... my

face... slowly become redder and redder as blood flows from a bullet hole. A bullet hole that he... I... put there.

"No..." I whisper, shocked. My fingers drift towards the spot on my head that no longer produces any blood. "No... please, no." I collapse to my knees and the Grim Reaper stares as I weep for myself. Finally, he kneels before me and grabs my shoulder, tilting my chin up with his other hand so I am forced to look at him.

"We all make mistakes," he says, his voice thick with emotion. I continue to sob, leaning into his hand to give myself comfort. The Grim Reaper takes a deep breath. "I know how you feel. I know that you don't want to know any more." I don't respond, but continue quietly sobbing. The Grim Reaper takes another breath.

"Sometimes life pushes us to our limits, it tests us beyond our endurance, because God only gives his toughest battles to his strongest soldiers."

I stare at the Grim Reaper, soaking up the words he said.

"That's what went on your tombstone," the Grim Reaper says, pulling me to my feet.

I collapse against his shoulder, trying to breathe normally again.

"Pretty, ain't it?" The Grim Reaper laughs softly. "The quote, I mean." I shrug, trying to laugh with him, though there isn't really a reason to. "We just have to keep moving forward." The Grim Reaper encourages me, forcing me to take a step. "We can't fix those mistakes. It's over now. But we can remember them, and respect them. Learn from them, even." The Grim Reaper continues forcing me forward.

"You have eternity, brother. There is no use crying over a few regrets for all of eternity when you could be doing something useful. Doing something good. Fun, even. Just move on. I know it's hard, but it has to be done. It just isn't worth it any other way."

"Who was that boy?" I sniff. "Who am I? You never answered that question."

"You are Maxon Effritte," the Grim Reaper replies, parting the slash in the curtains of eternity and gesturing for me to go through.

"But who am... was... I?" The Grim Reaper grins.

"I don't know... but you have eternity to find out."

I am Michaela

Michaela Walker

I am Michaela
And I am a furry.
But I do not own a fursuit.
I am really creative and good with animals.
I do not hurt or condone the abuse of animals.
I am a furry artist.
But I do not create nsfw furry art.
I am pansexual.
But I am not wanting a poly relationship.
I am hyper.
But I am not annoying.
I have mental issues.
But I don't let them define me.
I am a dancer.
But I do not do ballet.
I am easily angered.
But I do not let that get me down.
I am the daughter of a computer specialist.
But I am not interested in going into the tech field.
I am a weeaboo.
But I do not have collections of anime merch or books.
I play videogames.
But I am not a gamer.
I am Michaela.

Beauty

Chloe Raymundo

Beauty is different in every mind
You see, it comes in every kind.

To some beauty is thin with blue eyes,
But beauty isn't hiding your true size
Beautiful isn't what they advertise
I like pretty that's witty, that doesn't regard regularity
A beauty with integrity, a wildcard, a true rarity
Beautiful is Carriedee.

Beauty is the ability to always persevere
To maintain agility, to be without fear
Beauty is scarlet and tarnished, with explicit spirit
Without a limit, beauty would never quit
It isn't afraid to take a hit, it's esprit
It's Bridget.

Beauty is unique, it's like no other
If found, it might not be seen by another
Beauty is the one who cares for your welfare
The one who prepares, and teaches to share
There's nothing as fair
As a mother's care.

Beauty is individuality

It's diversity

Personality

My family

I am...and What I Will Be

Eric Nguyen

I am not my father. My father is a great and hardworking dad, but I will be even greater than him. I am very privileged in that I have not faced any major struggles with my life. My whole life has been a walk in the park, and setting myself up for failure. I was always the "smart kid," I was praised for my natural ability at Mathematics and English, I was the child prodigy. What people don't know about child prodigies is that we can't handle all the expectations and burn out. Sure, we can perform really well when we are twelve years old, but we don't continue growing at that rate. We just got there faster than everyone else.

What does this result in? Never learning the important work ethic and adopting the "Give up when I don't perfect on a first try" mindset. Looking back, I would have given up all my natural talent and abilities to learn how to make friends. I would have focused on what made me happy, instead of what made my parents happy. My whole mindset changed when I entered high school. All of

a sudden, no one knew of me or my talents, or how special they were because they were able to do the same things. I wasn't special anymore, I was just like everybody else. I walked around every day with this "empty" feeling inside of me, looking for something to replace the constant compliments of my talents in middle school. Slowly and gradually, I got friends and even socialized with them online, and slowly filled up the emptiness. Reflecting on this emptiness, I had a major discovery, why should I do what my parents want? I started looking for clues at what I myself wanted. I learned that I really wanted to achieve greatness in the field of computer science, but not because my parents wanted it, but because I was fascinated by it. I adopted a strong work ethic, and learned how to complete all of my schoolwork while having fun with my friends!

In the process of realizing this, it was clear that intention my parents had in mind. They weren't the evil parents making me do math

all day just to suffer, they just want what is best and will make me live the happiest life. Both of my parents work full shifts every single day, just to keep me and my sister comfortable in our nice house. My dad is a great man, and I will become greater and more hardworking than him to make myself proud.

Escape into the Unknown

Kayle Orantes



Reflections

Savannah Carbine

I am full of contradictions.

As many of us are, each person so vastly different and yet uniquely the same

Each of us possessing a wide variety of facets to our souls

Here are a few that I've noticed

I am indecisive.

Overwhelmed by infinite capabilities and thus rejecting a definitive choice

Always in search of a spirit freed from daunting decisions and confining commitments

Losing true liberation amid a thousand dreams of possibility

I am feeling.

Easily infatuated, musing, trusting, and forgiving—a hopeless romantic

Only just discovering an intense ability to empathize, and suddenly losing myself in you

Yearning to understand this soul but struggling under loads of heavily confused sensation

I am cerebral.

Seeking hidden depth and meaning in everything, an analytical overthinker

Sensitive, solitary, mind-dwelling, and insightfully introspective

At once incredibly self-aware and selectively blind

I am altruistic.

Aspiring to author creative solutions and fix the deeper problem

Finding joy, purpose, and fulfillment in aiding where I can

Pitted to the core to know that my actions have caused pain in another

I am traitorous.

Fiercely loyal to those I love, but ruthlessly self-critical and mentally abusive to myself
Shame lurking constantly in the back of my mind, guilt invading my heart
Drowning in a self-imposed feeling of failure

I am clumsy.

Habitually unsure of how to present myself to you
Blustering, at once deeply vulnerable and tightly closed off
Both warily guarding my heart and carelessly rash with its keeping

I am changing.

Working for a better version, the newest update
Pursuing the latest greatest model, the best one yet
Striving to become something more

I am full of contradictions.

As many of us are, each person so vastly different and yet uniquely the same
Each of us possessing a wide variety of facets to our souls
And each of us inextricably human

A Worthless Adventure

Lucy DeMoux

The journey was a long one. I got the chance to experience a wide variety of emotions I've never felt before. Despair, hope, anger, sadness, I had gone through all of them. So why? Why has all of my hard work suddenly gone to waste? The tears I shed, the battles I faced, were they all for nothing?

I remember it so vividly. The illness consumed all that was alive. Children, elderly, it didn't matter. Death mercilessly took them all. Yet, the medicine that our village so desperately needed was out of reach. It wasn't that it was expensive, no, it was just rare and hard to find. Yet, no one else did anything. No one really tried to look for the medicine. Sure, they asked some trading villages, the villages didn't have any, they gave up. So I volunteered. I'd come back with that medicine no matter what it cost me. At first, it was just that. Find the cure, go home, everyone's happy. But then it changed into something more. The people I met, saved, fought for, fought with, they changed something. My goal of saving the

village blossomed into an undying sense of achievement. I had done something bigger than myself.

So when I finally returned home, all I felt was pure and unbridled happiness. Then it shattered. Shattered into so many pieces it could never be put together ever again. Apparently a villager from one of the trading villages managed to get ahold of the medicine a few weeks after I left. The goal I had been working towards up to this point was irrelevant. Thrown in the gutter before I could even get a good look at it. I didn't have time to react before hot tears started to spill down my face. It felt as though the air had been sucked out of my lungs. The lump in my throat. The shattered hope I once was filled to the brim with. Is this all I get?! I had put my life on the line only to be left with the crushing weight of disappointment! Oh god, I'm suffocating. No! This is, this is all just one big lie, isn't it? I must be dreaming! I'll wake up tomorrow morning and I'll be in the same shabby inn

with the friends I've been with this whole time.

"Moirá? Are you sure you're okay? I know how disappointing it must be to find out you did all that work for nothing. Oh! But we all appreciate that you tried though. That's better than nothing right?"

