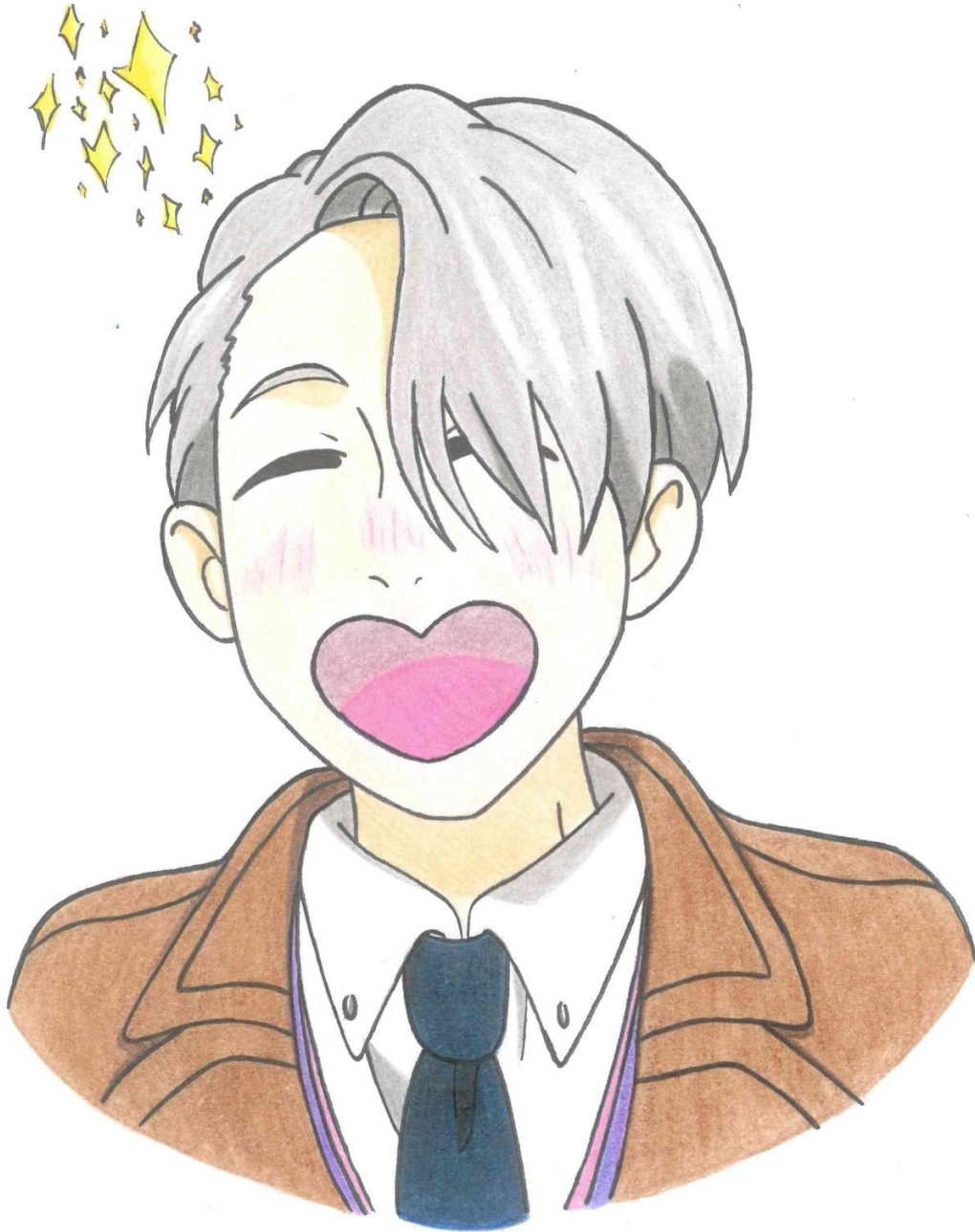


The Alternative United Voices



Vol. 2 The Fiction Issue 2017

Alternative United Voices – Volume 2

A compilation of short stories from the students of Montreal's
alternative high schools

Cover art by Kayla de Bonis

An Alternative United publication

Organized by Colin Throness



Find out more about Alternative United and read the publication
at alternativeunited.ca

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Foreword

Say word! This is the second annual Alternative United writing competition and some incredible submissions came in from five different outreach schools, Mile End, Perspectives II, Options, Venture and Outreach.

It was so much fun reading through this year's short story submissions. They were adventurous, hilarious, tragic, surreal, visceral, captivating, insightful, and they were truly blessed. For a lover of all things related to fiction and storytelling, it was a special treat. I was absolutely blown away by your prose, your imagination, your wit, your courage, and, above all, by your voices. I want to keep the message short and sweet for this year's flock of aspiring wordsmiths—

KEEP WRITING!

Bless up!

Colin Throness

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The Green

By Allison Poszwaylo

In the distance I can see one of the tallest buildings fall, hear the loud booms of concrete hitting concrete and the huge cloud of dust that swallows the ruins whole. It's especially windy today, and I have to use all my energy to walk against it towards my home and try my hardest to keep the dirt from going into my eyes. I keep a look out to see if anyone is around before I duck underneath a fallen wall and a rock, which I call my house.

The only thing in here is a blanket and a locked chest, with the key around my neck. You can't leave anything unlocked around here. People scavenge for everything and anything they can find. Cans of food, water, clothes, all of these things have been getting harder and harder to find.

Before all of this mess, this city was thriving. It was one of the very few new cities in America to be built. I lived with my mom and dad but I wasn't home often so I didn't get to see them much, and I regret that. There are memories in my head of us three on the train as we watched a blur of grey rubble whiz past us when we moved here. Most of the country is broken cities. Only the rich that are alive get to live in the nice places. But the only thing I remember about the nice places are the blur of colour and lights passing by, then many guards, guns and walls.

I was young then, maybe three years old. When no one was looking, I saw green. Green trees, green grass, I even saw a river in the distance, but I didn't tell anyone at the time because I've never even heard of it. I learned more about The Green as I grew up.

Apparently it's just a big area in the United States that is untouched by any human being. They aren't allowed to build cities there or anything.

As I started to learn, I became obsessed. The only colour I see in my day to day life is just a grayscale with the occasional flyer or label with beautiful, vibrant colours. My plan is to live in The Green, instead of these ruined cities. I doze off in my concrete hut to the winds howling through the city with holes.

I hear movement above me and something cold and thin against my neck. I open my eyes to see an old man above cutting the rope with the key around my neck loose. I try to stop him, but I can't do much because I'm laying down and got a knife pressed against my throat.

He opens my chest and cries out for joy, as I have cans of food and bottles of water in there. I was planning on taking them to The Green with me. I lay silent as he puts my food into his bag. His last words are “sucker” because when he turns his back away from me to leave with all of my stuff, I throw a big rock at his head and he falls to the ground.

I pick up the bag he was carrying and stuff my blanket into it too. Since there's now a dead man just out front of my home I know I have to go and go now.

The books said they're towards the mountains, so that's where I go.

It takes me a few days of walking to actually see the treetops. I notice while walking, there are less buildings around and the

ground isn't completely concrete—there are patches of grass all around me. I reach out to touch it and I feel that the ground is kind of damp.

That's the first time I have ever seen something growing. I feel butterflies run through my stomach for a brief moment before I rip the grass out of the ground and stuff as much of it into my pocket as I can. My fun lasts about ten seconds before I hear footsteps. I stand straight and start to creep around, getting closer and closer to my destination.

At this point, there are no tall buildings. Just some houses lining only a few streets that are all empty. I do my best to look through the houses for anything I might need, but the excitement is overwhelming. I turn the corner and ahead of me I see The Green behind a fence. The green trees, the green grass. It takes my breath away for a moment, before I see a guard crossing the street against to the fence in front of me.

I hide from him, but I think he saw me because I hear faster footsteps coming up the empty street. I move quick and cautiously between the abandoned houses. So I'm almost right in front of the fence. I see too many guards, though. There are about three just around the street that I was just on.

I need to make a break for it, so I do. I carelessly run towards the fence, but before I even take more than four steps I hear guards shouting, so I freeze and look around. There's a lot more shouting, and one of the guards points up. So I look and see four planes flying over The Green. The planes are letting out a yellow gas that canvases the entire Green.

The area around me gets all fogged up with thick yellow gas. I didn't notice that all the guards were gone. I start coughing a lot and make my way over to the fence and climb it. I run through the yellow gas laughing and smiling to the other side.

The grass feels like the softest thing I've ever touched, so I take off my shirt and lay on my back. The last thing I remember is my smile, my skin pressed against the grass, and the coughing fit that led me to another place with no colours.

The Bus Stop

By Leah Poszwaylo

It was a hot summer day in the city of Montreal. Shane was waiting for the bus, and to no one's surprise, it was late again. It would've bothered him any other day, but today it was a nice day and he enjoyed being outside.

Down the street he could see a girl with bright green hair. He wasn't too thrilled. He had seen this girl around the neighbourhood and he was always sitting alone or walking but he never saw her with anyone. He wasn't too surprised about that either. When she walked, she would take huge steps. Shane thought it was completely wacky and her style was absolutely awful. He knew how to dress very well and carefully planned out each outfit every day, so looking at her almost made him throw up. As she walked up, Shane looked at the ground to avoid any eye contact and started humming to his favourite childhood song. His dad always told him not to talk to crazies, and to Shane that's what she was.

As Shane started humming the lyrics, the girl started to stare at him. At first Shane wasn't that bothered, because come on, he's *very* good looking and who wouldn't? But when she wouldn't stop, Shane snapped, gave her the dirtiest look and yelled at her to go away.

The song he kept humming was very special to him. It was an old song that his grandmother used to sing to him and his friends all the time that was passed down from his ancestors for generations. The song was so unique that nobody could really

remember how it goes, and there was no other song that sounded like it. He wanted to learn all the lyrics so that when he was older he could sing it to his kids, but he only knew the melody and had forgotten almost all the lyrics.

The next day, Shane was waiting for his bus, and again, it was late. The girl with the crazy green hair, taking giant steps walking down the street, was coming up to the bus stop. Again she was staring at Shane. She was obviously trying to get his attention but he was still giving her dirty looks, and avoiding eye contact as much as possible.

She started humming. Shane was getting extremely annoyed with her voice, but then he realized something... She was humming the same melody that he was humming the other day! He was confused as to why she knew the same song as him and also a little angry. He couldn't think of anyone else who knew the song so she was obviously trying to copy him. Pathetic.

Then she started to sing the lyrics of the song.

At that moment Shane didn't know what to think. He was not expecting that in a million years. How in the world could she possibly know the lyrics of the song?