Thanks for trying. Is that all I get? Besides what the hell does she know. I went to hell and back just to get this medicine. For her nonetheless. But that's it? A gold star for trying and a pat on the back?! "I'm going home."

"Huh, Moria, wait!"

Never again. Never again will I be utterly humiliated like that. If other people will just do it for me, what's even the point of trying. Maybe all of these emotions that are raging inside will stop once I sleep. I'm tired.

Blue

Trin Martin

It is the light wind in the spring seasons
The rain pelting the roofs of homes,
and the feeling of calm before a storm hits

It is the soft warm blanket that you curl up under,
and the mug that you drink your tea from.
This is blue.

Blue is the feeling of being reassured by a best friend
after a heartbreak.
The knowledge that it will get better, even if it has to get
worse first,
and it is the sound of waves crashing down into the deep ocean.

Blue is the feeling of water running along skin,
the smell of paint,
the feel of hardened wax on an old wooden chest,
the taste of popsicles on a hot day,
and the belief that everything is going to get better.

Life in the Hands of an Artist

Trin Martin



Peace in Paradise

Kayle Orantes



I am

Scott Sorenson

I am thoughtful, hardworking, determined, and funny. These are words others would describe as well as myself. These few simple words define my character.

They also motivate me to be better, to strive to be the person that everyone likes.

Now, I am a people person. I have lots of friends. When I am in a group, I try my best to keep everyone happy. In some cases it might mean to stay with them so they aren't alone, one example is this: a little bit ago there was a school dance, and we were all having a great time. There was a ton of great music and everyone was yelling and dancing. In the middle of the dance, I noticed one of my friends was gone. I noticed him step outside. So, I went outside to check on him. He said he was feeling sick, so instead of going back, I stayed with him so he would not be alone. I stayed until he felt better and then we headed back.

I am a pretty good student, if I do say so myself. But sometimes it is not easy. It takes a lot of work and determination to be smart. These past two terms in school have been hard. Being online is not the easiest. For me, it has been really difficult. It has been hard to stay focused and motivated. It still is but I am getting better. In one of my classes this past term I didn't have the grade I wanted. So, I emailed them, and after two weeks of emailing and waiting, I was able to find something I can do to raise my grade. My teacher helped me as much as he could. I retook a test, I redid three assignments and after a long weekend of spending countless hours I finally raised my grade.

I am a funny guy, I can lighten any situation with a couple of good laughs. I am a people person. I like to talk to people and people like to be around me. I can make anyone laugh.

Dragon Blood Part One

Maeve Remke

To whomever it may concern: If you ever get hospitalized for a mysterious lung infection for 2 weeks, do not go to an antique store the day you get out. This information is extremely valuable, so be grateful that you were not the one who had to find it out the hard way.

Finding out the hard way includes waking up with a mysterious heat racing up and down your throat that causes you to cough so hard you can't breathe, which makes you pass out, which makes your poor old-as-dirt Grandma have to load you into her bright red Volkswagen beetle and race you to the hospital, where you spend the next two weeks wheezing in a clean, white bed begging for ice water, until you finally get released and immediately dragged along to your grandma's dusty, old antique shop which is absolutely the worst place for any pair of lungs to be. So, naturally, you immediately start dying and have to excuse yourself to the bathroom to die alone so your grandma can work and not worry.

That is the hard way. You are so welcome for that very valuable information. It may very well save your life, making my sacrifice not in vain.

Oh gosh, I hope I'm not making a sacrifice.

It's one of the few thoughts that manages to attract my attention during my terrible coughing fit. It's definitely not the last thought I want to have. I lean back against the wall of the bathroom. Somehow, I ended up on the floor. The white panels are cool on my back, and I manage to subdue my coughs into labored wheezing as the coolness envelops me. I close my eyes and rest my head against the wall as well, letting a familiar darkness envelop me.

I wake suddenly to the sound of soft knocking coming from the bathroom doorway.

"Patmos?" my grandmother calls. "Are you alright?"

"Yes. Hi. Sorry." I say, my voice extremely hoarse.

"I... I found something you were looking at before you went to the hospital. I was wondering if you still wanted it."

I sit there silently, thinking what it could possibly be. Curious, I painfully push myself up off the ground and stagger to the door. I push it gently open and see my grandmother standing there, staring at me almost sympathetically through her coke-bottle glasses. I glance out her outstretched hands and see a glimmering amulet resting in her palm. I scowl as I suddenly remember my brief interaction with it.

The day before my sudden lung infection, I had been browsing the antique shop while my grandma worked. I browsed the antique shop quite often, pretty much every time my grandma was working, but it never got boring because there were always new things. I had been pushing to the back of the shelves to try and find things I hadn't seen before, and I happened to find the amulet.

It had practically glowed once I brushed off the thick layer of dust from the orange stone that hung on the silver chain. I had fingered the silver socket in which the stone rested admiringly, catching the dust that had congregated in the indented strange symbols that ran around the entire circle. Unfortunately, I had failed to notice the sharp spoke that came out of the bottom. So of course it stabbed me. Deep. I had forgotten about the cut because of the dramatic incidents that happened soon after, but I noticed the small, fresh scar on my thumb now. All logical reasoning aside, now that I remembered the amulet, I kind of blamed it for my sudden mysterious lung disease. Still, it's nice of my grandma to think of me. And it is a pretty amulet.

I look up and smile semi-sincerely at my grandma. "Thanks, grandma. This is a really nice amulet." My grandma smiles broadly back at me.

"Well, I just noticed you looking at it and I thought you deserved something nice after your... incident." My grandma tapers off, her smile faltering. My grin lessens a little as well.

"Right. Well, uh, thank you." I try to smile again, but it comes off like more of a grimace. My grandma continues to smile at me, so I grudgingly slip the amulet over my head so she knows I at least appreciate the thought. My grandma nods in satisfaction and turns away to go help some customers that have just arrived.

I do appreciate my grandma's present, even if it was an instrument of blood and pain. I fiddle with the amulet thoughtfully. My grandma, great businesswoman that she is, is not one to hand out free gifts anyway, so the present is pretty special. Even if...

"Seriously?" I cry as the sharp spoke on my amulet quite suddenly impales my thumb again. My grandma glances at me with concern, so I shoot her an apologetic glance before slipping back into the bathroom. I rip the amulet off my head and set it on the sink for the optimal glaring angle while I suck on my thumb.

"Stupid amulet," I mumble, staring at the newly-bloodied spoke... which is no longer bloody. "Um, what?" I say, popping my thumb out of my mouth and advancing on

the amulet to investigate further. The spoke is completely clear of blood. Like it absorbed it. I lean in closer and notice a tiny hole in the spoke. Almost like a straw.

I look at the amulet stone warily for clues and that's where I find my blood.

Veins run through the stone, curving around to form the general shape of a dragon. Its thin head is touching the spoke, and it is filled with blood. My blood. The amulet dragon was drinking my blood.

Shrieking, I chuck the amulet into the corner of the room, willing it to shatter. But it refuses to be destroyed. Instead it hits the white tile with a soft clink and falls to the floor. I scramble to the far corner of the room, unable to break my gaze of the amulet for sake of pure terror.

Suddenly there is a knock at the door. I scream again.

"Patmos?" my grandmother asks. I slap myself in the face for being so edgy. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, sorry. I slipped," I lie.

"Do you need any help?" my grandmother says hesitantly. I smile softly. No way would my grandmother ever come into the boy's bathroom.

"No, I'm fine," I say.

"Okay, then. Just be careful," my grandmother says. There is a moment of silence, and then I hear her walking back into the heart of the shop.

I stare at the amulet as my terror subsides, then slowly I get to my feet and walk towards it.

"Okay. I don't know what you are. I don't know what you are doing... but you are seriously freaking me out," I say, crouching down to get a better look at the amulet. The amulet seems to be waiting. Like it knows what's about to happen, and it is impatient. I sigh.

"Alright. I'm going to try something. Just to see if I'm not crazy." I hesitate. "Although trying this might mean that I am crazy."

I stare at the amulet again, debating.

The amulet waits. "Fine. Here goes nothing."

Inhaling deeply, I put my bleeding thumb over the amulet's spoke and squeeze it with my other hand. A small drop of blood wells up on the cut and quickly falls down onto the spoke. I hold my breath and wait, not exactly sure what I am hoping will happen. I count the seconds. 1... 2... 3...

Suddenly, I blink and the blood is gone. I stare at the veins in the amulet and watch in horror as the blood slowly seeps further through the veins and fills the neck and the base of the wings of the dragon. I exhale slowly.

"Okay..." I whisper. "Not exactly sure what to do now." I stare intently at my vampire-dragon amulet, willing it to give me the answers I need. The amulet is silent. Sighing, I carefully scoop it up and stuff it in my pocket. Then I decide that I don't want my butt to be impaled, so I carefully slip the amulet back over my head and let it rest securely on my chest. I turn and stare at myself in the mirror. The amulet goes well

with the rest of my outfit, though for some reason I suspect that the amulet would go well with anything.

Suddenly there is another knock at the door. Surprised, I slip backwards and land hard on the floor.

"Ow..." I moan, struggling back onto my feet and massaging my buttocks.

"Patmos? It's time to go," my grandma says tiredly from the door. I nod to myself and walk out of the bathroom, trying to smile casually at my grandma. My smile is obviously quite strained, but she just smiles back. Her smile is strained as well, but neither of us say anything. We just smile and nod. It's a mutual agreement that no questions will be asked. Then we both silently walk out of the antique store and to the car.

Cat-Dog-Knife Demon

Finn Allred



Monstrous Beauty

Bridget Raymundo

At the start there was Earth,
And then Sky to envelope her curves.
A horizon to divide
And unite divine lovers.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder,
But heavenly Sky could not shoulder
Beastly creatures who roamed forth
Birthed at the feet of Mother Earth.

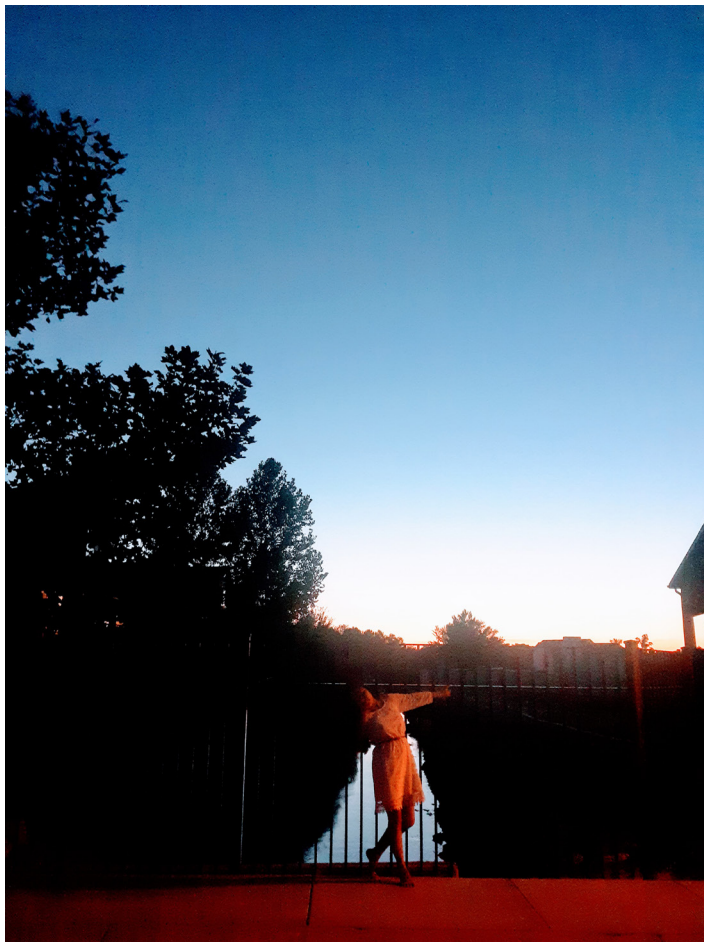
Cold disgust forced a father's hand,
Concealing his children buried underland
Crying Earth raged to tear the Sky.
Coves of sorrow drown loving eyes.

Disguises of godly beauty hide treachery.
Dynasty to dictatorship, titans raised weaponry.
Dead at the hands of his beauteous sons,
Delivered by the wrath of his goddess undone.

Even after Sky's blood had been shed,
Emancipation for the monstrous awaited to
End the wrongfully imprisoned atrocities below grounds,
So exalting only exterior beauty expounds

The Little Goddess

Bridget Raymundo



An Adventure like No Other

Kayle Orantes

I stare out of the train door, trying to memorize all the distant lights, in case I never see my small city again. As the train runs past the buildings where my life used to be, I can't help but ask myself could I have changed the way things ended up? Wanting to escape from the world, I lean my head on Carmen's shoulder and try to doze off. I feel Jackson tenderly squeeze my hand and my eyes flutter open. His warm smile takes away the anguish I was feeling only moments ago. Carmen and Jackson have been through every trial we've faced, right by my side. They both have helped me try to stay sensible. Well, as sensible as a person can be knowing that at any moment, they could suddenly be taken like their family did. No. I reassure myself. It won't happen to me too. I angle my legs towards Jackson and reposition my head on Carmen's shoulder to try to get comfortable. Before I know it, I feel myself drifting off, hoping to wake up to my life the day before it all started. Then, maybe I could save my family.



I never let myself think back on the night it all happened, but my dreams always seem to have a mind of their own. The last time I saw my parents, I argued with them for not caring about the severity of the situation. My mom and dad knew all the riots and protests against the monarchy were not always going to stay peaceful. Every time we would discuss the events happening, they would end up siding with King Albert, and not with our people. I couldn't take my parents' obliviousness to the want for a new government anymore that night, so rather than talk with them about our flawed society, I screamed, "you are both terrible people that stand up for nothing!" I ran upstairs to my room. Pacing the length of my bedroom back and forth, I turned around so furiously that I gave myself a migraine. Before I started feeling nauseous, I flopped down on my bed dramatically and closed my eyes.

"Rose. Rose! ROSE!"

I was startled. I immediately sat up on my bed, asking myself if I had just imagined the shouting.

"Rosie! Are you in there?"

"Peter, is that you?"

"Yes, Rosa Ding Dong. Can I please come in now?"

"Oh sorry, yes." I sat up and realized that Peter has never asked to come into my room. For as long as I could remember, Peter would always barge into my room without even acknowledging that I was in it.

"We need to talk Rosie," Peter said as he opened the door. "It's about mom and dad."

"Truthfully Peter, whatever you have to say about them, I don't want to hear it. We both know that something's going to happen soon and they don't even want to admit they know."

"Rose please," Peter begged, his eyes pleading with mine. "I'm not saying that you should understand why they don't want change, but just know that they are not going to be around forever, sis."

"I am sick and tired of you always taking their side. They know what is happening, Peter! Why in the world won't they acknowledge it?" I stared expectantly at Peter to come up with an answer. After several moments of silence, I looked down at the floor and told Peter, "Please go Peter. I love you and them all so much, but I can't handle their ignorance anymore." Peter nodded, a frown growing in the place of his normal grin. "I understand. Night Rose."

Wanting more distance than my room could provide from my family, I opened my window and jumped as far as I could.

I was acting foolishly by jumping to the oak tree outside my window—something I'd never done before. I struggled for a few seconds, trying to grasp a limb on the old tree. After many attempts, I finally managed to wrap my legs around one of the bigger limbs. The quietness of the street caught me off-guard, our house was on a main road that always got traffic at night. I thought nothing of it, though, looking back on it now, I wish I did. After adjusting my position on the branch, I finally grasped the fact that there was no way to get back into my room without facing the 15-foot fall. Instead of

shouting for help to get down from the tree, I got comfortable on the large branch and gazed at the stars starting to appear in the sky, deciding to take a nap.



"I don't know how I would handle it if I were her."

"Neither do I. If I found out that everything that I thought I knew was a lie, I'd be lost and act like a fish out of water too."

It took a moment to realize the first voice belongs to Jackson and the second one to Carmen. They were whispering to each other from both sides of me. I raise my head off Carmen's shoulders and the whispering comes to a halt. Jackson's face freezes and his eyes become as deep as the ocean. He reaches for my hand and gives it a light squeeze.

"Rosalyn, how are you feeling?"

"Rosalyn? Jack, the only time you call me Rosalyn is when you're furious at me. Just by the look on your face, that isn't the case. What's wrong?"

"It's nothing," Jackson says, his voice filled

with concern. "Rosalyn-Rosie sorry, just answer the question, how are you feeling?"

"I'm just feeling great," I reply mockingly. "My family is somewhere in the city and I feel like I'm just letting everyone down. Just your typical great day."

Jackson scrunched his nose—his smile faltering, worry seeping through the creases of his lips. "Rosie, you know Jackson didn't mean it like that," Carmen says, defending Jackson's harmless question. "We're just extremely worried about you. We're sorry."