Instead of wanting to ignore her, he wanted to get to know her because he was astonished. His thoughts had changed completely. He looked at her again, and perhaps it was the sun hitting her face in the right place, but suddenly Shane's thoughts on this girl had changed completely. Her voice was so beautiful and pure almost like she was supposed to be singing his

grandmother's song. Now it was Shane who was the one staring at her. Instead of looking at her clothes and thinking they were awful, he was thinking that they were unique in a nice way. Her skin was pale and her lips were big and plump. She also had a nice tiny nose and high cheekbones. He needed to know more about this girl and find out how she knew this song.

Right as he was about to get up to walk over to her, his leg gave out and he fell to the floor. "Not again," he thought. Unable to get up quickly, he didn't have time to catch up to the girl because her bus had just come. And now he missed his bus too! Shane watched the bus disappearing down the street with her on it, knowing that he would see her around some other time. He spent the next couple days wondering about her.

Now Shane had to try and get up. He was frustrated because this happened at least once a day.

When he was younger, he used to go sledding all the time. It was one of his favourite things to do. He would go all over the city trying to find the biggest mountains he could climb up and go down. His favourite hill was the one at his grandma's house. It was right in her driveway and seeing his grandma was his favourite thing to do.

One day when he was sliding down a hill like he always did, he didn't realize that it was too icy and he got into a terrible accident. He got a leg injury that would be there for the rest of his life. He also smacked his head really hard against a rock, which caused him to lose part of his memory and his balance to be off. It was a tragic event for him and his family. And right when that

happened, his grandma had to move away to a different city because her younger brother was sick. That period of his life was very hard for him and the only memories he had of when he was a child were those as well as that song he listened to all the time. It was the only song he could remember from his childhood. He also remembered some of his friends and missed them so much. Especially his next door neighbour, but he didn't know who they were anymore or what they looked like.

Shane had recently moved to Montreal and ever since things were better. His dad got a job and they all had a good amount of money. Things were going well except for the fact that he was having trouble finding friends. He had never been used to moving around, and making friends wasn't the easiest thing to do, but his parents kept on telling him that eventually he'd find some.

A couple days later, Shane was at the bus stop again and like usual, the bus was late. He saw the girl with the bright green hair and unique fashion style walking down the street, just like he had the other day. But this time he wasn't going to ignore her like he had before. He went up to her and asked her, "How do you know that song I was humming the other day?"

She said, "It was a song that my next door neighbour and his grandma used to sing. He got into an accident and lost his memory. He was one of my best friends I could ever have and singing the song reminds me of him."

Standing in awe, Shane couldn't believe what she just said. Could she really be his next door neighbour? The chances were so

small that this girl had moved to the same exact city as him and that they were meeting up at this moment.

“Was your friend named Shane?” he asked.

“Yeah how did you know?” she replied.

“Because your friend you’re talking about is me!”

Now the girl was standing in awe too. They both couldn’t believe that they’d found each other again. Then suddenly all his memories of playing in the snow on the mountains came back to him and the whole bus ride home, Shane and the girl couldn’t stop talking and reminiscing. They talked about how in the morning they would get all bundled up to play on the mountain for hours and hours until it was dark. After they would go inside and have some nice hot chocolate with Shane's grandma and go back outside playing again. They did this almost every single day of the winter and it made Shane so happy that he got this part of his memory back.

He really liked this girl now and he could tell that in the future they were going to become great friends.

Socialites
By Heloise Valois

I wake up in my stark white bedroom as the sunlight pours in. My morning ritual has begun as I lazily reach for the phone on my night table. I quickly scan my social media accounts to compare the number of likes my posts have gotten since the day before. Satisfactory. I've done better. My bare feet hit the wooden floor and I am soothed by the order around me.

Walking into the bathroom, I feel a shiver of anxiety as I look in the mirror. Long blonde hair, pink lips, ice-blue eyes, pale skin and high cheekbones. A portrait stares back at me. I look at her features critically. Looking for a glimpse of who I was in the past. The past remains silent and disconnected.

I begin my beauty routine, wash my face with lukewarm water, organic cleanser and lotion. My shower steams with the aroma of citrus to energize my day. All of a sudden, I start seeing black spots. I let out a yell, holding onto the shower precariously to balance myself. I stumble out, dress quickly, with the outfit I laid out carefully the day before. I panic, check my fit-bit and heart rate. Abnormally low, this would be something I would have to talk about with my trainer.

Once upon a time, I used to drink coffee in the mornings and sing to myself. Now, I meticulously arrange my breakfast—fresh fruit salad—in the most attractive way possible. I angle my camera and tilt to take a bite debating this morning's emotion. Serene, cheerful or lost in thought. I think back to my most recent posts to make sure that I am not repeating myself. A thought pops into my

head. Flirtatious. I haven't expressed that emotion in a while. I look at a few of the selfies I have taken in the last few weeks. Assessing them, I realize that I wish I was the one in the photographs. The vibrant girl full of drama and full of life.

My apartment is silent and still. I hurriedly clear away my breakfast, stacking it in the dishwasher and starting it. I walk to my hallway which is painted the perfect shade of photographer grey. Once again, adhering to my routine, I take a snapshot of my outfit. This ritual began as a way to not wear the same outfit twice. Now, it's one of a series of uploads.

I walk thoughtfully to the vegan market on the corner of the street. The street is so full of sound, families, life. Grabbing a basket, I begin to choose perfect unmarred fruit and vegetables, apples, pomegranate seeds, a bunch of kale. I realize that the other shoppers are looking at me though I feel anonymous. I smile gently making sure my smile reaches my eyes as I look back at them.

As I walk to the cashier with my basket in hand, the girl at the cash does a double take.

"Oh my god! Are you Lauren? I have been following you for the last two years. I check your posts every single day!" she states excitedly. "I can't believe I actually got the chance to meet you." She is quiet for a moment. "I wish I had your life!"

I look back at her in complete agreement. I also wish I had Lauren's life. The life where everything happened in between the stills, where success, love, and betrayal matter. Where everything

was picture perfect but you didn't lose all traces of your identity along the way.

"I wish I had her life too." I replied. She looked confused. We did not break the gaze for a solid ten seconds. As she looked into my cold eyes I felt as though she was looking for something. An answer maybe or for a person that was simply not there. Realizing the tension and the fact that we were holding the line up, I snapped out of it.

"I mean, thank you! I always love meeting my followers." She smiled, noticeably still uncomfortable. As I was starting to walk away with my things, I stopped.

"What's your Instagram?" I asked her.

"You want my—my Instagram?" She sounded surprised.

"Yes." I answered coolly.

"Oh, uh, it's @marlenesheen."

"Great, I'll follow you," I said with a smile.

At home I unlocked my phone and opened Instagram. I typed in marlenesheen and found her page. A regular Instagram, 235 followers, an average of about 50 likes per picture from what I could tell. It was very mundane. I looked at her life, the heartfelt birthday posts for her friends, get togethers with the family, etc. I thought of the Lauren that had Instagram five years ago, before the 500,000 lip injections and the dozens of sponsorships.

I was a person back then, not a facade that you can only see glimpses of through status updates and pictures. I switched to my

page and examined it once again, keeping to my routine checks. A spike in likes on my fruit bowl post. “Great,” I thought to myself as I looked at the fruit in the garbage and the bowl in the dishwasher. I looked back to my page once again and searched through my tags and at the people featured in the act that is my life. I wondered if they had feelings, if they felt like real people or images.

I didn’t know how much longer I could do this. I was Marlene Sheen, a regular person with a loving family and friends. Someone who would think of Lauren as an unachievable image that I would only daydream about. The truth is, it is unachievable. Marlene cannot have a perfect life with perfect friends because regular people are never perfect. Only Lauren is. There are dozens of “Laurens,” fake people with fake faces and fake lives. I do not want to be Lauren anymore, I want to be regular me.

“Are you sure you would like to delete your account?” appeared on my screen. Never had I been more sure of something in my life.

Untitled

By Mia Dawe Dechene

I woke suddenly in the middle of the night to the sound of smashing glass and loud angry voices. I shot up to a sitting position in my bed, my brain automatically jumping to the worst case scenario, thinking something terrible might be going on downstairs, only to realise that it was just my parents having another one of their arguments.

For as long as I can remember, my parents have not gone a day without having at least one little disagreement. To give some background information on how they came to be this way, my parents met when they were 23 and crazy and their bad habits fed off each other, only making matters worse. My dad has had a problem with drinking since he was 19, and my mom has been struggling with a cocaine addiction since she was 21. Together, they had lots of fun but ruined themselves by partying too much, spending loads of money on drugs, alcohol and trying to live an unnecessarily extravagant life.

See, my dad is a great guy and I know he loves me very much, but he is not a very good father figure. He is more of a friend than a parent; he takes me out for dinner, coffee and we talk about boys, partying and we share our new rap music finds with each other. He doesn't understand how to work hard, or even work at all, since throughout his entire life, everything he could possibly ask for has been handed to him on a silver platter. As for my mother, she has had to take a slightly different path; she has worked hard her whole life, always providing for herself. Overall, my family looks pretty

together and privileged from the outside; we live in a huge house right on the beach in Miami, we have a collection of expensive sports cars and I have anything any teenage girl would die for. You name it: shoes, clothes, a TV in my room, a puppy, someone who cleans and cooks for me and even my own entrance to the house (great for sneaking friends in!) On the inside, our family is not what you'd expect. We are very dysfunctional, we barely speak to one another some days, we almost never eat at the same table and when we do try spending time together, something always goes very wrong.

Tomorrow morning, we are supposed to drive to Orlando, Florida, to go to Disney world for my 18th birthday. Of course, the day before we are supposed to do something nice all together, they have to get in a screaming fight about how they can't handle me anymore. Last year, they found out through my ex-best friend Emma that I had been doing drugs, skipping school and hanging out with the wrong group of people. Ever since then, they seem to not know how to deal with me. They know what it's like to be young and experiment but they say they would hate to see me go down the same path they took. My parents always disagree about how I should be punished for behaviour that they consider unacceptable. They have tried grounding me, taking away my driving privileges or keeping me on house arrest, but those rules never last long because that would mean I would be around all the time to witness their bad behaviour.

I slowly crept out of my bed down our huge swirling staircase, trying to hear which room their voices were coming from. I was

wearing my fuzzy pink Michael Kors slippers so each step I took was silent. I realised they were standing in the kitchen and it sounded like they were actually talking about something other than me for once. I stayed hidden around the corner listening to my dad talking in a firm voice and my mom crying.

I heard my mom say, “Steve, you know I love you to pieces but I don’t know how much longer we can keep doing this, I’m starting to think we might be the reason Ashley is acting out and the last thing I would want is for our own daughter to hurt herself because she is unhappy with her family life.”

I knew my parents had thought about splitting a few times, but hearing my mom say that it would be better for me breaks my heart. I would hate to see my parents ruin their 19-year marriage over the child I’m sure they didn’t really want in the first place. I couldn’t handle hearing things like this, I hated to think all their fighting could possibly be my own fault. I had to hold back my tears and resist peeking out from around the corner to beg them not to do this.