"I know Jackson didn't mean it like that," I say softly. "I should be the one apologizing. You guys have been family to me. I don't know anyone else who would abandon their safe lives to help someone who doesn't even know if she's doing the right thing."

"Well you know what they say," Jackson says, a small smile tugging at the corners of his lips. "Those who run away together to the unknown, stay together."

For a moment the seriousness of the situation slips from me as I unsuccessfully attempt to stifle my laugh. Just looking at Jackson's lips turn up into a smile, makes it

impossible for me to hold my laugh in, so I don't. "There's the smile and laugh I love. Everything will turn out fine Rose, Carmen and I are here with you to the end."

"Rose?" I question.

"Gosh darn it, Rosie. I can't call you by your full name or by your nickname I gave you when we were kids?" Jackson asks me, laughing to himself. "No, that's not it Jack," I interject. "Gosh Rosie," Jackson says. "Then what is it?"

"It's just that," I falter. "It is just because when..." I look to Carmen for support. Of course, she doesn't know that Peter has been the only one to call me Rose for years. I stay silent, hoping Carmen will understand my silence and change the subject. Carmen looks me into the eyes and asks, "Do you guys hear the noise in the background too?"

"What?" Jackson asks. I smile at Carmen, mentally thanking her for changing the topic.

"Do you seriously not hear a wailing noise? It's been on for the last minute or so." The perplexed look that Carmen gives us makes me wonder if she's doing this to distract

Jackson, or if she's serious. I can't think straight when I see a man in a long, dark black trench coat on top of a building. I notice something in his hand. "Binoculars," I say quietly. As I keep watching, the man raises the binoculars to his eyes and points it towards us. As the wailing sound gradually gets louder, I realize Carmen wasn't trying to distract Jackson. To my dismay, I realize the noise is a siren. My knees get weak with worry and I feel myself falling towards the floor.



I awoke suddenly to loud, piercing sirens. As soon as I moved, I realized I was still in the tree. I blinked several times, trying to get my eyes to see something in the dark. Then I saw them. Multiple vans were pulled up in front of my house. I was frozen with fear as I saw my brother and sister being dragged off into one of the vans by men in long, dark black trench coats. There was a sack over my siblings' heads which blocked me from seeing their terrified faces. Seeing my sister and brother so defenseless made me feel powerless. I screamed for help and tried to get a better grip on the tree so I could see more of my surroundings. The last

thing I remember was stepping on a limb
that snapped under my weight and sent me
plummeting towards the ground.



"Rosie. Rosie! We need to run now."

Descent

Audrey Hall

TRIGGER WARNING: descriptions of domestic violence and suicide.

January 1st,

I stand at the top of a spiral staircase. The black marble reflects an unknown light, and a faint noise rises from the stairway below me. Behind me is a white granite staircase, crafted with the same precision, spiraling upwards in a sea of purity. I can walk around on this floor of black and white checkers, and I attempt to go back up the granite staircase. An invisible wall blocks my way.

My eyes shoot open and the dreamscape fades into a memory. My pencil releases from the paper, and with a heavy sigh I hang up the new addition to my wall of drawings. Rows of papers with endless stairs cover the wall opposite my bed. This is the first of its kind, with both dark and light staircases. The dark hasn't yet made its solo appearance.

The only drawing on the wall that isn't a staircase is a sketch of Mom. Her smile

warms my heart and reminds me of how happy we were before everything went to shit.

I don't know how to describe it in any way but a vision of sorts. It could be considered a recurring dream, but it changes every time. One year ago today, I was twenty-nine steps down the granite staircase. The top of the stairs was where I had sat as a child. The floor there was solid white. It's been seven years, and I've not seen the pure white floor since.

Every time I get a bad grade on a test, every time my drunk of a father throws a punch, every time Mom cries, I have the vision. And every time I have the vision, I stand one step lower. 246 steps in the past year.

Mom started boxing to mask the truth behind the bruises, but she never fights back against him. She bruises so easily, she is so

fragile. I don't know how to save her.

It's been almost exactly 3 years since the first day he started drinking. Almost 3 years since he hit her for the first time. New year, new me. The thing that all idiots with a holiday blog and a hipster Tumblr account say the second that the calendar turns over to January first. Try this new juice cleanse! You've never felt so healthy!..... My new workout routine, I lost 20 pounds in a month!..... Blah blah blah blah. I guess it's true enough, though. It's definitely a new year, it's the new me part that I doubt. People say that they'll be better, that they won't eat as much sugar, they'll keep the weight off this time, but no one truly changes with the calendar.

January 2nd,

It's a Sunday. He won't hurt her today, he won't get the chance. She spends all day at the church. I, however, would not be surprised if he throws me into a wall for being a "lazy sack of nothing" or a "failing student with no potential." These were common insults, resulting in only a half a step of difference on the staircase.

I made dinner tonight, Mom usually stays out until around 10:00. He eats at 8:30. I will eat a half-hour later, whatever he leaves untouched. I undercooked the rice and burnt the chicken. Five lashes from his belt. I put the beer out too early and it got warm. An insult shouted in my face. I'm failing every class except for art. Another lash.

She prays every night, but not in their bedroom. He doesn't like that. She came to my room to kiss my forehead, say a short-lived prayer, and flip off the light switch. Mom's belief in God is strong, she says every day how grateful she is to be alive. She hopes that God will give her mercy for staying strong through pain and suffering.

I do not pray. I go to my room while she's getting dressed in her nightgown. I lay in bed silently, ignoring the stack of homework on my desk. I listen to Mom's whispers and the constant tick-tock of the clock on my bedside table. My belief in God was lost long ago. I believe that if he was out there, he would have allowed us an escape. I do not pray. I listen to Mom's heart beat quickly in her chest when she hugs me, I listen to her nervous breath before returning to bed, but

I do not listen to her apologies as he yells at her for taking so long.

She prays for the both of us.

January 3rd,

I have descended three steps down the black marble staircase. The noise rings a bit louder, caressing my ears with a melody to drown out the strain of life. I still can't see the bottom.

January 4th,

School is getting worse. I neglect turning in assignments, and my grades would be dropping, but they can't get any lower.

I sit for ten minutes in the art room after school every day. I can see the worry in my teacher's eyes as I draw the same things. Tears, sadness, monsters, staircases. He is too scared to speak up. Too scared that he'll break me if he makes a sound. My pencil scratches away all the white from the page, and all the light from the art.

I sit in my room until he comes home from work, usually. Today, however, I was

supposed to be cleaning up the kitchen. I'm not looking at the clock, one of the more foolish decisions I've made in my life. He's never come into my room before, he usually resorts to yelling for me to "stop being a hermit" and to "get out of my damned room." Today, however, he storms in to scream at me. His voice is cut short when he sees the drawings.

He tears down every last one of them. Rips them in half and screams at me for stabbing holes in my wall, then for spending too much time on my art and not enough on school. To finalize his rampage, he makes sure to yell at me for not cleaning the kitchen. As he storms out he sees the drawing of Mom that I had done. It was before he started drinking, back when she was happy.

It now lays in pieces on my floor.

January 5th,

I am five steps down the black staircase. I try to move down the steps, closer to the noise. I now realize it is not one long-standing note, but a song. My ears strain to hear it, it's so faint. My feet won't budge

and I'm forced to stay where I am.

He apologizes sometimes. He didn't drink at all last night and spent all day today with a splitting headache. Mom forgave him without batting an eye.

I ask her about it that night, and she tells me that she still loves him, and he cared enough about her to apologize. This was after her prayer and before he started drinking again after dinner.

All of the drawings are in my folder, still torn in half. I don't have the energy to try and tape them back together, and I fill all of the holes in my wall with spackle. The staircases will no longer be visible to anyone but myself.

January 6th,

He gets more and more agitated as the days go on. Mom has a new black eye and a bright red handprint on her arm. He says it's work, Mom says it's stress, I say it's alcohol. His football team lost and he threw his beer bottle at the screen. Our TV is now shattered and covered in beer. He's still ranting about

how if I had a job we'd be able to afford a new one. This is a lie. His job provides enough.

January 7th,

I am now ten steps down the black staircase. The song doesn't seem to be getting any louder and I am desperate for the relief of the music to wash over me. I want the sea of sound to cover me like a blanket. I want it to sing me into a sleep with no staircases, no fear, no sadness. I don't feel like it ever will.

He throws my backpack into a wall only a few minutes after I come back from school. After his one night of sobriety, he is more drunk than I have ever seen him. He screams at us for his faults, criticizes every move we make, hurts me, hurts Mom. I don't feel the pain anymore.

January 8th,

Today he got fired for sneaking booze into the office and yelling at his boss. When he came home, it was nothing but screaming and punches and grabbing and anger. Mom started crying. She was too distracted to notice that dinner was burnt. He stood

up, beer in hand, and shoved her into the same wall where my backpack had hit. He screamed at her and began to hit her. Over and over and over again. I called 911 but they were too late.

Mom is dead.

January 9th, today.

I stand forty-five steps down the black staircase. The music is louder. I can see the staircase even when I have my eyes open. That's never happened before, though. I walk slowly to the bathroom. As I walk, I descend the stairs. 64... 65... The music grows louder. In the mirror, I see a tear-streaked face with pale skin and bloodshot eyes.

My father was arrested yesterday. When the police came, they wanted to ask me some questions.

I grab a bottle of antidepressants that Mom took as prescribed by her doctor. I walk back the way I came, going down the stairs the whole way. 101... 102... Mom's favorite place was the park during the winter. It was

sprinkled with snow. It was beautiful.

I said that I couldn't, but they urged me. I only answered two before they brought out the closed body bag. I fainted.

The car door slams behind me and I drive to the park. Carefully, just like she did. The snow soaks my leggings as I kneel down in front of our bench. Our initials were carved into the wooden slab. 306... 307...

The policeman caught me before I hit the ground. When I woke up, I was laid carefully back in my bed. Mom's slippers were on the floor of my bedroom.

The entire bottle is emptied into my hand, and I take one last look at the beautiful world that she couldn't enjoy in her last few moments. The music is surrounding me, draping over me, calming me.

I dragged myself from my room to hers, and I hugged her nightgown close to my chest, Bible at my side.

I say a prayer, and I swallow the pills.

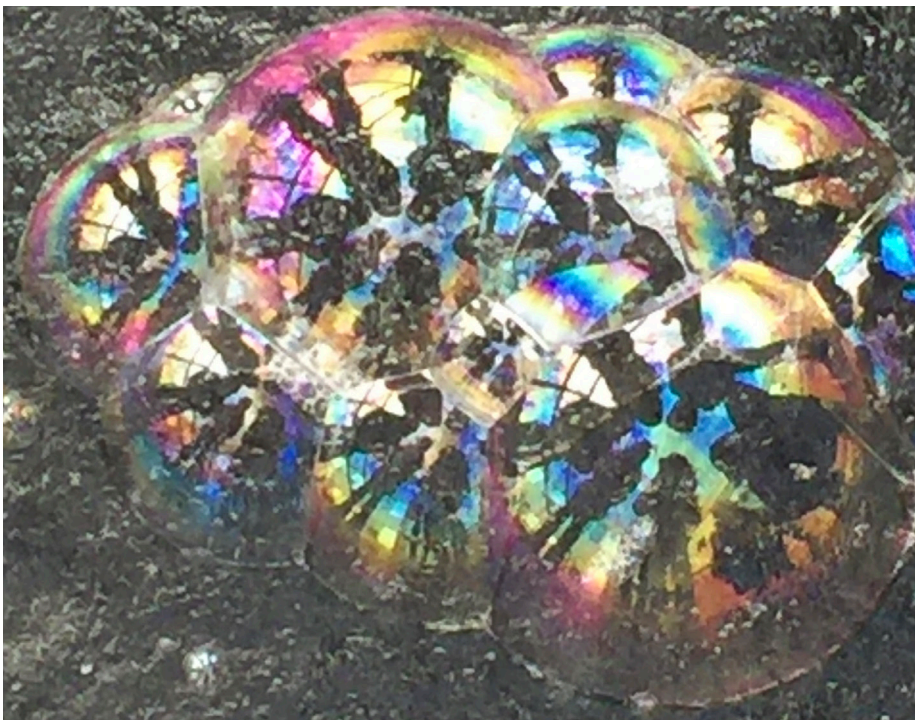
My eyes open, and confusion clouds my thoughts. Am I not dead? I look down to see the last step of the black marble staircase. A glance above me reveals the entirety of the path I've walked. I try to move backward, and I manage a step behind me. The music fades to almost nothing. Panic fills me to the brim. I want the music back, so I place my foot back on the bottom step.

I take a deep breath, and step down onto the floor past the stairs. A single light pierces the darkness, and Mom steps into view. All the bruises are gone, her skin is unridged by scars, there is not a drop of blood in sight. Her smile is full again, her laugh more joyful than I ever remembered.

I run to her, and I am home.

Figures in Bubbles

Lucy DeMoux



I am: A Memoir of an Asian-American Teen

Dans Nguyen

I am a one-and-a-half generation Asian-American. I was born in Vietnam but only stayed for five months before my mom and I went to go live with my dad's side of the family in America. I have lived here ever since, only visiting my home country once in a while.

As a result, I was mostly exposed to American culture. I know what it's like to go to an American school, to eat American food, to have American friends, and, in general, what it's like to be an American. The little time I had at home with my family was my only exposure to Vietnamese culture and traditions. Pretty much my entire family are first-generation immigrants from Vietnam. I feel like I should be already accustomed to this side of my life, but things still feel a bit foreign.

This foreign feeling is only amplified with my visit to Vietnam about a year ago. Never have I felt more disconnected from my origins until then. My knowledge of Vietnam

was being tested and I'm only getting mediocre scores. Even something as small as saying, "thank you" made me look like an outsider. I had an amazing experience in Vietnam, but it got me thinking about how I was balancing my two sides.

With the current situation forcing me to stay at home, I spent time trying to rebuild a balance between being American and being Vietnamese. I eat more of my family's dishes and try new ones. I indulge myself in foreign music. I ask my family why things are the way they are. It's a slow process and I still know next to nothing. However, I think it's a great start and I'm planning to learn more.

I am a one-and-a-half generation Asian-American. For my whole life, I felt more American than Asian, but I have plans to fix that.

Fear

Kayle Orantes

Fear of falling.

Fear of dying.

Fear of loneliness.

Fear of darkness.

Fear of failure.

Fear of oppressors.

Fear of time.

We all have fears.

But why do we only look at fears when we have

The strength to soar

The ability to live forever in hearts

The knowledge that there is always someone around us

The bravery to have a light within

The courage to keep pushing towards your dream

The power to stand up for someone

The knowledge that the passing of time is inevitable so we make our movement now.

Dragon Blood Part Two

Maeve Remke

I've lived with my grandma for 5 years. It was only supposed to be a temporary arrangement, and for the first 2 years it was. Every time I complained about living in the middle of the city, every time I criticized my grandma's ancient furniture or house decorations, every time I cried about missing my old life, my grandma would say, "It's temporary. It's just until your parents are ready for you."

I know now that I shouldn't have wasted those two years on hope. I know now what I must have realized the second after my parents left me at my grandma's house. Temporary is just another kind of forever.

Not that it matters to me now. I love my quiet life. I love my creaky bed. I love the ancient home phone that is only used to call the plumber. And I love my grandma. I especially love the fact that I am not alone. That my grandma was able to stick with me while her temporary life turned into her new one. That testifies that she loved me, or at

least was more loyal to me, than my parents ever were.

That's why I don't miss my parents. Because why would I? My life has been good and fine ever since they left. Everything happens exactly the way it should. Everything followed the constant routine of life. There were rules, and they were followed. Until now.

I'm not sure how I made it to my room from the car without falling dead asleep mid step. With the coursing adrenaline that had been running through my blood and the constant coughing fits that had been happening all day, I was completely exhausted. My grandma offered dinner, but I just shook my head. I barely remembered to tear off the amulet and place it on my nightstand before I slipped into a deep, deep sleep.

I dream about dragons. They swoop low over my head, nipping at my ears and hissing out sparks onto my hair. I scream

and yell for them to stop, but their thirst for blood is strong. Suddenly, a small dragon the color of my amulet lands on my shoulder and whispers into my ear; “I can make you strong. I can make you able to save yourself.” I nod, whimpering. Then I wake up.

I refuse to acknowledge the welcoming sunlight that streams through my window curtains. I am totally not ready for it to be day. I am totally not ready to wake up. But my body, as exhausted as it is, refuses to fall back asleep, so I roll over onto my back and groan.

A dull, throbbing pain erupts from my shoulders as they make contact with the bed. I sit up and the pain immediately lessens, but does not disappear. I rub my eyes open and wonder why I am not in the hospital.

Then suddenly it all comes rushing back.

The amulet, the dragon, my blood. I groan as I remember what a predicament I am in. Then I sit up, fully awake now. I glance at the amulet on my nightstand, and it stares back at me. Almost tauntingly. Dare I put it on? Or do I leave it there and forget any of

this happened? Something about the amulet tells me it already knows the answer.