Instead, I decided to go quietly back upstairs to my room. When I got there, I let all the tears come out and I frantically looked around my room for a little box I had hidden a few weeks ago. When I finally found the little pink fuzzy box that needed a key to open, my hands were shaking with anticipation. I got the box to open, and just as I had hoped, there lay a small baggy containing 10 small blue sleeping pills, a note I had written to my parents one day when I thought I could no longer take this life and a shiny metal blade that I had once relied on to relieve my pain, by

sliding it across my wrists, only to hide it from anyone who may want to help.

In the moment, there were so many different things running through my mind, I was shaking and hyperventilating from crying so much. I had an incredible headache and felt sick, probably since it was the middle of the night and I was still coming off all the Xanax I had been doing the past few days. Without even thinking it through, I opened the baggy, poured the pills into my hand and swallowed them all at once with a sip of vodka from a bottle I had hidden under my bed.

I still felt anxious, so I got into bed, put my earphones in, blocked out the rest of the world and hoped I wouldn't wake up tomorrow. Maybe then my parents could live a happy life without having to worry about influencing me or bothering me. I decided that I should get the note in case my parents found me in the morning. When I stood up out of my bed, I got this incredible dizziness and then all I saw was darkness.

I guess I fell to the ground and made a lot of noise because I heard my parents running up the stairs. They burst into my room and my mom let out a cry.

“Ashley, what have you done to yourself my precious?! Steve! Ashley has really hurt herself this time, call an ambulance!”

I remember nothing after that until I woke up in a bright hospital room, with an IV coming out of my arm. I lay my head back on the uncomfortable plastic like pillow they had in the bed

and accepted the fact that maybe my parents actually cared too much to let me go?

The Maze

By Emanuel Olivierre-Quamina

I've been here for about three years or so. It's hard to keep track of time down here.

One of the reasons I'm not dead yet is because every second day I find enough food to keep myself alive. I don't know who or what is leaving this food for me but I'm not sure if I should feel grateful or scared. Throughout the day I spend my time hidden in the cracks of the maze to avoid any predators that might be looking for a nice snack, even though I haven't seen any yet, but I know they're out there.

Today was different from the others because in the small amount of food I received, I also found a small knife. I started to think why *it* would give me a weapon but that doesn't matter: I now have a way to defend myself.

Tonight I won't be spending my night in the shadows but outside in the open. I'll find out where exactly I am and what else is out there. To prepare for whatever is out there I get essentials from my surroundings—I bring the knife, a long vine to use as rope, a small amount of food, some water and I smear mud all over my clothes for camouflage. The first thing I'm going to do is find out where I am. To do that I'm going to climb the highest tree around here.

After looking around for a couple hours I spot the tallest tree and from the looks of it this isn't going to be easy. It takes me a

half hour to get to the top of this tree and I nearly fall twice. I finally know where I am—in a giant maze in an unknown forest.

As I look ahead into the sky I see a horde of dark clouds slowly approaching. This is bad. I need to get out of here before it hits.

I hurry down the tree using the vine I brought with me. As soon as I hit the ground I head to where I saw the border of the maze. It will take me a week to get there but I don't have a week, I have three days before that storm hits. I don't waste time walking. Instead I jog at an easy pace. I take a break after jogging for an hour.

As I start pulling out a piece of cooked meat I hear something. Could it be the thing that's been watching over me all this time?

I stand up and yell out to the bush I heard the noise from: "Hello?! Hellooo?! I won't harm you! Please, come out."

The first thing I see as it comes out of the shadows is two long horns. This is not the guardian angel I was hoping for.

I run for my life while that thing behind me chases me. It's way faster than I am so it catches up to me no problem. Its large arms pin me down and it introduces its teeth to my face.

I'm frozen. I never thought I'd die from getting eaten alive by some type of abomination that shouldn't even exist in this world. I guess there isn't always a happy ending for the underdog. I should have never ran away from home.

A Mermaid Dies
By Rachel Labelle

Once upon a time, somewhere in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, a mermaid burst through the rough waves to see her younger sister fall from a ship to the ocean and transform into foam.

“No!” she screamed. “She's gone!”

Mermaids have the upper body of a woman and the lower torso of a fish. They have deep blue eyes, as blue as the ocean and curly golden hair. Adella was the eldest of four mermaid sisters, Ariel was the youngest. Being the eldest, Adella protected her younger sisters, especially from humans. She couldn't believe that her younger sister Ariel had made a pact with an evil ocean witch, Calypso. Calypso had replaced Ariel's lower torso with legs, but in order to remain human, Ariel was told she had to kill her true love. The price was too high for Ariel to pay.

Adella had wanted to stop Ariel from being with humans, but it was Ariel who couldn't bring herself to killing her true love. Instead she threw herself overboard. It was a well known fact amongst the pod of mermaids that Ariel had fallen in love.

“It's true love and love at first sight,” Ariel would happily say. It was also well known that Adella hated humans.

Upon seeing the floating foam, Adella screamed so loud that the heavens opened up with thunder and lightning causing the ocean to swell with mighty, rough waves. Fear, then anger, took over, and with a strong flick of her fin she flung herself high up into the air and dove into the dark ocean depths.

She continued to swim and scream as hard as she could until the pressure of the deep ocean knocked her out. She continued to drift downward deeper and deeper until she hit the ocean floor. After a short time she opened her eyes and without moving she noticed faint sunlight light peering through the ocean's surface high above. The storm had passed, she thought.

Suddenly, Adella realized she was in the Abyss of Rah, a very dark and dangerous place deep within the Marianas trench. She gazed upon the faint light that seemed to dwindle down from the surface upon an enormous shadowy shape of a what looked to be a human. As she swam closer she found that it was the carved figurehead of a woman on the bow of a shipwreck. Floating above the figurehead were thick strands of golden seaweed, like hair, that danced with the ocean current. Adella froze in her swim forward and held her breath—the figurehead looked like her sister, Ariel. “This is it,” she thought. A fitting memorial to Ariel.

She gathered all her strength and swam back to the pod to search for her sisters. She managed to convince the grieving sisters to follow her to the monument and see for themselves. All three gazed upon the figurehead and at that moment they agreed to return to pay tribute to their sister. Each sister returned to the monument and when it was time they dissolved into foam. Adella knew her time was near and as she started to dissolve, she gazed upon the figurehead and finally she understood that Ariel's sacrifice was the very nature of true love.

To this day, when one sees foam upon the crest of ocean waves, a mermaid dies.

Harlem Nights

By Joseph Myschkowski

The violent streets at night were dangerous and scary as a young kid growing up in Harlem. I was always hearing sirens and gun shots at night when I was going to sleep. But now times have changed. After high school I saw what my future would be if I went in the wrong direction. A lot of things happened in my city that I wish I had never seen, such as murder, drive bys and mass shootings. But the worst things happened to me as I got older.

I always seemed to think that Harlem wasn't that bad. But I was wrong, it was that bad. A lot of people were killed over the years. There was a lot of poverty and homeless people, and poor living conditions such as broken windows, broken doors, abandoned houses and I failed to see the reality of it. Even this man that I had met, he was a talented artist who was becoming successful and decided to quit that lifestyle he had back then, but unfortunately he didn't make it and I didn't find out until several years after. There were so many riots at night, the people were protesting against the police.

It all started back when I was a young teen, when I saw what people were doing out in the streets. A lot of gangs had deadly weapons such as loaded guns and assault rifles. They were very serious about it. I never got involved but I had a friend who decided to become friends with one of the gang members and that's when everything turned around for him.

His name was Jonathon. He was always a good kid and never really caused trouble or had issues in school and he was a very good

student. But one day he talked to one of the gang members and started building a relationship with this guy named Chris. Chris was one of the gang members and was highly feared and owned a large part of the drug business out in the streets.

Jonathon didn't know what he was doing, but he was hanging out with Chris and his gang after school and he felt like he was a part of them. He would go to one of the gang members houses and do drugs with them. I had warned him to stay away from them, that they were no good to him, but he just said, "You're jealous that I have boys that take care of me." He didn't listen to anything I would say to him and started selling drugs with Chris out in the streets at night.

I was very worried about him because a lot of drug dealers would get robbed out there or some would get killed and he was just a young skinny kid. After doing the drug business with Chris, Jonathon decided to continue selling and bring it up a level. He wanted to sell it around other areas that he wasn't familiar with to bring up the amount of money they were getting.

I was very worried and I told him, "Jonathon, now you should really stop. I don't want you to get killed out in these streets. You're better than that. You've got a future ahead of you." But he just continued ignoring me.

It happened at 2:40 in the morning. I heard the gun shots as I was walking home, coming back from the gas station. I ran back to pick him up and tried to stop the bleeding, but it was too late by the time the ambulance arrived. Jonathon was dead.

After that tragic death, his funeral was very saddening to me, and his family was mourning too. Some time passed and I decided to move out of the city to Florida. I wanted to do some schooling there. I got a degree as a personal physical trainer and I was doing well. But the the flashbacks of my past always haunt me, even to this day.

Retrospection
By Julien Deveau

“Mr Altegra? Mr Altegra?”

“Yes, I’m here.”

“Do you understand what is going on today? You have a very serious medical condition, and we have the test results. You are positive for stage four lung cancer.”

Gerry's life flashed before his eyes. It was finally going to be over. A life of misery, abandonment, drug and alcohol abuse and failure.

Gerry Altegra was a washed up 50-something year old who used to be the “Tom Cruise” of his time. He was a big time Hollywood actor, who destroyed his success by alcohol and drugs. Not long after that his wife Alice divorced him and took their daughter Chelsea with her. Alice is now happily married to a gentleman named Frank. He hasn't had a reason to live since.

Being a released alcohol and an ex-drug addict with money is a bad combination. After the doctor's appointment he got in his car and drove to his mansion in the Hollywood Hills. He then dove into a large night of drinking.

Ding dong! The doorbell went off.

Gerry got up and put on his robe and answered the door.

“I have a package for a Mr. Altegra.”

“Yup, that's me,” he signed for it and quickly shut the door. He started to open the package when he realized that it was all of

his medications he needed to start taking with instructions of dosage.

Gerry started to think about his family. He still loved Alice, his ex wife, and missed his daughter Chelsea. He thought about Chelsea every day. Now all he needed to do was reach out. He picked up his cell phone and dialed his daughter Chelsea.

“Hello? Gerry?”

“Hey Chelsea, how's it going?”

“What do you want?”

“Just seeing how my daughter is doing. I have something to tell you.”

“Ok. Go on.”

Chelsea didn't care much for small talk with her father. She had been hurt too many times by him.

“Well, I went to the doctors to get some test results yesterday and it turns out I have stage four lung cancer.”

“Jesus Christ! I'm so sorry.”

They continued the conversation for a few minutes. Gerry enjoyed conversing with his daughter because he hadn't been much of a father to her for a long time. But he wanted to. Maybe under these circumstances this might make things better between both of them.

A few weeks later Gerry had already started to get chemotherapy. On a sunny Saturday he met his daughter at a coffee shop.

They had already been developing their relationship over the last few weeks. Things had gotten better. All Gerry wanted in life now was to be a better parent to his daughter.

At the coffee shop they enjoyed their lattes and participated in light discussion. Chelsea had been present in all of his cancer treatments. After their coffee Gerry drove Chelsea home to her mother and stepfather's house.

“Hey Dad, do you want to come in for a minute?”

“I think that would be a bad idea. Your mom and step dad wouldn't be so happy.”

“Come on now.”

He didn't want to argue with her so he went in the house.

“Hey Mom, I'm home! I have a visitor with me,” said Chelsea.

“What the hell are you doing here?!” said Alice.

“Is this who you've been seeing lately, Chelsea?”

“Mom, I didn't want to tell you because you would act like this,” said Chelsea.

“Get out of my house right now or I'm calling the police, Gerry,” said Alice.

“Mom, please. Dad has lung cancer and just wants to make things right,” replied Chelsea.

“Please, Alice. I just want a minute to explain,” Gerry responded quickly.

“I don't care if he is dying. He is only trying to make things better for himself, not you, Chelsea,” retorted Alice, who was hysterical at this point. She picked up the phone and dialed 911.

“I'm sorry, Chelsea. I've let you down.” Gerry quickly dashed out and drove away not knowing that that was the last time he was going to speak to his daughter.

The next few days Gerry started drinking again. He started to blame himself for all this. He should have never brought his daughter into all this mess.

Gerry called Chelsea multiple times, and no answer. He called one more time and the number was changed. Gerry then stopped taking all of his medications. He was now waiting for the inevitable. He knew he had failed as a man and a father.

With no legacy, people would remember him for his limited fame, and mostly for his alcohol and drug abuse.

On August 5th, 2017, Gerry Altegra died of lung cancer. Three months after his diagnosis, his cancer had spread to his brain and he died a fast and painless death. People would only remember him as a failure, except for his daughter Chelsea.

Chelsea knew he was a good man who tried to be in her life at the end. In Gerry's will, he left his large fortune to one person: Chelsea. Money wasn't important to her, but it showed that when he was at the brink of death, he was thinking of her.

The Mountain

By Damien Agnellini

Three border points connect to one mountain. Not just any mountain, Roraima, the tepui, which in native South American tongue means the house of God. If a tepui is the house of God, then Roraima must be the everything else of God.

It is the highest of the Pakaraima chain of tepui plateaus in South America. It is also one of the largest tabletop mountains in the region, measuring 2,810 metres in height. The dense jungles of Brazil, Guyana and Venezuela surround the massive tabletop mountain. Dangerous wildlife roams rampant and free, but that's not enough to deter the great Lucas Hydra, a man of great adventures and discoveries, a man with no fear, a man who you'd think can overcome the secrets of Mount Roraima.

But until this day, he has not been able to find a helicopter pilot to take him through the rainstorm ridden jungles surrounding Mount Roraima. Everyone tells him, "It's too dangerous, I'm not going to risk my life for some mythical stories." He's been searching for months on end. It is the only piece of the puzzle missing, the only piece of the mystery left to conquer Mount Roraima and its secrets.

Then it hit, at of all places a Brazilian social club in the center of Rio de Janeiro. Lucas was sipping on his glass of whiskey on the rocks whilst studying ways to breach through the dense jungles leading to Mount Roraima, when a man stepped up. A sort of dissident among the people, he scared everyone away with every move he made, and sat right next to Lucas. He spoke with a rough

Russian accent, “Ye got a bad thing coming to ya if ye wish to make it atop that Ol’ Mountain of God. But I’ve heard of yer work and I wish to aid ya with the only option in, my grand baby, Lucystov.”

“Lucystov?” Lucas responded.

“Aye, Chiara, my ol’ Mi-8, left in Cuba after the Cold War. I brought her down here and she’s been a hell of a good baby to me. She’ll be a hell of a good baby to you too, but I require a little incentive, if ya know what this means.”

“Oh, for sure! You will be paid well for such a treacherous journey. Do not worry, friend. As long as you get me in and out, there will be a large amount of riches coming your way.”

Lucas was filled with joy. The very next day he got the rest of his goods together and set journey with the old Russian man to where the helicopter was stashed.

“So, I didn’t catch your name?”

“It is Popov. No more questions. I wish only to bring you there and get out, with my money.”

So Lucas sat quiet. He saw it in the eyes of Popov, a little twinkle of excitement, as well, which caused worry in Lucas. What if he wanted all the fabled riches stored in the depths of Roraima for himself?

They finally reached the chopper and spooled the engines quickly. And they were off. Off to the riches.

The two caught a lucky break. For the first time in seven months, Roraima wasn't being pelted by rain. It was still cloudy and could blast off at any second, but they took the chance and landed on top of Roraima.

They set up base camp in the back of the helicopter which measured 18 metres long. The cargo space was immense and filled with survival tools and old Cold War munitions, which could be useful as neither of them knew what awaited them.

They set off as quickly as possible. Lucas had an idea as to where the opening was that led to the fabled riches. So he took lead and after almost four hours of travel on the damp and soft flora and fauna filled summit of Roraima, they reached the so called opening.

“This is it. This is where it is supposed to be. This is our time to make history, my friend. No one said we could do it, but here we are. Lucky ones, aren't we? Catching a break in the rain and all.”

“We sure are.” said Popov. He stared at Lucas in a violently driven way. He pulled out a .44 magnum from his worn out satchel. “Listen, Lucas. You know you can not enter this place without a marking of blood, right? So this is where your journey ends, and mine begins.”

“Popov, NOO!”

The shot rang out.

The birds sitting atop the plateau flew away into the sky. The echo kept singing. The ground crackled. A sigil glowed, opening a pathway to the depths of Roraima.

Lucas put his foot on the first step.

Natural Landscape
By Giuseppe Carabetta

“I’ll get it!”

I still remember that day, the last time I saw them.

It was only a few weeks after winter and yet the trees bloomed as if they did not mind the cold. The air was as warm as the smiles on our faces. I was wearing my favourite, or at least I think it was my favourite Star Wars shirt. Hey, now that I think about it, it feels like an eternity since I’ve seen those movies or rather any movie. Seventeen years. We were playing with the ball we got our dog for Christmas and he threw it too far. My sister began to cry so I said I’d get it. It landed behind those bushes next to the small forest surrounded by houses. When I moved the bushes and reached for the ball, my life changed. I found you.

You were just lying there on your side almost lifeless, your coat was covered in mud and you were breathing slow. You were just a little pup I thought. Behind you the bushes rustled.

“Hello?” I called.

Those must be its parents, I thought. I must’ve scared them off. Being the five year old angel I was, I decided to bring you to them personally. Angel, my mom used to call me... Mom.

I picked you up carefully and walked through the bushes, dirtying myself. The branches grabbed me as if trying to tell me to turn back. I pushed through them continuing on my “mission.” Then that’s when everything changed. I felt something. As if I was underwater, I felt the weight of my body lighten and all sound was

muffled. My vision blurred for a few seconds and then in an instant, everything was... Normal?

I looked around realizing how tall and thick the trees were. The leaves were like clouds blocking the sunlight from caressing my face. When I looked back, the bushes were gone. There were only trees with some strange markings on them that stared me down. Scared, I looked down at you and saw you shivering a little.

No, I thought. I wasn't just going to leave you because I was afraid. I shrugged off the gaze of the trees and moved on. My feet were getting tired as I walked for I don't know how long when...

SNAP

A branch snapped somewhere behind me. I was being followed, I thought to myself. But who was following me? I turned around.

"H-hello?" I called nervously.

Silence.

I waited a few moments before I continued. I resumed my trek when suddenly I heard whispers. Goosebumps ran up my body, you began to shiver more intensely. I held you tighter, and then it showed itself. It stood there, staring at me, eight feet tall, almost statue-like.

I couldn't tell if it was breathing or not. It was thin to the bones. Its ribs were clearly visible on its almost grayish-blackish skin. Its veins wrapped around its body, glowing a violent purple that matched its hateful eyes. Its teeth were razor sharp and looked

like they were able to pierce through titanium. Arms extended with claw like hands, equally as sharp as its teeth.

Frozen. My breath came in and out as inaudible whimpers. I stood there out of fear not knowing what to do.

“R-r-run,” a childish voice whispered in my ear. I turned and ran as fast as I could. It screeched furiously behind me. It sounded as if someone was scratching a chalkboard with a knife. My breathing became heavier as I kept running, not knowing where I was going. I tripped. I lost my grip and you rolled behind a tree. I tried to get up, but a root in the ground held tightly to my ankle. I struggled and struggled but, it was no use. I looked up.

It was there.

1991, Montreal, Quebec
By Antonio Hewitt-Godoy

I'm at a bar chilling with the boys, drinking coffee and busting each other's balls. Suddenly a loud noise speeds by right outside the bar. Everyone rushes to the window to see what the problem is outside. It's a high speed chase, five cop cars burning their tires just to stop this maniac. Smelling the burnt tires gives a little itch in my nose, so I block it from the scent of corruption, like as if it was a terrorist blowing up. I see one of the cop cars hitting the driver's left corner bumper, and at that moment it's the end. The car makes a drifty hard left turn, and when the cop makes impact, the high speed chaser's car tips over and starts to barrel roll towards a metal pole. The man in the vehicle must be praying. That's what I say to myself, because if I was in that position it would look like a movie to me, hearing only my heart beating, people outside screaming in deafening voices, and me always blanking out and waking up every five seconds. The high speed chaser hits the pole. And then ten seconds after the impact with the pole, a fire starts up. The man in the vehicle hurries to get out before he burns to death. He struggles with his seatbelt, but remembers he has a knife so he cuts the seatbelt and breaks free. Me and the boys get closer to the crime, but at this moment everything is in slow motion. I hear somebody running towards us, but can't really see their face. I see a silver object in this person's hand, running towards me. When I look closer at him, it's the high speed chaser running from the police that are following him from behind. I see an officer lift his weapon from the high speed chaser's shoulder view and I'm in

shock. I can't move. He's five feet away from me, so I close my eyes. I only see darkness, nothing else, until a sound like lightning striking down. I open my eyes and I see the high speed chaser guy on me, running towards me as if to give me a hug. I feel numb and shock because there are two people who die tonight, me and this guy, the knife puncturing through the middle of my chest and him taking a bullet through the back of his head.