I groan again at the pain in my shoulders as I slide out of the bed covers and grab the amulet, glaring at it as I slip it over my head. If only I wasn’t so curious, then I could win the imaginary battle of wills every time I looked at it.

I tear off my pajama shirt and turn to face the full-length mirror that hangs on the wall of my room, grabbing another shirt—hopefully clean—off of my nightstand. I start tugging the shirt over my head but then stop, staring at my shoulders in horror.

Large, orange welts cover the top of my shoulder. I turn slightly to the left and see that they cover my shoulder blades as well. It seems I can never escape peculiar ailments. Sighing, I tug my shirt over my head, deciding that the best course of action is to ignore the welts and try to have as normal a day as possible.

Unfortunately, it wasn’t as easy as it sounded. My grandma notices something is wrong with me the second I walked into the kitchen.

"What's wrong with your arms? You're acting stiff," she accuses. I shrug off her concerns.

"Nothing. Just a little... sore."

"Why?" she questions.

"Uh... I was browsing a lot yesterday? Digging through the shelves. Hard work, you know."

"You spent all yesterday in the bathroom. Doing nothing." My grandma raises an eyebrow as she places a plate of waffles in front of me. I stare down at my plate and don't answer. My grandma sighs as she sits down at the table across from me. I feel her staring at me as I shovel waffles into my mouth.

"The hospital left a message," she says slowly. I look up at her nervously, not sure what to expect.

"And?" I question.

"They want you to come in for some... testing." My grandma looks away. Her shoulders are shaking.

"What sort of testing?" I am careful to hide my rising terror from my voice. My grandma looks back at me. Her eyes are wet.

"They found something on the back of your head. They look like... the doctors say... tumors." My grandma looks down. I drop my fork onto the table and my hand immediately flies to the back of my head, feeling for what the doctors assume are tumors.

I feel two bumps.

I am silent as my hand falls down to my side. My mouth forms a perfect "O."

"We'll leave right after breakfast," my grandma says matter-of-factly.

Breakfast ends quickly. We both seem to have lost our appetite. We clear the dishes slowly. Neither of us seem to want to walk to the car, but eventually the anticipation proves to be too much, and we both get in the car and drive to the hospital.

It's interesting how one person can be having the worst day of their life, and everything just continues on normally. As we

head out on the road, nobody knows that the little red Volkswagen beetle is driving to the hospital. Nobody knows that the people inside just had their normal lives shattered.

It's interesting.

I find myself fiddling with my amulet, careful to avoid the spoke. The mysteriousness and creepiness of it all has been pushed far from my mind. In my new world, everything is white noise. Right now, the amulet is just a gift from my grandma.

"You know, someone shopping at the store really wanted that amulet." My grandma says suddenly, startling me out of my thoughts.

"What?" I say. My grandma nods towards my amulet.

"The couple who came in right after I gave you the amulet? They were wanting to buy it."

"Really?" I ask, surprised. The amulet had been at the back of the shelves for a while.

Its prime time for being purchased had come and gone by the time I found it.

"Yep. The man had come in the day before and saw it out in the open where you left it. He expressed some interest, but he didn't have any money. He said he might come back the next day, but then of course the shop was closed. I didn't think he would come back, and I didn't like him, so I gave it to you."

I laugh, "So I didn't get this amulet just because you loved me?"

My grandma laughs too, "Well, that was part of the reason."

We both laugh together, and I barely have time to ponder the strangeness of my grandma deliberately turning down a sale before we arrive at the hospital and all pleasure quickly dissipates.

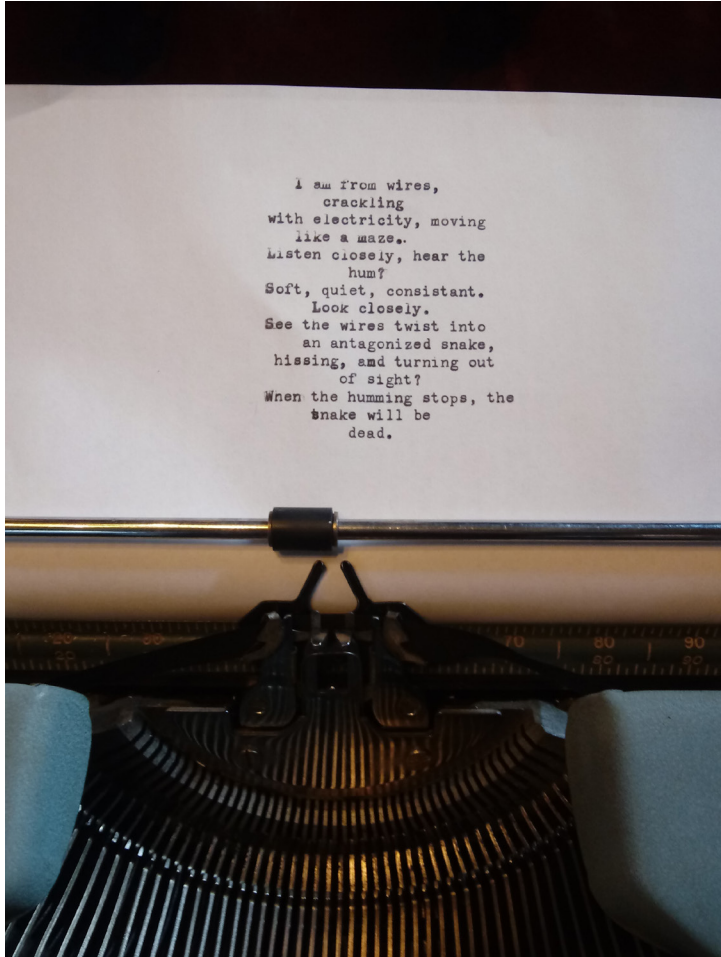
Rose on a Typewriter

Emma Flanigan



I am from Wires

Emma Flanigan



I am from wires,
crackling
with electricity, moving
like a maze.
Listen closely, hear the
hum?
Soft, quiet, consistent.
Look closely.
See the wires twist into
an antagonistic snake, hissings, and turning out
of sight?
When the humming stops, the
snake will be
dead.

You Want More

Dani Sires

Episode 1

So, a quick anecdote about my social life. My friend, Santos, was talking to this one girl Lupita. Well Lupita is a quite shy, sweet, smart, and pretty girl that most of the people in her ambience liked. Despite the fact that she might seem as if she's quiet all the time, she won't quit when emphasizing when someone does something erroneous. That's something that Santos liked about her, because she used that part of her personality to actually help him when he first got to our school. So yeah, it kind of makes sense that he has a certain affection for her. The weird thing is he would always LITERALLY adhere to her like if he was a paper that was stuck to her. He would also adhere to her in the sense of believing every single word she said, as if she were the religion he wouldn't stop following. One day, they were talking during lunch about so many things they shared in common, including how ambitious they both are, the good way though. Then, out of nowhere, he

asks her if she'd liked to go out sometime on the weekend. Then he got ME involved!!! ME!!! Rocco Boyd. The worst part of all is that I had to spend time with Lupita's friend, Victoria. She's cute and all, but come on, I was going there to be a third wheel. Anyways, the day came, and I forgot I had her on social media. She texted me before I made my way there, and she was actually cooler than what I expected. Anyways, so we all made it there. Santos tried to make it arcane that he liked Lupita, but to the rest of us, it seemed as if it were a double date, and Victoria and I were just playing violins in the middle, because third wheels would not be the right term for it. It's just that at times I DON'T understand Santos. He might have thought that it was just a gathering between friends, and I mean the invite could mean something ambiguous, but STILL. He tries to make it seem to EVERYONE in our school that the FACT that he loves Lupita is just an anecdote. Lupita is NOT stupid, and NEITHER is Victoria, whom I honestly wouldn't mind hanging out with again. I

was feeling quite ambivalent about what has happened so far. On one side, I feel as if Victoria and I are actually chill and I actually felt as if we have chemistry. Yeah, at times she seemed quite ambivert, which I didn't understand, but she's really chill.

Santos is doing the right thing and it's not that Lupita feels weirded out. However, on another side I wonder, what if maybe Victoria is doing it for commitment to help her friend out? What if Santos gets friendzoned HORRIBLY?!?!? Adding to that, this whole hangout has lasted 120 minutes so far!!! Last thing, can we just talk about how I LIED about this being an anecdote??? Trust me though, there's a lot more interesting things to this story that hasn't been told.

So stick around with me if YOU WANT MORE...