Alex's Tragedy
By Alessandro Palmieri

Saint Leonard: An Italian neighbourhood. There's a park that all the kids go play in after school. This park is called Pirandello. It's named after a man called Luigi Pirandello. Every night around eight o'clock, usually after supper time, there's a group of old Italian men who live around park Pirandello and they all gather up at the park to either play bocce, which is an Italian sport, or they play Italian card games.

Alex spent most of his childhood in Saint Leonard living at his grandmother's house, which was a five minute walk from Pirandello Park. He frequently went to Pirandello Park to meet up with friends or to simply go for a bike ride. He knew more about his grandmother's neighborhood than his own.

Alex's grandmother was 80 years old; she grew up in Italy but she moved to Montreal for a better life. World War II had forever changed her mother country. She found work in a sewing company. She got by. When her only daughter, Alex's mom, had him, his grandmother stepped in, because of family problems. His grandmother was like a second mother to him. She raised him and took care of him when his mom was busy or working to support the family. His grandmother earned the right to give him a good yelling at once in awhile.

At the age of 10, on an early Saturday afternoon, Alex decided to take his brand new BMX bike for a test ride at Pirandello Park, after his grandmother specifically told him not to leave the house

because there was a heavy cloud of rain approaching the neighbourhood.

Alex didn't listen because he was very excited to test out his new bike, not thinking that he didn't have a helmet. He started pedaling in the direction of the park. As he approached the park he realized the grey clouds were moving in and the wind was getting colder. He didn't care. The very second the wheel of the bicycle touched the park's soil the dark cloud containing heavy rain burst. It was raining so hard he couldn't even see a foot in front of him.

He raced to get to shelter. He rushed towards the shed at the park. The shed of the park was located at the bottom of a mountain.

Alex tried to pedal hard, but as he did so, his shoe slipped off and his foot got caught up in the bike chain.

In that moment he was helpless. He couldn't move or break his fall, and he was plummeting to the ground. The rear wheel of his bike started heading towards the front of the bike and at that point he hit the pavement with a lot of force and landed on his side, scraping his flesh on the cold wet pavement.

Alex was unconscious for about a minute after the impact. Upon coming back to consciousness all he could remember was the guard for the park helping him go inside the shed because it was still raining heavily. The guard tried to speak to Alex, but Alex couldn't hear a single thing. He explained to the guard that all he could hear was a ringing sound in his ears. The guard asked him if there was an adult who could accompany him to the hospital, but Alex couldn't remember the usual information, like his grandmother's

phone number or exact address. He only remembered that she lived a few houses down from the park. One of the Italian men decided to take it upon himself to find Alex's grandmother's house. Thankfully he found it and brought her to the park

The ambulance rushed to the park with sirens blaring and lights flashing. The paramedics did a couple of quick tests and shortly after Alex and his grandmother were in the ambulance on their way to the closest hospital. They arrived at Rosemont Maisonneuve hospital and were immediately sent to the ER.

Alex and his grandmother waited in the emergency room for over 45 minutes before Alex's mother arrived. His mom worked at the airport which was at the other end of the city and she had Alex's medicare card. After she arrived, they waited another couple of hours.

It was getting late. Alex was getting sleepy.

As soon as the doctors saw that he was closing his eyes, they rushed him to a ward. Suddenly, Alex was getting checked by nurses. He got checked every two hours during his first night at the hospital. The doctors were making sure he wouldn't fall into a coma.

The second day in the hospital, doctors examined him and broke the terrifying news to him and his mother. "I'm sorry, Miss Russo," Dr. Mignicca said. "It seems your son has suffered a fractured skull with internal bleeding, but he is very fortunate."

When Alex heard these words come out of the doctor's mouth, he broke down in tears.

The following day they took a couple of x-rays and MRI scans. The doctors sent him pictures of his head scan—everything looked normal except for the left side near the temple. The bone here looked out of place.

The next day Alex woke up with a black eye. His doctor said that it was all the blood from his internal bleeding making its way out of his head. They assured him that it would go away.

After spending three days in the hospital, Alex was finally dismissed and allowed to go home for the first time. He had to spend his whole summer vacation doing nothing. He had to remain home, and he couldn't do anything to put pressure on his head. He couldn't even watch or listen to music.

The BMX was still in good condition. The chain had come off but Alex was able to put it back easily. After he fixed it up a bit, he threw it in the garbage. He wanted nothing to do with it.

Two months later, he was back to normal. His head was healed, but to this day he deals with blurry vision, short term memory and hearing loss due to the head injury. He and his grandmother don't talk about it anymore.

Boiling Point
By Vince Beauregard

It felt like my head was in the deep end of a swimming pool and the rest of my body was buried in the swimming pool floor. The sound of the alarm was like the pressure of the water about to make my goddamn ears implode. It was absolutely the most insane thing I have ever witnessed. He was executing those poor bastards one by one. I could not move or breathe and with each round Michael fired it felt as if someone dropped a hand grenade in the pool.

I blinked my eyes and the next thing I knew, there were sixteen, maybe even twenty blue boys out front. I shouted at Michael to snap out of his psychotic episode and then the cops started to unload on the place. We hauled ass for the fire exit with the jewels in hand. There were about four cops taking cover behind their car doors waiting in the jewelry store parking lot ready to blow us away. By some act of God we managed to take cover behind a dumpster and waste them. We ran for the car. It felt as if acid was flowing through my veins and my heart was beating so fast I thought I was going to have a heart attack. I stomped on the gas pedal all the way to the safe house.

It was an old abandoned distillery surrounded by a chain link fence and beyond that were neighborhoods of run down crack houses with nothing but dead cats and dirty needles in every room. "You crazy son of a bitch!" I yelled at Michael as I shoved him to the dusty concrete floor of the distillery. "Why the fuck did you kill them?!" Michael casually stood up, reached inside his black

suit, pulled out a lighter, cigarette and began puffing away. “What the fuck are you talking about?” He exhaled. This made me want to strangle him with his black tie and beat the living hell out of his Aryan face. “The goddamn shooting spree in the store. Remember?!” “Oh, fuck ‘em. They set off the alarm. They deserve what they got.” I looked at him in disgust. “That’s your excuse for killing all those innocent people? Really?” Michael took one last drag from his cigarette, flicked it to his right, blew smoke out of his nose like a pissed off bull. “I told ‘em not to touch the fuckin’ alarm and they did. If they hadn’t done what I told ‘em not to do they would still be alive.” I sarcastically applauded him. “My fuckin’ hero!” He smiled, did a respectful bow and thanked me.

He was pushing me towards my threshold. Whether it be the Hindenburg or the guns of the Navarone, I was ready to blow. “That’s your excuse for going on a kill-crazy rampage?” He looked at me with a smug look, “I don’t like alarms, Lawrence.” The Hindenburg had landed.

Michael and I go way back. We’ve known each other since we were in the third grade and fighting was a common activity in our relationship. We would beat each other up to a pulp over a pretty broad and sometimes argue who was the best player in the NBA but no matter what we always forgave other. We were practically brothers. This was different. Michael wasn’t the same. Nam did something terrible to him. He left thinking this war was going to be his rite of passage, his great adventure. It was no adventure, it was a downward spiral into hell and madness. At the time it didn’t cross my mind that he was sick and wasn’t thinking right. The

only things that were on my mind were those hostages that were brutally put down like dogs and not to mention how young some of those hostages were.

I whipped out my Colt. “You sick piece of shit!” He followed up with his own. The sound of the gun going off in an empty building with every square inch of it made of concrete was an echoing roar that reverberated throughout my body. My ears were ringing. Then the muffled sound of pained groans became clear after the ringing had ceased. He was already in a pool of his own blood. He hopelessly applied pressure to his neck trying to stop the blood but it was no use. He was coughing up blood, getting it in his eyes and blinding himself. He was panicking. Then, slowly he began to lose consciousness, making smaller movements and then finally he went limp. It felt as if I was in a vacuum of sound. I stood there and watched the dark red pool expand, entranced by it.

Captain Tory
By Natasha Johnson

“It was 1971, almost twenty years ago,” he told me.

He was sitting in the cafe across the busiest street in old town as he sipped his coffee and read the morning's newspaper. That's when he saw her.

She had hair that moved with the rays of the sun and danced with the wind that blew through the lobby doors. She had beautiful golden brown eyes that glanced around in his mind. She sat in the lobby of her hotel talking to the lobby boy. Grandad tried to get her attention as he smiled and waved from across the busy street, but that was not enough.

He sipped his coffee for the last time and he laid his newspaper down as if he were to put it to sleep and slipped his tab under the rim of his coffee cup. He left his seat and ran through the cars that were left idle in the street. As he stepped foot on the pale, crooked sidewalk there she was frozen in time; this was the first time he had seen her up close and he could not believe how beautiful she was. It was like staring at a painting in a museum through the thick glass panes as it stared right back at him.

As he approached her, her beautiful, golden eyes were locked on him and in that moment it seemed like nothing else mattered but them two. He says that's how he knew she was the one and that's how my grandparents met.

Grandad was full of stories; anything from war to monsters—he always had a story to tell. But ever since my grandmother and my parents passed away Grandad’s stories were cut short.

My grandmother and my parents passed away when I was eight in a boating accident. That happened two years ago. It was all so sudden.

Grandad was great at telling stories, but not this one; it nearly tore him apart. Ever since then Grandad’s stories were cut short.

It's just been me and him since then. It seemed as if the spark in his eyes had disappeared since that fateful day.

That day, I was sitting around in the den doing my homework when I came across a book that had been placed in my knapsack. “The Shipwreck,” it was called. I don't know what came over me, but I yelled for Grandad. As he walked down the narrow hallway he asked me: “Yes, Noah. What's the matter?”

“Well, I was wondering if you had any stories about boats and ship wrecks?”

“Well there is one,” he replied.

Grandad went on to tell me about this one story. It happened about thirty years ago. It was an odd evening. Grandad was not feeling too well, so he decided to go for a walk to the corner store. As he was walking something caught his eye: two men were walking oddly fast in front of him.

He was about to call out to them but a strange man came limping out from behind him and hollered, “My backpack they took my backpack! Help me, please!”

It took Grandad seconds to realize that a robbery had taken place and this young man needed his help. He sprung into action and ran after the two men, fought them off and retrieved the young man's backpack. The young man introduced himself as Randall Schooner and he invited Grandad to dinner that night.

When Grandad arrived at Randall's house, before he had even rung the door, Randall was already waiting right behind his door. He greeted my grandfather graciously and told him to follow. Randall walked right through the whole house out to the waterfront where there was a very large boathouse. Grandad was confused for a moment. He thought Randall was going to murder him.

That's when Randall turned his head and said: "I never got to thank you properly for what you did earlier."

Grandad was confused but relieved.

"Please follow me." Randall led him into the large boathouse, but when Grandad looked around there was no boat in the boathouse.

"This was given to me by a very close friend and I think you will put it to good use."

Grandad thought Randall was crazy, so he asked him: "What exactly was given to you? This boathouse?"

"No, not exactly," he replied.

"Then what was given to you?" Grandad asked.

“See... the boat... I named it after me because it didn't have a name,” he explained.

“Then where is it?” Grandad asked.

“The schooner will only appear when one is in need or when it is called upon,” Randall explained.

“See that lantern over there? That's the key to how this magic comes alive.”

“Okay, is this a joke?” Grandad asked

Randall walked over to a table and picked up a lantern and he swung his lantern three times and slowly the schooner appeared. It was like nothing he had ever seen before. It was large and had royal blue linings and a bronze anchor. The sails were massive; they were the size of half a football field. As it emerged from the lake, water was spewing out of every crease and cavity. In a moment of silence the two men were smiling with joy and amazement.

“My name is Admiral Toryten, if you ever wanted to know,” Grandad said.

“Nice to meet you, Admiral. The boat is yours. I think they should call you Captain Toryten,” Randall said jokingly. “Ahhh, what am I thinking? That's way too long. How about captain Tory?”

Grandad was speechless and did not know what he was going to do or say, but Randall insisted. He said it was time that the schooner had a new owner. “Captain Tory,” he said in a loud tone.

“I don't even own a boathouse and I've never owned a boat before. I really can't,” Grandad said.

“Listen Mr. Toryten, there's only one way this is going to end. This is my gift to you. You saved my life today and I would like to thank you,” Randall stated.

“So how about we dine like kings now, huh? Let us go inside and talk a little more,” said Randall.

And that was the last of Randall Schooner. Grandad never saw or heard from him again.

“I call chicken poop!” I yelled. “Okay, then show me the boat,” I told Grandad.

“Are you up for an adventure? I'm sure I've got one last one in me,” he claimed.

“Go ahead grab some food for the road and your jacket,” he told me.

In a frenzy I started to panic. For a moment I was frozen. I started to wonder if this was just one of Grandad's tricks or could he actually have a magic boat that appears and disappears under the shadow of the water. I hoped with everything I had that this could be true.

We lived not far from Old Town and that's where the port was. Old Town was a place known for mysteries and mistakes. It was an odd little town but it's our home and Grandad never really wanted to leave because this is where our family was born. I grabbed all that I could and hopped up. We started walking.

It was late in the evening when we arrived by the port. There was a beautiful black rail that separated where my Grandad was standing and there was a gorgeous view, but I was exhausted so I found a large rock and made myself comfortable on it.

Grandad caught my attention and called me over. I got up and ran, and before I knew it he grabbed my arm with an iron grip to prevent me from falling into the water. He told me to look up.

From where we were standing you could see the old building in Old Town and all the light that came through their windows looked like golden stars shimmering and glistening in the distance. It felt like I could just touch them. Grandad pointed at the largest building on his right; it was so beautiful it was captivating.

“This is the hotel where I met your grandmother,” he explained

As I stared at the building about which I had heard so many great stories, I heard a clinking sound that came from behind me. As I turned there he was standing right beside me with the legendary lantern in one hand and my arm in the other. Grandad told me to brace myself for what was about to happen next. He tightened his grip on my arm once more and as he swung his lantern three times slowly the schooner appeared.

The Importance of Friends
By Chrissy Hawkhurst

“Idiot!” he shouted.

“You lazy...” she screamed.

“Stop it, you guys” I cried.

It was like this every morning, but at least this morning there wasn't any blood.

I started to get ready for school. I was always going to school early to get away from it.

I put on my hand-me-downs and my old worn out sneakers and I said bye to my mom, not knowing that would be the last time I lived with her for awhile.

I got to school and everything was normal. I played by myself in the school yard. Deep down I was really hurting but no one knew. So I thought.

I went to English, Math and French but the whole time I was in class I was wondering if my mom was okay. Finally, it was recess time. I was ready to go out and play with my friends, but they were always running off without me. I didn't have the nicest shoes or clothes and that's what was important.

I was sitting outside alone and a teacher came up to me.

“The principal wants you to go the office,” she said.

“Why?” I asked.

“I don't know I'm just the messenger,” she said.

So I started to walk to the office. All that was going through my head, at that moment, was what could I have done to get in trouble. Why did the principal want to see me? When I got to his office the door was closed so I sat and waited. The door opened and I saw my mother, my social worker and my principal. I could tell my mom had been crying, her eyes were all red and puffy. What was racing through my mind at that point was someone in my family has passed.

“Whats going on?” I said in a panic.

My mom looked at me and said, “Lily you are going to go live somewhere else for a little bit.”

I already kind of knew what a group home was because my brother had been placed in one a few months before because of his behavior.

“What? Why?” I started to cry

“Please don’t cry because then I’ll start to cry again,” my mom said.

So I got myself together and stopped crying because it killed me to see my mom sad.

“What about all my stuff”? I said.

“We already have it,” said my social worker, pointing to a small black garbage bag at the end of the table. How could she know what I want to take with me? We started to leave the building and now that I wasn't with my mom anymore I started to bawl my eyes out. My classmates saw me crying and not even one of them asked me what was wrong.

The whole car ride was quiet, I didn't have anything to say. I just sat and looked out the window watching everything go by. About twenty minutes later we pulled up to one of the biggest houses I've ever seen in person.

When I got inside I saw another girl, maybe one year younger than me. I went in the office and I noticed she kept on peeking her head out to look at me. I kind of felt like an animal on display at the zoo. They told me I would be sharing a room with another girl. I wasn't sure how to feel about that. I only ever shared a room with my brother when I was a baby. The staff told me they were going with Kayla to pick up my roommate and that if I wanted I could come. Kayla was the girl who was interrogating me with her eyes when I came in. At that point I felt very overwhelmed and I really did need some air, so I went with them. It was only like a ten minute walk to her school. I still felt very sad, to be honest. I was kind of in shock because of everything that just happened. This pretty little girl with braids and nice pink and purple beads started to approach us.

"Hi Kayla. Is that your friend?"

Before Kayla said anything I was already answering.

"No, I'm the new girl. I'm going to be your roommate."

I wish I said it with more confidence, but at that point I had none.

"My name's Megan," she said with a big smile.

"Mine's Lily," I said with a little smile.

She held my hand walking across the street and it didn't just stop there, we held hands all the way until we we're back at the group home. I had just met her. I already felt like I had just made a new friend, but I couldn't have because it's never that easy for me to make friends. Or was it?

We got back to the group home and the staff asked me if I was ready to go upstairs and unpack my bag. I felt embarrassed with my garbage bag and my lack of stuff. Megan came upstairs with me to help me unpack even though there really wasn't much. No one ever wanted to be my friend just because I had so little, so one of my biggest fears was that she would judge me right away.

Her side of the room had so much colour to it, while mine was plain. Her side had posters, games, books and toys. Mine had a pillow and a blanket, that was about it. I don't know if Megan noticed the emptiness I was feeling inside. She told me I could use anything that belonged to her, all I needed to do was ask. She also gave me a poster for my walls and some stickers. Instead of judging me for having so little she gave me some of what she had to make me feel happy.

She helped me through my first day in a group home. Her and her sister ended up helping me through six years, but that's a whole other story.

Questions

Anonymous

When I became a teenager I started to wonder more about myself. I started to ask myself, “Why am I here? What’s my purpose?” And “Is anyone going to love me?” I thought about love so much that I started becoming afraid that it was going to consume my whole being. So after a while, I stopped wondering and asking questions. I just started to let things flow. I was just getting into high school, not thinking that reality would hit me in the face anytime soon. Literally.

At one point I fell in love with someone who would rub my feet for me when things got really bad, and he would come sit with me on the bathroom floor while “Isn’t she lovely” by Stevie Wonder would be playing and for six months I felt like I was finally making progress. I thought that I didn’t need to ask questions anymore.

He was 6’1, had black hair and crystal blue eyes like the ocean on a sunny day. He was so beautiful to me and I wouldn’t dare let anyone ruin his beauty. He was my danger, he was my thrill, he was my heart and my headache. He was a masterpiece. I trusted him and I fell into his ocean; but I fell too deep and didn’t realize I was drowning.

At one point his parents died in a car crash, and that changed everything.

His eyes were not as crystal as they used to be, his bold black hair started to become dull and his heart was becoming colder. He

told me that alcohol made him feel better, and then I told him I'd start planning his funeral. That was the last time we actually had a conversation and that was the last time he actually laughed with joy. Then, his ocean became completely dark and his masterpiece was ruined.

I never remembered to water my plants so he did them for me, but now I think they must be dead and so was he.

He started to hurt me, and questions started running through my mind again. I stayed up nights, wondering how I could make his soul alive again. I wondered what I was doing wrong. Maybe it was because I was getting bigger, because clearly he visualized my figure.

At one point he started to bring his anger out on me. He started drinking more, and then kicked me around like I was a rag doll. He had power. He had enough power to make my hands shake just by saying his name, just like a cheap pack of native cigarettes can. He told me that he was afraid of losing me and I guess he was so afraid of losing me that he started to beat me.

He started to become obsessive, he tracked down my phone to make sure I was telling him the truth about where I was going and at one point, I let him have so much power over me he started to rape me. I never wanted to have sex with him. Every time he forced himself on me I felt empty, I felt disgusting and I felt horrible. I couldn't look at myself in the mirror without feeling hopeless and worthless. He made me feel like I wasn't good enough for anyone.

When I walk into the nearest pharmacy, I know exactly where to find band-aids. Two years of him tearing me apart and you get used to dragging yourself into the nearest drugstore and with a bruised eye and blood dripping on your face while the employees pretend not to notice and smile at the wall behind you when they ring you up.

And I know what you're thinking now: "Why didn't you just leave?" Or "Why'd you let him hurt you like that?" And my answer is: I loved him.

I was trying so hard to fix him I lost myself. I just wanted to see his golden soul once more. It felt like if I lost him, I lost everything. Besides, I was still losing everything anyways. To be honest, I don't remember the first time we met or even the second. I can't tell you what he was wearing or how the sky looked that day. But I can tell you the moment I fell in love with him and every moment since. I can tell you how the air smelled when he first kissed me. I can tell you how it felt when he wrapped his arms around me during our first movie night. Every detail is ingrained in my mind just like his intoxicating memories are ingrained in my heart.

It might not have been love from the start but it's a love bigger than life now. He said, "I'll always love you, through the good and the bad." Then the bad turned to worse and the good disappeared entirely and suddenly he didn't love me anymore. Because it was too much for me, I was emotionally drained. He left, and with every part of me, and the last good thing in my life.

But I didn't blame him. I'd leave too if I could. But I didn't have the strength. And I wish I did.