Episode 2

So here we're back with my story... Well more of the story of my really weird friend Santos and the sweet, amiable, and nearly sacred Lupita. (Side note: Maybe that's why her name is Lupita. Lupita is a diminutive of Guadalupe, that comes from the Virgin

of Guadalupe from MDXXXI). Anyways going back to them, Vico (Victoria) and I were just in the back watching this whole TELENODELA scene. After two hours of going out, we all started ordering food, and well we were waiting to be called. Suddenly, Santos goes for IT!!! However, just as he's about to ask Lupita out... "SANTOS!!!" yelled the employee for him to pick up food. He picks up the food, and somehow as he comes back, he sees a different glow on Lupita's face. A guy was talking to LUPITA!!! HOLY SMOKE, SANTOS WAS PISSED!!! Santos' heart was about to break... He was acting quite arbitrary in the sense of being so uncontrolled. This is the thing with Santos, when he's with Lupita, he's chill but when he gets angry, RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!!! So after the guy left, Santos asked who that was, and then it turns out it was Lupita's ex. I NEVER EVEN KNEW SHE EVER HAD A BOYFRIEND!!! She seemed so nice and innocent that I thought she was going to go to a convent and become a NUN!!! So yeah. That happened. Then, all of us started eating and it was so quiet at the table where we were sitting. Then the silence broke... Her aunt called to pick her up... So she just said bye to Vico and

I. Santos felt really bad. Once she left, the three of us were having a talk with Santos. He attributed Lupita's departure to the fact that maybe her ex called her. Yet, we told him that she said it was because her aunt called her. He was telling us that the worst part is that he didn't tell her anything of what he felt. I ALWAYS WONDER... why do I have such CONFUSING friends??? Seriously, what did I do to deserve this... Honestly, if this would've just been Vico and I going out, things would've been better. She's super chill and, I don't know if I mentioned this before, but she's pretty!!! The whole time we were just making fun of Santos' stupid face when he would look at Lupita. It's so incredible how someone can become so dumb when they're in love, then again I'm not one to talk. Vico and I were having some chemistry... Anyways, we DON'T talk about that... Then Vico left, and she gave me her number because that's the only thing she didn't give me. I was happy, but then thinking of what Santos did got me really angry again. Damn... I definitely need to accredit Santos for making this hangout the most AWKWARD one of my life... I think it was arbitrary that because of Santos' jealousy and stupidity, Lupita and Victoria

had to leave. I got SO angry at Santos and instead of fixing stuff, it went worse... Also, Lupita's ex came in our direction... The thing is that I didn't recognize him until I saw him up close. It was Nicolas!!! He has been my friend since elementary... The thing is, ever since I last saw him, he CHANGED so much. He's the total complete antithesis of Santos. Nicolas is a very confident, buffed, and chill guy. I thought this would all turn out bad but no. Nicolas just warned Santos to not make Lupita feel bad. Nicolas was told by her that she really likes Santos, it's just that she was too shy to say anything. So, Santos felt confused because of how Nicolas was. I just have to say that one of Nicolas' greatest attributes is the fact that he's a Pandora Box. He's full of great surprises. I wonder what might Santos do once we all go back to school on Monday... CAN I JUST SAY THIS HANGOUT WAS AWKWARDLY

COOL THOUGH!!! Also, what might happen with Vico and I??? Will Lupita FINALLY say yes??? Stick around...

Because I know, YOU WANT MORE!!!

Episode 3

Before I start telling you more about this story, I'm going to say, looks can be deceiving. So you know how I said things were going to be good after the benevolent smile and the good conversation that Nicolas had with Santos??? Things got worse now... He JOINED our school... That is NOT something beneficial neither for Lupita, or Santos or for ME!!! Basically, everyone knows me there and somehow the world is SO small that I'm friends with everyone. If something gets to happen in the next days of school, I'm SCREWED... So, it was a Tuesday, and despite the fact that my friends wanted me to sit with them at lunch, I decided to hangout with Vico. I don't know... I mean, I guess going out with Santos and Lupita made me think that spending time with her wasn't a disbenefit after all. Anyways, the two of us were talking about them and about maybe going out this weekend but just without SANTOS BEING A FREAK!!! Damn that chemistry we have is just burgeoning more and more and it's AWESOME!!! Anyways, going back to Santos, I went to walk with him to go to a class together but then something befell

Santos. He saw Lupita talking to Nicolas and you could tell he was flirting with her. I was suspecting that since Nicolas was saying the most BANAL pickup lines to Lupita in another class we had without Santos, but Nico wasn't trying to make it noticeable even though... YEAH!!! The point is, Santos got really jealous... I mean, in this case, who wouldn't get angry??? Lupita and Santos are actually just really close to becoming a "thing" and as much as Nicolas is my friend, he should just BACK OFF!!! Things don't end here though... As much as I told Santos to calm down and think that it's just a friends' thing, he couldn't bear it... So I just let him go because I mean Nicolas looks like he was purposely asking for some help from Lupita when he got injured in the back after coming from a team practice... He bared and his "abs" were showing!!! I know I shouldn't be biased, but I support Santos even though at times he can be ANNOYING!!! So yeah, that's when Lupita said she's more biased, as in more interested in Santos. Lupita confessed that she felt weirded out for helping Nicolas. Then, it was on... Santos and Nicolas started fighting!!! Lupita was just in the middle and well I was trying to separate them and then we all got sent to the principal's office!!! This

is the one and ONLY time I've been to the principal's office. BUSTED much??? So yeah, that situation was my bane. However, my bane would also be how my reputation will go to the FLOOR after this!!! The question is what will happen with Santos and Nicolas??? Will Nicolas get expelled on his first week here??? Will Santos be separated from Lupita???

Just keep on waiting for it because I know YOU WANT MORE!!!

Episode 4

So here we are at the principal's office. At that point I just wanted to hide myself in 6 billion layers of CLOTHING!!! I swear Nicolas is so deceiving with not only his looks, but also what he says. While being at the office he was talking about how the injuries were caused after the fight he had with Santos, and that thanks to him, his leg is broken. Lupita, who happened to be one and ONLY coherent person in this whole conflict said that it wasn't true. "Santos didn't do anything and despite the fact that he did fight with him, the reason why Nicolas got injured had to do with something at his soccer practice!!! He'd be incapable of

doing something bad and Nicolas was being quite weird anyways" she said. Santos felt happy that she complimented him. In my head, I was thinking "UGH, they're doing it again." And that's when Nicolas couldn't compose himself, and then got angry and a bunch more noise was captured in not only the principal's office, but the whole main office too. By the tone of Nicolas's voice, he sounded so angry as if he wanted to decapitate Santos. The principal let Santos talk about his side of the story, and involved me in it. He just said that I, "purposely", made him look elsewhere that way he wouldn't get angry or beat up Santos for making Lupita feel uncomfortable. I have to accept that I did get angry with Santos too, but if I tried to distract Santos is exactly because I didn't want THIS to happen. I AM one of the most popular guys in this high school and getting some stupid punishment will risk MY reputation. Also, it'd be okay if it was just me being laughed at by my friends but no... I suffer from overprotective-and-strict-parents-itis. My parents are Argentinian as much as people might not believe it, and if they find out about this, the CHANCLA will reach my face or any part of my body no matter how much I avoid

it!!! Adding to that, my phone will be taken away for MORE than a month and there's NOTHING I can do to compensate for it!!! My SOCIAL life will go to the floor. Also, I won't be able to talk to Vico and I really like her, and I can perceive that she likes me too by her looks and everything. The point is I am composing a song for her through my phone with GarageBand. Then again, they might give me my phone back before the day I'm released from being grounded since they need to communicate with me. Mostly, it's a good thing except the fact that my parents somehow have an app in which they can track me wherever I go. Anyways, why am I getting worried right now??? He hasn't given any final statement. Oh wait... what is Lupita doing? IS she seducing the principal to compensate for not getting in trouble? Oh no this will go worse than what I expected. Also, can we just talk about how this whole conversation, more of an argument, is as long as a circuitous journey?!?!?! The school is about to close for the day and it's 5:50!!! Anyways, going back to the whole situation at the office. Lupita actually convinced him to not tell our parents but we're going to have in-school suspension. We're going to clean the WHOLE entire cafeteria!!! That is

not really bad for a punishment. I mean at least it isn't a lot of homework!!! Anyways we left the office finally!!!

Concurrently, Vico left her drill team practice. Somehow, I wanted to talk to her but walked away. Then, she came up to me and she just asked me if I wanted to go with her to go eat Chinese food. So, I obviously said yes and then she kissed me. Somehow, I kissed her back and then I told her I like her. Then, she said she does too. However, she was quite skeptical of what she feels. Then, we ACTUALLY kissed!!! YOOOOOOOOOOO! That made my day a BILLION times better... It's not even my birthday, and this is the BEST gift I could've received. Meanwhile, Nicolas and Santos were screaming insults at each other. Lupita was crying because she felt bad about getting in trouble though. For now, I just don't give a cucumber of what they're doing or getting in trouble. However, what will happen on our date as an official couple??? Also, will we get in trouble more than once and all because of Nicolas and Santos???

Keep waiting for the next episode because I know, YOU WANT MORE!!!

Episode 5

OH BOY!!! It's great to be back writing in this JOURNAL not diary. Buddy let me say I've missed letting out everything here. Okay so now that we're in Halloween season, let me tell you a bit of what has happened with me, because trust me, IT'S A LOT TO EXPLAIN. So, as usual, I came from school after being scolded by Mr. Tchaikovsky... Yeah sorry for never bringing up his name. It's just that to begin with, his last name is so COMPLICATED to pronounce to the point that I laugh thinking about Tchaikovsky the COMPOSER!!! And well, MY MOM opened the door just three.. minutes... after... I was grabbing some cereal to eat just because... She walked in. My madre was tired though so I was assuming she would not get angry for how late I got home. BUT HOLY SMOKES!!! I. Was. Wrong. "ROCCO BOYD MEDINA!!! Where the heck have you been?" She didn't sound angry, however she reminded me of the serial killers that appear on her series of "Imperfect Crimes" she would watch on TV at 2 PM. I just told her I stayed at school because in Math Honors, there was something I didn't understand and in Music I forgot my folder. She, of course,

didn't believe me. Man, SOMETHING ABOUT MOMS being great detectives or something... "Hijito, you think I'm a day old... NI A PALOS VOLUDO. (No way but in the strict-Latina-mom-way to say it.) Usually, people take at least 15 minutes, half an hour, or at most 1 hr. You made it here at 6!!!" I told my mom that yes I was late home, but I came back at around 5 PM. "LIES! Paula was here the whole time and she didn't hear a peep at 'around 5'!" Suddenly, my "AMAZING" sister came and said the following... "Maybe he was with his GIRLFRIEND," she said with the biggest smirk that showed her retainers. Damn, I wish she would've NEVER said that, because there's nothing that triggers and saddens my mom more than the idea that her "16-year-old baby" has a girlfriend. "So, that was why you have been ignoring me lately and paying attention to that f... blessed phone." My sister was trying to maintain her calm. However, that backfired. As the older brother, I just gave the COMMAND to my sister to just go to her room and well my mom told her the same. Later, my mom was having a TENACIOUS grip to her chancla and extended it to start aiming. Then, she received a call from Dad. I thought she was going to tell him but no. So

she said we will have a talk and that she'll take away my phone for a second week consecutively. I didn't want to discuss with her the fact that I bought my phone because then she'll bring up the whole "family contract" where I "have to obey her rules as long as I live under the roof of my parents' house." So all of my happiness basically contracted and turned into anger and joy concurrently. However, she does NOT like Vico so I couldn't tinker. Later on, I put the cereal away and ate a bit of the strawberry gelatin on the fridge. After eating, I went to my room and started writing music with my ELECTRIC guitar to talk about rebellion and treachery. I mean my sister was the main reason I wrote this song. My mom was angry and what she said made things a LOT worse. She had to bring up her condescending attitude when days before she promised me she wouldn't snitch since I bought the camo jacket she wanted. So I finished it, and then I started thinking about the kiss Vico gave me, and out of nowhere I got tingles... The days passed and finally Vico and I went on a date. I don't know if it was necessary because she's naturally pretty, but she had a really nice contour on her face which shocked me!!! I got captivated with how

beautiful she was either way; therefore I told her that, and we kissed. Not only did we go to the Chinese restaurant with tables of a specific contour, we went to a Haunted House. Once I thought things were going well, I saw Nico trying to condescend guys around him for having better looks and getting girls numbers. I have a lot of questions to ask. First of all, how come the girls weren't asked to be taken out because of COVID-19 PROTOCOL. Lastly, what do girls see on him other than abs? I mean if he's attractive, I'd be a PLAYER!!! And Vico knows this, since I told her I go to the gym... Anyways, I didn't pay attention to that and I just went inside to pay for me and Vico... She ended up paying for herself because she felt bad... Then I see Lupita and Santos more together than ever. We later joined them and we went in together... WE took a picture together and everything went ok because like Santos, I hugged my girlfriend. Later on, we finished and Nico was walking toward us... The only one that saw him was me... I wonder what he will do THIS TIME?

Stick around to listen to a relatively larger episode than this, because I know YOU WANT MORE!!!

39 Alternate Names for Humanity

Finn Allred

1. Homo sapiens
2. Homo sapien sapiens / Homo sapien neanderthal
3. Earthlings
4. Dealers of stories
5. Lying Apes
6. Featherless bipeds
7. Pre vampires
8. Meat popsicles
9. Selfish sapiens
10. Star stuff
11. Meat shields
12. A mortal with a beast for a body and a maze for a mind
13. Half centaur half minotaur
14. Hairless apes
15. Tellurians
16. Non lunar werewolves
17. Assholes
18. Earth's favorite parasites
19. Land dolphins
20. Well intentioned, maybe
21. An actor with too many masks
22. Bee keepers
23. Artistic apes
24. Curious in nature and intention
25. Anxious anthropoids

26. Musically-inclined mammals
27. Worst Pokemon
28. Flesh sacks
29. Story addicts
30. Intelligent omnivores
31. Precarious primates
32. Biological clocks that keep losing minutes, missing ticks and tocks
33. Auspicious apes
34. Monkey sequel
35. Non-artificial AIs
36. The squids of mammals
37. A creature like liquid carbon, like an iron piano
38. "My god what is that thing?"
39. Apes

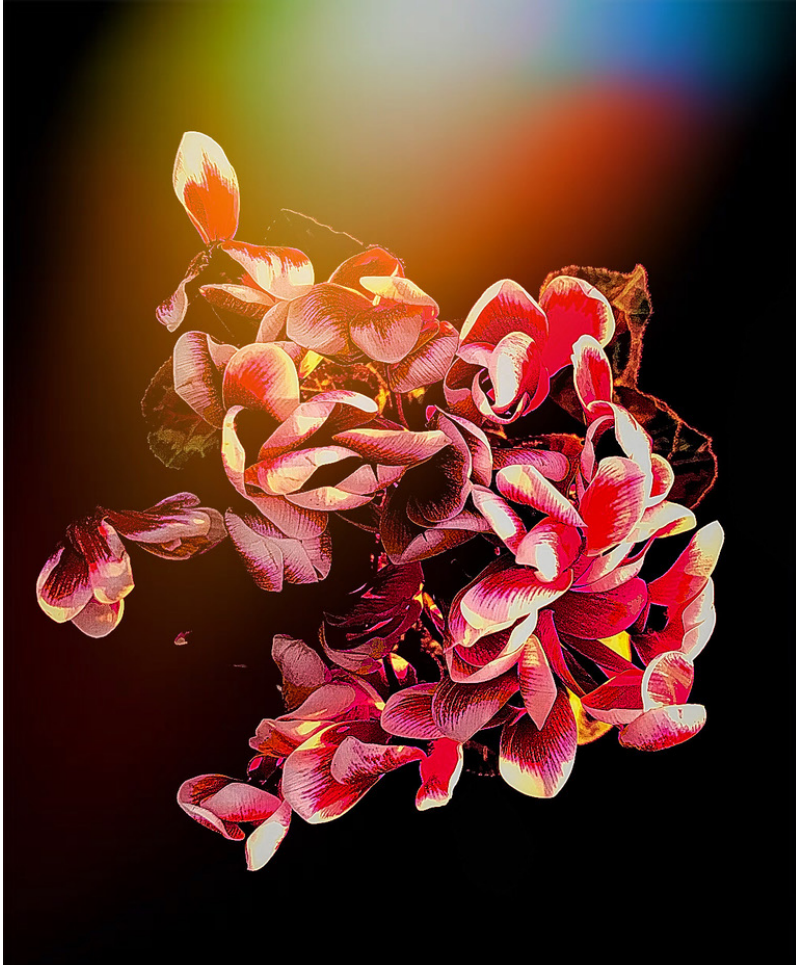
Moonlit Lake

Kayle Orantes



Blooming

Kellen Hunnicutt (K.H.)



**Thank you to Yoli Perez, Stephanie Costa,
Stephanie Howell, and Roger McDonough
who have been integral to the SLTW
program.**