The things that I would do to him with just a couple seconds. He coloured every moment, made it feel like it was forever, but after a while we lost a real connection. I'm still lost, holding in all of the anger at the bottom of the ocean; and I thought he'd be my saviour. I was distracted, unaware of his behaviour, and when I started drowning, I didn't know he was the anchor.

The Bad Dad
By Cynthia Bowman

“FUCK!!! Where's the bottle opener? Ugh!”

She threw the covers over her head to pretend it wasn't happening. “He's hitting the bottle again, nothing new, here we go again,” she mumbled to herself under the covers.

At the age of 15, she took on a responsibility that was way bigger than she would've ever thought. It was just her and her dad, like it'd always been, but something had changed. He was an annoying drunk who she felt ashamed of, but she loved him. “He's harmless, don't worry.” she thought to herself everyday. “He's just trying to numb the pain of Mom leaving, I know it, I'm sure of it,” she said to herself out loud.

But that day when she got home from school, everything changed. He went from one Tequila bottle a day, to three bottles on top of mixing all kinds of drinks. He went from the harmless drunk to the most violent man she knew in just a couple of hours.

Days went by that she hadn't left her room, hadn't gone to school, hadn't spoken to anyone and she was scared for her life. When she heard that front door slam, she knew that was her chance to try to change things. She ran down her dark-wooden stairs to the kitchen, got a garbage bag and started throwing all of his full bottles away then ran outside to the garage where she threw the trash bag in the garbage.

“He's going to change, I know it. He loves me, it'll work, he'll change,” she said out loud. But little did she know, she wasn't helping, she was only making him madder.

When he got home, he went straight to the kitchen as usual, and he quickly noticed that all his bottles were gone. He dropped his keys, threw his Nike cap off and ran up the stairs furiously.

“That little bitch, she's going to see!” he yelled while going up the stairs. He pushed open her door with so much force that it hit the bright pink wall. He grabbed her by her long blond hair and kept throwing her to the ground, kicking her while she was down and threatening to kill her if she ever pulled a stunt like that again.

The next day, she went to school with a black eye, bruises all over her body and every time anyone would ask her what happened, she'd break down into tears. Later that day, at around one o'clock in the afternoon, she was called to the office, where she was asked to explain what had happened and why she had so many unexplained absences. She broke down. She told them everything, starting from when her mom left.

Child services were contacted immediately and by the end of that week, she was out of her father's house and in a group home, until they could find a family member that would take her in.

She knew that wasn't what she wanted, but she also knew she didn't want to be living somewhere where she was scared to even cough too loud.

After about two weeks of her being gone, it hit him. “She's gone, and she isn't coming back,” he said to himself. He was

completely alone; he had no one at all. He started having flashbacks from when her mother left him, because of his drinking problems. He needed to make a change and fast.

“I need my little girl back and I’ll do anything to get her back!” he yelled out loud in his empty house. He went to rehab and he made it through. “I did it!! I’m going to get my little girl back,” he yelled happily while walking to the bus stop.

At 100 days sober, he tried to see his daughter, but he was denied that privilege. “SHIT!!” he yelled. He was too late; he knew he’d messed up.

But on the other hand, she was out of the group home after three long and complicated months. After all the back and forth drama, she finally ended up living with her mother and her new family. She even got the dog that she’d always wanted but never got, because her father wouldn’t allow it. She named her two-month-old yorkie Milo.

“Life is great,” she told herself and her mom every single day, even though she knew she had a lot of catching up to do with her mother.

By Ireland Clarke

Maisie

7:21 p.m., Aug 22nd, 2017

Sitting up on this roof, looking into the sunset, I released a tear. Internally, everything hurts. I feel like I'm choking on my own life; it's not supposed to work like this. Parents are supposed to be there for you, encourage you, support you; they're not supposed to scream at you to do better when you get 80s or 90s. Why do they ignore me afterwards? I'm in love with someone that thinks of me as a friend. He looks at me with those green eyes, probably clueless to how I think of him.

I know what I have to do. I've known for a while. I can't stand being stuck in a world that makes me cry myself to sleep practically every night. Standing up relieves tension in my legs. The wind intertwines with my fingers. I close my eyes, smile. "Emmet Wite, I love you," I whisper to the sunset, then lean forward.

Emmet

8:01 p.m., Aug 22nd, 2017

Walking back from football practice, I see an ambulance at 2243 Manchester. Maisie's house. I start running. One of her parents could be hurt (her dad's had a heart attack once before). I can't even begin thinking of her being hurt; my chest weighs heavy at the thought. The driver is in the ambulance waiting, and I run up to the window.

“Hey. Hi. I’m their neighbor. What happened?”

“I don’t know, kid.”

I turn my head to see two men rolling a body out from the back yard. Mr. Adams is sitting on the front steps covering his eyes with his left hand.

Was it his wife? But wait I see her in the window.

I turn to the men with the body.

I overhear the word, “suicide.”

No, no, no...

The world is spinning. I can’t think. I love her. I’ve loved her since I first laid eyes on her.

“This can’t be happening.” I just stand there empty, paralyzed in the moment. It hurts.

I'm Sorry
By Sabrina Iapalucci

“Ava, watch out!”

Crash!

Emilio opens his eyes. All he can see are shadows hunched over him. Slowly regaining his vision he realizes it's a paramedic.

“Can you hear me, sir? What is your name?”

“Emilio Windfield,” he replies, wincing with extreme pain.

“And who was in the car with you tonight?”

“My twin sister, Ava. Can you please check if she is okay? Can you also tell her I'm so sorry? I didn't see the truck until the last minute. It must've been a drunk driver.”

“Of course. We are going to transport you to the local hospital, and your sister as well once we've checked in with her.”

“Ava, my name is John. I'm a paramedic. How're you feeling? Any pain?”

“Yes, my whole entire body.”

“Just take it easy, okay? The hospital will give you some medication for that. Do you remember anything that happened tonight?”

Ava is struggling to talk. Gasping for air, she says, “I remember my brother and I were in his car. It was dark. We were surrounded by trees and it was freezing. We were heading up north to celebrate Karren's eighteenth birthday with our friends. After

that, I just remember a bright light shining on the side window of the passenger seat and that was it.”

“Well, I'm sorry to say but you and your brother have been in a car accident. Your brother has minor injuries but you on the other hand seem to have more serious injuries. We are going to send you to the local hospital where your brother is and the doctor and nurse will take care of you. You're a lucky girl, you could have died.”

“Thank you so much but what about our friends up north? They're waiting for us, they are going to worry.”

“We'll take care of that. You just rest.”

“Okay.”

The nurse walks in her room and says, “There's a visitor. He says he's your boyfriend. I'll leave you two alone.”

“Hey, how are you? How are you feeling?”

“Lucas? What are you doing here? Weren't you supposed to sleep up north?”

“Yeah, but I got a phone call about you. You scared me, Ava! You want some breakfast?”

“No, I hate hospital food. Where's Emilio?”

“The doctor sent him home. He's in steady condition.”

“Do my parents know what happened to us?”

“Yes, I told them. They wanted to come back here but I

encouraged them to enjoy their anniversary in Florida. I mean it's their 25th anniversary and that only happens once in a life time. I convinced them that I would take good care of you and Emilio and for them not to worry.”

After three days in the hospital, Ava seems to be doing okay. But at 10:00 am, the beep of her heart monitor slows down. Nurses rush in to find her having had a stroke and in a deep coma.

“Mrs. Windfield?”

“Yes, who's speaking?” she replies in a nervous tone.

“Doctor Kuba.”

“Is everything okay with Ava?”

“I'm afraid not. She had a stroke and has unfortunately sunk into coma.”

“Oh my God! Well, how long will she be in a coma for?”

“We can't determine that. Time is the only thing that can do its part, I'm sorry.”

Mrs. Windfield tells Ava's family, including her boyfriend Lucas, about this hard news. All family members fall into despair, tragedy and loss. Time passes by. One week, two months, a year, and still nothing. Her boyfriend visits her almost every day, trying to talk to her, hold her hand and even pray for her to come back. He hopes that she knows he's there, and that this might somehow pull her back into consciousness. He is going to marry her one day.

...Four months later...

“You're here again? Lucas it's time for you to move on. She wouldn't want you wasting these years waiting for her.”

“I can't. I've tried, but she's just amazing. She's beautiful, smart, generous and just the best person I've ever met. And leaving her would tear her apart.”

...Two years later...

Lucas is sitting down on a chair close to Ava's hospital bed, crunched over, looking at the floor, holding her hand.

Suddenly, he feels some type of movement from her hand. He slowly looks up and a sense of excitement and surprise hits him. Ava struggles to open her eyes, as if seeing a bright light.

“Ava, oh my God!”

Her face registers confusion. At first she's scared because she doesn't remember anything. After a while she slowly regains her memory.

“Lucas, I'm so happy to see that you're okay. The last thing I remember is the car crash.”

Ava reaches out to grab his left hand and upon squeezing his hand she realizes he has a wedding ring on his finger. She then looks at her hand and notices she has no ring.

With tears rolling down his cheeks, he says, "I'm sorry."

I Love Lucy
By Gabriella Quintanilla

It was a normal day. Well mostly. I went to school and saw some friends, went to work and saw some more friends. It was a normal Friday and on a normal Friday my friends and I go out for drinks. We go to a local bar/diner close to our school and work called “I Love Lucy.” The owner, who’s a close friend and my ex-boyfriend, loves the show I Love Lucy so he named his bar after the show. I think it’s kind of cool. Freddie has good taste in shows and he loves to drink so it makes sense he opened a bar with a cute name.

Realizing I’m at the bar I get out of my car. It is pretty dark out, the only light is coming from the street lamps and the headlights of the cars passing by. I lock my car and head into the bar, passing by a few people on the sidewalk who give me dirty looks because I’m blocking their path. As soon as I get into the bar I’m greeted by the smell of booze and burgers with fries; smells like home! In a circular booth in the far back I see a few of my friends talking and drinking together, probably already drunk. They’re always already drunk when I get here Friday night, it’s like our normal Friday night routine. I walk towards them, waving at Freddie as I pass the bar and he smiles.

“Hey guys!” I smile at Jenny, Joe, Rachel, Frank and Wes.

“Amelia!!” Joe slurs and I chuckle.

“You started drinking without me?!” I joke.

I sit down next to Wes who with a huge grin offers me a shot of tequila. And of course I take it. I mean, come on, it’s Friday!

An hour later we all downed five or six more shots (I can't really remember, all I know is I am way too wasted to be out). I drunkenly get out of the booth where all my friends are currently laughing at a picture of a cat that belongs to Rachel and I head to the bar where Freddie is serving drinks while talking to customers. Which I suddenly find impressive: who knew men could multitask?

"Ame! How you doin', Babe?" Freddie smiles at me and I chuckle randomly, probably because I'm drunk.

"Freddie! Did you see the picture of the cat?" I slur.

"No, what cat?"

"Freddie, he's just sooo fat!" I laugh loudly and he rolls his eyes.

The bar door opens forcefully, hitting the opposite wall, and everyone turns to see who's coming in. If I wasn't so drunk my mouth would probably be hanging open because my college professor just walked into the bar. Freddie looks at me with knowing wide eyes and suddenly he's handing me a cup of coffee.

"Trust me, you don't want your professor to see you like this," he whispers and I shrug while grabbing the cup of coffee out of his hand.

The professor and I lock eyes while he walks over to me very tipsy like with his hard stare on me. He sits down on the stool next to me at the bar and I suddenly realize how awkward this is. Still drunk, I start to laugh. Both Freddie and my professor, Mr. Charles Philip, look at me like I'm crazy but I just shrug.

After two or maybe three awkward cups of coffee I start to sober up and realize just how drunk my professor is. He's sloppily sitting on the bar stool, mumbling to himself. He's staring at his shot of vodka longingly. He's got bags under his eyes, he has a beard growing (which is weird for him). His curly gray hair, which is usually slicked back, is a mess of curls, his tie is undone, his suit has wrinkles and I think he's...crying? Who knew my teacher had emotions? I don't think I've ever seen him cry not even out of frustration (and he always gets frustrated in class).

The professor turns to me and asks, "Why me?! Why?!" I look at him like he's crazy but he's too drunk to care.

"Uhh..." Too nervous to answer, I just awkwardly stare at him.

"I thought she loved me but... she doesn't." he cries and my eyes widen. Is he talking about his wife?

"Okay," is my dumb answer to him, but I don't think he heard it because he just continued to cry and vent to me.

"She told me every day she loved me but it was a lie. It was ALL a lie. She only loves that other bastard's credit card!" he yells and everyone in the bar turns to look at him. I stupidly start laughing (What can I say? It's a nervous habit).

"Hey, don't uh... worry. It'll all be fine." I awkwardly try to comfort him by patting his back and out of nowhere he hugs me. He wraps his arms around my waist squeezing my body and I slowly but not any less awkwardly pat his back.

I look over at Freddie behind the bar and he mouths, “*You want me to kick him out?*”

I shake my head, “*I’ll take care of it.*” I smile at him and he nods.

After our weird hug I sit the professor down on the bar stool and ask Freddie to get him a cup of coffee instead of the sixth shot of vodka he wants. After sobering the professor up with about four cups of coffee, I watch as he starts to realize where he is and how crazy he looks.

“Amelia...” he starts to say, but I can see he’s struggling to find the words he wants to say. “I’m sorry if I said anything... well, inappropriate.” He sighs and I give him a small smile.

“Hey, it’s not like you’re still my professor. We can be friends there’s nothing wrong with that,” I say and he laughs.

“I guess not but I still don’t think I should’ve bothered you with my problems on a Friday night. I know how you kids love to *party it up* on a Friday night,” Professor Philip says and I chuckle.

Who the heck says *party it up*? We need to work on his teenager/young adult talk—it could use some major fixing.

The rest of the night I spend talking with Charles, who is way nicer than he looks. He’s got a big heart but he doesn’t use it much. Around four in the morning we decide to make this a thing, hanging out or “chilling” (I taught him that word) every Saturday because he knows Friday nights I’m with my friends.

I thought it would be weird talking to my old professor but I guess one weird and awkward situation can change your whole perspective.

Unless I Save Myself
By Jaime Amoretti-Petrelli

I walk up to my house. I cannot recognize who I am or what I'm doing. Loss is trapping me in my soul and mind. I am deteriorating in my own diabolical creation, darkness. Visuals of lines swirling and turning around me are invading my eyesight and my sense of coordination. I step on the first step. I tumble. The second one I fall. Come to the third one I fall backwards but I keep myself up. I have survived the great journey of the three-stair case. I step in front of the door to death. I know what is awaiting me. I ring the door bell. A person that I have never seen answers it. She looks at me with wide eyes, and says, "Are you okay?" I start running through a house. I cannot feel, touch, or comprehend what I am doing; I hit a dead point. I smash my face on a glass screen. I turn around, forks are flying by me, I try to grab one. It is not there. I start fidgeting. I look at myself, and I shut down; I thought I was turning into an avatar. I start falling deeper and deeper into the ground, I see God as a devil enslaving people. Beep, Beep, Beep, and all I know, I am lying on a table, doctors are surrounding me. I have experienced an overdose, and all that I knew and loved is gone.

My Crackhead Teacher

By Shane Shepherd

I imagine that most teachers spend their weekends grocery shopping, and decorating their homes—you know, doing your usual wholesome, boring stuff. At least, that is what I used to think...

When I started grade 9, I had an English teacher who we'll call Miss S. I was convinced and am now sure that she was a crackhead. She was always extremely hyper in class to the point where we couldn't even take her seriously. Sometimes when she was explaining things she would start yelling the instructions and looking at us with her eyes wide open and bloodshot red. One day it got really bad and I knew for sure she was a crack addict.

I walked into class for third period as I usually did with my lunch so I wouldn't have to eat it at lunchtime. My teacher was looking extra sick today. Everybody was laughing their asses off but I found it somewhat scary. She began teaching the lesson and was in an extremely pissy mood and would lash out and the smallest things. For example, someone asked to go to the bathroom and she started screaming about 911 and threw a chair at him.

We wanted to go tell the principal or someone but everyone was too scared to get up. The class decided it would be best to just let her teach her lesson. As class continued she had more and more crazy outbursts. She would even keep scratching until the point she would cut herself and pull out hair.

After Miss S finished explaining the assignment everyone got to work. I sat pretty close to the teacher's desk along with a couple of my friends. About five minutes after starting our work we smelled a strange burnt plastic type scent. I looked over to my teacher's desk and saw her hunched behind her desk coughing her ass off. Then all of a sudden she was wired the rest of class and didn't seem sick anymore.

I walked up to her desk pretending that I had a question for her. I looked behind her desk and hiding underneath the desk in her hand was a small portable crack-pipe still warm and smoking and filled with residue. I quietly walked back to my seat, and then asked to go to the bathroom.

Instead of going to the bathroom I went to the principal's office and told on her. A couple of minutes after I got back to class Miss S was removed from class and I never saw her again.

This was the day I found out my teacher was a crack addict and that she got fired.

Puff Puff Epiphany
By Imani Labonté-Adams

We sat on the brown torn leather sofa in his mom's basement, like we do every day and don't ask me why, but a sudden thought occurred to me and me being me, I thought why not share with my stoned friend, Trevor.

"I wonder if at any moment something drastic, like World War 3 will happen to this world again. You know, something to bring society together... I mean against each other, I guess, ha... Something big enough to distract everyone off their course. For example, I am here, smoking a joint, watching Futurama in your mom's basement wearing the same Beatles shirt I have for the past two days... I should really change out of this... Point is, that is what my life is. It's nothing. But if something big enough were to happen, would that suddenly open up my eyes to what's really out there or would I still remain in this wretched, isolated reality? "

I waited for a response. But I just sat there in complete silence, everything seemed to be spinning, slowly, but fast.

"DUDE YOU'RE TRIPPIIIING," he said slurring his words.

I rolled my eyes and rose up from my seat,

"No, this is not the weed talking, but I think I am having the greatest epiphany of all. My life could have so much potential, like, this is not enough. Forget what I said about World War 3, that was dumb, but the point I wanted to make was if something big enough to distract me from this reality, this shit hole reality, I for

once would see what the world has to offer, how big of a place it is. Maybe I wouldn't be so self-involved and see that everyone fucks up. It's those who try to fix their life, no matter how big the obstacles, are the ones who really count, right? Those who stop giving a damn about people's opinions and letting it change their path, and just do what they want to in life are those who make a serious difference. I want that!"

"OKAY NOOOOW YOU'RE TRIPPING!" he shouted while blowing smoke rings, an art I will never master.

Ignoring his statement I sat back down,

"What do you want to change about your life?"

Me, I answered my own question in my head. Everything, from the dropping out of college to not calling Mom back after she left me countless voicemails.

I had asked him the question in a solemn tone. He exhaled one last time and looked at me. Bloodshot eyes and smirking, he said "I would... Come closer." He brought his face to mine and whispered in my ear, "GET MORE WEEEEED!" Except he didn't quite whisper that last part, he shouted it.

This is where I get my epiphany. I didn't want to be a Trevor, getting stoned out of my mind in my mom's basement all my life, because by the looks of it, that's exactly where my life was headed. "I think I want to get a job," I said, excitement laced in my tone. "I could like work at the Shoppers down the street." I felt an ounce of discouragement once those words left my mouth. I hadn't worked a day in my life. And Trevor didn't help with my self-

doubt because as soon as I said that he burst out laughing, like tears coming out of his eyes laughing. I gave him a serious what-the-actual-fuck face, but he ignored that.

“The day you work will be the day Hitler rises from the dead, and causes World War 3,” he said mockingly.

“Just you wait,” I said. “I will make a name for myself. It may not be tomorrow, next week or in five years, but I Jim Rock will be a name to remember.”

My Saviour

By Rhyan McNeill

I first met my saviour on June 5th, 2004. It was my 16th birthday, and I went to a concert alone. Like normal. I bumped into her by accident. She affected me. She made me warm, she made me smile, and she showed me new ways to watch movies. Or listen to music. She gave me the strength to quit my job. And to leave my family. They didn't like me anyway. She helped me find a new place and she would always come to visit.

I first met my saviour on June 5th 2004. It was my 16th birthday, and I went to a concert alone. No, I went with her. We ran into each other in the parking lot. And she affected me. She made me warm, she made me smile, and she showed me new ways to watch movies or listen to music. She told me my job was not following the law. She is so smart. She also saved me from my family. I would have never left them without her.

I first met my saviour on June 5th 2004. It was my 16th birthday. I was there with her at a concert. She saved me from my job. They weren't paying me anyway. Same with my family; they just wanted to tear us apart. The idiots. She is my guardian angel, my hero. Why would I ever want to leave her?

I first met my saviour June 5th. She keeps reminding me of it. She reminds me of how she saved me. How I need her. I need her to make me smile. I need her to make me strong. I have never had a family. And why would I need one? I got her. She's my everything. She would never lie to me.

I first met my saviour June 5th. She's still saving me to this day. She's my medicine when I'm sick. She makes my nose burn less, and these marks on my arms hurt less.

I first met my saviour June 5th.

AWARD WINNERS

Heloise Valois (Mile End) – “Socialites”

Damien Agnellini (Perspectives II) – “The Mountain”

Natasha Johnson (Options) – “Captain Tory”

Gabriella Quintanella (Outreach) – “I Love Lucy”

Imani Labonté-Adams (Outreach) – “Puff Puff Epiphany”



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